

**Study Guide
for
HALF
MAGIC**

at Lifeline Theatre

6912 North Glenwood Avenue

Chicago, Illinois 60626

773-761-0667

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This study guide is only to be used in conjunction with performances of

Half Magic

at Lifeline Theatre in Chicago, Illinois.

Any other use is strictly forbidden.

Introduction

Lifeline Theatre's KidSeries

Lifeline Theatre's KidSeries is committed to bringing children's literature to the stage to entertain, educate and empower both kids and adults. Our goal is to help students develop greater appreciation of literature and theatre as art forms, to excite kids about reading, as well as to teach them about various subjects within each individual show.

We encourage you to use this study guide to enrich your students' experience of Lifeline's KidSeries, and to enhance the educational value of the performance you attend.

Illinois State Board of Education Fine Arts State Goals

The Illinois State Board of Education ("ISBE") has three State Goals for the Fine Arts:

- Students should know the language of the arts.
- Through creating and performing, students should develop an understanding of how works of art are produced.
- Students should understand the role of the arts in civilizations, past and present.

This study guide and the activities included herein will help your students to reach these goals, as well as other Illinois State Goals listed throughout this guide.

The Play

The Adaptation

Lifeline Theatre's production of *Half Magic* is an adaptation of the book by the same name written by Edward Eager, illustrated by N. M. Bodecker. The play *Half Magic* was written by Elise Kauszlaric. In this study guide, we will generally refer to Mr. Eager's version of *Half Magic* as "the book" or "the story" and Lifeline's *Half Magic* as "the play."

Play Synopsis

"Magic never really happens, not really" says Mark at the beginning of the play. However, when Mark, Martha and Jane find a mystical coin (thinking it's a nickel), they discover that magic *does* happen. As soon as Jane finds the coin, strange things begin to happen. She wishes that Mark and Martha would be still for ten seconds, and they move in slow motion for five seconds. Mark and Martha both make a wish and nothing happens, so they guess that Jane has all the magic, but Jane refuses to make another wish to prove their theory.

Not realizing that it's the coin that has made Jane magic, she gives it to her mother so that she can take the bus to visit the kids' aunt and uncle (who were, she explains, very kind to her when the kids' father died). At the end of the evening she wishes she were home, and suddenly finds herself on the

road, halfway home. She is offered a ride from a kindly stranger, Mr. Smith, but she can't understand what has happened, and begins to worry about her sanity.

The next day, after hearing about their mother's odd experience the night before, Mark, Martha and Jane figure out that it's the coin that's magic and that it only grants *half* of each wish. They decide to travel back in time to Camelot, to see one of King Arthur's tournaments, wishing to be "twice as far as the days of King Arthur." Upon meeting King Arthur, Martha is surprised to find him quite stuck up, and she wishes that she could defeat him (twice, of course) in a jousting tournament. She does, and he is so ashamed to have been "beaten by a girl" that he leaves Camelot, changing history. The kids realize that they have to be careful with their wishes, and set everything to rights before returning back to their own time and place.

After that adventure, Mark, Martha and Jane keep their wishes close to home, but none of the wishes go quite as they plan (even when using the correct "times two" formula). However, the coin does do the "big important thing" they realize that it came into their lives to do: the kids' mom and Mr. Smith fall in love, giving the whole family their true hearts' desire.

Before the Play

Discuss with your students proper theatre etiquette. For example, it's okay to clap and laugh, but it's not okay to talk to your neighbor. Have students compare and contrast the difference between watching a movie and watching a play. Ask if students have been to a play before. If so, what play? What was the experience like? What do they think this particular experience will be like? If the students have not been to Lifeline before, have them think about what they might expect: a big theatre or a small one, many seats or only a few, young actors or older ones, etc.

After the Play

Ask students if they enjoyed the play. Based on this experience, would they like to see other plays? If they've seen plays before, how did this play compare? Was it better? Funnier? More enjoyable? What happened that they were expecting to happen? What happened that they weren't expecting? Was seeing a play a better experience than seeing a movie? Why or why not?

