



Interrupting Vanessa

by Colleen Neuman

Directed by Anthony Runfola

Scenic Design by Katharina Hantke

Costume Design by Liz Ihlenfeld

Sound Design by Anthony Runfola

Lighting Design by Michael Eddy

The Cast

Vanessa. Yolonda London
 Mom. Jodie L. Weiss
 Dad. Steven Scally
 Timmy Fibbins. Eric Zaklukiewicz

School Tour- November, 2004- June, 2005

This production is supported in part by:

- America West Airlines Education Foundation
- Arizona ArtShare
- Arizona Commission on the Arts
- Arizona Diamondbacks Charities
- Arizona Republic
- Bashas'
- Boeing ECF
- City of Tempe / Tempe Municipal Arts Commission
- JP Morgan Chase
- The Medtronic Foundation
- National Endowment for the Arts
- Pacific Life Foundation
- Phelps Dodge Foundation
- Phoenix Office of Arts and Culture
- Phoenix Suns Charities
- Pinnacle West Energy / West Phoenix Fund
- Scottsdale Cultural Council
- Tucson/Pima Arts Council

Preview Guide for Parents and Teachers to
 Childsplay's Production of

Interrupting Vanessa

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:

In a world where imaginary friends seem real, and real friends are scarce, Vanessa discovers both.

Vanessa lives with her mother. Her mother seems too busy to listen to her and calls Vanessa's beloved collection of stuff a "pile of junk". Vanessa uses her stuff to create inventions and to make up stories. Alone in her room, Vanessa gets carried away by her imagination, telling knock, knock jokes with her made-up father and creating elaborate stories about things like receiving a gold medal from the president and having a ranch with bucking broncos. Her mother finally gets her attention only to make a horrible announcement: Timmy Fibbins is coming over to play. Vanessa is mortified because no one talks to Timmy at school and he has a tendency to throw up after eating peanut butter sandwiches. Her dad reminds her that no one talks to her, either. He also decides that it's time for him to leave. Vanessa protests saying " I made you up. You have to do what I say!" Once Timmy arrives and starts talking things aren't so bad. Timmy likes Vanessa's junk, laughs at her jokes, and doesn't laugh at her inventions. And he's a great audience for her wildly imaginative stories, most of which are not at all true. In the end, Vanessa makes a new friend and a statement of truth: her dad died last year. Realizing she is never really alone, she lets her dad go to "live on the ranch and ride the broncos."

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 pointers prior to seeing the performance.

- ◆ 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 people in the audience by not talking during the performance.
- ◆ Appropriate responses such as clapping or laughter are always welcome!
- ◆ Please, please, please turn off all cell phones and leave your cameras at home!

Things to Talk About and Do Before Seeing the Performance:

Behind the Scenes:

How does a play go from page to stage? Way before the rehearsals ever begin, a design team consisting of scenic, costume, props, lighting and sound designers is assembled to create the world of the play. At the first *production meeting*, the director presents his or her vision for the play. Ideas are exchanged and preliminary designs are created. Over a period of several weeks or months, the designs evolve into what is the final production. Meanwhile, about 3 or 4 weeks prior to the opening of the play, the actors go into rehearsal. The actors start by simply reading the script out loud (the first *read through*). The director spends some time discussing the play and the characters before putting it on its feet. The director gives the actors blocking (where and when to move, sit, stand, etc.) and the actors are responsible for writing their blocking in their scripts in order to remember it. Once a play is blocked, it is rehearsed until it is ready for an audience. The actors have homework outside of rehearsal that consists of memorizing lines and blocking, and doing any research necessary to develop their characters. While the play is being rehearsed and the sets are being built, the marketing team is working hard at publicizing and selling the play because, of course, you can't have a play without an audience!



Preliminary scenic design by Katharina Hantke

The Actor Factor

When students ask questions of actors following a performance, they often wonder what it's like to be an actor. Here's an explanation from the Childsplay point of view: Being an actor can be a challenging job. Most actors do not make movie star salaries and are continually looking for the next job. In addition to acting jobs, many actors have to work another job in order to make ends meet. Childsplay has the unusual advantage of employing a resident acting ensemble, which means that you see many of the same faces throughout the season in different roles. The advantage for the actor is that Childsplay provides year-round employment and benefits. For Childsplay, the ensemble system ensures that we can retain our best actors, and that rehearsals tend to move along faster when the actors are familiar with each other and often, with the directors.

