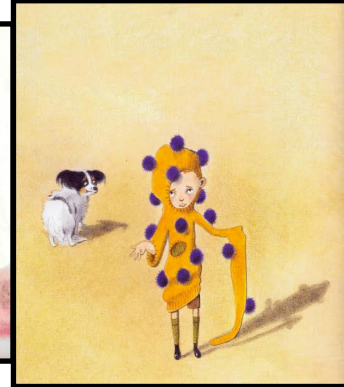




KidSeries Season 2015-16



EDUCATOR STUDY GUIDE

Mr. Popper's Penguins (Fall 2015)

Sparky! (Winter 2016)

Lester's Dreadful Sweaters (Spring 2016)

Lifeline Theatre * 6912 North Glenwood * Chicago, Illinois 60626 * 773-761-4477

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Sparky!



Based on the book by Jenny Offill, illustrated by Chris Appelhans
Script by Jessica Wright Buha • Music & Lyrics by Laura McKenzie
Directed by Amanda Link

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Introduction to the Student Matinee Program

Lifeline Theatre's award-winning adaptations of children's literature inspire a love of reading that will activate your students' imaginations and stay with them throughout their lives. Every year, Lifeline Theatre's KidSeries Student Matinee Program serves over 3,000 students, 35 schools, 120 classrooms, and 185 teachers with school-day performances of our season productions.

We encourage you to use this study guide to enrich your students' experience of *Sparky!* and enhance the educational value of the production. Please let us know what parts are helpful to you and where you would like additional materials. There is a teacher feedback form and student survey to copy for your class, and we hope you will take the time to let us know what you thought of both the show and the study guide. We do this work for you and your students, and we want to make it beneficial and user friendly!

PREPARING FOR YOUR FIELD TRIP

Before the Play: Discuss Appropriate Behavior

Have a discussion with your students about 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? Talk about the concentration that performing in a play requires, and ask the students what they find distracting when they are trying to accomplish a task in front of people. How can they help the actors succeed and do a good job? Let students know that in plays, actors sometimes play several different characters, and change roles by simply swapping out costume pieces and altering their voices and bodies.

After the Play: Reflect on the Experience

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? What happened that they weren't expecting? How was seeing a play a different experience than seeing a movie?

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, 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. We invite you to send the reviews and pictures to Lifeline – we enjoy reading them and learning from student feedback.

TRADITIONAL PLAYS VS. LITERARY ADAPTATIONS

Lifeline Theatre's KidSeries productions are often musical adaptations of picture books and short stories for children. We encourage you to discuss the elements of each version and compare/contrast the two both before and after you see the play.

Before the Play: Get to Know the Original Story

Read the story to your students, or have them read the book themselves, before the production. After reading the book, discuss it with your students, using these questions as launch pads:

- Who are the characters in the story?
- What happens in the beginning of the story? The middle? The end?
- Is there a character in the story you don't like? What makes you dislike this character? How do you think he/she might be portrayed in the stage version?
- What do you think you will see on stage as the actors tell this story?
- How might the play be different from the story? How might it be the same?

Beginning, Middle and End

To encourage sequential thinking, 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, another 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: Compare/Contrast the Story to the Play

- How were the book and the play different?
- How were the book and the play the same?
- What elements of the play surprised you, based on your knowledge of the book?
- Which did you enjoy more, reading the book or watching the play?
- What was your favorite part of the play? Was that your favorite part of the book too?
- Were there any characters in the book that were not in the play, or vice versa?
- Why do you think the playwright added or subtracted certain parts?

JOBS IN THE THEATRE: BEHIND THE SCENES

Before the Play: Prepare Your Students to Observe All Aspects of the Production

When we create a play at Lifeline, we have a community of artists working together to make a complete production. Ask students to be particularly observant during the performance for the parts of the show that are done by the various people listed below:

Playwright/Adaptor/Author – writes the play

Composer – writes 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, and what the actors do onstage

Choreographer – creates and teaches the actors the dances in the show

Lighting Designer – designs and hangs the lights for the show; designs lighting effects

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

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

Costume Designer – designs and finds or 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

After the Play: Discuss the Students’ Observations

Ask the students what they noticed about the “behind-the-scenes” jobs:

- How did the costume designer make the actors look like the characters they were playing?
- What about their costumes helped you to know what kind of people or animals they were?
- Did you have a favorite costume in the show? Which one? Why was it your favorite?
- If there were animal costumes, how did the costume designer create them so that they would look more like animals than people?
- What are some of the locations the play took place in?
- How did the set designer make the settings look realistic?
- What sound effects did you hear in the play? How did those sound effects help you to know what was happening in the play?
- Why do you think the composer chose the styles of music he did? What sorts of music would not make sense with the story?

