



# *The Yellow Boat*

By David Saar

Directed by **Graham Whitehead**

Scenic Design by  
**Kimb Williamson**

Costume Design by  
**Katherina Hantke**

Lighting Design by  
**Paul Black**

Musical Direction by  
**Alan Plado**

Music Composition by  
**Alan Ruch**

Stage Manager  
**Lisa A. Leonhardt**

## **THE CAST**

Benjamin..... Gordon Waggoner  
 Mother..... Cathy Dresbach\*  
 Father..... Dwayne Hartford  
 Joy.....Debra K. Stevens  
 Eddy.....D. Scott Withers  
 Chorus..... Angelica Frost  
 Chorus..... Kyle Sorrell

\*appears through the courtesy of Actors' Equity Association,  
 the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers  
 in the United States

Tempe Performing Arts Center  
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# Guide for Teachers and Parents to Childsplay's Production of *The Yellow Boat*

**We hope you find this guide helpful in preparing your children for an enjoyable and educational theatrical experience. Included you'll find things to talk about before and after seeing the performance, classroom activities that deal with curriculum connections and education standards, and resource materials.**

### **The Story...**

*The Yellow Boat* is based on the true story of Benjamin Saar, who was born with hemophilia and died in 1987 at the age of 8 of AIDS-related complications. The play was written by Benjamin's father, David Saar, who is the founder of Childsplay and its artistic director.

Along with the joys and sorrows of a "normal" childhood, the play traces Benjamin's short life as he and his family face the special challenges of hemophilia and contracting HIV through a blood transfusion. We see Benjamin admitted to the hospital, where, with the help of Joy, a Child Life Specialist, he is able to form a team with the doctors and nurses in order to participate more fully in his treatment.

A uniquely gifted artist, Benjamin's imagination transformed his physical and emotional pain into a blaze of colors and shapes in his fanciful drawings and paintings that inspired all those around him. The story is told through Benjamin's eyes and his artwork.

The play is a celebration of a child's life and a tribute to all children. Though it touches on and sensitively explores the serious issues of death and dying and AIDS, this is a play about living. It is about the power of imagination and art to transform our lives and make them full of color, energy, humor and hope.

### **About This Production...**

While *The Yellow Boat* is based on Benjamin's life, it is not simply a realistic documentary. In this play, we see a lifetime in what seems like a moment; the "eight years, four months, and twenty nine days" of Benjamin's life are explored in approximately 80 minutes.

The production style is non-realistic. Benjamin's birth is an explosion of colored fabric. The lines and shapes of his drawings are a three-dimensional "dance" of fabric and movement. The infusions of Factor 8 (to help his blood clot) are established with ribbons of red fabric drawn across the stage. The HIV infection is illustrated with the introduction of a strip of dark color into the ribbon of red fabric.

The actor who plays Benjamin uses the narrative voice to speak directly to the audience, then dives directly into the action of the scene, manipulating time freely, moving us backwards and forwards. The actor uses a cloth doll to show himself as a baby, and separate himself from his body as necessary.

Colorful, vibrant images were Benjamin's primary language. He transformed his own experience in the drawings that inspired this play.

While the play deals with Benjamin's struggle with AIDS and his ultimate death, its focus is really on Benjamin as an artist and how he was able to use art and creativity to communicate his feelings:

"I think we need to emphasize the theme of the artist, the artist's voice, and the use of art as a means of expressing emotion and dealing with the huge journey that Benjamin was facing. In this context the play can be broken into three sections. The first section begins as Benjamin discovers the power of art as a language and a guide. In the second section, in the hospital, the language is lost. We find Benjamin surrounded by white-coated people in a white, sterile environment and his will and ability to communicate through his art is depleted and, for a while, totally disappears. The third section, then, through the intervention of the aptly-named character of Joy [the Child Life Specialist], Benjamin is again able to find his wonderfully individual artistic voice, the one that carries him on the journey that only he can make."

