



By Eric Bass

Directed by **Jon Gentry**
Scenic Design by **Jim Luther**
Costume Design by **Connie Furr**
Sound Design by **Adam Jacobson**
Stage Manager: **Alexandra Corder**

Produced by special arrangement with
The Anchorage Press

The Cast

Sonny Boy. **Ricky Araiza**
Mom. **Danette D'Anjou**
Grandma. **Elizabeth Polen**
Grandpa/Puppeteer. . . **Juliet Drake**

School Tour,
November 2007- June 2008

This production is sponsored in part by:

- Arizona Commission on the Arts
- Arizona Diamondbacks Charities
- The Arizona Republic/12 News/
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- Tempe Municipal Arts Commission
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- US Airways Education Foundation
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Preview Guide for Parents and Teachers to Childsplay's Production of
In My Grandmother's Purse

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 Playwright's Description

"A young boy and his mother play a game in which each has to remember lists of things they both imagine to be 'in Grandmother's purse.' As they play, the things they imagine seem to suggest two different ideas about Grandma. For the boy, she is an adventuress, a fighter of knights and tigers. For the mother, she is the parent who did not care enough about her family. Grandma's appearance only makes matters worse, as all three try to learn to balance the joy of fantasy with the need to feel safe and secure. The play also addresses the themes of death and memory, where one finds the beauty in them, and what they can mean for a child." -Eric Bass

About the Play

As with most of the plays Childsplay chooses to produce, *In My Grandmother's Purse* has many different layers, which explains the appeal to a variety of age groups and levels of maturity, from preschool through adult audiences. On the surface, and for the very youngest members of our audience, this is simply a play about a boy and his mother playing a memory game. This spirit of fun and game-playing sets the tone for the action. Beneath that layer are a mother and a son with very different perceptions of a person they both know and love. Further, this is a conflict which binds them together, much as the rope used in a game of tug of war holds together the adversaries. To her grandson, grandmother is an exciting and romantic figure; to her daughter, she is a parent who didn't provide the security of hearth and home for which she yearned.

Peeling back yet another layer, we find three generations of a family all struggling with the need to remember. Grandmother experienced the adventure of moving and is the keeper of the first-hand memories which Sonny Boy so enjoys. Mother wants to fit in, to adapt to her new surroundings and is probably happy to forget the adventure of moving which was to her an ordeal. The oral histories of Grandma and Mom are prompted by the boy's questions and his obvious delight in the stories help to keep the memories alive.

Another layer reveals the struggle which faces many women today: balancing their own needs for exploration and adventure and self-fulfillment with a desire to nurture and protect their families. Grandma and Mom are emblematic of the two extremes. But, in the course of the play, Sonny Boy who is so admiring of his grandmother's adventurous spirit and is so critical of his mother's need for security, comes to appreciate his mother's qualities too. It seems that security is only really appreciated when it isn't there. Perhaps at the core of this most exuberant and entertaining play is an appreciation that memories keep our loved ones alive. Grandma will live forever through the bizarre collection of memorabilia that inhabit her purse.



Childsplay's school touring program is supported by:



We would love to have your feedback on this Preview Guide. What did you find helpful? Did you use any of the content before seeing the play? After? Which activities did you try? Did you have success? Is having AZ Education Standards noted in the activities helpful to you or unnecessary? What else would you like to see us address in future Preview Guides? Please send them to: Katie McFadzen at kmcfadzen@childsplayaz.org or c/o Childsplay, PO Box 517, Tempe, AZ 85280

About *In My Grandmother's Purse*:

Here are topics for discussion or activities to use before or after seeing the production:

Memory games • Puppetry • Generations • Life stages • Musical styles • Reminiscing • Oral history • Points of view •

Hold That Thought: Ask students the questions in **bold type** on this page before seeing the play and talk about their answers afterwards!

About Seeing the Play:

It's helpful to review the rules of theater etiquette before seeing a performance, 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:

~Use the restroom before seeing the show as we do not have intermission during our school performances.

~Stay seated during the performance.

~ Be respectful to the performers and other people in the audience by not talking during the performance. Remember, the actors can see and hear the audience just like you can see and hear them.

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

~Food, candy, gum and beverages are not allowed during the performance.