Critiquing the Play

Have the students write a review of the play. Use the attached form or have them write a paragraph or two on their own. Encourage the students to be specific about why they enjoyed a certain part of the play. If they liked a scene because it was funny, have them explain *why* it was funny to them, what the characters *did* or *said* that was funny, etc.

Have the students draw a picture or make a collage of their favorite scene or character. Have them show their picture to the class and explain why that scene or character was their favorite. Feel free to send the reviews and pictures to Lifeline – we enjoy reading them!

Comparing the Story to the Play

Illinois State Goal 25.B.3 Students will be able to compare and contrast the elements and principles in two or more art works that share similar themes.

Before the Play

Read *Half Magic* to your students, or have them read it themselves, before the production. After reading the book, ask the students the following questions:

1. Who are the characters in the story?
2. What happens in the beginning of the story? The middle? The end?
3. What is your favorite part of the story? Why?
4. Who is your favorite character? Why?
5. Is there a character in the story you don't like? What makes you dislike this character?
6. What do you think you will see on stage as the actors tell this story?
7. How might the play be different from the story? How might it be the same?

Beginning, Middle and End

To encourage sequential thinking, choose one of the chapters from the book and have students act out the beginning, middle and end of the chapter. Split the students into three groups (or more, depending on the number of students in your class) and have one group enact the beginning, have the next group enact the middle, and the final group the end. Have the students watching the performances help the group to remember any parts they may have left out. Give the groups the chance to redo their performances, including any elements suggested by their classmates.

After the Play

Ask the students the following questions:

1. How were the book and the play different?
2. How were the book and the play the same?
3. What elements of the play surprised you, based on your knowledge of the book?
4. Which did you enjoy more, reading the book or watching the play?
5. What was your favorite part of the play? Was that your favorite part of the book as well?
6. Were there any characters in the book who were not in the play?
7. Were there any characters in the play that were not in the book?
8. Some parts of the play are different from the book. Why do you think the playwright added or subtracted certain parts?

Cast of Characters

There are five actors – three women and two men – in *Half Magic*. All but one of the actors play more than one character. The following is a list of the characters in *Half Magic*.

Jane	Mr. Smith	Queen Guinevere
Mark	Aunt Grace	Dirty Rat Robber
Martha	Uncle Edwin	The Gray Lady
Their Mother (Alison)	Sir Launcelot	Assorted Townspeople

Before the Play

Ask the students the following questions:

1. What are some ways that you think the designers (costumes, sets, lights, props) will help the actors to play their characters?
2. When you watch the play, see if you can figure out which actors play more than one character. What characters does each actor play?
3. Do you think it is hard or easy for an actor to play so many characters?
4. Why might it be hard for an actor to play so many characters? [Quick costume changes; having to come up with different character voices and mannerisms]
5. See if you can figure out what changes the actors who play different characters make with their bodies and voices to create different characters.
6. Why might it be fun for an actor to play many different characters in one play?
7. If you were in a play, would you like to play just one character, or more than one? Why?
8. Why do you think the playwright decided to have some of the actors play more than one character? [Cost/salary considerations; some parts are very small, so it's better to have one actor play those smaller parts]
9. In the play, the actor who plays Mark (a boy) plays Aunt Grace (a woman) and Martha (a girl) plays Uncle Edwin (a man). Why do you think the playwright made that choice? [She did it for comedic effect.]

After the Play

Ask the students the following questions:

1. In what ways are the characters different in the play than in the book?
2. In what ways are the characters the same in both the book and the play?
3. What characters are in the play that are not in the book?
4. Do you think it was difficult for the actors who played multiple parts? Why or why not?
5. Could you tell which actor played which parts? What different things did they do with their bodies and voices to create different characters? [Different accents; walking and sitting differently for each character; physical differences]
6. How did the designers help the actors to play their parts?
7. Did you find it funny when the actor playing Mark played Aunt Grace and Martha played Uncle Edwin? If you were the playwright, would you have made the same choice?

