



**Preview Guide for Parents and Teachers  
for Childsplay’s Production of**

**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.

**The Story:**

Danny 'Delco' Carter and his mom move *a lot*, so Danny’s learned how to pack his bags faster than it takes to tie a shoelace. And, he can make a friend in a morning and a best friend in a day. But, far from being overcome by his transient lifestyle, Danny appears to be thriving. When Danny and his mom move to a new basement apartment, the neighbor kids Angelo and Penelope aren’t getting along very well—with each other or with their parents. Penelope’s parents are divorced and won’t talk to each other. Angelo’s Dad is jobless and sounds like a dinosaur. But Danny’s imaginative play creates an alternate world which is *exactly* what he and his new friends need to help them cope with the problems they face in real life.

Most enjoyed by young people ages 7 and up.

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

**Danny, King of the Basement**

by **David S. Craig**

Directed by **David Craig**

Music Composition by **Richard Sacks**

Set and Costume Designs by **Andjelija Djuric**

**The Cast**

- Penelope. . . . .Tonia Usher
- Louise. . . . .Jodie L. Weiss
- Danny. . . . .Jamie Israel
- Angelo. . . . .Eric Zaklukiewicz

**School Tours, January-June, 2007**

This production is supported in part by:



- Arizona Commission on the Arts
- Arizona Diamondbacks Charities
- Bashas’Markets
- DMB, Medtronic Foundation
- Phoenix Suns Charities
- Scottsdale Cultural Council
- Scottsdale League for the Arts
- City of Tempe/Tempe Municipal Arts Commission
- The Eliot Spalding Foundation
- The Shubert Foundation
- The Stocker Foundation
- Tucson/Pima Arts Council
- 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. *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](mailto:kmcfadzen@childsplayaz.org) or call 480-350-8105. You can access the new arts standards at: [www.ade.az.gov/asd/arts/ArtsStandards.asp](http://www.ade.az.gov/asd/arts/ArtsStandards.asp)

**About Childsplay:**

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

**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

1-800-583-7831 (in-state)

**Email us at:** [info@childsplayaz.org](mailto:info@childsplayaz.org)

**Web Site:** [www.childsplayaz.org](http://www.childsplayaz.org)



Special thanks to Pat McCarthy, for contributions to this study guide. To access the original study guide go to: [www.roseneath.ca/studyguides/DannyTeachingGuide.doc](http://www.roseneath.ca/studyguides/DannyTeachingGuide.doc)

## ***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 (including text messaging), cameras and any other recording device are *not allowed in the theater at any time!*

### **About the Playwright:**

David Craig has been an artistic director and producer of plays for young audiences for twenty-five years. He is a tireless promoter, entrepreneur and advocate of theatre for young audiences. His productions have appeared at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, The Kennedy Centre, The New York International Arts Festival, The Kravis Centre and the Discovery Theatre in the United States and at festivals in Scotland, Ireland, London, England and Singapore.

Throughout his career, Mr. Craig has been a prolific playwright with twenty-seven professional credits. He is the author of *Booster McCrane, P.M., All For Beaver Hats!, The Railroad Story, Cue for Treason, Fires in the Night: The Story of the School on Wheels, and Having Hope at Home*. In 1984, he co-wrote and directed *Journey from A.M.U.* (Dora Nomination) for the Metropolitan Toronto Special Committee on Child Abuse. He is a popular speaker and teacher on the themes of playmaking and theatre arts.

### **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 a transient lifestyle and a single-parent family. Through the building of community among his peers, he shows how the power of friendship can change lives.

It provides a timely, sensitive and creative opportunity for children and adults to learn about and discuss issues related to poverty, illiteracy, divorce and joblessness; and, how these and other family stresses impact self-esteem, friendships and success. 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 rise above their current 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 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's hopes for a better future by becoming a hockey player are 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. However, the three are resilient and under Danny's mastery as a secret agent, who encourages positive social relationships, they develop a friendship which helps them cope with their family stresses and deal with negative images. Danny has not stayed in any school long enough to learn to read. However his life-skills, creativity, leadership ability and the acceptance of his friends make him an engaging hero.

### **Sensitive Subjects:**

*Danny, King of the Basement* deals with the serious issues of poverty, homelessness, and divorce in a way that is uplifting and entertaining. Most children will see the children, especially Danny, as heroes who have triumphed over great difficulties. However, we can never be sure with which characters or situations children may identify and be

affected. Therefore it is important to make sure that there is opportunity and space for each child to express their individual response to the play. This could take the form of a talk with a caring adult or even a private journal entry. When discussing the play, ensure that a positive classroom environment is established where students respect each other. Reinforce the ideas that there is no such thing as a *typical* family, welfare case, or homeless person. Stereotypes are certain to be inappropriate and students should be encouraged to actively listen to each other's stories. No put-downs allowed and confidentiality assured.

### **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.

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, live in all kinds of neighborhoods and work all kinds of jobs. Fifty-one percent of illiterate adults live in small towns and suburbs, 41 percent live in urban areas, and eight percent in rural areas.

