



Childsplay presents
The Roseneath Theatre Company
 of Toronto, Canada
 in

Danny, King of the Basement

by **David S. Craig**

Directed by **Richard Greenblatt**
 Music Composition by **Richard Sacks**
 Set and Costume Designs by **Andjelija Djuric**
 Lighting Design by **Glenn Davidson**
 Costume Construction by **Truly Carmichael**
 Stage Manager: **Annie McWhinnie**

Herberger Theater Center, Stage West
 February 2006

The Cast

Penelope.....Sharmila Dey
 Louise..... Astrid Van Wieren
 Danny.....Matt Bois
 Angelo.....Adrian Churchill

This project is made possible in part by a grant from
 the Association of Performing Arts Presenters
 Ensemble Theatre Collaborations Grant Program, a
 component of the Doris Duke Charitable
 Foundation Theatre Initiative.

This production is supported in part by:

**THE ARIZONA
 REPUBLIC**

Arizona Commission on the Arts
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City of Tempe/Tempe Municipal Arts Commission
 Wells Fargo



Preview Guide for Parents and Teachers to the Roseneath Theatre's

Danny, King of the Basement

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.

David Craig's award-winning play is performed by the Roseneath Theatre Company, which created and first performed it in 2001. Something of an "after-school special" live on stage, the show embraces fantasy and humor, alongside drama and suspense.

Danny and his mom move *a lot*, so Danny's learned how to make friends fast. When he and his mom move to a new basement apartment, the neighbor kids Angelo and Penelope aren't getting along very well—with their parents or with each other. Using his lively imagination to create an exciting world of secret agents and spies, Danny finds plenty of ways to divert his new friends (and himself). Turns out that their playful alternate world is *exactly* what they need to help them cope with the problems they face in real life.

Most enjoyed by young people ages 7 and up

Talk Trigger Topics: homelessness / illiteracy / growing up too fast / escapism / dysfunctional families / economic status / deception / emotional abuse

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. *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 Before Seeing the Performance...

Theater Etiquette: 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!*

About the Play:

Danny, King of the Basement is a funny and touching play about a boy whose spirit and imagination triumph over the challenges of homelessness and life in a single-parent family. Through the building of community among his peers, he shows the power of friendship to change lives. It provides a timely, sensitive and creative opportunity for children and adults to learn about and discuss issues related to poverty and homelessness, and how these and other family stresses impact on self-esteem, friendships and success at school. Although the main characters in the play are dealing with serious family and societal issues, they have developed creative coping strategies which, reinforced by their friendship, allow them to transcend their situations. As a result, they provide positive role models for children dealing with similar life and family situations.

Each child has created a disguise that provides both a coping strategy and offers hope for a better future. For Danny, there is the myth of a father in Vancouver and a stable, financially secure family. Danny develops a creative role as a secret agent by which he is able to control and create friendships and move on -- physically and emotionally -- as necessary. Penelope copes with her controlling, non-communicative parents by her narcissism, her dancing and her ability to control her parents

by her material demands. Angelo hopes for a better future by becoming a hockey player is encouraged by his father although he feels the brunt of his father's displaced anger over his joblessness.

Disguise, however, is not without the anxiety that others may see through it or that it may fail or get beyond control. However, the children are resilient and under Danny's mastery as a secret agent who encourages positive social relationships through non-judgmental acceptance of each other, they develop a community which allows them to transcend and cope with their family stresses and deal with negative images and self-talk which inhibits their ability to succeed. Danny has not stayed in any situation -- school or accommodation -- long enough to learn to read. However his life-skills, his creativity, his leadership ability and the acceptance of his friends make him an engaging hero and underscore other aptitudes and intelligence that would support academic success if his life and learning opportunities become consistent and he is able to benefit from individual programming and support.

Danny, King of the Basement affirms the hope that although teachers are not able to control the make-up of their student population, they can make a significant impact on the lives and learning of their students. Danny, Penelope and Angelo are striking reminders that when teachers and caring adults assist students in developing nurturing relationships at school, they reinforce self-esteem, academic competence and the coping and problem-solving skills which allow them to transcend life's uncertainty and injustice.