Creating a Character

Illinois State Goal 26.A.2b Students will be able to describe various ways the body, mind and voice are used with acting, scripting and staging processes to create or perform drama/theatre.

Actors use their bodies and their voices to create characters who are different from themselves (grownups playing kids, a male actor playing a female character and vice versa).

1. How do the actors use their voices and their bodies to show which characters they're playing?
2. How do the actors playing kids move to make themselves appear to be kids instead of grownups?
3. What different accents do the actors use to make their characters sound different? [British, East Coast, Midwestern]
4. What else do the actors do to their voices to make themselves sound different? [An actress lowering her voice to play a male robber; an actor making his voice higher and scratchier to play an older lady]
5. How do the costumes help the actors to play their parts?
6. How do the costumes help you to know who each character is? [The Dirty Rat Robber wears a bandanna over his face; Aunt Grace has a grey wig; Sir Launcelot wears a helmet]
7. What sort of props do the actors use to help them create their characters?
8. How do the set pieces help you to know which character an actor was playing? [Signs saying "Jewelry Store" and "Book Smith" let you know who would be expected in those places]

Have students practice using just their bodies and voices to create the different characters in the story. Have students choose character traits that make sense for each character—for example, an old uncle and aunt move differently than a kid, and a mom behaves differently than a robber. Have a student come to the front of the room and move as if she is a character from the play. Have the class guess which character she is. Have them describe how she moved in words (rather than by saying "she moved like this" and showing it with their bodies) and how that helped them to guess which character she was playing. Play follow the leader, with the class moving or shaping their bodies the same way the student playing the character does.

Jobs in the Theatre

Illinois State Goal 27.A.3a Students will be able to identify and describe careers and jobs in and among the arts.

When we create a play at Lifeline, we create a community of artists working together to make a complete production. The following is a list of people who helped to create *Half Magic*:

Playwright/Adaptor/Author - writes the play

Director - directs the play: makes decisions about costumes, lights, sets, etc.; gives actors their blocking (where to go on stage)

Lighting Designer - designs and hangs the lights for the show; designs the light cues (when to change the lights)

Set Designer - designs and builds the scenery and props for the show

Sound Designer - designs and records the background music and sound effects for the show

Costume Designer - designs and makes the costumes for the show

Stage Manager - helps the director during rehearsals; sets props and scenery before each performance; runs the sound and lights during the performance

Actors - perform the play

Before the play, ask students to be particularly observant during the performance for the parts of the show that are done by the various people listed above.

After the play, ask the students the following questions:

1. How did the costume designer make the actors look like the characters they were playing?
2. What about their costumes helped you to know what kind of people they were?
3. What about the costumes told you that the play takes place in a different time period (the 1920's)?
4. Did you have a favorite costume in the show? Which one? Why was it your favorite?
5. What different locations did the play take place in? [The kids' house, the Gray Lady's house, the movie theatre, a jewelry store, Mr. Smith's bookstore, Camelot, etc.]
6. How did the set designer create each place with a simple set piece or two? [Door and porch railings for the kids' house; signs indicating the bookstore and jewelry store; curtains for Camelot; a table with flowers and a "Keep Off the Grass" sign for the Gray Lady's house]
7. How did the set designer create the movie/shadow screen? [A light behind a thin fabric]
8. How did the set designer change the scene from Aunt Grace and Uncle Edwin's house to the street? [The chair is turned around to become a trash can and the lamp shade comes off to become a street lamp]
9. What sound effects did you hear in the play? [Magic sounds, music for the coin, music during scene changes, horse hooves, car sounds, crowd sounds, etc.]
10. How did those sound effects help you to know what was happening in the play?
11. Did you notice that some sounds came from behind you and some from in front? How do you think that is accomplished? [Speakers in various places on stage and underneath the audience]
12. How do you think the "ghost" effect for Martha was created? [A wire that lights up was sewn into the fabric and the actress turns it on as she puts on the costume]
13. Why do you think the sound designer chose cartoon/silent movie music for the Dirty Rat Robber fight with Mark? Did you like that choice? What other kind of music might have worked there?

