



Carousel Players presents the October 2008 Niagara School Tour of

Kindness

by Dennis Foon
directed by Richard Greenblatt



STUDY GUIDE

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Study Guide Compiled by Ellen Peterson

Kindness

by Dennis Foon
directed by Richard Greenblatt

CREATIVE

Playwright: **Dennis Foon**
Director: **Richard Greenblatt**
Composer: **Cathy Nosaty**
Designer: **Leanne Foley**
Lighting Designer: **Bill Williams**
Puppet Artist: **Shawn Kettner**
Video Consultant: **Deco Dawson**
Stage Manager: **Chris Pearce**

CAST

Damon/Keegan's Grandpa **Eric Blais**
Keegan/Tessa's Dad **Tom Keenan**
Tessa/Damon's Mom **Sharmilla Dey**
Feldspar/Chloey/Zoey/R/D/J/Vet
Rex/Principal/SPCA Worker **Shannon Perreault**

Kindness was commissioned by Manitoba Theatre for Young People (MTYP), Leslee Silverman, Artistic Director, and was first produced by MTYP at the Canwest Performing Arts Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba, November 15, 2007

Manitoba Theatre for Young People is a member of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT) and engages under the terms of the Canadian Theatre Agreement, professional artists who are members of the Canadian Actors' Equity Association. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the City of Winnipeg, The Winnipeg Foundation, Manitoba Arts Council, Canada Council for the Arts, Canadian Heritage and all corporate and private donors.

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TOM KEENAN, ANDREA SCOTT, DANIEL BRIERE
PHOTO: HUBERT PANTEL

BEFORE THE PLAY

Note to Educators

The Study Guide

This Study Guide will help you decide how to prepare your students before and after attending the play. Included are suggestions on how to work the performance into your curriculum, and a list of resources pertaining to the topics addressed in the play.

Resources For You

Before you present this information to your students, please see the list of resources on **page 10** of this guide. Links to the Ontario Ministry of Education are also highlighted on page 10.

Activities

The activities in this guide are provided as **suggestions and starting points** for further exploration into the themes expressed in *Kindness*.

Preparing Students

Theatre Etiquette

Please remind students:

- It is rude and disruptive to talk, eat or drink during the play.
- Photos or recordings are not allowed.
- Excessive movement can be distracting to others.

Active Viewing

Please encourage your students to not only watch the play for the story, but to pay attention to the set, costumes, and music. These important aspects of a live performance will enhance discussion about the play.

Pre-Show Discussion

Kindness takes a sensitive look at the death of a pet, damage caused after a natural disaster, and bullying. These issues are suggested for discussion in preparation for viewing the play.

ABOUT THE PLAY

Synopsis

Tessa, Damon, and Keegan share the same band class and the same passion...their pets. When Tessa loses her beloved dog Joey, the event challenges and transforms not only the three children but the adults in their lives.

Kindness is a heartwarming story with surprisingly humorous turns, set in an expressive theatrical environment. Dennis Foon, Canada's premiere playwright for young audiences, sensitively captures the reality of children's feelings as they navigate the small and large events in their world. From Hurricane Katrina to everyday encounters in the school hallway, the play *offers* an unforgettable lesson in compassion and listening to one another.

In preparation for writing *Kindness*, the playwright spent several weeks interviewing students in Winnipeg schools and discovered the importance to children of giving and receiving compassion, generosity, and unconditional love. By watching *Kindness* and participating in the activities outlined in this study guide, students will be encouraged to think about how they too can contribute to making their own world more caring.

Over the past 25 years, MTYP has presented many of Dennis Foon's plays, including *New Canadian Kid*, *Invisible Kids*, *Mirror Game*, and *Liars*.

MTYP also presented the world premieres of Dennis Foon's plays *SeeSaw*, *Chasing the Money*, and now *Kindness*.

"The whole performance was excellent. Actors, sets and use of puppets was so creative." – Crestview School, *Seesaw*

MTYP PRODUCTION OF **SeeSaw**, 2000



ABOUT THE PLAY

About the Playwright

Dennis Foon has won awards and honors throughout the world for his plays, screenplays and novels.

As artistic director of Vancouver's acclaimed Green Thumb Theatre for Young People for twelve years, he produced a body of plays that are frequently produced internationally and for which he has won the British Theatre Award and two Chalmers Awards.