***The Problem of Illiteracy In America:**

Forty percent of adult Americans have trouble reading and writing even simple things. They cannot fill out a job application, read traffic signs, read election ballots or read the prescription on a medicine bottle. They can't understand a bus schedule, newspaper article, product labels or read a story to a child.

The problem is getting worse. The United States ranks 49th among 156 United Nations member countries in

its literacy rate - a drop of 18 places since 1950. At the same time, the need for good literacy skills is increasing, especially in the workplace.

Illiteracy is a solvable problem. With only 35 to 45 hours of tutoring, an adult can improve his or her reading skills by one grade level. Libraries, community colleges, churches, newspapers, businesses, voluntary organizations, employers, correctional institutions, the national Adult Basic Education Program and community groups all across America are working to help nonreaders become new readers.

Illiteracy costs the United States more than \$225 billion a year in lost productivity. It is tied to unemployment, crime, poverty, and family problems. Seventy-five percent of unemployed adults have reading and/or writing difficulties. Sixty percent of all juvenile offenders have problems reading. Each year, \$5 billion is spent on welfare and unemployment compensation due to illiteracy.

Businesses spend millions of dollars annually to provide basic skills training for employees whose lack of education can result in low productivity, industrial accidents, lawsuits, and poor product quality. In addition to the tremendous monetary costs, there are the personal costs experienced by nonreaders and their families who have no access to the joy and knowledge found in books, magazines and newspapers. Youngsters whose parents cannot read are twice as likely as their peers to have difficulty learning to read and write well.

There are no "typical" nonreaders. They can be businessmen, college students, farmers, housewives, truck drivers, engineers, office clerks, nurses' aids, military personnel - anyone. Nonreaders come from all age groups. Forty percent are between the ages of 20 and 39; 28 percent are ages 40 to 59; and 32 percent are over 60. Nonreaders live in all kinds of neighborhoods. Fifty-one percent of illiterate adults live in small towns and suburbs, 41 percent live in urban areas, and eight percent in rural areas.

*From Literacy Program, County of Los Angeles Public Library

About Youth Homelessness in Arizona:

- It is estimated that each day in Arizona 1,780 youth under 18 are on their own and homeless.
- In 2004, Arizona law enforcement agencies filed 5,534 arrest reports for runaways. The number of runaway reports annually has been slowly increasing over the past several years.
- In 2004, there were an estimated 59 beds known as emergency community beds that can serve homeless youth, as well as 66 transitional housing beds.
- Half of the homeless youth under 18 receiving community-based services noted that they were abandoned or ran away from home.
- In a survey of 250 homeless youth in Tucson, 32 % indicated they had been physically abused as children and 58% noted they had experienced emotional or verbal abuse as children. 30% of them ran away from home because of problems and 29% were kicked out of their homes.
- Last year, about 50% of people without homes were families.

In a year, about 3 million people in America don't have homes for some period of time, whether it's one day, two weeks, 3 months or a year.

Things to Talk About and Do After Seeing the Performance...

Discussion Questions:

- *After seeing the play, have your ideas about poverty and homelessness changed?
- *How does Danny handle being poor? In what sense could we say that Danny is "homeless"? How does he feel about this situation?
- *Talk about living on a budget. Discuss how Danny is able to quickly decide how to spend the family money.
- *Which one of the characters in the play would you want for a friend? Explain why.

Homelessness and Poverty:

Making a Budget

In groups of 4 or 5, create a budget where you live on \$900 a month. Decide how much to spend on rent, food, entertainment etc. Create a shopping list of groceries you'll need for one week. Compare

budgets with other groups in your class.

Fundraiser

Research Arizona organizations that offer services to homeless youth, impoverished people and illiteracy. Decide on one of these agencies that you would like to help. Brainstorm fundraising activities (e.g. dance-a-thon, bake sale etc.). Organize, advertise and hold a fundraiser for a specific charity.

