Diary of a Worm, a Spider, and a Fly

Book, music, and lyrics by Joan Cushing
Adapted from the Diary of a Worm book series by Doreen Cronin and Harry Bliss © 2001

STUDY GUIDE

Pre-Show Activities

Worm, Spider, Fly

OUT-OF-CHAIR ACTIVITY • 10 MINUTES

Objective: Students will work together to actively explore the physical differences between the three main characters and humans.

Discussion: What does a worm look like? How about a spider? A fly? What makes these characters different from people? Will someone show me how one of these characters moves? Have a few volunteers for each character to show different ways to move like these characters.

Activity: Have students stand in a circle while you stand in the middle. When you point at a student and say “worm,” “spider,” or “fly” that student must work with the students on either side to create a statue of that creature before you count to 10. For example, if you point at one student and say “fly,” that student could use his/her hands to create compound eyes and the students on either side could become wings.

Extension: Have students do more research on the biology of these creatures to inform their statues.

Theater Etiquette

IN-CHAIR ACTIVITY • 5-10 MINUTES

Objective: Students will actively explore proper theater etiquette.

Discussion: How should you act when you see a play? Is it the same way you should act when watching a movie or playing at recess? Is it okay to laugh during a play if you think it is funny?

Brainstorm: As a class, create a list of good and bad theater behaviors.

Modeling: Invite one student to sit in a chair at the front of the class and act out one of the poor behavior scenarios for about ten seconds. Ask the class to discuss what was inappropriate about the behavior. Next, ask the student to change his/her actions to be proper theater behavior for about ten seconds.

Activity: Select various good and bad theater behaviors from the list and ask students to act them out individually from their seats. After each scenario is acted out, initiate a discussion about the behavior. When is it appropriate to behave like this? How would you react if other audience members around you did this? Conclude with the entire class acting as a good theater audience.
A Behind-the-Scenes Spotlight on Directing
An interview with New York City Director Rob Urbinati

With his pulse on everything that is happening in current American theater, Director Rob Urbinati's career reflects a lifetime passion for theater.

His work has spanned the nation and includes experience as a theater reporter for Home Box Office (HBO), a theatre consultant for HBO in New York City, and a Ph.D. from the University of Oregon. He directed over 40 plays at theaters across the country before returning to New York in 1995, where he directed Staceyann Chin's Border/Clash for the Culture Project; the premiere of Eric Bogosian's Griller for the Lincoln Center Director's Lab; Jeff Whitty's Suicide Weather at NYU; and Lucas and Sondheim's Marry Me a Little with Brent Barrett and Sally Mayes at Queens Theatre in the Park.

Plays written by Rob Urbinati include Hazelwood Jr. High, directed by Scott Elliott for the New Group, with Chloe Sevigny, and Rebel Voices, which featured Danny Glover, Steve Earle, and Lili Taylor in its rotating cast. His latest play, Death by Design, was commissioned by the Houston Family Arts Center.

Q: What is the most interesting part of being a director?
A: I like to work the staging out in my head before rehearsals begin, and I like to work with the designers to create the world of the play. Rehearsals are fun because I'm not an actor, and it's fun to see what ideas the cast comes up with as they explore the script. I even love tech - trying to balance the practical with the artistic. The best part, though, is watching the show when it finally opens!

Q: Do you prefer to direct musicals or plays? And, why?
A: I really don't have a preference. I also don't have a preference between commercial productions and experimental ones. Diversity is fun. It makes me sharpen my skills as a director. I like to be able to overlap: use musical theater techniques in straight plays, experimental techniques in commercial plays, etc. Dabbling in all genres and styles is the way to go!

Q: When directing a show such as Diary of a Worm, a Spider, and a Fly, what do you do first?
A: The first thing I do is read the script over and over. Then, I close my eyes and start to imagine the show on stage - trying to see what it looks like "in space" and how it moves from scene to scene. The next step is to meet with the designers to start developing the "look," so I can get more specific.

Q: What challenges did you face when casting Diary of a Worm, a Spider, and a Fly?
A: For this production, I needed actors who were physically fit - and then some! As you'll see, there's a lot of jumping, bouncing, rolling, crawling and flying - everything that insects do - so I sought out a cast that was up to the near-Olympic physical challenges the production presents. Not to mention that they also had to sing and dance!