Graham Whitehead, Director, *The Yellow Boat*

### **Benjamin's Art...**

When you are at the theatre, be sure to take time before or after the show to view the original paintings and drawings by Benjamin Saar displayed in and around the theatre. Benjamin expressed his feelings eloquently through his artwork. Have your students notice the minute detail, the way he used colors, and discuss what those colors might signify. There are a number of self-portraits in the collection. What do those show about how he felt about himself, his illness, his treatment?

# Things to Talk About Before Seeing the Production...

## A Word About Theater Etiquette...

Whether going to the theater or having theater come to you, there are a few important things to communicate to your students before seeing a play. Since this may be the first live theater experience for some of your students, please take a moment to discuss the following prior to seeing the performance (3AT-R2).

- Stay seated during the performance.
- Remember that the performers can hear and see the audience just like the audience can hear and see the performers. Be respectful to the performers and other students in the audience by not talking and staying in your own space.
- Appropriate responses such as clapping or laughter are always welcome!

## Preparatory Discussion Topics...

*The Yellow Boat* will raise questions among its audiences—questions about serious illness, compassion, fear and how society deals with it, and the cycle of life and death. Preparatory discussion will help young people (and adults) to understand the play and to express their feelings about the plays issues:

- Share with the students the fact that this play is based on a true story.
  - Describe the theatrical stylization they will see in this production (see About this Production).
  - Talk about and share experiences of personal loss that you or your students may have had.
  - Talk about the fact that the play will elicit a range of emotions from everyone—children and adults alike.
- Read about and discuss information about hemophilia and HIV/AIDS. Educate and prepare yourself for the questions that will come after the play.

### Language and Vocabulary...

Because several scenes of this play take place in a hospital, it would be a good idea to introduce your students to some of the specialized medical language used. Definitions and discussions of such words as **Hemophilia**, **Blood transfusion**, **Factor 8**, **HIV-positive** and **AIDS virus** will help them to follow those scenes without being concerned about missing meaning. You will find definitions of these terms highlighted on this page.

## About HIV/AIDS...

- **AIDS** is an acronym for **Acquired ImmunoDeficiency Syndrome**. It is a disease caused by the **Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)**. **HIV** may live in the human body for years and can be spread to others before symptoms appear. HIV makes you unable to fight other diseases that invade your body. These diseases can be fatal.
- There is currently no cure for HIV.
- As frightening as HIV/AIDS is, we cannot allow our fears to block efforts to teach children about this serious disease. It is important for you to know the facts regarding HIV/AIDS and help your children learn how the virus is and is not spread.
- Who you are has nothing to do with whether you are in danger of being infected with the virus. AIDS is non-discriminatory and can strike any age, race or gender.
- High risk behaviors can lead to HIV:
  - Unprotected sexual intercourse
  - Sharing hypodermic needles
- Giving blood does not put you at risk for HIV. The equipment that is used for blood donations is always brand new – used only once, then thrown away.
- Receiving a blood transfusion no longer presents a risk for HIV. Some people (like Benjamin) were infected with HIV by getting blood prior to 1985. Today, all donated blood in the U.S. is tested to make it safe for transfusions. The risk of HIV transmission from a blood transfusion is less than 2%.

### You cannot get HIV/AIDS from:

- |                               |                           |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| ▶ playing with other children | ▶ touching other children |
| ▶ coughing                    | ▶ sneezing                |
| ▶ spitting                    | ▶ drinking fountains      |
| ▶ a hug                       | ▶ sweat                   |
| ▶ tears                       | ▶ mosquito bites          |

### or from using

- |                         |                        |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| ▶ toilets               | ▶ showers              |
| ▶ forks, knives, spoons | ▶ cups                 |
| ▶ desks                 | ▶ playground equipment |
| ▶ swimming pools        | ▶ chairs               |



*You cannot get HIV  
by being a friend.*

## About Hemophilia...

**Hemophilia** is a hereditary blood clotting disorder that affects males almost exclusively. In many cases there is a known family history of hemophilia. However, up to one third of newly discovered cases occur in families without a history of this disorder. Daughters may “carry” the gene for hemophilia, but rarely have the symptoms of the disorder.