Theatre Job Application Letter

Ask the students which job they would like to have in the theatre. Have the students write a job application letter to Lifeline Theatre for the job they would like to do. Have them include what the job is, why they would be good at that job, what qualifications or past experience they have (this can be real or made-up experience), and why they want to do that job. Stress good penmanship in this activity, since they are applying for a job and want to make a good impression on the person reading the letter.

The Playwright

The play *Half Magic* is based on the book by the same name. It is an *adaptation* of the book, meaning that the book is changed so that it becomes a play. Ask the students the following questions:

1. What sort of changes did the playwright make? [Cutting some of the adventures the kids have; having three kids instead of four; not having a half-talking cat; etc.]
2. Why do you think the playwright made those changes? [Time considerations; desire to keep the cast small; etc.]
3. Do you agree with the changes that the playwright made?
4. Would you have made different changes? What would they have been?
5. Lifeline likes to keep KidSeries shows to under an hour. If you would add anything to the play, what would you remove to compensate for the added time?
6. How might the play have been different if it were a musical?
7. Do you think you would have liked the play better if it were a musical? Why or why not?
8. If the play were a musical, what sort of music do you think you would hear?
9. What stories would you like to make into a play?
10. Do you think it would be hard to change a story into a play? Why or why not?
11. Why do you think some stories might be easier than other stories to adapt? [Stories with a lot of dialogue are easier to adapt because much of the writing is already done.]

The Fine Arts

Illinois State Goal 25.B.2 Students will be able to understand how elements and principles combine within an art form to express ideas.

The Illinois State Board of Education defines four fine arts in its State Goals for Arts Education: **Visual Arts, Drama, Dance and Music.** *Half Magic* makes use of three of the four fine arts:

Visual Arts: scene painting; sculpture (props, three-dimensional set pieces); costumes

Drama: acting; script; characterization

Music: music transitions between scenes; underscoring

Have students identify how the three fine arts above are used in *Half Magic*. How would the play be different without music between the scenes or underneath some of the scenes? Without the sets? Without the 1920's costumes? Which elements of the three fine arts above are absolutely necessary to tell the story and which elements could be left out? How would the play have been different if it were a musical? What styles of music could have been used to tell the story?

Have the students identify how the fine arts are combined in other entertainment (dance concerts, movies, TV, music videos). Which of the fine arts do they prefer? Why? Have students identify places in their town or city where they can see or experience each of the four fine arts.

Have the students plan out and perform an all-dance performance of *Half Magic*. Have them tell the story through pictures only (painting or drawing). Have them tell the story of *Half Magic* by writing song lyrics to a tune they already know (a folk song, popular song, nursery rhyme).

Magic

Magic Tricks

Have students find books at the library that show how to do simple magic tricks using everyday items, and have each student learn a trick to show to the class. Once the students have shown their tricks to the class, have each student teach another student his trick. Invite another classroom to see a magic show featuring the class. Discuss with the students:

1. How do magic tricks "work"? What methods do magicians use to trick their audiences?
2. What is the difference between magic tricks and the magic in fairytales?
3. Can you name any famous magicians? What tricks are those magicians known for?
4. Magicians don't like to share the secrets behind their tricks. Why do you think that is?
5. Can you think of any books that involve magic? Are they magic tricks or "real magic," like *Mark, Martha and Jane wish for*?
6. Do you have a favorite magic trick (either one you can do or one that you've seen)? Why do you enjoy that magic trick?

Fairytale Magic

Have students bring in fairytales that involve magic for the class. Have students investigate fairytales from many different cultures and compare and contrast how the stories convey the various cultures' beliefs regarding magic. Discuss the following:

1. Compare and contrast how the magic happens in the stories: is the person or character magic, or does some object confer magic upon her?
2. Does he use a wand to perform magic? Or some other item? If he loses that item, can he still perform magic?
3. Has the character always had magic capabilities, or is it something that he discovers or is conferred upon him?
4. Is the magic permanent or does it come and go?
5. If a character loses her magic powers, what causes her to lose them?
6. Is there a moral to the story? What is the moral?