About the Play:

Interrupting Vanessa handles a difficult topic in a very delicate way. Vanessa's life has been interrupted by her father's death. She is unable or unwilling to let go of him and is scared to be alone. So, she creates an imaginary version of him. She works through problems she has at school and at home by talking to him. The play is more about transitions than about death. Vanessa makes a transition in her life when she makes a friend in Timmy and is able to say goodbye to her father. Timmy makes a transition when he spends time away from his overprotective mother and makes a friend in Vanessa. And Vanessa's mom makes a transition when she listens to Vanessa and becomes a little more accepting of who she is.

Loss and Transition:

From the death of a loved one to the melancholy sadness felt upon graduating from one school and moving on to the next is an inherent part of all children's lives. The simple act of giving up

a security blanket is accompanied by a period of loss and transition in a child. Some people feel a sense of sadness when the seasons change! Talk about change and transition. How do we deal with change? How do we feel when we lose something or someone? What helps us to feel better during these transitions?

"We know what we are, but know not what we may be."

-William Shakespeare

Imaginary Friends:

It is quite common for children of about three or four years of age to have an imaginary friend. This may be another child or could be a magical person or an animal. Sometimes the imaginary friend changes as the child grows older. Having an imaginary friend does not necessarily mean that a child is lonely. They are often creative, imaginative children. As the child grows older the real world takes over and by the time the child is going to school the imaginary friend usually just quietly disappears. Sometimes children create imaginary friends as a result of trauma or crisis or because they are indeed lonely. Such is the case with Vanessa. She creates an imaginary friend in her deceased father as a way to cope with her sense of loneliness and grief.

"Friendship with oneself is all important because without it one cannot be friends with anybody else in the world."

-Eleanor Roosevelt

Multi-Tasking Parents:

Everyone's parents are different. Some work full time while others stay at home. Some have one child while others have six! Some home school their children while some teach in the same school that their children attend. Parents have many responsibilities. Talk about the role of parents. What day-to-day responsibilities do they have? What is hard about being a parent? What problems can they face in raising children? What can you do to help your parents?

Things to Talk About and Do After Seeing the Performance:

- ▶ All plays have three P's: *People* in a *Place* with a *Problem*. Where does the play take place? Who are the people? What are the problems?
- ▶ Vanessa creates an imaginary character to help her deal with some issues. Who does she create and why? What happened to that character in real life?
- ▶ Vanessa's mom appears not to listen when she actually does. Has there been a time when one of your parents seemed too busy to listen? How did you feel?
- ▶ Vanessa is horrified when she finds out that her mom invited Timmy over. She doesn't want anyone at school to find out because no one talks to Timmy. Yet, she doesn't really know him and after some time together, realizes she likes him. Have you ever pre-judged someone without knowing him/her?
- ▶ Vanessa likes to make up stories. She has a very vivid imagination. What is the difference between telling a story and telling a lie? Have you ever stretched the truth a little when telling a story? Why do you think people sometimes do that?

Social Studies:

Family Units: All families are different. Some children have two parents, some have two sets of parents, while some have only one parent. Vanessa is from a single parent family. Research family units in the United States (or in your school). What percentage of families are single parent families? What percentage are blended families? Multi-generational (grandparents raising grandkids or living with them) families? Other?

Language Arts:

Stories of Change: Write a short story that tells about something or someone you have lost or a place you have had to leave. How did you feel at the time? How do you feel now? Share the story with the rest of the class.

Mottoes: (A brief statement used to express a principle, goal, or ideal). Timmy talks about having a motto on a flag. Vanessa's dad then lists several mottoes like "a penny saved is a penny earned" and "a stitch in time saves nine". Come up with a list of familiar mottoes. Now, invent your own personal motto. Create a motto wall in your classroom where all of the mottoes can be displayed!

Dream Teacher:

Vanessa and Timmy love their teacher, Mrs. Wing. She is interesting and unique. Imagine that you are hiring the perfect teacher. Think about what your requirements would be for the teacher. Write a classified (want-ad) for the newspaper. Look at real classified ads for ideas!

The Arts:

Music:

Vanessa experiences several different emotions in the play: fear, frustration, happiness, anger, etc. Talk about the different feelings she experiences. Either as a class or in small groups, find music that communicates Vanessa's various moods.

Dance:

Now that you have music that represents different emotions, come up with movement that communicates the emotion (and goes with the music). Divide into groups of three or four and choose one emotion music piece that you can create a short movement piece or dance for. Share with the class!

Visual Art:

Stuff Sculptures: Vanessa loves to collect stuff and is offended when her mother calls it "junk". Start collecting stuff like: wire, metal, tile, cardboard, plastic, etc. Connect your stuff together (using glue, wire or whatever) to create a sculpture! Display your work somewhere in your school!

Theater/Creative Drama:

This Is Not A...