- A hemophiliac does not bleed faster than anyone else, but he may bleed for a longer time. The major problem for the hemophiliac is not external cuts and bruises but uncontrolled internal bleeding, which can begin spontaneously, and without apparent cause. Over time, bleeding into joints and muscles can cause crippling and pain.
- 80% of hemophiliacs have **Type A hemophilia**, which indicates the absence of a protein carried in the blood that is necessary for clotting. **Factor 8** is the name of the missing protein, and it is mentioned frequently in the play.
- The hemophiliac is treated with **blood transfusions** (a procedure in which the blood or blood components from one person, called a donor, is given to another, called a recipient) by infusing a clotting factor, derived from human blood, which remains active in his blood for a short period of time. It is important to administer clotting factor with most internal bleeds in order to reduce the chances of permanent damage.
- Although there are effective controls, there is no cure for hemophilia. A child born with the disorder will have it all his life.
- The cost of treatment now averages \$80,000 to \$100,000 per year per patient.

# After the Show...

•The play is targeted to grades 4-8. Activities can be adjusted to serve different ages and needs.

## Things to Talk About:

(3AT-R1, 3AT-R3)

### **Questions to Spark Discussion:**

- ▶ What did you like or not like about the play? What helped make it believable? How did the technical elements help communicate the story?
- ▶ Why do you think it was easier for Benjamin to draw how he felt than to tell his doctors?
- ▶ How did adults react when Benjamin's parents told them of his HIV infection? Why?
- ▶ Why was Eddie allowed to go to the hospital? How would you feel about visiting a very sick friend in the hospital? What might you talk about or do together?
- ▶ Benjamin and his family encounter prejudice (irrational suspicion or hatred of a particular group, race, or religion, formed without knowledge of the facts) in their community. Have you ever experienced prejudice or felt prejudice towards someone?

## Activities To Try:

### Language Arts/ Creative Writing

(W-E1, 1AV-R3)

**Personal Metaphors:** A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison, as in "a sea of troubles". Benjamin represented himself as a yellow boat soaring skyward. How would you represent yourself? Draw your own metaphor, and then use poetic images to describe it. Start with "I am a... and go from there!"

**Personal Legacies:** A personal legacy is something one leaves behind or what one is remembered by. Benjamin's legacy is his art, the play, and the inspiration they give to others. What would you want your legacy to be? Write a paragraph or two about what you would be remembered for.

### Art

(1AV-R1, 1AV-F3)

#### **Color Connotation:**

Benjamin used color to express different feelings. Create a list of 10 emotions like anger, joy, sadness, etc. Using old magazines, have the students find colors and/or textures that represent each emotion. Cut or tear them out and make a collage of words and colors!

**Squiggle Start:** The first bit of color or line an artist makes begins a whole world of possibility. Start with a squiggly line on a blank piece of paper. Now, trade with a friend. What could the line become? Complete the picture!

### **A House With A Million Rooms:**

Benjamin imagines a house with a million rooms. Draw your own house with a million rooms. Fill it with rooms that are just as you want them to be. Add a secret room that no one knows about except you. Where is it? How do you get there? What's in it?

**Me Drawings:** Start with a big piece of paper the size of you. Have a friend outline your body. Fill your body with as many elements of you as you can think of. Think in terms of adjectives or words that describe you. Use your favorite colors and fill in as much space as you can!

### Science

(4SC-F5)

**"Me"-Rays:** X-rays help doctors to see what's inside of us. Draw an imaginary x-ray. Where are your bones? Your heart? Your lungs? You can use different colors to show "feeling places" as Benjamin did with Joy in the play.

