

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

Bunnicula

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 this hilarious musical, the Monroe family animals, Chester the cat and Harold the dog, tell the tale of a mysterious bunny who comes to live in their house. It was a dark and stormy night (of course) and the Monroe's have just returned from the movies where they have seen a vampire flick. While there, they found a bunny sitting in one of the seats. They had to bring him home; they couldn't just leave him there! Chester and Harold are not thrilled with this new addition to the family. The rabbit is given the name Bunnicula and is there only a short time before *dreadful* things begin to happen. A tomato in the kitchen turns white. Soon other vegetables begin to lose their colors! The Monroe's assume that the veggies have gone bad or that maybe they need to change grocery stores. Chester, through her fine detective work, figures out that the rabbit is a vampire and she tries several ways of stopping him from destruction. But depriving Bunnicula of his vegetables makes him lethargic and sad. It is Harold who makes everyone understand that Bunnicula must have his veggie juice in order to survive. In the end Chester and Harold find room in their hearts for a very special bunny. Based on the books that have delighted millions of children since 1979, *Bunnicula* lives on in this silly, only slightly scary romp. Best enjoyed by ages 5 and up.



Bunnicula

Based on the book by **Deborah and James Howe**
Book and Lyrics by **Jon Klein**
Music by **Chris Jeffries**
Directed by **Adam Burke**
Scenic Design by **Paul Sannerud**
Costume & Puppetry Designs by **Rebecca Akins**
Lighting Design by **Michael J. Eddy**
Musical Direction by **Alan Plado**
Choreography by **Francis Smith Cohen**
Sound Design by **T. Greg Squires**
Stage Manager: **Samantha Ries**

Bunnicula.....Jodie L. Weiss
Harold..... Jon Gentry
Chester..... Debra K. Stevens
Robert Monroe..... D. Scott Withers
Ann Monroe.....Katie McFadzen
Pete Monroe..... Dwayne Hartford
Toby Monroe.....Michael Arbuckle



This production is supported in part by:

Arizona Commission on the Arts
Bashas' Markets
City of Tempe/Tempe Municipal Arts Commission
Tempe Diablos
Wells Fargo

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 standards in several areas. We have included some standard connections that are noted in parentheses. *If you would like a more detailed list of standard connections for your particular grade we would be happy to assist.* Simply email Katie McFadzen at kmcfadzen@childsplayaz.org or call 480-350-8105.

Things to Talk About and Do Before Seeing the Show...

Theater Etiquette: (3AT-R2) It's helpful to review the rules of theater etiquette before seeing a show especially 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.

~ Be respectful to the performers and other people in the audience by not talking during the performance.

~ Appropriate responses such as applause or laughter are always welcome.

~Use of cell phones, cameras and any other recording device are *not allowed in the theater at any time!*

Read the book: If you haven't already read *Bunnicula* by Deborah and James Howe, read it before you see the play. You can read it aloud as a class or as part of your homework. Talk about the plot and characters as a class.

Adapting Books for the Stage:

Reading the book, it's hard to imagine how it could be translated to the stage because the characters appear as cartoon illustrations *and* they're animals! A team of designers worked with the director to create the world of the play. When you see the play, you won't see the characters dressed in animal costumes. Instead, the costumes will give suggestions of the creature by using color and texture. Because Harold and Chester are very human-like characters and are played by humans, their costumes, movements and voices will be very human! Since the play is from the

viewpoint of the animals, the set designer used forced perspective to make the house seem bigger than life and a monochromatic color scheme (supposedly many animals can only see shades of gray). The designs also have a 1950's horror movie feel to them. Bunnicula is a three-foot tall puppet manipulated by an actor dressed in black who is in plain view of the audience.

About James Howe:

James Howe is the author of many novels for young readers, including six books about



Bunnicula and his friends, the Sebastian Barth mystery series, the Pinky and Rex series, and the highly acclaimed picture books *Horace and Morris but Mostly Dolores* and *There's a Monster Under My Bed*. He has also written four interactive Bunnicula books: *Bunnicula's Wickedly Wacky Word Games*, *Bunnicula's Pleasantly Perplexing Puzzlers*, *Bunnicula's Long-Lasting Laugh-Alouds*, and *Bunnicula's Frightfully Fabulous Factoids*.