He has received the Gemini, two WGC Top Tens, and the Robert Wagner Award for his screenplays, which include *Little Criminals*, the international Emmy nominee *White Lies*, *Scar Tissue*, *Torso*, and *Terry*, the acclaimed CTV movie about Terry Fox.

Foon's novels for young adults include *Double or Nothing* and the Sheila A. Egoff award-winning *Skud*. His newest book is *The Keeper's Shadow*, the final volume of the evocative fantasy trilogy, *The Longlight Legacy*.

To find out more about Dennis Foon, please visit the following Web site:
www.dennisfoon.com

ACTIVITIES

Questions for Discussion

Grades 3 to 5

- Why do you think some of the characters appeared as shadows or puppets? Did this help you understand the play? Why do you think video was used? Did these techniques add to your understanding of the play or not?
- Have you ever raised money or done something else for a good cause? Why? How did it make you feel?
- Why is the play called *Kindness*? What were some of the kind things people did in the play?
- Tell about a time when you were kind.
- Why does Damon say things that aren't true?
- When Keegan's Grandma finds out Rex has been bullying him, she says "*Only one thing to do about bullies. Stand up to 'em. He hits ya, ya hit him back twice as hard.*" Do you think this is the best way to deal with a bully? What are some other things Keegan could have done?
- Has anyone in the class experienced the death of a pet? How might we help someone who has just lost their pet?



ANDREA SCOTT; PHOTO: HUBERT PANTEL

ACTIVITIES

Questions for Discussion

Grades 6 & 7

- Why do you think some of the characters appeared as puppets or shadows? Discuss some other ways that these and other characters might have been represented.
- There are a few different kinds of bullying shown in this play (eg. physical, verbal). How are they different? What do they all have in common?
- What tactics do the characters use to deal with bullying? Which ones are most effective?
- What kinds of causes would you be willing to work for?
- Why is the play called *Kindness*? What were some of the kind things people did in the play? Ask students to share their experiences of being kind, or of being treated kindly.
- Do you think it is important to be kind to animals? Why or why not? Was putting Joey to sleep kind?
- Why do you think Damon says things that aren't true?
- When Keegan's Grandma finds out Rex has been bullying him, she says "*Only one thing to do about bullies. Stand up to 'em. He hits ya, ya hit him back twice as hard.*" Do you think this is the best way to deal with a bully? What are some other things Keegan could have done?
- When Damon asks Tessa to go out with him, what are some of the things she does to get him to stop? What would you do?
- What would you do if someone was spreading rumours about you or one of your friends?
- Has anyone in the class experienced the death of a pet? How might we help someone who has just lost their pet?

ACTIVITIES

Language Arts

I) Write a Letter

- **“Please Give.”** Ask each student to write a letter asking people to support a cause. They can refer to an existing organization or charity, or make up their own.
- **“Make a Change.”** Try to create positive change in the world by raising awareness or changing behavior. Begin by deciding who this letter should be sent to: members of the general public, a specific individual or a government official. For instance, if the change you hope to see is a reduction in the use of fossil fuels, you can write a letter encouraging people to use public transit, or a letter to the City Government requesting that more money be spent on bicycle paths. If your cause is “stop eating junk food”, the letter might be written to students, parents, school officials, or junk food manufacturers, depending on the point the student wishes to make.

II) Point of View

What can we learn by exploring the point of view of another person?

Using the characters in the play or characters of your own invention, write a two-part story about a bullying incident. First write the story from the point of view of the person who is bullied, then write the same events from the point of view of the bully. Both parts of the story should be written in the first person, for example “I was on my way to school...”



DESIGN SKETCH BY LEANNE FOLEY

ACTIVITIES

Theatre Arts

I) Objectives: Can I get a dog? (levels 5 – 7)

In all good plays, *conflict* occurs. This usually happens because the people in the play want different things. Help your students remember some of the conflicts that happened in *Kindness*. What did the characters want that caused the conflict? In acting, the things people want are called *objectives*.

Let students try this exercise privately in their own corners of the room before performing an improvisation for the class. Working in pairs, ask students to play a parent and child. The child chooses something that she wants (a bike, a sleepover, a snack), and begins to improvise, acting out how she would try to get it. Encourage students to use a variety of tactics: begging, threatening, tantrums, reasoning. The student playing the parent will use all the usual responses that parents use, but make sure that the reason why he refuses is a real one: one that's important to the parent. The more important the characters' objectives are to them, the more tension created. After the improv, ask the "parents" to report on which tactics came closest to working.