Q: What is the most difficult part of your job?
A: Working within time constraints! There's never enough rehearsal time, never enough tech time, never enough previews, etc. When I write, I can take as much time as I need to finish a play. With directing, there are always time limits.

Q: What is the most enjoyable part of your job?
A: Before I was a director, I was a theater consultant for HBO. I have always loved sitting in the audience and watching shows. And, as a director, that's still my favorite part.
Post-Show Activities

A Point-of-View Activity: What Do You See?

IN- AND OUT-OF-CHAIR ACTIVITY • 5-10 MINUTES

Objective: Students will use their imaginations to see the world from the point-of-view of an insect.

Discussion: Sitting in your chair, look around the room. What do you see? Now lie on the ground like a worm and look around the room. What do you see now? How does a worm see the world differently than people do? Now stand up and bend over so you can see behind yourself through your legs like a spider hanging from a web. What do you see? How is this different from a worm or a person? How does a fly see the world? Using your imagination, what would you have to do to see the world like a fly? What would you see?

In theater we have to understand the way other characters see the world. Actors have to understand why the characters behave the way they do. Designers must know what their world looks like and change our world to look like it.

Activity: Hand each student three pieces of drawing paper, one for each character. On the “worm” paper, students will draw the classroom from a worm’s point of view. On the “spider” paper, they will draw the classroom from a spider’s point of view. On the “fly” paper, they will draw the classroom from a fly’s point of view. If you are comfortable, allow students to lie down like a worm or hang upside down like a spider while drawing. Fly will, of course, be drawn completely from the student’s imagination.

Sculptors and Puppeteers

OUT-OF-CHAIR ACTIVITY • 10-15 MINUTES

Objective: Students will be able to further explore their understanding of the anatomy of worms, spiders, and flies.

Discussion: How did the actors become different characters from Diary of a Worm, a Spider, and a Fly? What did they do to change how they looked and how they moved? Who were your favorite characters from the show? Why? What did he/she do during the show? How could you act like that character?

Modeling: Ask one student to stand in front of the class in a neutral position (e.g., standing straight, facing forward, hands at his/her side). Ask the rest of the class for ideas about how to change this person’s body and face to look like the butterfly. With each suggestion, have the volunteer take the suggestion and change his/her body.

Encourage students to think of ideas that build on previous ideas. After taking a few suggestions, tie “invisible strings” to the volunteer’s hands, head, and feet. Announce that you have now made a puppet. Now whenever you move a string, the puppet responds by moving the corresponding body part.

Extension: Ask students to find a partner. In each pair, one partner is labeled “A” and the other is “B.” This is just to allow you to speak to the entire class and streamline directions. Partner A is the puppet first and Partner B is the sculptor/puppeteer first. Partner A begins in a neutral position. Announce to Partner Bs that their job is to create a puppet for the fly. Give Partner B a few moments to sculpt the puppet first, and then ask them to tie strings to their puppets. Partner B now uses the strings to move his/her puppet around the room.

Switch roles for the partners: Partner B is now the puppet and Partner A is now the sculptor/puppeteer. This time have Partner A create an earthworm puppet. Repeat the activity with the many characters from Diary of a Worm, a Spider, and a Fly.

Go, Stop, Melt, Drop

OUT-OF-CHAIR ACTIVITY • 15-20 MINUTES

Objective: Students will be able to use their bodies, voices, and imaginations to create characters from Diary of a Worm, a Spider, and a Fly.

Modeling: Clearing an open space in your classroom, ask students to each find their own place in the room. Begin explaining the rules to the students: when the teacher says “GO” that means you may move around the room and talk or make sounds, when the teacher says “STOP” that means you freeze right where you are and are silent. Allow students a chance to explore these two rules on their own. Then introduce the final two rules: when the teacher says “MELT” that means you slowly melt into the ground, when the teacher says “DROP” that means you safely and silently lay flat as you can on the floor.

Activity: After modeling, students should be lying flat on the floor. Give the students a character to become, e.g., “When I say ‘go,’ move around the room like you are a spider.” Create different experiences for these characters to encounter: at school, at home, with your friends. Throughout the activity, you may use the four directions in any order you see fit.

Hot Seating

OUT-OF-CHAIR ACTIVITY • 10-15 MINUTES

Objective: Students will explore the emotions of the characters featured in the play.

Discussion: When an actor plays a character in a play, he/she must take on the emotions of that character. The actor must be able to walk, talk, and feel like the character he/she is playing.