### Creative Drama/Music/Dance

(1AT-E3, 1AT-R5)

**Town Meeting:** People are often divided about decisions that are made in their communities. Hold a town meeting in which an issue is being argued. First, choose an issue. Maybe it's about a historic building being torn down to make room for a highway or maybe it's something more serious like whether or not a child with HIV should be permitted to go to a particular school (like Benjamin). Divide into two equal groups and come up with the reasons for your feelings. Look for factual information to support your choice. Try to find ways to convince the other group that your choice is the right one. Then, with the teacher as the leader or mayor, have a debate about the issue (the teacher can act as facilitator to make sure the debate runs smoothly). Once each group has had a chance to speak, vote on the issue. Discuss the outcome. Did anyone change opinions? Why or why not?

**Rituals:** Divide into groups and create your own ritual commemorating birth or death. Include music (live or recorded), dance/movement, and dialogue. Rehearse and then share with the rest of the class.

### Math

(2M-E1)

**Stats:** Find statistics for HIV infections from 1985 to the present. Create a graph for each year and compare. Which year has the highest number of infections? The least?

### Social Studies

(1SS-E1, 1SS-E11)

**Life and Death Rituals:** People celebrate life and mourn death in many different ways. Compare any experience of birth or death rituals known by members of the class, then research and examine those of other cultures.

**Plagues and Epidemics:** Epidemics and plagues run throughout the course of world history. Every historical period has had some kind of plague: bubonic plague, cholera, leprosy, and polio, to name a few. How have they affected the time in which they occurred? What were the effects on literature, art and culture? How is HIV/AIDS affecting our society today?

### **Ribbons and Awareness:**

The red ribbon is a symbol of AIDS awareness just like the pink ribbon is a symbol of Breast Cancer awareness. Research awareness ribbons and see how many you can find! What do they represent? Make a chart with the ribbons and what they represent.

### **Red Ribbon Campaign:**

Have your own Red Ribbon Campaign to raise money for AIDS research or to send a child to camp! Set a financial goal and a time limit for raising the money. Go to a craft store like Michael's and buy red ribbon and safety or stickpins. Cut the ribbon into 5 or 6-inch sections and use a pin to hold it together. Offer the ribbons to people in exchange for a donation. Let people know what you're doing and where the money will go. Advertise your campaign in school and/or in the community. Check out the "How to Help" section at [www.campheartland.com](http://www.campheartland.com) for more ideas!



A Scandinavian folk song tells of three little boats. "one was blue, one was red, and one was as yellow as the sun. They sailed far out to sea. The blue one returned to the harbor. The red one sailed home, too. But the yellow boat sailed up to the sun."

Benjamin always concluded his bedtime ritual by saying, "Mom, you can be the red boat, or the blue boat, but I am the yellow boat."

# Additional Resources for Parents and Teachers...

## The Yellow Boat Booklist

Prepared by Tim Wadham,  
Youth Services Coordinator  
Maricopa County Library District

### For Younger Readers

By Eleanor Coerr  
*Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*

By Tony Johnston  
*That Summer*

### Fiction

By Paula Fox  
*The Eagle Kite*

By Lois Lowry  
*A Summer to Die*

By Teresa Nelson  
*Earthshine*

### Non-Fiction and Biography

By Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe  
*Daddy and Me: a photo story of Arthur Ashe and his daughter, Camera*

By Anna Forbes  
*Kids With AIDS*

By Kathryn White  
*Everything You Need to Know about AIDS and HIV*

By Ryan White  
*Ryan White: My Own Story*

By Judd Winick  
*Pedro and Me: Friendship, Loss and What I Learned*

All materials are available through the  
Maricopa County Library District  
Check it out!



A GREAT way to get information is from the internet! These are FANTASTIC resources for you and your students!