Sparky! Synopsis

Libby is an only child who desperately wants a pet. One day, as her mother is trying to work, and Libby is especially bored, she begs her mother for a bird, a bunny, a trained seal - and her mother answers that she can have any pet that doesn't need to be walked or bathed or fed. Libby is ecstatic, but after brainstorming with her friend Mary Potts, and with the school crossing guard, Mrs. Edwin, she finds that she can't think of any pet that meets her mother's requirements. When she consults the Animal Encyclopedia, however, she learns about sloths, which live in trees, eat leaves, and spend most of their time napping and barely moving – sometimes sleeping more than 16 hours a day! A sloth, Libby decides, will be perfect for her.

When the sloth arrives, Libby names him Sparky. She is delighted with her new pet, and finds a tree in her yard where he can get comfortable. Sparky promptly falls asleep. Later, Mary Potts arrives and is very unimpressed with Sparky, who does not wake up during her visit. Mary brags about all the tricks her dog and cat and parrot can do, and Libby impulsively announces that she and Sparky will perform a Trained Sloth Extravaganza the following Saturday, including Countless Tricks to Thrill and Mystify the audience. Mary is doubtful, but agrees to attend, and gives Libby some dog treats to use as she trains Sparky.

Libby sets about trying to teach Sparky to fetch, speak, and jump through a hula hoop. It's frustrating work, but Libby tries to remain optimistic and encouraging as Sparky mostly sleeps and moves very slowly. He is very good at playing dead, however, and Libby's affection for Sparky is undiminished. She imagines a spectacular show in which Sparky does all the exciting feats she has taught him. She does admit to Mrs. Edwin, however, that she wishes she had not advertised "countless" tricks on her Extravaganza poster.

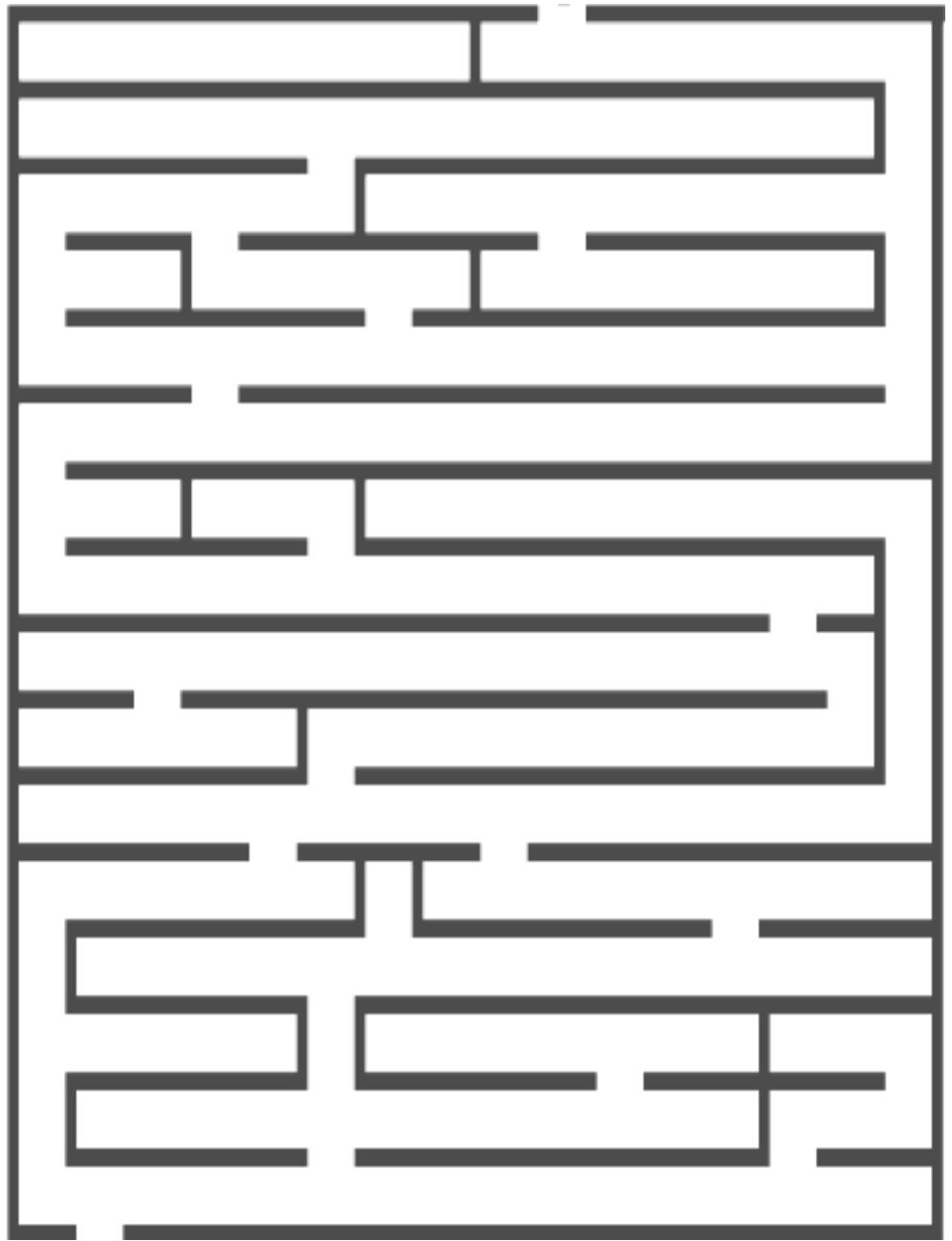
On Saturday, Libby's mother makes cookies, and the audience - Mrs. Edwin, Mary Potts and Libby's Mom - arrive, sitting in chairs under Sparky's tree. Sparky does what he does best: sleeping and moving very, very slowly. Mrs. Edwin notes how kind Sparky seems, and what an attractive coat he has. Mary Potts is not impressed, and says so. After the guests leave, Sparky gives Libby a slow hug.