~Use of cell phones (including text messaging), cameras or any other recording device is *not allowed during the performance at any time!*

~Following the performance (time permitting), the actors will give the audience an opportunity to ask some questions. The question and answer session

usually lasts about five to ten minutes. **How is seeing a play different than seeing a movie?**

The Characters:

***Mom:** practical, likes the comforts of home

***Sonny Boy:** about 7, Mom's son, precocious and clever

***Grandma:** Mom's mom, a fantasy, a memory

***Grandpa:** Mom's dad who does not speak, also a memory

Here are some things to look for regarding the elements of design (puppets, music, set and costumes):

► Many puppets are used in this production. In fact, the characters of Sonny Boy and Grandpa are large puppets. The puppeteer appears in plain view of the audience and gives focus to (looks at) the puppet when manipulating and speaking. This way, the audience will also look at the puppet making the puppeteer blend into the background. This also allows the actor's emotions to translate to the puppet. **How many different types of puppets can you find in the play?**



► Music is a very present element in the production. Music is used to help set the mood and to define characters. Some of the music is well-known and some will be unfamiliar. Listen for the different styles of music. **How does music affect the mood of various scenes in the play?**

► The set is based on the idea of things spilling out of a purse. The back walls are made of a large scale purse and a greeting card. The set pieces are based on things that might be in a purse. For example, a round, ottoman like structure is based on an old make-up compact. **Can you recall how many things on the set are based on real objects?**

► The costume designer wanted Grandma and Grandpa to look like they are from another world than Mom and Sonny Boy. The costumes were inspired by 1970's style. **How are Mom and Sonny Boy's costumes different from Grandma and Grandpa's?**



Costume and puppet renderings by Connie Furr. Left: Mom and Sonny Boy (and puppeteer). Above: The Black Knight

Vocabulary Words to Review:**dreadsome:** Sonny Boy's made up word based on dread (profound fear or terror)**dank:** disagreeably damp or humid**eerie:** inspiring inexplicable fear, dread, or uneasiness; strange and frightening**lawfully:** recognized by the law**Punjabi:** native to Punjab, a state in India**atmosphere:** the air or climate in a specific place**hearth:** literally the floor of a fireplace; also family life; the home**valorous:** having or showing courage; bravery**The Game:**

The plot of the play revolves around a memory game where the players take turns adding unique things to a list (directions on next page). Mom and Sonny Boy play the game with the following list:

"In my grandmother's purse I found... a pearl-handled sword, an ivory comb and matching brush, a horse named Charger, a portrait of Grandfather, the Black Knight (with two snakes), a new digital recording of Rimsky-Korsakov's A major sextet for strings, fog, Grandma's wedding, the great Punjabi Tiger King, a lullaby, Grandma's Great Escape, a hot water bottle, Grandma's Traveling Puppet Show, Grandpa's broken broom, Grandpa's angels, the Road to Valorous Deeds, and Grandma's Wild Swan."

What images come to mind when you hear this list? How might some of the things in the list come to life in the play?

Storytelling/Oral Traditions:

In the play, memories are recalled and played out as stories. The oral tradition of storytelling has been around as long as humans have been on earth and have been able to communicate. Stories

were often used to explain the unexplainable: life and death, nature, and the spiritual world, for example. As stories passed from one teller to another, from one generation to the next, they gradually changed and were recorded thus preserving their content. Today, the formal art of storytelling has grown in popularity with storytelling festivals happen all over the world. Storytelling, weather sharing a short tidbit about a personal experience or performing a story in front of an audience, is a tradition that is and will continue to be a major part of the human experience.

Behind the Scenes of a Tour:

Like all Childsplay productions an immense amount of work goes into the school tours. Unlike a show that you see in a theatre, the design team and production staff have many additional challenges when creating a tour. They have to consider how many months the production will be on the road, how to fit all the elements (including the actors) into a van, and how to make the load-in, assembly of the set and props and load-out as easy for the actors as possible. This is accomplished by countless meetings and planning sessions that occur as much as a year before the first performance.

Tours typically last much longer than a production in a theatre (an "in-house" show). Tours can be on the road anywhere from 6 to 12 months, sometimes even longer. In-house productions typically run 4 to 6 weeks. Every week a tour company may perform up to 14 shows in as many as 8 different schools. By the end of the tour, the actors may have performed as many as 200 performances. Having so many performances can create a huge amount of wear

and tear on the scenery, props and costumes and each department deals with this differently. The scene shop often coats scenery with a plastic hard coat that makes carved foam pieces indestructible. The prop shop often makes multiples of pieces that may break during the tour. The costume shop also provides doubles of any costume items so that actors can clean their costumes as frequently as possible. They also make sure that many costume pieces can be machine washed and dried instead of requiring dry cleaning.

