

Childsplay's  
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Preview Guide for Parents and Teachers to

## River Rat and Cat

We hope you find this guide helpful in preparing your students 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.

By Y York

Directed by Mark Lutwak

Scenic Design by Kimb Williamson

Costume Design by Kish Finnegan

Sound Design by Mark Lutwak

Stage Manager: Gretchen Schaefer

### The Cast

Rat. . . . . Juliet Drake  
Cat. . . . . Justin Krueger  
Dale Beaver. . . . . Ricardo Araiza

School Tours, November '06-May '07  
Field Trips and Public Performances  
May 29- June 8, 2007  
Tempe Center for the Performing Arts

This production is supported in part by:



Arizona Commission on the Arts  
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Y York's *River Rat and Cat* is a tale of two friends, River Rat, a pack rat who has a home near the river and Cat, an escaped house cat. They play together, garden, help each other with life's difficulties and sometimes, as in most friendships, they drive each other crazy. River Rat is a worrier and a pack rat. His cave is overflowing with junk and he can't stop himself from collecting things: he'll collect ANYTHING! Cat needs constant attention, has pockets that are useless and is constantly trying to rid Rat of his collecting addiction. However, all is well between the two friends until Dale Beaver (a beaver who lives up stream), sends a windfall of junk for River Rat. Beaver's "gift" upsets their functional little world. Dale Beaver tries to play one against the other so that ultimately he can take Cat's tree and use it in the construction of his current project, the biggest dam ever built. Cat and Rat's friendship is put to the test. Will Rat give up his junk? Will Cat give up his tree? The two of them find out just how far they'll compromise for their friendship.

### 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 or any other recording device is *not allowed during the performance at any time!*

## Things To Talk About Before Seeing the Production:

### About Friendship:

~Rat and Cat are unlikely but very good friends. They are quite different from one another. Friends do not need to be the same but they do need to accept each other's differences. Friendship takes work. Friends need to communicate. They need to listen, give and take. The definition of friendship is: "supportive behavior between two or more social entities."

Friendship is considered one of the most central human experiences. *What does friendship mean to you? Can animals have or be friends?*

~Friendship can be shown physically in many ways; a handshake, a hug, a high-five, holding hands, an arm around a shoulder or a pat on the back.

*What other ways are there to greet a friend?*

~There are all sorts of different names we use for friend. Some examples are: buddy, pal, girlfriend/boyfriend, acquaintance, dude, companion, playmate, side-kick, and chum. *Can you think of other names people use for friends?*

~Some questions to ponder: Who are your friends and why? What would you do for your friend? How far would you go to help a friend? Why do people go out on a limb for their friends?

**"Friendship is the only cement that will ever hold the world together."**

**- Woodrow Wilson**

**About Beavers:** Dale Beaver wants to build a dam that will affect the lives of Rat and Cat. Beavers are the largest rodent species in North America and weigh 40 to 60 pounds. They are semi-aquatic animals that

spend most of their time in rivers and streams. Beavers are equipped with several unique features: webbed hind feet which assist in swimming;



dense fur which acts as insulation in cold water; ear and nose openings designed to close when submerged; and a broad, flat tail that assists in swimming, dam building, and communication. Beavers create dams to raise water levels so they can build their homes in the water. By creating an island with an underwater entrance, they are protected from many predators. Beavers eat the leaves, roots, and bark of trees. They also eat clover, apples, corn, grasses, water lilies, and other aquatic vegetation. A beaver's teeth will grow throughout its lifetime; gnawing on trees keeps them from overgrowing.

Beavers are a keystone species. This means their presence in nature greatly affects other wildlife. In fact, the removal of beavers from their natural setting leads to a decrease in habitat quality. As a result, fewer wildlife species are able to utilize the area. Beavers build dams and create wetlands upon which many species depend. In fact, almost half of all endangered and threatened species in North America rely on wetlands to survive, and 85 percent of all North American wild animal species depend on wetlands. Beavers help purify water by filtering silt from the water bodies in which they live. Beaver dams can also slow flood waters. Beavers may also aid in containing forest fires; by

converting streams to larger bodies of water, these can serve as both a fire line and water supply to fire fighters.

### About Rats and Collecting:

There are many species of rats but River Rat is probably a Wood Rat or Pack Rat. Pack rats collect various objects and bits of material to deposit in, or use in the construction of, their nests. They are especially fond of small, bright, shiny objects which they will readily confiscate.

Pack rats live in nests built of plant material like branches, twigs, sticks and other debris. The huge, beaver-dam-shaped structures may be up to four feet across. They are usually constructed in a tree or on the ground at the base of a tree or rocky ledge. Pack rats can become quite a nuisance, getting into everything from attics to car engines, stealing their treasures, damaging electrical wiring and wreaking general, noisy havoc.

