

Diana Wortham Theatre and Theatre UNCA Study guide for

# James and the Giant Peach

Written by David Wood based on Roald Dahl's book

## Dear Teacher:

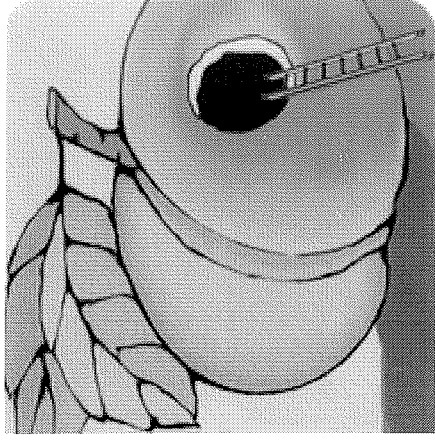
We have created the following study guide to help make your students' theater experience with *James and the Giant Peach* as meaningful as possible. For many, it will be their first time viewing a live theatrical production. We have learned that when teachers discuss the play with their students before and after the production, the experience is more meaningful and long lasting. Our study guide provides pre and post performance discussion topics, as well as related activity sheets. These are just suggestions... Please feel free to create your own activities and areas for discussion. We hope you and your class enjoy the show!

## The Story

James, an orphan, lives with his cruel aunts at the top of a steep hill in a rickety house with a barren peach tree in the garden. One day a mysterious man gives James a bag of crocodile tongues – if used properly, amazing, wonderful things will happen to James and he will never be sad or lonely again. James accidentally drops the bag at the roots of the old tree, and the tongues magically burrow into the ground. Soon, a peach starts to grow at the top of the tree, and continues to grow and grow until it becomes larger than the house. One night James crawls inside the peach and reaches the pit, where he meets a gargantuan Old-Green-Grasshopper, a tremendous Ladybug, an enormous Spider, and other huge insects. When the colossal Centipede chews through the stem of the peach, it detaches from the tree, and tumbles down the hill, across the countryside, and into the ocean – and the journey begins! Through shark-infested waters, into the seagull-filled sky, and across the ocean all the way to NYC, James and his new friends work together to overcome incredible odds and have the adventure of a lifetime!

## Attending a Play

- ▶ Let them know that they will be expected to stay quiet during the play.
- ▶ Bring a booster if you need one for younger children.
- ▶ It will be dark at times so make sure the children are aware of the nature of theatre.
- ▶ There is no dress code but how fun is it to dress nice for the play. And a great picture.



## Pre-Performance Discussion

### *James and the Giant Peach*

Much of the dialogue (and many of the songs' lyrics) are lifted directly from Dahl's writing. You may also wish to watch the 1996 animated film of the story. (The film is rated PG and may be too frightening for very young or sensitive children.)

### Expectations of a live show

- How do they think scenes involving the peach's travels across the countryside will be staged?
- What do they think the costumes for the various insects will look like?
- How is a movie different than a live play? (Actors can hear you when you talk in the audience during a live performance, and they can't during a movie.)

### Proper Theatre Etiquette

- Carefully follow teacher's or group leader's directions
- During the show, students should be quiet and remain in their seats unless they are invited to participate. (See attached guidelines for *Attending a School Show* for a complete list.)
- Actors love cheers and applause, especially at the end of songs and when the show is over. This is a great way to thank the actors for their performance and for the actors to thank you for watching!

## ROLES IN THE

**Playwright** - writes the play

**Director** - Helps the performers understand their roles and tells them where to move on stage. He or she works with the designers to create the whole production.

**Stage Manager** - keeps everyone organized and calls the cues during the show

**Actors** - perform the different characters in the play

**Designers**

**Set** - creates the set for a performance

**Costume** - designs the clothing and other items worn by the performers on stage.

**Lighting** - creates the lights for a performance.

**Sound** - creates music and other sound effects, which help tell the story.

## Post-Performance Discussion

### Class Discussion

- Who were their favorite characters and why?
- What were their favorite moments in the play?
- Compare and contrast live performance, as well as other adaptations of the story they may have seen. Did the show meet their expectations? Why or why not?