James Howe credits the creation of *Bunnicula* to his and his late wife Debbie's passion for watching B-movie versions of Dracula on late night television. It was Debbie's mother who suggested writing a children's book about *Bunnicula*. "Transylvanian Bunny turns into vampire at night." Those were the first words written down when James and Debbie sat down to write a book with no idea where they were heading.*

*Excerpts from James Howe's *Reflections on a Vampire Rabbit*, originally written for Seattle Children's Theatre in 1996

The Vampire Myth:

Bunnicula is a vampire bunny who preys on vegetables and behaves very much like the human version of a vampire. The myth of the vampire is thousands of years old and can be found in many different cultures. According to tradition, a vampire is a person who does not die, whose corpse rises from the grave at night to suck the blood of the living. The vampire must return to the grave at dawn. Excommunicated people, unbaptized children, criminals, babies born with teeth, witches, magicians, and the seventh son of a seventh son can all become vampires.

Various methods have been used to protect against vampires.



Driving a wooden stake through the heart during the daylight hours will kill one. In Eastern Europe, vampires are believed to be afraid of garlic. Farm animals can be rubbed with garlic to protect them, while garlic often hangs from doors and windows to keep vampires out. Anyone who does not like garlic can be suspected of being a vampire. Thorns of wild roses will also keep vampires away. Because vampires are compulsive counters (a condition called arithmomania), poppy seeds are often tossed around cemeteries, so that when the vampire awakes, he will spend the night counting and be forced to return to the grave before dawn. The most famous "arithmomanic" is Sesame Street's Count Von Count. Vampires dislike mirrors and silver, so silver crosses or icons were frequently displayed in houses for protection.

Things To Talk About and Do After Seeing the Performance (3AT-R1):

- 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? What happens at the beginning of the play? The middle? The end?
- How is the musical different than the book? How is it similar to the book?
- Some things in the play could happen in real life while others could not. Talk about reality vs. fantasy in regard to the play (3AT-R3).
- Chester and Harold are quite fearful of Bunnacula, even though he is quite harmless. How do they overcome their fear of differences and become friends? What are you afraid of? Does your imagination ever get the best of you and make you fearful of things that aren't really that scary (3AT-F2, 3AT-E4)?

Family Portraits: Choose your favorite artistic medium (crayons, pencils, charcoal, etc.) and create a family portrait including pets. Label each family member and come up with 3 adjectives to describe each of them. Hang them around the classroom (1AV-R1, 1AV-F6, 1AV-E1, 3AV-R2).

I See the Sea: Homonyms are words that sound the same, are spelled differently and have different meanings. In the play, Harold and Chester mistake a "steak" for a "stake." What other homonyms can you think of? Get into groups of 3 or 4. In 5 minutes write down as many homonyms as possible. Write down the combined list on the board (Writing).

It's Called A What? A portmanteau is a word that is formed by combining both sounds and meanings from two or more words. It can also be called a frankenword. For example, breakfast +lunch=brunch; smoke +fog=smog. How many other portmanteaus can you think of? Have a contest to see who can come up with the most portmanteaus in 5 minutes. Have a volunteer write the combined list on the board (Writing).

Creature Feature: Bunnacula's name was created by combining "Bunny" and "Dracula." Combine some other animal names with monsters or things to create your own weird creature. Draw a picture of your new creature. You can even build a puppet of the creature. Be sure that both parts of the name are represented. Decide what your creature does and create a public service announcement alerting the public to its dangers. If you have the equipment, you can even videotape your P.S.A.'s and share with the rest of your school (1AV-R2, 1AV-E4, 1AV-F3)!

From a Dog's Point of View: The animals in *Bunnacula* have human characteristics. They can think and talk and read. Imagine that your pet or stuffed animal could talk. Create a story about *your family* from your pet's/stuffed animal's point of view. If you have more than one pet/stuffed animal, you could have your pets/stuffed animals talk to each other in dialogue. What would he/she/they say about you? What do they like? What don't they like? What kind of funny story might they tell about you and your family (Writing)?