Libby's mother notices that Libby is disappointed. She asks Libby to tell her what's wonderful and special about Sparky, and as Libby begins to answer, Mrs. Edwin returns for her forgotten hat. Libby explains to both of them that she loves Sparky's hugs, and his patience, and his ability to sit quietly and listen to her, and she begins to feel better. Libby apologizes to Sparky for asking him to learn tricks and be different than he is, and assures him that she appreciates his friendship exactly as he can express it.

Help Sparky Find His Tree!



Imagine that Sparky went on a (slow) walk to watch Mrs. Edwin help children cross the street at the corner. Now he needs to retrace his steps back to the tree in Libby's yard.



The Perfect Pet

In the play, Libby decides to draw a picture of her perfect pet for art class. If you could have *any animal* as a pet, what would you choose? Imagine that cost, space and safety are all issues that could be worked out. Would you choose an elephant? A dolphin? Or are you dying for a puppy? What adventures would you have with your pet? Can you imagine teaching her tricks and introducing her to your friends? What would be the biggest challenge?

Draw your perfect pet in the box below.



My perfect pet's name is: _____.

One fun thing we would do together is _____
_____.

One challenge I might have is _____
_____.



Kindness Reflection

Sparky! is a story that offers examples of kindness. For instance, Libby’s mom reaches out to Libby when she is disappointed after the Sloth Extravaganza. And Libby tells Mrs. Edwin and her mother how Sparky is kind: he’s a patient friend who listens really well, and is easy to spend time with, just being quiet. Write about a time a friend, family member, or pet helped you feel better by offering you kindness.



Tricky Pet Facts

We all know that dogs like their bellies rubbed and that kittens like a dish of milk, but can you match these tricky facts to the correct pet?

Guinea Pigs	Parrots	Dogs
Hamsters	Bunnies	Frogs
Goldfish	Turtles	Cats

1. These fluffy plant-eaters are born with their eyes closed and without fur:

2. These reptiles have excellent eyesight and a great sense of smell – and also a shell:

3. This pet spends about 70% of the day sleeping, and 15% of the day grooming:

4. This popular pet has the same type of rapid eye movement (REM) and vivid dreams during sleep that humans do: _____
5. These pets can be taught to imitate the human voice, and some species can live up to 80 years:

6. This pet has no eyelids, but is able to recognize human faces, shapes and colors:

7. This furry nocturnal animal can have a litter of up to 20 babies, and can store food in its cheeks for eating later: _____
8. Despite their tricky name, these animals are actually rodents, and love to be held:

9. This jumpy pet loves to eat crickets: _____



Tricky Pet Facts

ANSWER KEY

1. Bunnies
2. Turtles
3. Cats
4. Dogs
5. Parrots
6. Goldfish
7. Hamsters
8. Guinea Pigs
9. Frogs

FURTHER CLASSROOM ADVENTURES

Drama Games relating to *Sparky!*

In our Lifeline residencies, we use theatre games to not only teach the basics of performance, but also to explore themes in the student matinees. Below are some games you can play with your class that touch upon some of the concepts conveyed in the production.

