

**Study Guide
for**

***Lyle, Lyle,
Crocodile***

at Lifeline Theatre

6912 North Glenwood Avenue

Chicago, Illinois 60626

773-761-0667

© 2007 by Lifeline Theatre and James E. Grote

This study guide is only to be used in conjunction with performances of

Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile

at Lifeline Theatre in Chicago, Illinois.

Any other use is strictly forbidden.

Introduction

Lifeline Theatre's KidSeries

Lifeline Theatre's KidSeries is committed to bringing children's literature to the stage to entertain, educate and empower both kids and adults. Our goal is to help students develop greater appreciation of literature and theatre as art forms, to excite kids about reading, as well as to teach them about various subjects within each individual show.

We encourage you to use this study guide to enrich your students' experience of Lifeline's KidSeries, and to enhance the educational value of the performance you attend.

Illinois State Board of Education Fine Arts State Goals

The Illinois State Board of Education ("ISBE") has three State Goals for the Fine Arts:

- Students should know the language of the arts.
- Through creating and performing, students should develop an understanding of how works of art are produced.
- Students should understand the role of the arts in civilizations, past and present.

This study guide and the activities included herein will help your students to reach these goals, as well as other Illinois State Goals listed throughout this guide.

The Play

The Adaptation

Lifeline Theatre's production of *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile* is an adaptation of two books by Bernard Waber: *The House on East 88th Street* and *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile*. The play *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile* was written by Christina Calvit and George Howe. Ms. Calvit wrote the spoken part of the play, which is called the "book." Mr. Howe wrote the music for the play, as well as the words to the songs, which are called the "lyrics." In this study guide, we will generally refer to Mr. Waber's *The House on East 88th Street* and *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile* as "the books" or "the stories" and Lifeline's *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile* as "the play."

Play Synopsis

When the Primm family move into their new home on East 88th Street in New York City, they are surprised to find a crocodile living in their bathtub. They receive a note from Lyle's old theatrical partner, Signor Hector P. Valenti, saying that the crocodile's name is Lyle, and that he can perform many good tricks. Lyle quickly becomes a beloved member of their family, but their neighbor Mr. Grumps (and Loretta, his cat) are not pleased to have a crocodile running around the streets of their neighborhood. One day, as Mrs. Primm and Lyle are shopping at Macy's, Lyle runs into Signor Valenti, who is now a pajama salesman. They perform an impromptu soft shoe for the shoppers, but

Mr. Grumps (who happens to be the store's manager) discovers them and has Lyle locked up in the zoo. Luckily, Signor Valenti is able to help Lyle escape. As they make their way out of the city, they see that Mr. Grumps' house on fire. Lyle quickly springs into action, saving Mr. Grumps and Loretta and becoming a hero. Mr. Grumps then decides that he would be glad to have Lyle living next door once again, and even Loretta welcomes Lyle back to the neighborhood.

Before the Play

Discuss with your students proper theatre etiquette. For example, it's okay to clap and laugh, but it's not okay to talk to your neighbor. Have students compare and contrast the difference between watching a movie and watching a play. Ask if students have been to a play before. If so, what play? What was the experience like? What do they think this particular experience will be like? If the students have not been to Lifeline before, have them think about what they might expect: a big theatre or a small one, many seats or only a few, young actors or older ones, etc.

After the Play

Ask students if they enjoyed the play. Based on this experience, would they like to see other plays? If they've seen plays before, how did this play compare? Was it better? Funnier? More enjoyable? What happened that they were expecting to happen? What happened that they weren't expecting? Was seeing a play a better experience than seeing a movie? Why or why not?

Critiquing the Play

Have the students write a review of the play. Use the attached form or have them write a paragraph or two on their own. Encourage the students to be specific about why they enjoyed a certain part of the play. If they liked a scene because it was funny, have them explain *why* it was funny to them, what the characters *did* or *said* that was funny, etc.