Self-esteem and Self-talk:

Building Self Esteem

In pairs, role-play a situation where one of your friends is showing low self-esteem (putting down own abilities, afraid of failing at something, etc.) Show how you could help in this situation. Try this activity without words. Use movement and mime to convey these ideas.

Coat of Arms

Create a Coat of Arms for yourself, which shows your talents, qualities, family, and interests. Display them in the classroom and take time to learn something new about everyone in your class.

Self-talk is all the messages I give to myself.

Self-talk can be...

Internal: silent, in your head

External: said out aloud

Positive: "I'm a good friend"

Encouraging: "Keep calm! Think before you act"

Negative: "I'm stupid"

Self-talk has a big impact on self-esteem: Give yourself positive messages and you'll feel better and become better.

Remember:

*I am what I say (to myself and others)

*Positive self-talk gives you power to reduce negative messages from other people

*Discuss examples from the play where negative thoughts affect the characters' self-esteem and ability to do their best (e.g. Angelo hears his father's angry messages and is unable to score at hockey; Danny believes he cannot read etc.)

*Discuss examples from real life where negative 'self-talk' leads to negative results

*Talk about how you can change other people's **put-down** messages to positive messages for yourself. **Be your own best friend...**

Practice these rules for positive self-talk:

-I will not put myself down.

-I will concentrate on what I am able to do.

-I will set small goals for improvement e.g. Practice my spelling 5 minutes every day.

-I will celebrate my improvements e.g. this week I spelled 10 words correctly; last week I only spelled 8.

-I will learn from my mistakes.

-I will choose to be with people who encourage me (supportive friend, teacher, parent, coach).

Inner/Outer Voice

In groups of three, improvise a scene where one person is speaking in a non-supportive way to the other. Two of the actors are playing the characters, while the third is the "inner voice" of the character who is feeling put-down. Before the character speaks, we should hear the character's self-talk. The audience can then help the actor change negative to positive self-talk.

Friendship:

Writing-in-Role

In role, as one of the characters in the play, write a letter to friend or relative telling them about your friendship with the other characters in the play. (e.g. Penelope tells her cousin how she is now friends with Angelo)

Poetry

Write a poem expressing how important it is to have friends.

Collage

In pairs or small groups, create a collage of favorite activities that you do with friends.

My Friend's Room

Interview one of your classmates or friends. Then design a room that would express the personality, interests and talents of that friend (e.g. favorite colors, books, equipment from a favorite sport etc.)

Danny, King of the Basement Booklist

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

Homelessness

Sammy Keyes and the Sisters of Mercy by Wendelin Van Draanen
Fly Away Home by Eve Bunting
The Lady in the Box by Ann McGovern

Illiteracy

Illiteracy in America by Edward F. Dolan

Economic Status

Lupita Mañana by Patricia Beatty
Blue Willow by Doris Gates

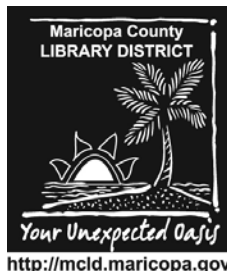
Deception

Sammy Keyes and the Art of Deception by Wendelin Van Draanen
The Cats of Mrs. Calamari by John Stadler

Emotional Abuse

What Jamie Saw by Carolyn Coman
Don't You Dare Read This, Miss Dunphrey by Margaret Peterson Haddix
The Watcher by James Howe

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



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:

Childsplay, Inc.
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

Web Sites Worth Looking At:

www.roseneath.ca/studyguides/DannyTeachingGuide.doc

-access to the Roseneath Theatre's complete study guide for the original production of *Danny, King of the Basement*

www.endhomelessness.org

-National Alliance to End Homelessness

www.hud.gov/kids/hthsplsh.html

-homelessness awareness

www.azchildren.org

-Children's Action Alliance, info on all kinds of kid's issues

www.literacyconnections.com/index.html

-promotes literacy and a love of reading



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 reservation!

Special thanks to Pat McCarthy, who prepared the study guide materials for the original production of Roseneath Theatre's *Danny, King of the Basement*, for contributions to this study guide.