

Eckerd Theater Company

presents

Interrupting Vanessa

Expanding the Classroom

Interrupting Vanessa

By Colleen
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About the Show

Show Synopsis

When 10-year-old Vanessa comes home from school each day, her mom seems too busy to listen to her stories. She tells Vanessa to do her homework and to clean up that “junk” in her room. Junk? Her beloved stuff is not junk! Vanessa retreats to her room to share knock-knock jokes with her imaginary dad and create amazing inventions from the stuff she’s collected. But today is different. Today, Vanessa’s mom has invited Timmy Fibbins to visit. Timmy, who throws up every day at school! No one talks to Timmy Fibbins! The start of this unlikely friendship leads Vanessa to a decision that will change her world forever.

Eckerd Theater Company

Eckerd Theater Company (ETC) is a touring company of professional artists, educators and administrators under the umbrella of The Marcia P. Hoffman Performing Arts Institute, the education center for Ruth Eckerd Hall at the Richard B. Baumgardner Center for the Performing Arts in Clearwater, FL. ETC seeks to provide the finest in performance and arts education experiences to family audiences of all ages. Since its inception in 1988, Eckerd Theater Company has performed for more than one million young people and their families throughout the state of Florida and in venues as far north as Canada and as far west as the Mississippi River.

From eight local performances of its first production in 1988 through 189 performances in the 2007-2008 season, ETC has been a proud ambassador of Ruth Eckerd Hall, creating professional productions of original works, adaptations of classic literature and the finest published scripts for the theater. ETC productions entertain while they explore such themes as diversity, multiculturalism, self-worth, loyalty, and tolerance.

ETC began touring the state of Florida in 1991 and national touring began in 1993. Since 1996, the Company has been on the Florida Arts on Tour roster, a state program providing funds to allow productions to travel to remote and underserved parts of the state.

In 1998, Julia Flood took the reins as ETC Artistic Director. In 1999, a State of Florida Challenge Grant provided funds for The Florida Project, a collaborative process bringing national and Florida theater artists and educators together to develop a new theater-for-young-audiences piece about the South. ETC was invited to showcase at both the Southern Arts Exchange in 1999, and at the 2002 International Showcase of Performing Arts for Young People, performing alongside companies from Germany, Canada, the U.S. and the U.K.

Since February 2003, Eckerd Theater Company has made its home in the 182-seat Murray Studio Theater in The Marcia P. Hoffman Performing Arts Institute.

Background Information

Communication

Human beings are utterly reliant upon **communication**, the exchange of ideas and information. Communication allows people to share their experiences and emotions. These can be shared many ways, through both verbal and nonverbal means. Verbal communication is expressed through language, but nonverbal communication can be as simple as a smile, a laugh, or a hug. Much can also be communicated through **body language** or facial expressions.

Communication through spoken language emerged between 30,000 and 100,000 years ago. The increase in the variety of modes of communication (e.g., books, phones, television, computers) has led to an increase in languages. In addition to human languages, there are also fictional languages (such as Klingon or Lothlorien) created for television shows and books, and programming languages created for computers. Languages constantly change. The study of how languages evolve is called **linguistics**.

Even animals find ways to communicate with each other. The study of animal communication is called **zoosemiotics**. For example, scientists have discovered that gorillas will stick out their tongues when they are angry, and horses rub noses with each other when they are feeling **affectionate**. Although pets can't speak our language, they often communicate with us, expressing affection or displeasure, or warning us of danger. Dogs often bark at intruders, thus warning their owners that someone is approaching. Sometimes cats will leave dead mice at their owners' doorsteps as repayment for the food and care the owners provide.

In our daily lives, communication is necessary for our survival. Communication with other people is extremely important, especially when it comes to expressing emotions or feelings. Sometimes, however, people find it difficult to express their emotions to others. Sharing this kind of communication helps to strengthen relationships and makes people feel more connected to each other.

Information courtesy of http://www.sciencenetlinks.com/interactives/animal_resource2.html, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communication>, http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/thought/talk_feelings.html, and <http://library.thinkquest.org/C004367/la1.shtml> [limited access]

Bullying

At most schools, people are familiar with the words **bully** and bullying. In fact, a nationwide representative study of young people in grades 6–10 concluded that 30% of all students admit to being bullied, bullying others, or both.