Have the students draw a picture or make a collage of their favorite scene or character. Have them show their picture to the class and explain why that scene or character was their favorite. Feel free to send the reviews and pictures to Lifeline – we enjoy reading them!

Comparing the Story to the Play

Illinois State Goal 25.B.3 Students will be able to compare and contrast the elements and principles in two or more art works that share similar themes.

Before the Play

Read *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile* and *The House on 88th Street* to your students, or have them read the books themselves, before the production. After reading the books, ask the students the following questions:

1. Who are the characters in the stories?
2. What happens in the beginning of each story? The middle? The end?
3. What is your favorite part of each story? Why?
4. Who is your favorite character? Why?

5. Is there a character in the story you don't like? What makes you dislike this character?
6. What do you think you will see on stage as the actors tell this story?
7. How might the play be different from the story? How might it be the same?

Beginning, Middle and End

To encourage sequential thinking, choose one of the books and have students act out the beginning, middle and end of the story. Split the students into three groups (or more, depending on the number of students in your class) and have one group enact the beginning, have the next group enact the middle, and the final group the end. Have the students watching the performances help the group to remember any parts they may have left out. Give the groups the chance to redo their performances, including any elements suggested by their classmates.

After the Play

Ask the students the following questions:

1. How were the books and the play different?
2. How were the books and the play the same?
3. What elements of the play surprised you, based on your knowledge of the books?
4. Which did you enjoy more, reading the books or watching the play?
5. What was your favorite part of the play? Was that your favorite part of the books as well?
6. Were there any characters in the books who were not in the play?
7. Were there any characters in the play that were not in the books?
8. Some parts of the play are different from the books. Why do you think the playwright added or subtracted certain parts?

Cast of Characters

There are four actors – three men and one woman – in *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile*. All but one of the actors play more than one character. The following is a list of the characters in *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile*.

Lyle the Crocodile	Mr. Grumps	Information Lady
Mr. Primm	Loretta (his cat)	Sporting Goods Salesman
Mrs. Primm	Signor Hector P. Valenti	Zookeeper
Joshua Primm	Sam the Hot Dog Man	Two Crocodiles
	Mr. Delight the Ice Cream Vendor	Various New Yorkers

Before the Play

Ask the students the following questions:

1. What are some ways that you think the designers (costumes, sets, lights, props) will help the actors to play their characters?
2. When you watch the play, see if you can figure out which actors play more than one character. What characters does each actor play?

3. Do you think it is hard or easy for an actor to play so many characters?
4. Why might it be hard for an actor to play so many characters? [Quick costume changes; having to come up with different character voices and mannerisms]
5. See if you can figure out what changes the actors who play different characters make with their bodies and voices to create different characters.
6. Why might it be fun for an actor to play many different characters in one play?
7. If you were in a play, would you like to play just one character, or more than one? Why?
8. Why do you think the playwright decided to have some of the actors play more than one character? [Cost/salary considerations; some parts are very small, so it's better to have one actor play those smaller parts]

After the Play

Ask the students the following questions:

1. In what ways are the characters different in the play than in the book?
2. In what ways are the characters the same in both the book and the play?
3. What characters are in the play that are not in the book?
4. Do you think it was difficult for the actors who played multiple parts? Why or why not?
5. Could you tell which actor played which parts? What different things did they do with their bodies and voices to create different characters? [Different accents; walking and sitting differently for each character; physical differences]
6. How did the designers help the actors to play their parts?

Creating a Character

Illinois State Goal 26.A.2b Students will be able to describe various ways the body, mind and voice are used with acting, scripting and staging processes to create or perform drama/theatre.

Actors use their bodies and their voices to create characters who are different from themselves (a crocodile, grownups playing kids, a male actor playing a female character, etc.).