## 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.). Hold a fundraiser for a specific charity.

### Rich vs. Poor

**What do you think it means to "be rich"?** Here are some 'official' definitions: possessing great material wealth; having great worth or value; having an abundant supply; abounding in natural resources; meaningful and significant; very productive; containing a large amount of choice ingredients.

**What do you think it means to "be poor"?** Here are some 'official' definitions of the word: having little or no wealth and few or no possessions; lacking in a specified resource or quality; not adequate in quality; inferior; lacking in value; insufficient; lacking in quantity; undernourished; eliciting or deserving pity; pitiable.

\*Discuss how these apply to your ideas of rich and poor. Can someone be rich without having a lot of money? In what way? Can someone who has a lot of money or possessions be poor? In what way?

### 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.

*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.

*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).

### 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.

### Collage

In pairs or small groups, create a collage of favorite activities that you do with friends. Use magazine clippings, drawings or photos as resources.

### 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

### **Families in crisis**

*Skellig* by David Almond

*Runaway* by Wendelin Van Draanen

*Sammy Keyes and the Sisters of Mercy* by Wendelin Van Draanen

*Becoming Naomi León* by Pam Muñoz Ryan

### **Literacy**

*Just Juice* by Karen Hesse

*Zooman Sam* by Lois Lowry

*Raising Sweetness* by Diane Stanley

### **Making friends**

*Mitch and Amy* by Beverly Cleary

*The Root Cellar* by Janet Lunn

*The Railway Children* by E. Nesbit

### **Moving**

*The Four-Story Mistake* by Elizabeth Enright

*Anastasia Again!* by Lois Lowry

*The Kid in the Red Jacket* by Barbara Park

*Making Music* by Susan Bonners

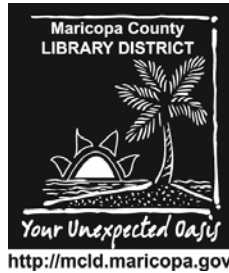
### **What is wealth?**

*The Table Where Rich People Sit* by Byrd Baylor

*Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan

*Well at the End of the World* by Robert D. San Souci

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



**If you know of any child affected by the issues raised in this play, you may want to visit some of these web sites. Finding help for someone can be just a click or phone call away.**

### **Web Sites Worth Looking At:**



**[www.endhomelessness.org](http://www.endhomelessness.org)**

-National Alliance to End Homelessness

**[www.azchildren.org](http://www.azchildren.org)**

-Children's Action Alliance, all kinds of kid's issues (602 266-0707)

**[www.literacyconnections.com/index.html](http://www.literacyconnections.com/index.html)**

-promotes literacy and a love of reading

**[SelfHelp.org](http://SelfHelp.org)**

-government assistance

**[www.ahsc.arizona.edu](http://www.ahsc.arizona.edu)**

-AZ Child Abuse Information Center

**[www.parent-wise.org](http://www.parent-wise.org)**

-to assist parents and other caregivers in their desire to keep children safe from abuse.

## ***FAMILY RESOURCE INFORMATION***

***(provided by Jewish Family and Children's Services)***

### **Crisis Assistance and Information**

Child Protective Services, 1-888-767-2445

Childhelp USA National Child Abuse Hotline, 1-800-422-4453

National Domestic Violence Hotline, 1-800-799-7233

Teen Lifeline, 602-248-8336

ValueOptions, 1-800-564-5465

CASA (abuse), 602-254-6400

### **Domestic Violence**

Jewish Family and Children's Service, *Shelter Without Walls*, 480-994-8477

AZ Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 602-279-2900

PREHAB, 623-939-6788

DeColores, 602-269-1515

Crysalis, 602-955-9059

### **Counseling**

Jewish Family and Children's Service- 602-279-7655

CASA (abuse), 602-254-6400

Family Service Agency, 602-264-9891

Children's Advocacy Center, 602-861-6735

ValueOptions, 1-800-564-5465

### **Parenting Classes/Education/Groups**

Child and Family Resources, Inc., 602-234-3941

Parent Support Center, 602-506-6339

East Valley Family Resource Center, 480-834-9424

Friendly House, 602-257-1870

Parenting Arizona, 602-248-0428

Single Parents Association, 623-581-7445

### **Helpful Books**

*Successful Divorce and Single Parenting*; Mickey Michaels

*The Truth about Children and Divorce*; Robert E. Emery, Ph. D.

*Scream Free Parenting*; Hal Edward Runkel

*The Power of Positive Parenting*; Glenn I. Latham

*Crisis in the Family*; Kofi Quaye

### **Basic Needs Assistance**

Association of Arizona Food Banks, 602-528-3434

Food Stamps, 1-800-352-8401

*Health Insurance*; AHCCCS/KidsCare, 1-800-645-8713

Shelter Hotline (CONTACTS), 1-800-799-7739

AZ DES Workforce Connection, 602-542-395