Bullying usually involves three types of people: **bullies**, **victims** and **bystanders**. Bullies are the people who victimize others. Studies suggest that there are different types of bullies: the **aggressive** bully who is physically strong and does not exhibit much emotion toward his/her victim, the **passive** bully who is more **insecure** than the aggressive bully and will usually join in bullying incidents only after prodded by someone more aggressive, and the bully/victim who has often been a victim of bullies. The bully/victim is the least common type of bully, and he/she chooses victims physically weaker than him/herself.

There are also different types of victims. The largest category of victims includes passive victims, who are often lonely, nervous in new situations, and have low self-esteem. These character traits usually heighten with incidents of bullying, making these young people even more afraid, depressed and **self-defeating**. A smaller group of victims is defined as **provocative** victims. These students provoke attention by **disruptive** behavior and **irritability**.

The largest category of students who are part of bullying incidents consists of the bystanders. Bystanders are those young people who witness bullying but are neither the bullies nor the victims. In the U.S., six out of ten teenage students witness bullying in school one or more times a day. Bystanders often don't stand up for victims because they fear negative attention from the bullies. This leads some bystanders into bullying behavior as a response to peer pressure, and makes other bystanders feel guilty about their inability to stand up for the victims.

If students feel that bullying is a problem in their school, they should talk to friends and adults they trust (parents, teachers, counselors) about joining or starting a school-wide antiviolence program. If enough people work together, bullying can be stopped!

Information courtesy of <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/training/bullying/index.html>

Background Information

What is Grief?

Merriam-Webster's student dictionary defines **grief** as a deep sorrow or sadness. People experience grief in a variety of situations, usually after some kind of **tragedy** or loss. Grief might follow the loss of a job or material possessions, or it could follow the death of a pet or loved one.

In her 1969 book *On Death and Dying*, psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross wrote of five stages of grief. She explained them to be:

Denial—"This can't be happening to me."

Anger—"Why is this happening? Who is to blame?"

Bargaining—"Make this not happen and in return I will.."

Depression—"I'm too sad to do anything."

Acceptance—"I'm at peace with what is going to happen/has happened."

These five stages of grief are common responses to difficult times of loss or tragedy. However, grief is also a personal process, and people express their sadness and grief in a variety of ways. Even Kübler-Ross clarified her model of five stages of grief later in life by saying, "They were never meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages. They are responses to loss that many people have, but there is not a typical response to loss, as there is no typical loss. Our grieving is as individual as our lives."

People experiencing grief seek support in different places. Some people rely on their friends, others rely on their blood relatives and/or church families, and still others turn to support groups or professional therapists and counselors. Communication is important in the grief process, so that those grieving don't feel completely abandoned and alone.

Children understand loss and experience grief in different ways from adults. For example, children under six may have a more difficult time understanding the finality of a loss. Thus, they may not react with sadness and may react physically—acting more aggressively or even regressing and acting infantile.

Grief is a difficult process at any age. However, communication and self-expression can be important and helpful tools in coping with loss.

Information courtesy of http://www.helpguide.org/mental/grief_loss.htm, <http://www.elisabethkublerross.com>, <http://www.kidshhealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/death.html> and <http://www.wordcentral.com>

Focus on Directing

Movies, plays, and television shows are like gigantic puzzles. Several pieces must fit precisely together to form a complete picture. Have you ever thought about who puts those pieces together for you? That person is called the **director**.

Some of the pieces of the theatrical puzzle are the **script**, the **actors**, the **designers**, the crew, **lights**, **sound**, **costumes**, **props** and **set**. The director is responsible for the vision of a show, what he/she wants the audience to experience while watching the play.

Most directors start with selecting a script. They carefully read scripts to choose ones they would like to bring to life. Then, a director decides how he/she would like to tell the story that is on the page. Stories can be told simply, without many people or technical support, or they can be told more elaborately, with **lavish production** values.

After a director determines how the story should be told, he/she assembles a team of people who can help tell the story. This team includes costume, prop, set, lighting, and sound designers, as well as **stage managers**, **running crews** and actors. Together, these people all collaborate, using their various talents to represent the director's vision on stage.

A show's director is responsible for the overall look and feel of a show. The director uses his/her creativity to create specific moods or interpret the script in **innovative** ways. For example, if a script has a **character** that is a ghost, there are many ways the director could represent this character in a production. Perhaps this character only wears white, or always has a bright light focused on him/her. Perhaps the character is dressed and lit like everyone else on stage, but the other actors never directly acknowledge his/her presence.

The director has a lot of important decisions to make, and a lot of homework to do before a show goes into production. Once a show is running, however, the director puts trust in the team he/she has assembled to keep the show's vision intact. The next time you see a piece of theater, think about how you might make similar or different decisions in telling the story that you see. Now you're thinking like a director!