1. How do the actors use their voices and their bodies to show which characters they're playing?
2. How do the actors playing kids move or speak to make themselves appear to be kids instead of grownups?
3. What different accents do the actors use to make their characters sound different? [New York, East Coast, Midwestern]
4. What else do the actors do to their voices to make themselves sound different? [An actor growling like a crocodile; an actor making his voice higher and scratchier to play a lady; actors using various New York accents, rather than their usual accents]
5. How do the costumes help the actors to play their parts?
6. How do the costumes help you to know who each character is? [Lyle wears a hat that is shaped like a crocodile's nose; the zookeeper wears a hat that says "zoo"; Signor Valenti wears a bright pink jacket; the ice cream and hot dog vendors have hats with ice cream and hot dogs on them]

7. What sort of props do the actors use to help them create their characters? [Bathtub items for Lyle; a fancy purse for Mrs. Primm; a ball and glove for Joshua; a cat puppet for Mr. Grumps.]
8. How do the set pieces help you to know which character an actor was playing? [A bathtub for Lyle; the pajama backdrop for Signor Valenti, the pajama salesman]

Have students practice using just their bodies and voices to create the different characters in the story. Have students choose character traits that make sense for each character—for example, an old uncle and aunt move differently than a kid, and a mom behaves differently than a robber. Have a student come to the front of the room and move as if she is a character from the play. Have the class guess which character she is. Have them describe how she moved in words (rather than by saying "she moved like this" and showing it with their bodies) and how that helped them to guess which character she was playing. Play follow the leader, with the class moving or shaping their bodies the same way the student playing the character does.

Several characters in the play are defined by simply a hat. Have students draw hats or find pictures of hats that each character might wear in their own version of *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile* or *The House on 88th Street*. The hats can be silly – like the ice cream and hot dog hats that the vendors wear – or realistic. What is it about each hat that defines who that character is or what she does? Have each student design and build a hat that says something about them: maybe a hobby they participate in or something they want to be when they grow up.

Jobs in the Theatre

Illinois State Goal 27.A.3a Students will be able to identify and describe careers and jobs in and among the arts.

When we create a play at Lifeline, we create a community of artists working together to make a complete production. The following is a list of people who helped to create *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile*:

Playwright/Adaptor/Author - writes the play

Composer - writes and (in the case of *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile*) records the music for the show

Lyricist - writes the words (or "lyrics") for the songs in the play

Director - directs the play: makes decisions about costumes, lights, sets, etc.; gives actors their blocking (where to go on stage)

Choreographer - creates and teaches the actors the dances in the show (the director did this job for *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile*)

Lighting Designer - designs and hangs the lights for the show; designs the light cues (when to change the lights)

Set Designer - designs and builds the scenery and props for the show

Puppet Designer - designs and builds the puppets for the show (the set designer did this job for *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile*)

Sound Designer - designs and records the sound effects for the show

Costume Designer - designs and makes the costumes for the show

Stage Manager - helps the director during rehearsals; sets props and scenery before each performance; runs the sound and lights during the performance

Actors - perform the play

Before the play, ask students to be particularly observant during the performance for the parts of the show that are done by the various people listed above.

After the play, ask the students the following questions:

1. How did the costume designer make the actors look like the characters they were playing?
2. What about their costumes helped you to know what kind of people they were?
3. What about the costumes told you that the play takes place during the 1960's instead of today? How would the clothes look different if the play took place today?
4. Did you have a favorite costume in the show? Which one? Why was it your favorite?
5. How did the costume designer create Lyle's scaly skin? [Bubble wrap]
6. How did she create his head and long nose? [A hat with an added brim and bubble wrap]
7. What other things could she have used to create scales?
8. What different locations did the play take place in? [The Primms' house/bathroom; Central Park Zoo; Macy's; etc.]
9. How did the set designer create each place with a simple set piece or two? [Door and porch railings for the front of the Primms' house; signs indicating Macy's; a bathtub for the Primms' bathroom; etc.]
10. How did the set designer create the fire? [Strips of fabric with a fan to blow them above the Mr. Grumps' house]
11. What set pieces changed when Mrs. Primm and Lyle went into Macy's? [The stage right drop flipped around to show the inside of the store, the front of the Primm house was pulled up and a drop showing the pajama display was hung in front of the door.]
12. What sound effects did you hear in the play? [Splashing, crowd sounds, fire sounds, whistles during the mime section, applause, street sounds, voiceovers, etc.]
13. How did those sound effects help you to know what was happening in the play?
14. Did you notice that some sounds came from behind you and some from in front? How do you think that is accomplished? [Speakers in various places on stage and underneath the audience]
15. How do you think the puppets were made? [Loretta was made from a stuffed animal; the crocodiles were made especially for the show]
16. Have you ever seen a puppeteer working a puppet without being hidden? Which do you like better: seeing the puppeteer, or having him hidden behind something? Why?