**The Mysterious Little Man** gives James explicit instructions on how to use the magic crystals, but James accidentally drops them, and they burrow into the ground, eventually affecting the insects and the peach.

- What would have happened if James had been able to follow these directions?
- How might have these additional directives have affected the outcome?
- Discuss what happens when you skip an ingredient in a recipe: How would sugar-less cookies turn out? Or spaghetti sauce without spices? Or lasagna without cheese?
- To further illustrate the importance of following directions, you may wish to play “Mother May I” or “Simon Says.”

### Animals Habits

Rhinoceros are herbivores: they eat only plant life – they would not have eaten human beings. The insects are afraid that the sharks would eat the peach while it was floating in the ocean. Sharks are actually carnivores. They eat only meat, and would not have eaten a peach. (In addition, the position of their mouth in relation to their snout would forbid them from biting the rounded peach.)

- **With your class**, brainstorm a list of animals and discuss whether they are herbivores, omnivores, or carnivores.

**Scared of insects?** James is frightened by the large insects, but he soon realizes that they are friendly, and most of them are very useful to people.

- Review the creatures featured in *James and the Giant Peach*, and their duties:
  - Grasshopper an elderly insect who is also an acclaimed musician
  - Miss Spider catches pests in her web
  - Ladybug eats pests in farms and gardens
  - Can your students think of any other insects that are useful to humans?

**British Slang** Part of the play occurs in London, England where they use words or phrases that may be unfamiliar to your students. Using the list below, see if students can guess the meaning.

- wretch
- podgy
- sniveler
- brute
- cheeky one
- righto

## Cross-Curriculum Activities

### Geography

**The Peach's Travels.** James travels from London to New York City.

- Using a map, trace James' path. What body of water did the peach cross over?
- With your students, plan other voyages for the peach –from England to Germany, Germany to India, India to China, China to Australia, etc.. What countries, continents, and bodies of water are between the originating location and the final destination? Have your students describe the view from overhead – do they see deserts? Rain forests? Any physical landmarks like the Great Wall of China?

### Language Arts

**Postcards from a Peach.** Have your students pretend that they are riding on top of the peach with James and his friends. Tell them to write a letter to their family or best friends about their experiences. They should describe how they felt when they met the creatures, the sensation of bobbing in the sea or flying through the sky. You may wish to have them create a postcard, with an illustration of their favorite scene from the play on the back. On the front, they should be sure to use proper letter-writing skills (salutation, address format, etc.).

**The five senses.** When James crawls inside the peach, he uses his five senses to describe the experience: the silence of the night outside, the pink-orange massiveness of the peach itself, the soft mouse-like fuzz on the outside and the stickiness of the inside, the sweet smell of the juice, and the luscious taste of it.

- Review the five senses: sound, sight, touch, smell and taste. Have your students divide a piece of paper into five sections, one for each sense. Assign them an object to describe according to each of the five senses, using adjectives. Food would probably work best – for sound they can describe the sensation of unwrapping it, or the sound that happens when they bite into it. Students should be as descriptive as they can – how would they describe a chocolate candy to someone who's never experienced it?

### Vocabulary from the play

ramshackle	declared	resign	twerp
revolting	friends	ungrateful	nonsense
tremendously	observe	peculiar	misery
traumatized	gorgeous	incredible	ghastly
forbidden	charming	marvelous	interfering
fortnight	radiant	horrible	delighted
fortunate	ignorant	fortune	soul
attractive	capture	selfish	millionaires
blossom	filth	colossal	brilliant

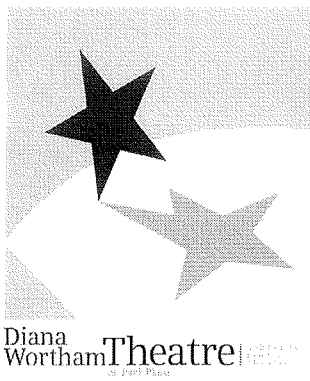
**Anticipation Guide** is a series of ten or more values statements related to the play. The audience member brings his or her experiences to the guide in marking agree or disagree to each statement. After the play is seen, the audience member reexamines his or her initial responses to see if his/her thinking has changed.