Vocabulary

Show Related

Affectionate—feeling or showing a great liking for a person or thing

Aggressive—showing readiness to attack

Amino acids—the chief components of proteins that are made by human cells or obtained as essential components of the diet

Body language—movement (as with the hands) or posture used as a means of expression

Bully—a person who teases, hurts, or threatens smaller or weaker persons

Bystander—a person standing near but taking no part in what is happening

Communication—an exchange of information

Displeasure—a feeling of dislike and irritation

Disruptive—throwing into disorder

Essential—important in the highest degree; necessary

Grief—a deep sorrow or sadness

Hemoglobin—a protein that contains iron, occurring in red blood cells and the chief means of transporting oxygen in the body

Insecure—not confident, uncertain

Irritability—readiness to become annoyed or angry

Linguistics—the study of languages

Passive—not active, but acted upon

Protein—any of numerous substances that consist of chains of amino acids, contain the elements carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen, and often sulfur, include many compounds (as enzymes and hormones) essential for life, and are supplied by various foods (as meat, eggs, nuts and beans)

Provocative—serving or intending to stir up or bring about

Pun—the humorous use of a word in such a way as to suggest different meanings or of words having the same sound but different meanings

Self-defeating—acting to defeat its own purpose

Sequence—the order in which things are or should be connected

Zoosemiotics—the study of the sounds and signals used in animal communication, as song in birds or tail-wagging in dogs

Tragedy—a disastrous or sorrowful event

Victim—a person cheated, fooled or harmed by another

Information courtesy of <http://www.wordcentral.com>,
<http://www.merriam-webster.com>,
The Random House Dictionary of the English Language

Art Form Related

Actor—one that acts, a person who act, especially in a play or movie or on television

Character—a person in a story, novel, or play

Costume—a special garment or piece of clothing created to be worn on the stage by actors

Designer—one who thinks up and plans out in the mind a creation for a specific function or end

Director—one that guides the making of a show (as for stage or screen)

Innovative—to introduce something new or do something in a new way

Lavish—spending or giving more than is necessary; extravagant

Script—the written text of a stage play, screen play, or broadcast

Set—an artificial setting for a scene of a play or movie

Stage manager—a person who is in charge of the stage and the related details of a theatrical production

Performance—the action of representing a character in a play

Production—a public presentation for an audience

Props—something other than scenery or costumes that is used in a play or movie (may be furnishings or carried by an actor, as an umbrella)

Running crew—the collective term for the entire group of persons required to operate a theatrical performance

Presenter—one who offers a production, e.g., a play or concert, to the public

Venue—the scene or locale of any action or event, e.g., a theater

Information courtesy of <http://www.wordcentral.com> and
<http://www.merriam-webster.com>, *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*

Expanding the Classroom through Discussion

Pre-Performance Discussion Questions

1. Do you find it easy or difficult to talk to adults? Why do you feel this way?
2. What is the most interesting thing that has ever happened at your school? To whom did you tell this story? Why did you choose to talk to him/her?
3. Have you ever noticed someone picking on someone else at school? How did that make you feel? What did you do about it?
4. What is the first thing that you like to do when you get home from school? What is your favorite place in your house? Why is that place your favorite? What makes it special?
5. What kinds of things make you laugh? Why is laughing important to people?
6. Have you ever lost something that you thought was really special? How did it make you feel when you lost it? What made you feel better?

Post-Performance Discussion Questions

1. Which character did you like best in the play? Explain why you chose that specific character.
2. Vanessa is upset when Timmy Fibbins first comes to her house, but then they become friends. What do Timmy and Vanessa have in common? What kinds of things do you have in common with your friends?
3. Why does Timmy always throw up at school? If you went to school with Timmy, how would you try to help him? What do you think Vanessa will do when she goes back to school?
4. What was your favorite moment in the show? Why did you like that moment the best?
5. Vanessa has treasures in her room that her mom calls junk. Do you own anything that your parents wish you wouldn't keep? Why do you think they feel that way? Why is it special to you?
6. What makes someone a good listener? What do you like the most about talking to a good listener? How does it make you feel when someone tells you that you're a good listener, and he or she likes to talk to you?
7. In ***Interrupting Vanessa***, Vanessa's dad is imaginary. Why do you think that Vanessa liked to talk to her imaginary dad? Why did she say that it was OK for him to go and stay at the ranch at the end of the play? Do you think that she'll talk to her imaginary dad again? Why or why not?
8. If you could continue the play, what would you write? Which characters would you like to include? Why would you choose them?