All the scenery, props and costumes that you see in a Childsplay tour must fit into a van. The scenery usually comes apart into several pieces and then stacks, folds or nests together in the van. There is also room in the van for the sound system, toolbox and the cast – which could be as many as 5 actors. If the cast is lucky there is usually room to squeeze in a few suitcases when they go out of town!

In addition to everything fitting in the van it must be able to load out of the van and get assembled in one hour with sometimes as few as 3 people. The Childsplay scene shop uses what they like to call "tool-less technology" to create tour shows. This means tour sets get assembled with as few tools as possible, sometimes none! Pieces are held in place by screwing in knobs, pieces interlock or rest on posts and sometimes fabric appliqués are Velcro-ed on to hard scenery frames.

Touring presents many challenges to a theater company. Only with excellent collaboration, communication and innovation are Childsplay tours able reach as many as 200,000 students a year with high quality sets, props and costumes.

Things to Talk About and Do After Seeing *In My Grandmother's Purse*...



Discussion Starters:

Story Structure~ All plays have three P's: People in a Place with a Problem. **Where does the play take place (setting)? Who are the people (or characters)? What are the problems (conflicts)? What happens at the beginning of the play? The middle? The end? What is the climax or high point in the plot? Resolution?**

Points of View~ Talk about the different points of view represented by Grandma, Mom, and Sonny Boy. Talk about the way parents, grandparents and children view situations and remember events differently. **Have you ever heard two people tell the same story with totally different details? Why do you think that happens?**

Playing Games~ Mom and Sonny Boy like to play games. Talk about different kinds of games and their rules. **How many can you think of? What do games have in common? What kind of skills can you learn from playing games?**

Grandparents~ Sonny Boy's grandma proves to be a very interesting and loveable character. Talk about the role of grandparents in your lives. **How many grandparents do you have (with the blended families of today, some children have many)? Where do they live (some live out of state while some live in the same home as the children)? How involved**

are they in your life (do you see them once in awhile or are they raising you)?

Reminiscing~ It's fun and interesting to tell stories about your life and to hear stories from your family and friends about their experiences. **Why do we re-tell stories? Do you think it's important to remember things from the past? Why or why not?**

Activities Linked to Curriculum and Standards (samples noted in bold):

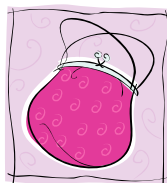
Theater/Creative Drama

Observation and memory are skills that actors use in their craft. Here are four games that work on those skills:

1. Play the "In My Grandmother's Purse Game" as a group or in pairs.

Sitting in a circle, have one person start by saying (for example) "In my grandmother's purse I found...a red fire truck." Each person that follows adds another object to the list (...a red fire truck and a dog named Walter...) until everyone in the circle has added something. If playing with two people, keep adding to the list until someone makes a mistake, then the other person wins. **T-S1C1, 4WP-R1**

2. This game is called "Change Three." With a partner, stand facing each other and take a minute to just observe each other. Turn your back to your partner. Quickly and quietly change three things about yourself (untie a shoe, take off a watch, etc.). When you are both ready, face each other and try to figure out what has changed. Switch partners and try changing five (or more) things! **3WP-F3**



3. A great game to illustrate how people hear and recall things differently is "Telephone." Sit in a circle.

Have one person begin by thinking of a sentence and then whispering it into the ear of the person next to them. That person then has to whisper what they heard into the ear of the person next to them and so on. Try and say exactly what you hear. The last person in the circle says the sentence out loud. How similar or different is it from the original sentence? A variation: Students can also say "operator?" if they need the sentence to be repeated. **LS-R2, T-S1C1**

4. Here's a variation of the "In My Grandmother's Purse" game:

One person begins by saying "when I go on vacation I'm going to bring..." and they say an object (sunglasses) and come up with a pantomimed gesture (putting them on) for that object. Everyone repeats the action. The next person says "when I go on vacation I'm going to bring my dog (all do gesture), and sunglasses (all do gesture). Repeat the pattern all the way around the circle with each person adding something.

► Create your own puppet character based on one from the play or by using your own ideas. Use paper plates, socks, crayons, markers, pipe cleaners, feathers, scraps of fabric, etc. to build your puppet. Practice making your puppet move, speak and look at different things. With a partner (or as a group), use your puppet characters to create a short scene based on a scene in the play or based on your original ideas. Rehearse and share with the class. **T-S1C2, VA-S1C2**



► Here's a pantomime (using body and imagination to communicate an object when it's not really there) activity to try. Sit in a circle on the floor. Pass an old, empty purse or bag around the circle. Using pantomime, pull an object from the purse. Do something with the object so the rest of the group knows what it is. If everyone understands, put the "object" back in the purse and pass the purse on to the next student. If the object is not clear to someone, the person sharing needs to give another clue about what the object is until everyone understands. Keep passing the purse until everyone has had a chance to take something out.