Theatre Job Application Letter

Ask the students which job they would like to have in the theatre. Have the students write a job application letter to Lifeline Theatre for the job they would like to do. Have them include what the job is, why they would be good at that job, what qualifications or past experience they have (this can be real or made-up experience), and why they want to do that job. Stress good penmanship in this activity, since they are applying for a job and want to make a good impression on the person reading the letter.

The Playwright

The play *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile* is based on two picture books by the same name. It is an *adaptation* of the books, meaning that the books are changed so that they become a play. Ask the students the following questions:

1. What sort of changes did the playwright make?
2. Why do you think the playwright made those changes?
3. Do you agree with the changes that the playwright made?
4. Would you have made different changes? What would they have been?
5. How might the play have been different if it weren't a musical?
6. Do you think you would have liked the play better if it weren't a musical? Why or why not?
7. What stories would you like to make into a play?
8. Do you think it would be hard to change a story into a play? Why or why not?
9. Why do you think some stories might be easier than other stories to adapt? [Stories with a lot of dialogue are easier to adapt because much of the writing is already done; long stories can be harder to adapt because there's more that has to be cut; short stories can be hard to adapt because the playwright must add more story to fill out the play]

The Fine Arts

Illinois State Goal 25.B.2 Students will be able to understand how elements and principles combine within an art form to express ideas.

The Illinois State Board of Education defines four fine arts in its State Goals for Arts Education: **Visual Arts, Drama, Dance** and **Music**. *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile* makes use of all four of the fine arts:

Visual Arts: scene painting; sculpture (props, three-dimensional set pieces, puppets); costumes

Drama: acting; script; characterization

Dance: choreography

Music: singing; musical accompaniment

Have students identify how the four fine arts are used in *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile*. How would the play be different without music? Without dancing? Without the sets? Without the 1960's costumes? Are the puppets necessary, or could an actor have played those characters? Which elements of the four fine arts are absolutely necessary to tell the story and which elements could be left out?

Have the students identify how the fine arts are combined in other entertainment (dance concerts, movies, TV, music videos). Which of the fine arts do they prefer? Why? Have students identify places in their town or city where they can see or experience each of the four fine arts.

Have the students plan out and perform an all-dance performance of *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile*. Have them tell the story through pictures only (painting or drawing). Have them tell the story of *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile* by writing song lyrics to a tune they already know (a folk song, popular song, nursery rhyme).

Real Crocodiles versus Lyle

Illinois State Goal 12.A.1a Students will be able to identify and describe the component parts of living things and their major functions.

Lyle is a crocodile. But he doesn't act much like a *real* crocodile. Discuss the following with your students:

1. How is Lyle different from other crocodiles?
2. Where do crocodiles live? Where does Lyle live? [In a bathtub in New York]
3. What do real crocodiles eat? What does Lyle eat? [Turkish caviar]
4. How do normal crocodiles move? How does Lyle move? [He walks on two legs]
5. What would you do if you found a real crocodile in your bathtub?
6. What would you do if you found a crocodile like Lyle in your bathtub?
7. Which type of crocodile would you rather have: a real one or one like Lyle?
8. What body parts do crocodiles and people share?
9. How are crocodiles' legs, arms, noses, etc. different from people's legs, arms, noses, etc.?