Vanessa loves to find unlikely uses for things. For this game you'll need several everyday objects like a cardboard box, an umbrella, a

Frisbee or a plastic cup. Start with one object and say "this is not a box" (or whatever the object is). Then, ask for a volunteer to come up and make the object become something else by doing something with it (for example, sit on the box so we know it's a chair). See how many different ways you can use the object and then try it with a different object!

Science:

Junk Inventions:

Vanessa finds something that look like part of a machine and she decides that it is called a boom and it is part of an artificial heart. Use found objects to create your own inventions! Draw a diagram, label the parts and write a description of what it does. It can serve a realistic purpose or it can be a completely made up function!

Math:

Using the results from the Social Studies activity, create a pie chart and/or graph to display your results.

Foreign Language:

Translate the words "friend," "mom" and "dad" into as many languages as you can! Write them on a poster that you can put up in the classroom.

Workplace Skills:

Timmy has a problem with a bully at school. Use critical and creative thinking skills to try and solve his problem. Write down the choices you devise and then vote on which solution is the best!

Health/P.E. and

Technology/Computers:

Create a list of items that you would consider the perfect lunch. Now, using the packaging from your food items (or another source), find out how many calories, grams of fat, grams of carbohydrates (and percentage of vitamins, if possible) there are in your perfect lunch. Next, go to the internet and find out what the daily recommendations are for each area. Is your perfect lunch healthy?

Interrupting Vanessa Booklist:

Prepared with the help of Tim Wadham, Youth Services Coordinator for the Maricopa County Library District

Imagination

Abuela by Arthur Dorros
Roxaboxen by Alice McClearran
Edward in the Jungle by David McPhail
Edward and the Pirates by David McPhail
Sam, Bangs and Moonshine by Evaline Ness
Cowboy and His Friend by Joan Walsh Anglund
A Cool Moonlight by Angela Johnson



Making Friends

How to Be A Friend: A Guide to Making Friends and Keeping Them by Laurene Krasny Brown
Timothy Goes to School by Rosemary Wells
The Care and Keeping of Friends illustrated by Nadine Bernard Westcott

Loss and Transition

The Tenth Good Thing About Barney by Judith Viorst
Nana Upstairs, Nana Downstairs by Tomie DePaola
Barn Kitty by June Kirkpatrick
Olive's Ocean by Kevin Henkes

Single Parenting

DeDe Takes Charge by Johanna Hurwitz
Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key by Jack Gantos
Moving Mama to Town by Ronder Thomas Young
The One Hundredth Thing About Caroline by Lois Lowry

Loneliness

My Father is Far Away by Robin Ballard
Very Best (almost) Friends: Poems of Friendship selected by Paul B. Janeczko
Missing May by Cynthia Rylant
The Small World of Binky Braverman by Rosemary Wells

Fibs and Lies

My Big Lie by Bill Cosby
Tell A Lie And Your Butt Will Grow by Dan Greenburg

Books for Adults:

Life and Loss: A Guide to Help Grieving Children
By Linda Goldman

Talking With Children About Loss: Words, Strategies, and Wisdom to Help Children Cope With Death, Divorce, and Other Difficult Times
By Maria Trozzi and Kathy Massimini

When Children Grieve: For Adults to Help Children Deal with Death, Divorce, Pet Loss, Moving, and Other Losses
By John W. James

Helping Children Cope With the Loss of A Loved One: A Guide for Grownups
By William C. Kroen

Interesting Internet Sites:

www.grievingchild.org

www.singleparents.org

www.babyzone.com

-type "imaginary friends" into search



Bring your friends and family to see

Interrupting Vanessa

at the Tempe Performing Arts Center
April 23-24 and April 30-May 1, 2005
Call (480)350-8119 for ticket information!

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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PO Box 517
Tempe, AZ 85280
Call us at 480-350-8101 or
1-800-583-7831 (in-state)

Email us at: info@childsplayaz.org
Web Site: www.childsplayaz.org

Arizona Academic Standards:

Your visit to the theater as well as the preparation and follow up activities can involve many content areas from the Arizona Department of Education K-12 Academic Standards. Many of the suggested discussion topics and activities can be tied to several standards. For example, a Math activity on creating Story Problems can fulfill standards in the areas of math, language arts and the arts (theater).

To access the K-12 standards go to:

www.ade.state.az.us/standards/contentstandards.asp

We are always looking for ways to help you prepare your students for the theatre experience and at the same time fulfill curriculum and standards requirements.

If you have any suggestions as to how we might improve in this area, please email Katie McFadzen at kmcfadzen@childsplayaz.org