T-S1C2, 1WP-R1

► Review some of the situations from the list Mom and Sonny Boy create. Choose one that you could play out in teams of two or three. Take a few minutes to rehearse and then share your versions with the class. **T-S1C2, 4WP-F1**

► The Black Knight (with two snakes) is a mysterious character. Create your own knight character. Decide what his/her name and age is, what he/she looks like, how he/she moves, walks, talks, etc. Draw a detailed picture of what your character would wear and carry. Next, use your voice, body and imagination to bring your knight to life. Take turns introducing your knights to the rest of the class: move as your knight to the front of class and share your name and age and one thing about yourself. You can also create short scenes with other knight characters from class. **T-S1C2, VA-S1C1**



► Find a photo from a birthday party, vacation or special event that you could bring to class and tell a story about. Rehearse your story out loud a few times before you share it with your audience. Think about giving your story a beginning, middle and end.

Variation: Find a picture in a magazine that you could make up a story about.

Visual Art

► Make your own family tree. Start by drawing, painting or using construction paper to create a tree with enough branches for each member of your family and extended family. If you need help, ask your parents or grandparents. Then, glue old photos or copies of photos of your family members onto the tree. Label each picture with a name. **VA-S1C2**

► Grandma and Mom often had two different perspectives (points of view) on the same situation. In art, perspective is the way in which an object appears to the eye. As a class, try drawing the same object from two or more different points of view. How does what you draw change as your perspective does? Compare your drawings to the drawings of others. What (if any) are the similarities? **VA-S1C1, VA-S1C2**

► Create a memory book for yourself. Think of things that have happened in your life over the past year (or more). Draw pictures of the events. Write (have an adult help if needed) a caption for each picture. Put them all together in a book. **VA-S1C1**

Music

► Mom lists "a new digital recording of Rimsky-Korsakov's sextet in A Major for Strings" as

an item in Grandma's purse. That's the style of music she likes. Grandma thinks of herself as a Benny Goodman jazz melody. Listen to several examples of musical styles (including the above mentioned). What is your favorite musical style and why? Choose a piece of music that represents you. Play or sing it for the class and be able to explain why you think it is like you. **GM-S1C1**

Writing

► Write a list of at least ten questions you can use to interview your grandparents (or other relatives) about their lives. Interview them and write down their responses. Rewrite checking for errors. Take turns reading them in class. **W-S1C1**



► Take a traditional story and write it from a different point of view. Start by reading *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* by Jon Scieszka, written from the wolf's point of view. Brainstorm ideas about other stories you could adapt. For example, *Cinderella* could be written from a step sister's point of view. Alone or in teams, choose a story and re-write it from another character's point of view. Add illustrations and turn it into a book. **W-S2C3**

► Here's a writing activity that is also a memory test. Write a short story about a trip to the grocery store. Include in it at least ten things that you purchased. Read the story to the class. How many of your items can they remember? Why do you think certain items are more memorable than others? Do you think the order of the items in the list has anything to do with how

you remember the items? **LS-F1, LS-F3**

► This activity also challenges the memory. Choose a photo of a person from a magazine. Hold it up for 10-15 seconds. Take two to three minutes to write down everything you can remember about the picture. Read some out loud. Show the picture again. How many people wrote accurate descriptions? Were there certain things that were remembered more than others? **1WP-R1, W-S1C1**

Reading

► In the play, Mom reads *Little Red Riding Hood* to Grandma. Practice reading your favorite book out loud to your mom, dad or grandparents. **R-S1C1**



► Find a non-fiction book in the library about a topic connected to the play that you can read and review. Here are some examples: puppetry, games, the 1970s, immigration, grandparents, generations, classical music, jazz music, or any other topic that you can think of. Talk about what you liked and didn't like as well as what you learned from the book. Give the book a rating based on the five star system (1=bad; 5=excellent). Share your report with the class.

Science

The great Punjabi tiger king is one of Grandma's memories. Learn about tigers and their habitat. How many types of tigers are there? Where do they live? What do they eat? How long do they live? Find pictures and facts and paste them on a poster board you can display in your class. **SC-S1C1, VA-S1C1**



Social Studies

► Mom and Grandma both remember leaving the security of their home and taking a long journey to an unknown land. In early America, people took unknown journeys when they traveled to new places. Find out about a specific pioneer or immigration experience. Draw a map of the journey. What was the transportation (try and find or draw pictures of the transportation)? What would the family have brought with them (again, find or draw pictures)? Put everything together on poster board and share your presentation with the class. **SS-S1C1**

► Where are your ancestors from? First, ask your parents or grandparents.