**AGREE DISAGREE**

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| _____ | 1. Anyone forced to live with wicked relatives should run away.                     |
| _____ | 2. Doing all the work around the house can be rewarding.                            |
| _____ | 3. If there were magic crystals to make everyone happy there would be no more wars. |
| _____ | 4. A dormant tree can never produce fruit.  |
| _____ | 5. Fear of the dark is an unreasonable fear.  |
| _____ | 6. Finding a light at the end of a tunnel means that a problem has been solved.     |
| _____ | 7. Losing something valuable is not always a bad thing.                             |
| _____ | 8. Earthworms are very useful creatures.  |
| _____ | 9. It is possible for a peach to grow the size of a house.                          |
| _____ | 10. The air can be filled with many flying objects other than birds.                |
| _____ | 11. Discovering how an insect grows can be fascinating.                             |
| _____ | 12. A peach could roll down the street only in a fantasy tale.                      |

### Small Group Discussion Questions

- If James was so mistreated by his aunts why did he stay? What are the advantages to his decision to stay?
- What caused the old man to choose James to bestow the magic upon?
- If you were James would you choose a life with your aunts or a life on your own? Why?
- Why did James accept the peach inhabitants so easily?
- Why did James risk his life for the centipede?
- How risky was being carried by several hundred seagulls? Explain your answer.
- How did the old man know that James was so mistreated and needed the inhabitants of the peach?
- Why didn't the sharks eat the peach when it was floating in the ocean?
- With all of the things that happened to James what do you think was the best and worst?
- What would happen to James today with the situation he was in at the end of the story, living by himself without a guardian?
- What fairy tale is similar to James and the Giant Peach? In what ways?



# Attending a School Show

Thank you for bringing your class to the Diana Wortham Theatre. Introducing a child to the magic of live performance at any early age can instill a passion that can last their entire life.

For some, this will be the student's first exposure to a theatrical event. The audience is an integral part of this event, and we welcome the energy and excitement the students bring to our productions.

It is the audience's responsibility to ensure everyone's enjoyment of the show by adhering to proper theatre etiquette. Teachers should discuss appropriate behavior with students prior to the performance. Keep the discussion lively and positive. Your enthusiasm is contagious!

## IN THE CLASSROOM

- Explain to students how watching a live performance is different from watching a movie. Let them know they will be expected to be quiet, sit still in their chair during the show out of respect for the performers and fellow audience members.
- You are welcome to bring a booster seat to help younger children see the show.
- Mention to your children that the theatre will be dark at times and sudden bursts of sounds may occur.
- While we do not have an established dress code, a well-dressed audience tends to be a well-behaved audience. Dressing up also makes the day more of an event rather than simply a day off from school.

## BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

- Visit the restrooms and water fountains before you enter the theatre.
- Turn off all electronic devices before entering the theatre.
- Remember that taking photographs or recordings of any kind during the performance is strictly prohibited.
- Do not bring food, drinks, gum or candy in the theatre. This included water bottles and sippy cups. If you bring lunches with you, you may place your food under the staircase in the lower lobby to enjoy after the show. Please let us know if we can assist you.

## DURING THE PERFORMANCE

- Children should remain in their seat for the duration of the performance. If you must leave in the middle of a performance, watch from the back of the theatre when you return until an appropriate break.
- Be engaged! Laughter, applause and discussions after the performance are encouraged.
- Please comfort crying or fussy children in the lobby not in the theatre.
- Feet should stay on the floor at all times not on the seats.
- At the end of the show, applaud if you had a good time. Applause is how you say **thank you** to the performer. The actors will bow as you applaud. That is how they say **thank you for coming**.