### HIV/AIDS Statistics

- ▶ [www.cdc.gov/hiv/stat-trends.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/stat-trends.htm) (statistics from the CDC for HIV/AIDS for the nation)
- ▶ [www.hs.state.az.us/phs/hiv/hiv\\_epi.htm](http://www.hs.state.az.us/phs/hiv/hiv_epi.htm) (Arizona HIV/AIDS statistics and reports)
- ▶ [www.kaisernetwork.org/static/spotlight\\_hiv\\_aids\\_factsatagance.cfm](http://www.kaisernetwork.org/static/spotlight_hiv_aids_factsatagance.cfm) (HIV facts at a glance)

### HIV Facts

- ▶ [www.hs.state.az.us/phs/hiv/englishfacts.htm](http://www.hs.state.az.us/phs/hiv/englishfacts.htm) (HIV facts in English; also available in Spanish)
- ▶ [www.npan.org](http://www.npan.org) (National Pediatric AIDS Network)
- ▶ [www.pedaids.org](http://www.pedaids.org) (Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation)
- ▶ [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

### HIV Resources in General

- ▶ [www.aids-alliance.org/links/index.htm](http://www.aids-alliance.org/links/index.htm) (AIDS Alliance for Children, Youth & Families—very comprehensive resource list)
- ▶ Arizona Department of Health Services Office of HIV Services, 3815 N. Black Canyon Highway, Phoenix, AZ 85015, (602) 230-5819

### HIV Resource Books for Young People

- ▶ Be A Friend by Wiener, Best & Pizzo
- ▶ [www.youth.org/loco/PERSONProject/Resources/Books/AIDS-biblio.html](http://www.youth.org/loco/PERSONProject/Resources/Books/AIDS-biblio.html) (a bibliography)
- ▶ [www.santacruzpl.org/kids/bibs/world/aids.pdf](http://www.santacruzpl.org/kids/bibs/world/aids.pdf) (a bibliography)
- ▶ [www.siecus.org/pubs/biblio/bibs0021.html](http://www.siecus.org/pubs/biblio/bibs0021.html) (a bibliography)

### Hemophilia Information

- ▶ [www.hemophilia.org/bdi/bdi\\_issues.htm](http://www.hemophilia.org/bdi/bdi_issues.htm)
- ▶ [www.hematology.org/news/press/press00\\_8.cfm](http://www.hematology.org/news/press/press00_8.cfm)
- ▶ The Hemophilia Association, 4001 N. 24<sup>th</sup> Street, Phoenix, AZ 85016, (602) 955-3947

Compiled by Tara Radke, MPH, Bill Holt Pediatric Infectious Disease Clinic Coordinator, Phoenix Children's Hospital. Tara is available to answer questions at 602.546.0233 or [tradke@phoenixchildrens.com](mailto:tradke@phoenixchildrens.com).

▶ For more information about The Bill Holt Pediatric Infectious Disease Clinic, go to [www.phoenixchildrenshospital.com](http://www.phoenixchildrenshospital.com).

▶ To learn more about art therapy go to The American Art Therapy Association's website at [www.arttherapy.org](http://www.arttherapy.org).

▶ To learn more about Child Life Specialists go to the Child Life Council's website at [www.childlife.org](http://www.childlife.org).

▶ A wonderful place for young people with HIV/AIDS is Camp Heartland. Visit their website at [www.campheartland.com](http://www.campheartland.com).

▶ For more information about Arizona Arts Standards, go to [www.ade.state.az.us/standards/arts](http://www.ade.state.az.us/standards/arts).

## About Childsplay...

Childsplay is a non-profit professional theatre company of adult actors, performing for young audiences and families.

Our Mission is to create theatre so strikingly original in form, content or both, that it instills in young people an enduring awe, love and respect for the medium, thus preserving imagination and wonder, the hallmarks of childhood, which are the keys to the future.

We love to hear from our audience members! Send letters, drawings or reviews to:



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