Teacher Guided Activities



Who's There?

In *Interrupting Vanessa*, Vanessa loves to tell knock-knock jokes. Most knock-knock jokes are based on a **pun**, or play on words. For example:

Knock, knock. *Who's there?* Orange. *Orange who?* Orange you glad I didn't say banana?

In this case, orange becomes "aren't." Knock-knock jokes can also use proper names as puns. For example:

Knock, knock. *Who's there?* Anita. *Anita who?* Anita napkin because I spilled my juice.

In this joke, the name Anita becomes "I need a."

As a class, write your own knock-knock jokes. First, explain what sequencing is. Remind the children that knock-knock jokes follow a specific **sequence**. Let the children practice telling each other knock-knock jokes that they know (or the examples given here) to ensure that they understand the proper sequence of the jokes. Then, write all of the students' names on the board. Ask them to identify any proper names that have other meanings (for example: mark, autumn, joy). Then, ask students to identify other proper names that could become puns (for example: Alison becomes "I'll listen." Finally, put students in groups of three or four, and ask them to write two different knock-knock jokes. Make certain that students are following the proper sequence! Finally, ask the groups of students to tell their jokes to the rest of the class. Students can vote for their favorite joke and give it a prominent place on the classroom bulletin board!

Directorial Debut

In a brainstorming session, ask your students for a list of their favorite stories (e.g., *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Jungle Book*). Ask students to describe memorable moments in these stories (e.g., Lucy meeting Mr. Tumnus in Narnia, Dorothy melting the Wicked Witch, Mowgli fighting Shere Khan). Ask them what makes these moments so memorable to them. Is it the action or the emotion of the moment? Explain how actions and emotions make stories engaging and interesting.

After you've finished discussing stories as a class, divide students into groups of three or four. Ask each group to decide on a story they would like to "direct." Then, ask students which memorable moment from this story they'd like to present to the class.

Once the students have decided on their stories and memorable moments, ask them to write a short scene together based on what they've selected to present. Remind students of proper scriptwriting format. Character names should be written on the far left of the page, followed by a colon. Lines of spoken dialogue follow the colon. Any actions or intentions should be written in parentheses in italics. For example:

Wicked Witch: (*advancing slowly on Scarecrow*) Here's a little fire, Scarecrow.

Dorothy: (*looking around frantically for water*) No!! I'll help you, Scarecrow!

Ask students to limit their scenes to a length of 5–10 minutes. After they've written their scenes, ask students to write short explanations of how they would direct their scenes. You may choose to have students continue to collaborate in small groups or write individual treatments of a scene. After students have solidified their vision, ask them to present their ideas to the class. Encourage students to engage in healthy debate. What ideas did they like and dislike and why? How easy/difficult would it be to create any of these visions onstage? As an additional exercise, groups may trade scenes and read the scripts aloud as "readers' theater."

Teacher Guided Activities

Peanut Butter Protein

In *Interrupting Vanessa*, both Vanessa and Timmy Fibbins enjoy eating peanut butter. Not only does peanut butter taste great, but it is also high in **protein**. Protein is very important to the human body, and it can be obtained by eating meat, fish, dairy, eggs, nuts, seeds and certain beans like black beans and lentils. The body needs protein to function! In fact, protein is the largest component of most of your muscles, organs and immune system. The body also needs protein to make **hemoglobin**, the oxygen-carrying pigment in red blood cells that bring oxygen to the various parts of your body. Proteins are essential to strengthen your heart.

Protein contains **amino acids** that the body breaks down during digestion. These amino acids re-form in your body to build the different kinds of proteins your body needs to perform tasks like breathing. Of the many kinds of amino acids found in protein, there are 22 that specialists say are most important to the human body. Of these 22, nine are called **essential** amino acids. That's because these amino acids cannot be made by the body. Instead, they have to be consumed, so it is essential that they are in your diet!

Not all protein-rich foods contain these nine essential amino acids. You can only find them in meat or dairy products. You can, however, combine foods to create these complete proteins. The next time you eat a peanut butter sandwich on whole-grain bread, know that you are eating a meal that has all of the essential amino acids, creating a complete protein.

Do you know how much protein kids need in their diet? There is a mathematical equation you can follow to discover how much protein you should be eating. Multiply your weight by .5 or $\frac{1}{2}$. That is how many grams of protein your body needs each day. This changes as you become an adult. Most adults only need about 60 grams of protein per day, even though they may weigh more than 120 pounds.