It's A Myth: Vampires and Dracula are nothing more than myths. Discuss the

other myths or urban legends you know of. Write your own myth or legend (complete with illustrations) and put them all together in a classroom book (Writing).

Animal Characters:

Chester and Harold are animals played by humans. The characters are very human-like both in the play and book. Create your own animal character. Decide on the type of animal, give him/her a name, draw a picture, and explore how the animal moves, eats, interacts with others and sleeps. In groups of 2 or 3, create a short scene involving your animal characters. Make sure you decide on a place and problem for your scene and make sure it has a clear beginning, middle and end. Share the scenes with the class (1AV-R1, 1AV-F1, 1AT-R3, 1AT-F2, 1AT-E1, 1AT-E3).

Before the Beginning: The only information revealed about Bunnacula's origins came from a note hanging on a collar around his neck that said, "Take good care of my baby." How did he end up in a movie theater? Where did he come from? Write the story of Bunnacula's life before he arrived in the movie theater (Writing).

Detective Work: Working in pairs, research nature's vampires - Vampire Bats. In addition, research the region that the fictional vampires traditionally come from called Transylvania. Once you have gathered information on vampire bats and Transylvania, write a letter to the Monroe family sharing the information you've found. Compare your information with Bunnacula's characteristics. Can you convince the Monroe's that he is a vampire (Reading and Writing)?

Bunnacula Booklist

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



Recommended Reading

Other *Bunnacula* books by James Howe:

Howliday Inn *Celery Stalks at Midnight*
Nighty-Nightmare *Return to Howliday Inn*
Bunnacula Strikes Again

Talk Trigger Topics:

Pets

The Mouse and the Motorcycle by Beverly Cleary
"Let's Get a Pup!", said Kate by Bob Graham
The Mysterious Tadpole by Steven Kellogg

Humor

The One Hundredth Thing About Caroline by Lois Lowry
Vampire State Building by Elizabeth Levy
The Day Jimmy's Boa Ate the Wash by Trinka Hakes Noble

Families

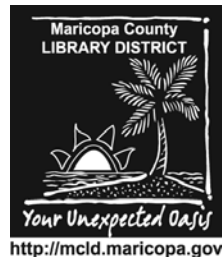
Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key by Jack Gantos
The Same Stuff as Stars by Katherine Paterson
The Bear's House by Marilyn Sachs
Moving Mama to Town by Ronder Thomas Young

Fear

Nightmares: Poems to Trouble Your Sleep by Jack Prelutsky
Junie B. Jones has a Monster Under Her Bed by Barbara Park
Some Things are Scary by Florence Parry Heide
There's a Nightmare in my Closet by Mercer Mayer

Communication

Gerald McBoingBoing by Dr. Seuss
A is for Aarrgh! by William Brooke
The Music of Dolphins by Karen Hesse



Vampire Myth

Dracula by Bram Stoker
(Children's edition from DK publishing)
Dracula by Stephanie Spinner

All materials are available through your local library.
Check it out!

Want some drama in your classroom?

If you would like help incorporating drama into your curriculum or would like to have an actor teach in your classroom, Childsplay can help. We offer a variety of residency and teacher training experiences. For more information, contact Debra K. Stevens at dstevens@childsplayaz.org or 480-350-8101



Web Sites of Interest:

www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4135921
-a great interview with James Howe that you can listen to

www.bconline.org/kidspage/kids_howe.html
-a good James Howe biography

www.romaniatourism.com/dracula.html
-lots of great info on Dracula himself!



www.answers.com/topic/count-von-count

-info about everyone's favorite Count, Sesame Street's Count Von Count

www.absoluteastronomy.com/encyclopedia/d/dr/dracula.htm
-so much info on Dracula, you'll never be able to look at it all

www.nationalgeographic.com/kids
-search for vampire bats and you'll see some cool pictures

Next from Childsplay!



THE SECRET GARDEN

By Pamela Sterling



Based on the book by Frances Hodgson Burnett
March/April 2006, Herberger Theater's Stage West
Call Beth Olson at 480-350-8107 to make your booking!

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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