Then, with the rest of your class, mark the countries, states, and/or cities that your family is from on a world map. When did your ancestors come to the U.S.? Why did they leave their homeland? What was their journey like?



Math

How much younger or older are you than other members of your family? Create addition story problems based on your ages. For example, Mikey is one year older than Robbie and Katie is three years younger than Mikey. If Mikey is 12, how old are Robbie and Katie? Trade your story problem with another classmate and see who can solve the story problem the fastest. **M02-S5C1-01**

Just for Fun:

Since *In My Grandmother's Purse* is about playing a memory game, it might be fun to try some of these games with your students:

Flash Card Matching~ First, create a series of flashcards with various images or words on them. Make two of each card. Place a group of at least five pairs of cards face down. One person starts by turning over two cards. If they don't match, turn them face down again. If they do match, keep those cards in a pile. Take turns doing this you're your partner. Whoever has the most cards at the end wins. Make sure you look at the cards that your partner has turned over so you can remember where there are.

Concentration~ Sit in a circle on the floor. Count off around the circle so everyone has a number. Practice this pattern: slap both hands down on your lap, clap hands together once, snap with left hand, snap with right hand. This is the pattern you'll rhythmically repeat for the whole game. One person starts by saying their number ("3," for example) on the first snap, and another person's number ("8," for example) on the second snap. Number "8" then says his/her number on the first snap and another number on the second snap and so on. If someone makes a mistake, they are out and the game continues without their number. Keep playing until there is a winner.

Remember Where the Object Is~

In this game, one person begins by pantomiming an action in a location chosen by the group (opening a cabinet in a kitchen, for example). The next person repeats that action and then adds a new action (opens the cabinet and takes out a glass). Take turns adding new actions seeing how many can be added before a mistake is made. Really focus on keeping the location of the actions consistent within the space.

Interesting Internet Connections:

<http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/chmemory.html>

-a source for memory games

www.thekidzpage.com/freekidsgames/memorygames.htm

-online memory games for kids

www.cerebromente.org.br/n01/memo/memory.htm

-interesting info on the human memory

<http://homeschooling.gomilpitas.com/explore/puppets.htm>

-more great puppet links

<http://42explore.com/puppet.htm>

-tons of puppet resources

www.lightheartfoundation.org

-an intergenerational organization based in Cottonwood, AZ that focuses on connecting the elderly with members of the community

<http://intergenerational.cas.psu.edu>

-a good source for intergenerational research, resources, newsletters and activities

www.storyarts.org

-storytelling game and lesson ideas

www.creativedrama.com

-creative drama and theater education resources

www.ade.az.gov/asd/arts/ArtsStandards.asp

-the AZ Dept. of Ed's newly updated Arts Standards

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!

Childsplay

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Want Some Drama in Your Classroom?

If you would like help incorporating drama into your curriculum by having Teaching Artist come into your classroom, Childsplay can help. We offer a variety of artist-in-residence and teacher training experiences. We can also help with pre- and post-show activities related to the production as well as AZ Education Standards connections. For more information, contact Patricia Black, Director of Education, at:

pblack@childsplayaz.org or 480-350-8129

In My Grandmother's Purse Booklist

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



Curriculum Connections:

Fairy Tale Characters

Beware of the Storybook Wolves by Lauren Child

Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book? by Lauren Child

Memory Games

Fun on the Run: Travel Games and Songs by Joanna Cole

Puppetry

On Stage: Theater Games and Activities for Kids by Lisa Bany-Winters

The Magician's Boy by Susan Cooper

The Muppets' Big Book of Crafts by Stephanie St. Pierre

Making Make Believe: Fun Props, Costumes and Creative Play Ideas by MaryAnn Kohl

Generations

Part of Me: Stories of a Louisiana Family by Kimberly Willis Holt

Century Farm: One Hundred Years on a Family Farm by Cris Peterson

My Great Aunt Arizona by Gloria Houston

Miss Rumphius by Barbara Cooney

Roxaboxen by Alice McLerran

Life Stages

What Grandma's Can't Do by Douglas Wood

Nana Upstairs, Nana Downstairs by Tomie DePaola

I Love You Forever by Robert Munsch

Musical Styles

The Kingfisher Young People's Book of Music

Reminiscing

When I Was Little by Marcia Williams



Points of View

Bisa Bea, Bisa Bel by Ana Maria Machado

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