

THE PAPER BAG PLAYERS

Big Bag of Laughs

New material for **THE PAPER BAG PLAYERS: Big Bag of Laughs**
was created by Kevin Richard Woodall and John Stone,
with classic sketches drawing from material created by founding Artistic Director Judith Martin
Performed by Ceili Fitzpatrick, Jymil Littles, Erika Mesa and Kevin Richard Woodall
Music by John Stone and Donald Ashwander
Scenic Artist: Florencia Escudero and Emiri Fujimoto (intern)
Directed by Kevin Richard Woodall

2022-23 Study Guide

Dear Teachers and Parents,

The Paper Bag Players are thrilled to present our latest show, **BIG BAG OF LAUGHS**. Since our company's origins in 1958, The Paper Bag Players have been all about joyful discovery, comical and unexpected ideas, silly movement, funny music and dance: in a word – laughter! At the heart of our theater are two special words: inspiration and imagination.

We use simple paper and cardboard materials to tell our stories, just like children do! While we draw inspiration from children and the imaginative ways they play, we hope through our own performances to inspire them in turn. Children have a wonderful and natural access to their own imagination, and have a special way of making the world smile and laugh with them: in our show, we hope to capture some of those laughs, and to give back a bunch more of our very own. Laughter is joyous, healing, expressive, and is the perfect glue for friendships: as the Danish comedian and pianist, Victor Borge, once said: “Laughter is the shortest distance between two people.”

Our show consists of 10 sketches that tell different kinds of stories, but share certain overarching themes such as courage, making friends with someone very different from oneself, being an ally, resourcefulness, and self-expression. A few of the many things and people you'll encounter in this Big Bag of Laughs include a pair of singing garbage cans (*A Couple of Cans*), a tug-of-war between a chicken and an apple (*Versus*), a girl and a bird who meet on a park bench and become fast friends (*That's Quite Absurd*), a rousing dance for slender cardboard houses where neighbors tell each other the silliest jokes (*Knock, Knock, Knock*) and pine trees in a forest who discover how to outsmart a woodchopper with a little help from the audience and their very own angel (*Tree Angel*).



From the entire Paper Bag Players team, thank you for being a part of this experience. We hope you enjoy the show!

A Message to Share with Your Children

Your presence is a very important ingredient of this show. In fact, without an audience, there is no show! You are part of the show whether you are silently listening, laughing or clapping. Sometimes, you will be called upon to help the performers, shouting advice, getting out of your seats to dance, and singing along with them. We can't wait for you to see our show – and to be part of it, too! Finally, **we love to hear from you**: If you have time to draw us a picture about your favorite moment, or a letter telling us what made you laugh or think about something in a new way, we will certainly appreciate it. Your artworks and letters are always treasured!

BIG BAG OF LAUGHS

While the opening of the show is all about laughs, did you know that laughter can be a serious area of scientific research? The study of laughter is called gelotology. Here are some facts about laughter:

- ✧ Before humans speak, they laugh! Laughter helps parents and their baby bond.
- ✧ Laughter relieves stress, improves memory, increases blood flow, and helps prevent sickness.
- ✧ Laughter forms social bonds: when you hear other people laugh, you are likely to laugh with them!
- ✧ There are many different types of laughter, including joyous laughter, nervous laughter, tickling laughter, and the kinds of laughter when you laugh with someone or at them.
- ✧ Many animals laugh like we do, including rats and monkeys.



Discussion: What were some parts of our show that made you laugh the hardest?

TREE ANGEL

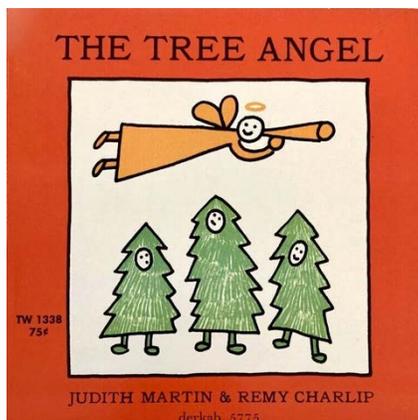
Tree Angel tells the story of three trees in a vast forest who are in danger of being chopped down by lumberjack. Suddenly, a tree angel appears and thinks of a way to save them.

Discussion

- ✧ Did you realize that the same person (Kevin) plays the tree angel and the woodchopper? When he's the angel, Kevin holds a silver stick that serves as a long trumpet. When he's the woodchopper, the very same stick becomes an axe.
- ✧ Historical fact: *Tree Angel* dates back to the earliest days of The Paper Bag Players, over 60 years ago! Even though it's a very old play, it has relevance today (that means, the story still is meaningful and important now). At the start of the play, the angel tells us, "The forests of this country are disappearing fast, so I have been appointed to try to make them last."



Kevin Richard Woodall as the Tree Angel, 2008 (Photo: Gerry Goodstein)



the angel says is still true: there are forests and jungles in this country and others that are endangered by fires, drought and manmade choices (such as logging, clear-cutting, and industry).

- ✧ The tree angel solves the problem for his trees by giving them feet so they can stand and run away. He also gives them the power to make faces and scare off the lumberjack. Can you think of some ways you might save trees that were in danger?