Pet Scramble *(to celebrate pets and getting to know one another)*

Ages: 2nd grade and up

How to Play: Have the group stand in a circle and use something uniform to mark their spots (chairs, a tape mark, a carpet square, etc.). The leader assigns each person one of three or four common pets (cat, puppy, hamster, etc.). Start the game with the teacher/leader in the middle of the circle. Leader calls out one of the animals (“cats!”) and everyone who is that pet has to leave their spot and find a new empty spot in the circle where someone else was sitting/standing. Do this with each pet and different combinations of pets until everyone understands this step. Next, the leader can make the prompts more personal (i.e., “People wearing blue,” “People who have brothers,” “People who like playing sports,” or more complex questions.) Kids around the circle continue to find new spots when the statement applies to them. The next, more advanced, step is for the leader to say something true about herself, and thus have to find one of the seats around the circle, making it so that a new person will end up in circle as leader. Statements can be “I like ice cream,” or “I want to be famous when I grow up,” or “I have seen the Atlantic Ocean,” etc. Everyone who agrees moves, and the last person without a spot stands in the center. New rounds can start by calling out the animal names again. Warning: Make sure as the game gets exciting that you verbalize: “No running, so no one gets hurt!” You can alternatively require students to walk in slow motion or tip-toe or hop, etc.

Pace Game *(to explore rates of speed)*

Ages: K and Up

How to Play: With students in their own self-space, talk about animals that they consider to be the fastest in the animal kingdom. Choose one (maybe “cheetah”) and have students run in place at “cheetah pace.” Then talk about animals that generally move at a more moderate pace (maybe “humans”) and have students run or walk in place at “human pace.” Then talk about the slowest animals, and choose one. (Perhaps “sloths.”) Have students move in place at “sloth pace.” (The group may have chosen 3 different animals: gazelle/raccoon/snail, or whatever.) The leader calls out the paces and the students run or walk in place: “Human pace! Sloth pace! Cheetah pace!” The next, more advanced, step is for the leader to call out activities to be pantomimed: “Building a sand castle – sloth pace!” “Making a sandwich – cheetah pace!” Make sure students are still doing each specific movement of the task, even when moving at cheetah pace.

Mirror *(to practice putting our complete focus on another person)*

Ages: K and Up

How to Play: Students are put into pairs, and instructed to find their own space in the room. They should face each other and determine which player will be Player A and which will be Player B. Then, Player A begins slowly, silently, moving his body, and Player B must be the mirror, following his actions exactly, creating the illusion of the mirror. At the teacher’s prompting, Player B then leads, and Player A follows. Urge students to move slowly, in ways that their partners can follow, working together to create the illusion of the mirror. Eventually, designate “no leader,” so that both players are leading and following simultaneously, or switching back and forth on their own.

Molasses *(a slow motion game)*

Ages: All Ages

How to Play: From a standing position each student must move without the leader seeing them to get all the way down to the floor on their back. If the leader sees anyone move, he will call that student out and the student will have to start from beginning. Then, reverse it from the floor up, or have students move from one side of the room to the other.

Student Review of *Sparky!*

By: _____

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

My favorite part of the play was _____

because _____

My favorite character was _____

because _____

If I had to choose what I liked best, I would choose (circle one)

the story the characters the music the costumes the scenery

because _____

KidSeries Teacher Comment Form

We'd love to hear from you! Please fill out this comment form, and get it back to us one of two ways: Either mail it to Julie Ganey, Education Director, Lifeline Theatre, 6912 North Glenwood Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60626, or email it back to us at julie@lifelinetheatre.com. If your students have completed review sheets, we'd love to see those too!

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

Show your class saw: _____

Have you attended a Lifeline KidSeries show before? ____ Yes ____ No

If yes, which one(s) have you seen?

Did you read your class the book before coming to see the show? ____ Yes ____ No

What was the strongest part of the show for you, or what did you like best?

What was the weakest part of the show for you, or what did you like least?

Would you bring your students to another performance at Lifeline? __Yes __No

Why or why not? _____

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

Please tell us about any other books you would like to see Lifeline adapt:

(optional) Name _____ Email _____