Have students create a scene using only their bodies to show a place where crocodiles would live. Ask them if there is a way to show the difference between one place and another. For example, how might a swamp in Florida be different from a river in Africa? Is there a way to show that with your "set pieces" (bodies)? Have students imagine a scene between two talking crocodiles. Without saying "we're in Florida" or "this is Africa," how could the crocodiles let the audience know where they are? (Some examples: "let's go ride Space Mountain!" or "be careful of those lions; they look hungry.") Encourage the students to use their imaginations and to have fun.

Have students move as if they were real crocodiles. Encourage students to stay in their own personal space and not interact with the other "crocodiles." Ask them to imagine what it's like to walk on land as a crocodile, or to swim in a river. What does it feel like to have such a big mouth, with so many teeth? What would you like to do if you were a crocodile? Where would you like to live? Would you like to be a big crocodile or a small one? What sorts of sounds do you make as a crocodile?

Crocodiles versus Alligators

Illinois State Goal 12.A.1b Students will be able to categorize living organisms using a variety of observable features (e.g., size, color, shape, backbone).

Have students research the similarities and differences between crocodiles and alligators. Have them create a chart showing the differences, including pictures and drawings. Alternately, have students create a poem or song about alligators or crocodiles, or a song or poem that compares and contrasts the two animals. What rhymes can they find for crocodile or alligator? Have students sing the song for another class and then see how much the class remembers about alligators or crocodiles after the students have sung the song. Ask students why it might be easier to remember facts that are sung, rather than simply read in a book.

Fire Safety

In the play and the book, Lyle goes into Mr. Grumps' burning house to save Mr. Grumps and Loretta. Ask students what they should do if they ever see a fire. Why was what Lyle did dangerous? Should you ever go into a burning building to save someone? Why or why not? What can happen if you go into a burning building?

Have students research fire safety on a website such as the Illinois State Fire Marshall's site at <http://www.state.il.us/kids/fire> or the National Fire Protection Association's Sparky the Firedog site at <http://www.sparky.org>. Have them create a poem, song, play, drawing or other method of teaching younger students what to do in case of a fire. Have the students show or perform their work for a younger class. Ask students if teaching someone else this information made it easier for them to learn it themselves. Why might that be?

Invite a firefighter into the classroom and have them explain what they do, show what they look like in their protective gear, and explain how children can protect themselves in case of a fire. For younger students it is important for them to know what a firefighter looks like in his or her protective gear so that if they need to be rescued they aren't afraid of him or her. Some children have perished in fires because they were hiding from rescue personnel because their protective gear made them look like "monsters." Ask students to draw a firefighter in his gear and identify how each piece contributes to protect the firefighter when he is rescuing someone or fighting a fire.

Comments

Please feel free to fill out the attached comment form and return it to Lifeline. We are always trying to make our shows and educational materials better, and your comments can help us to do that. Thank you for attending *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile*, and please come back again soon!

Review of *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile* **By:** _____

I give this play (circle the number of stars): ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

My favorite part of the play was _____

I liked this part of the play because _____

My favorite character was _____

He/she was my favorite because _____

I think everyone should go see this play because _____

Teacher Comment Form

Please fill out as much (or as little) of this comment form as you would like. When you are finished, please either: 1) mail it to Erica Foster, Lifeline Theatre, 6912 North Glenwood Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60626; 2) fax it to 773-761-4582; or 3) bring it with you when you come to see the performance. Thank you for your time!

School: _____ Grade Level: _____ Number of Students: _____

1. On a scale of 1 to 10 (ten being the best), how would you rate the performance of *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile*? _____

2. On a scale of 1 to 10 (ten being the best), how would you rate the study guide for *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile*? _____

3. What were some words your students used to describe the play? _____

4. Would you want to bring your students to another performance at Lifeline? Yes No

5. Why or why not? _____

6. Which activities in the study guide were most beneficial to your students? _____

7. How did your students benefit from these activities? (If possible, please give specific examples.)

8. What could we do to improve the study guide or our productions? _____

9. Are there any other books you would like to see Lifeline adapt? _____