Activity: The trees in *Tree Angel* are given feet so that they can stand up and run away from danger. Can you draw trees with feet, too? What other special powers could you draw on a tree to save it from danger? Now that the tree is safe, can you draw a happy tree?

THAT IS GOOD



Kevin Richard Woodall and Laura Canty-Samuel in "That Is Good" (Photo: Gerry Goodstein)

In *That Is Good*, a teacher is giving her student a test when suddenly, an alligator bursts onto the scene!

✿ Art Activity: How to Make a Paper Bag Players Alligator

1. Get a long rectangular box.
2. Draw a jagged line around the middle of the box (the two longer sides and just one short side).
3. Cut along the line. Make a hole in the bottom of the box.
4. Place a small slit in the top of the box for your hand.
5. Get inside the box from the bottom hole.
6. Lift the upper "teeth" up and down: *Grrr*, you're an alligator!



A homemade alligator

THAT'S QUITE ABSURD

In this scene, a girl named Joy learns how to fly from her new friend, a bird named Blue.

Discussion

What do you think you could learn from:

- ◇ A snake
- ◇ A whale
- ◇ A kangaroo

Act out what these animals would teach you how to do.

Art Activity

Now it's your turn to think of three other animals and what they might teach you. First, act out what you've learned from each new animal friend. Now, draw each animal on a piece of paper. Write what kind of animals they are and tell your class what they could teach you.



Lily Emilia Smith and Ted Brackett in "That's Quite Absurd" (2018) (Photo: Gerry Goodstein)

THE RED BAG



Lily Emilia Smith in "The Red Bag" (2018) (Photo: Gerry Goodstein)

In *The Red Bag*, a woman does a joyous dance with 7 bags of *descending* (smaller and smaller) sizes. When she sees a sad girl with her head down, the woman gives away her bags, and the sad girl turns happy.

Math Activity:

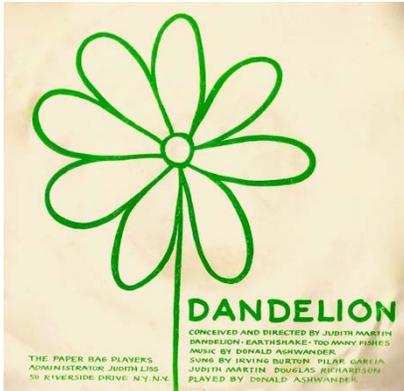
- ✿ A) The woman now has 8 bags, but wants to carry them evenly in 2 hands: how many bags will she have in each hand?
- ✿ B) Now she has 15 bags, and wants to divide them evenly among 3 friends: how many bags will each friend receive?

✿ C) The woman starts with 18 bags. She gives 8 to Sophie, 5 to Betty, and 4 to Judy; how many does she have left?

(Answer key: A = 4, B = 5, C = 1)

DANDELION

Dandelion features a song about the cycles of life, with many examples of how things in nature start as seeds or eggs, then grow up and continue the process all over again! We will teach you the song during the show, but it might help to practice before! Here are the music and words (“Dandelion, dandelion, same old story every time. Dandelion, dandelion, same old story every time!”)



Memory Game

Can you remember the ways in which the song shows the cycles of life? It might be hard to remember them all, so here's a reminder:

- * First a flower, then a fluff, then a seed, then a plant.
- * The cat has a kitten, the kitten becomes a cat.
- * The chicken lays an egg, the egg become a chicken.
- * Caterpillar spins a cocoon, out comes a butterfly.
- * The tadpole comes from out of the egg which comes from out of the frog.
- * The mother has a child, the child grows up, becomes a mother.

The Art & Fun of The Paper Bag Players: Workshops

Deepen your students' experience of the arts by taking them from seeing theater to creating it! Our innovative arts educational program is designed to expand upon the theatrical experience and bring to arts education into the classroom. Our workshops, led by The Paper Bag Players Creative Team, are tailored to children Pre-K – 3rd grade. Children become a Paper Bag Player for the Day, engaging in movement, storytelling, and improvisation, as well as creating sets, props, and costumes. Our 1-week and 2-week programs allow for in-depth exploration of each area and culminates in a class performance of the play for family, friends and community. Single 90-minute workshops are process-oriented, giving children the opportunity to fully explore working with paper in art, movement and dramatic play.



Children learn how to make theater out of what is all around them with the help of their own ideas, creativity, and a little bit of paper – just like The Paper Bag Players do! The paper transforms into everything from trombone to telescope, puppy to party dress. This dramatic play exercises children's imagination, as well as social, language and motor skills. Students work as a team and learn how to collaborate. Our workshops provide early readers and writers with an active context for literacy development and for exploring new and abstract concepts. In addition, teachers can witness The Paper Bag Players approach, tools, and techniques to enhance their own curriculum, utilizing low-cost, readily available, expressive paper.

Workshops are designed for groups of 10-25 children, can be held during or after school. For more details, or to book dates and times, call 212-353-2332. For examples of our work, CDs & DVDS, please visit www.thepaperbagplayers.org

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A Non-Profit Theater for Children

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