Information courtesy of http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/stay_healthy/body/protein.html

Keeping a Protein Diary

Ask students to track their daily protein intake. First, ask each student to multiply his/her weight by .5 (or divide it by 2). Then, have students write their numbers in their notebooks (or "protein diaries"). Tell students to keep track of everything they eat in a day, writing it all in their protein diaries. Ask them to record measurements (for instance, 2 tablespoons of peanut butter, 2 slices of whole grain bread, etc.). They may need to approximate measurements if they eat in a restaurant, or they can ask the servers/parents to help them determine portion size. Then, show students where they can find nutritional information on food packages as well as Internet sources such as www.nutrition.gov. After students have recorded their daily intake of protein in their protein diaries, ask them to compare their entries with their optimum daily protein intake. Have students share these results and determine whether their diet is on target or lacking nutrients their bodies need.

Peanut Butter Protein Snacks

What you will need:

- 2 jars of natural peanut butter
- 1 box raisins
- 5 celery stalks
- 2 apples, sliced
- 1 bag pretzel sticks



With the materials provided, ask students to create their own healthy protein snacks. Encourage them to use the materials creatively in constructing their original recipes, and give each recipe a fun name. Also, ask students to write down their recipes so they can share them with family and friends. Share your classroom protein treats and enjoy!



Eckerd Theater Company

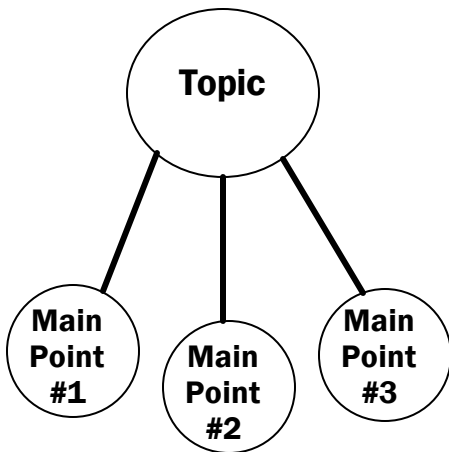
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eckerdtheatercompany.com

Writing Connections

As an audience, you get to experience the moment that Timmy Fibbins and Vanessa become friends. Can you remember what it felt like when you made a new friend? How did you feel? What did you talk about? Write an essay about your favorite part of forming new friendships. Don't forget to follow the helpful hints while writing your essay!

Helpful Hints



Paragraph #1--Introduction: In the first sentence, introduce your topic. In the next three sentences, state what your three major points are (one in each sentence). Finally, write a concluding sentence.

Paragraph #2--In the first sentence, tell what your first major point is. Then, in the body of this paragraph, give lots of good details about your first major point. Finally, write a concluding sentence.

Paragraph #3--In the first sentence, tell what your second major point is. Then, in the body of this paragraph, give lots of good details about your second major point. Finally, write a concluding sentence.

Paragraph #4--In the first sentence, tell what your third major point is. Then, in the body of this paragraph, give lots of good details about your third major point. Finally, write a concluding sentence.

Paragraph #5--Conclusion: Restate what you wrote in your first paragraph.

Language Arts: Writing

We want to hear from YOU! Write to us at The Marcia P. Hoffman Performing Arts Institute at Ruth Eckerd Hall, 1111 McMullen Booth Road, Clearwater, FL 33759

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Additional Resources

Ask your school or local librarian for help in locating these books for you and your students!

Beat the Turtle Drum
by Constance C. Greene

The Hundred Dresses
by Eleanor Estes

Sun and Spoon
by Kevin Henkes

Call Me Sonya Grey
by Sonya Tupone Lloyd

Bridge to Terabithia
by Katherine Paterson

Stargirl
by Jerry Spinelli

Wringer
by Jerry Spinelli

A Quilt for Elizabeth
by Benette Tiffault

Check out these Internet sites for additional information!

<http://www.dougy.org>

<http://www.kidsaid.com>

http://kidshealth.org/kid/grow/school_stuff/bullies.html

http://www.kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/problems/bullies.html

<http://library.thinkquest.org/5291/index.html>

Student Guide Concepts

Page 1--Language Arts: Writing; Theatre: Aesthetic and Critical Analysis

Page 2--Language Arts: Reading; Social Studies: Geography

Page 3--Health Education: Responsible Behavior; Language Arts: Writing, Communication

Page 4--Language Arts: Writing