II) I am an animal (all grade levels)

An exercise in imagination and compassion building helps students walk a mile in an animals "shoes." This exercise can be used as a follow-up to a field trip to the zoo. Ask each student to choose an animal. Allow them some time in school or at home to observe this animal either live (if it's a family pet) or on video. Watch the way the animal moves, sits, lies down, sleeps, eats and breathes. Now spend some time in class imitating the animals. Ideally, work in a multipurpose room or gym where there is plenty of open space, with each student working in their own area. After they have practiced for a while, ask the students to begin doing whatever their animal would be doing at midnight. Then call out the hours around the clock, letting the students live out the animal's day. Occasionally ask all the students to freeze. Call out one student's name, and ask them to say what the animal might be thinking or feeling at that moment.

Follow up this exercise with some presentations by students who are willing to share their work. You could also interview the animals, talk-show style, or give the students some time to write a journal of the animal's day. Discuss how their perceptions of the animal might have changed when they tried to behave like the animal. Returning to your discussion of the play *Kindness*, what do your students think Tessa's dog Joey might have been feeling?

ACTIVITIES

Social Studies: For A Good Cause

I) Giving

Use the letters written by the class in “Write A Letter...Please Give” (see Language Arts Activities, p. 6). Post the letters and allow students time to read all of them carefully. Give each student \$100.00 in play money, and let them give their money to the causes and charities as they see fit. They can give all their money to the cause that seemed most important to them, or they can split the money between two or more charities/causes. Count the money and see which letters compelled students to give the most, and discuss why they were so effective.

II) What can I do?

Use the following questions and discussion topics to help your class find a cause they care about:

- Have you heard or read any news stories lately about people who are suffering or in need?
- Have they heard about any young people who have worked for a cause?
- What do you care a lot about? People? Animals? Nature?
- Is there anything about your city/country that you think should be changed?
- Ask the class to rank these causes in terms of importance to them personally: poverty, homelessness, pollution, climate change, endangered species/habitats, disaster relief, peace, disease, animal rights, youth-at-risk.
- Create teams based on student interest. Each team chooses one cause and researches it, specifically looking for charities concerning that cause.
- Brainstorm ideas about how your class could help this cause: can you raise money? How? Discuss other ways to help: donate time, create a poster to raise awareness, help with an event, write a letter, start a petition, etc.
- If possible, follow through on these ideas, or encourage students to do what they can on their own.

ACTIVITIES

Art

I) Pet Collage

Students can think of their own pet, a pet they would like to have, or a fantasy pet. Supply the class with a variety of collage materials: magazines to cut up, paper and cloth of various textures, feathers, fun fur, etc. Create a collage portrait of the pet including words, images and symbols describing what the artist likes about the pet and things the pet can do. Hold a “Pet Show” in which students show their collages to each other and award blue ribbons for “best cat picture,” “most original collage” and so on.

II) A Thousand Words

If your class is working on a project suggested in “For a Good Cause” (see p. 8) use the issues they have chosen. You can also provide a suitable topic. Create a poster that will increase awareness or gain support for the issue. Students can make the pictures themselves or find pictures in magazines. The poster should use no more than two or three words to make its point. Alternately, you can make two posters: one with no words and one with no images. Which would be more effective?



TOM KEENAN; PHOTO: HUBERT PANTEL

RESOURCES

Related Web sites

www.animal.discovery.com/features/katrina

Features images and interviews of pet rescue efforts after Hurricane Katrina

www.canadiancrc.com

Includes Canadian statistics about bullying such as:

- 20% of K-8 students report being bullied more than once or twice over the course of a school term.
- 85% of bullying incidents are witnessed by others
- When other children intervene, most bullying stops within ten seconds

NOTE: Some material on this site may not be suitable for students.

www.bullying.org

Post this site in your classroom for students to use as a starting place if they need help with a bullying problem.

www.ladybugfoundation.ca

www.ryanswell.ca

www.freethechildren.com

Inspiring stories of important charities founded by Canadian young people.

Ontario Curriculum

Many Ontario Ministry of Education outcomes for Grades 4 to 8 can be demonstrated by participating in this play and by doing many of the activities suggested for specific grade levels. Contact Carousel Players at info@carouselplayers.com if you would like to receive a list of specific Ontario Ministry of Education Curriculum Outcomes for Grades 3 - 5 and Grades 6 - 7 that link to this play.

The Arts

Drama and Dance

Visual Arts

Language

Oral/Visual Communication

Writing

Learning Skills/Health and Physical Education