The Magic Coin

If you had a magic coin, what would you wish for? Would you wish for a thing (say, a million dollars or a pony) or would you wish for a change (say, that you would be tall or that you were a famous movie star)? Or might you wish for an adventure, like the kids in *Half Magic* do? How could your wish go wrong? The wishes in *Half Magic* don't usually go the way the kids want them to (even when they double the wish to compensate for the coin's granting only half of their wishes). Have students write a story in which they find a magic coin and make a wish. Have them think about how the wish goes right and how it might go wrong.

If you found a magic coin that could only grant a wish you'd make for another person, what would you wish for and for whom? Why would you wish that for that person? Has he told you that it was something he wanted, or is it something you simply guess that he wants? Is there any way you could make that wish come true for that person without a magic coin?

There's an old phrase that goes "be careful what you wish for: you just might get it." What do you think that means? Can you think of any stories that that phrase might apply to?

Fractions

Illinois State Goal 6.A Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge and use of numbers and their representations in a broad range of theoretical and practical settings.

Illinois State Goal 6.A.1b Students will be able to identify and model fractions using concrete materials and pictorial representations.

In *Half Magic*, the coin the kids find only grants wishes by halves, so the kids have to double their wishes so that they work out. What are some of the ways the kids phrase their wishes so that they get what they're wishing for? [Two times, double, twice as much, etc.] Have students write down some wishes as if they were wishing on the half-magic coin, using different synonyms for "double."

When the kids in *Half Magic* first make their wishes they don't realize that the coin grants wishes by half. In the book, Martha wishes that her cat can talk and the cat ends up talking in a sort of half-cat/half-gibberish. Have students make up scenes where they make a wish and it's only half granted. How does the half-granted wish happen? How does the half-granted wish cause problems? At the end of the scene have the student make a wish that will fix the problem.

Have students figure out how to rephrase the following wishes for the half-magic coin:


1. I wish I had a million dollars.
2. I wish I was as tall as Michael Jordan.
3. I wish I lived on the moon.
4. I wish I was a famous movie star.
5. I wish I had a pony.
6. I wish I could get an A+ on my next math test.
7. I wish I had four noses.
8. I wish I knew everything.
9. I wish I had a large pizza with everything on it.
10. I wish I owned my own amusement park.

Just like there is more than one way to divide a square in half (i.e., diagonally or horizontally or vertically), there is more than one way a half-wish could be granted. If the wishes above weren't doubled, what are some different ways the wish might be granted by the half-magic coin?

Comments

Please feel free to fill out the attached comment form and return it to Lifeline. We are always trying to make our shows and educational materials better, and your comments can help us to do that. Thank you for attending *Half Magic*, and please come back again soon!

Review of *Half Magic* By: _____

I give this play (circle the number of stars): 

My favorite part of the play was _____

I liked this part of the play because _____

My favorite character was _____

He/she was my favorite because _____

I think everyone should go see this play because _____

Teacher Comment Form

Please fill out as much (or as little) of this comment form as you would like. When you are finished, please either: 1) mail it to Erica Foster, Lifeline Theatre, 6912 North Glenwood Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60626; 2) fax it to 773-761-4582; or 3) bring it with you when you come to see the performance. Thank you for your time!

School: _____ Grade Level: _____ Number of Students: _____

1. On a scale of 1 to 10 (ten being the best), how would you rate the **performance** of *Half Magic*? _____

2. On a scale of 1 to 10 (ten being the best), how would you rate the **study guide** for *Half Magic*? _____

3. What were some words your students used to describe the play? _____

4. Would you want to bring your students to another performance at Lifeline? Yes No

5. Why or why not? _____

6. Which activities in the study guide were most beneficial to your students? _____

7. How did your students benefit from these activities? (If possible, please give specific examples.)

8. What could we do to improve the **study guide** or **our productions**? _____

9. Are there any other books you would like to see Lifeline adapt? _____