Brainstorming: Ask the class to help you list all the characters from the play. Write the names on the board. Under each character’s name, list physical and emotional attributes that most accurately describe the character. Were the characters ever different than that list during the show? Make a secondary list of these attributes. Who would like to demonstrate how certain characters move?

Modeling: Each student should pick one character from the list on the board. Tell him/her to sit as that character. How would his/her hands and feet be positioned? Would his/her back be straight or slouched? Next, ask the students to make their faces look like their character’s emotions. Do they look angry, scared, or silly?

Ask one volunteer to walk to the front of the room and sit down facing the class. Ask them several open-ended questions that they can respond to “in character.” What do you like to do for fun? How do you feel about your friends? What is your favorite part about being a worm/spider/fly?

Activity: Ask two to three students to sit together in front of the class as you ask them questions. Remind the students to use their imaginations and answer how they think the character would answer.

Side Coaching: How would your voice sound as this character? How does your character move his arms and legs? How does your character feel about the interviewer?

Extension: Have the students interview each other in partners.

Side Coaching: How would your voice sound as this character? How does your character move his arms and legs? Would your character refuse to answer some questions? Do they like or dislike the interviewer?

Extension: Have the students interview each other in partners.
Bibliography

If you enjoyed *Diary of a Worm, a Spider, and a Fly*, you might also enjoy these great resources:

**Books for Kids and Teachers**

*Insectigations: 40 Hands-on Activities to Explore the Insect World*  
by Cindy Blobaum  
This fun book is filled with activities to help you learn more about the world of insects. Using creativity and the scientific method, young people are introduced to a variety of insects. There are art and science activities for every student to become a budding entomologist.

*Are You a Spider?*  
by Judy Allen and Tudor Humphries  
This is one in a series of books that looks into the daily life of different creepy crawlies. The series also includes ants, dragonflies, bees, snails, butterflies, and more.

*Pet Bugs: A Kid’s Guide to Catching and Keeping Touchable Insects*  
by Sally Kneidel  
This is a great guide for young people interested in a hands-on learning experience with bugs. It is full of information and facts about different bugs that could be found by your house as well as tips on how to care for your small pets.

*How You Got So Smart*  
by David Milgrim  
This book is for those students who, like worm, spider, and fly, are realizing how different you become as you grow up. It is a fun glimpse into how we as humans grow and learn.

**Web Sites for Kids**

*[www.insects.org](http://www.insects.org)*  
An informational website for those who love to learn more about insects. There are facts, pictures, and folklore about a variety of bugs from all over the world.

*[www.buglife.org.uk/discoverbugs](http://www.buglife.org.uk/discoverbugs)*  
This website has craft ideas, competitions, information, and even poetry about a wide variety of invertebrates. Explore here to have fun with all the new bugs you’ve discovered!

**Web Sites for Teachers**

*[authors.simonandschuster.com/Doreen-Cronin/1569483]*  
Learn about Doreen Cronin, the author of the *Diary of a Worm* book series. Read a bio and articles written about her and her popular books.

*[www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plan/diary-worm-lesson-plan]*  
A journaling lesson plan for you to use in your classroom to extend science lessons. Introduce students to point of view while learning more about the different creatures.

*[kids.creativity-portal.com/d/articles/journaling.child.shtml]*  
This web site is designed to help you get young people excited about journaling. Most of these ideas are easily adapted to start journaling in a classroom.

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Book a pre- or post-show workshop for your group:

**Pre-show Acting Workshops**  
For Pre-K – 4th Grade  
This one-hour interactive workshop features creative drama activities, exploration of our basic acting tools (body, voice, and imagination), a review of basic theater etiquette, and short scene development.

**Intro to Theater Workshops**  
For 2nd – 6th Grade  
This hands-on workshop will introduce students to acting, design, directing, and playwriting. Students will also explore the set, costumes, and make-up designs from the show.

**Intro to Musical Theater Workshops**  
For 4th – 12th Grade  
Students will learn the basics of singing, acting, and musical theater dancing in this interactive workshop.

To book or inquire about a workshop, please contact Matt Gutshick, Omaha Theater Company on Tour Artistic Director, at (402) 502-4618 or mattg@rosetheater.org.

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Please feel free to contact us!

**Letters, emails, and phone calls may be directed to:**

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