River Rat behaves like a pack rat. His cave is full of stuff that he has collected. River Rat experiences a windfall (a word you'll hear often in the play) when he finds some old tires thus giving him something else to collect.

**Windfall: A sudden or unexpected piece of good fortune or personal gain.**

People collect things, too. Collections can range from toys and antiques to shoes and cars. Collections can range in size from just a few pieces to thousands of pieces. *Why do you think people have collections? Do you or does anyone you know have a collection? What is the strangest collection you've ever heard of?*

## Things to Talk About and Do After the Performance:

✱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?

✱Even though River Rat and Cat are the best of friends, they do get on each others nerves. Have you ever become annoyed with a friend? How did you handle it? What is the best way to deal with a conflict you have with a friend?

## Leaf Collection/Creation (Visual Art):

Start a leaf collection by gathering several different kinds of leaves from outside. Use the leaves to create rubbings. Use tracing paper and crayons or colored pencils. Cover one leaf with tracing paper. Using the side of your crayon or colored pencil, color over it so that you can see the shape and texture of the leaf on the paper. Repeat the process adding several leaves to your creation. Once you have "rubbed" the leaves you can go back and outline them or add other colors to them. Display your work in the classroom.

## Collection collage (Visual Art/Writing):

People collect all sorts of different things like buttons, rocks, beads or even spoons. Do you have a collection? Use an existing collection or create a new one that you could arrange in a collage. Display your items on poster board, card board, or in a shoe box (for heavier items). Label items with information like where you acquired the item, how long you've had it, which piece is your favorite, etc.

**Friendship (Writing):** What are some qualities of a good friend? Make a list of five or more qualities you like to have in a friend. Next, write a paragraph about one of your friends describing what you like about that person. Give examples of nice things that they've done for you and fun things that you do together.

### Friends are great and it's always fun to do something nice for a friend. Try one of these Friendship Activities

~make friendship bracelet to give to a friend.

~write a nice card to your friend telling them how much you appreciate their friendship.

~burn a CD that features songs that you think your friend would like

~make a friendship book for a good friend. Include photos, quotes and poetry telling your friend how special they are.

## Beavers and Dams Scene (Theater/Creative Drama):

Divide into pairs. One person is the beaver the other is a rat or cat. Beaver wants to build a dam but rat/cat doesn't want the dam built. Create a short scene in which beaver and rat/cat argue the point. Who will win and why? Share with the class.

## Pack Rat Game

**(Theater/Creative Drama):** Rats build their homes with and eat whatever they find. They might find a pitcher and use it for their nest or a candy wrapper as bedding material. Look around your classroom. Gather various objects, ones that aren't breakable. Put these items in a box or bag. One at a time, take out an object and use it in as many different ways as possible. For example, an umbrella is no longer something to keep rain off your head but

instead could be a cane, a sword, a pointer, etc.

## Marching Rhymes

**(Music/Writing):** Dale Beaver speaks in a military marching cadence (rhythm). This helps him to stay on task and remain focused. Try starting a simple marching song such as, "I don't know but I've been told" – class repeats, "I don't know but I've been told" – Teacher, "(name of school) kids are very bold" – class repeats, "(school) kids are very bold" – teacher, "sound off" – class, "one, two" – teacher, "sound off", – class "three, four"

All, "sound off, three, four, one, two, three, four"

Now try "clap your hands and stomp your feet, turn around and take a seat, sound off, etc." Can you think of a rhyming cadence for your classroom? Or school?

## We've Got The Beat (Music):

Have a volunteer begin a beat (using a drum, clapping hands, stomping feet, etc.), then the rest of the class repeats it. The focus is on both the person clapping (to create a clear repeatable pattern) and on the class listening carefully and repeating back as accurately as possible.

## Class book (Writing/Visual Art):

As a class, recap the story of *River Rat and Cat*. Divide the story and the class into five or six sections. Assign each group one section of the story to write and illustrate (one page for the written and one for the picture). Also, assign a group to create a cover, a dedication page, a table of contents or even a forward. After all the pages are completed, bind them together (maybe laminate the cover and back) and share it with another class, or maybe it can go into the school library!

## River Rat and Cat Booklist

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

### Curriculum Connections:



#### Recycling

*Garbage and Recycling* by Rosie Harlow  
*Recycling a Can* by Cynthia MacGregor  
*Earth Friendly Crafts for Kids: 50 Awesome Things You Can Do With Recycled Stuff* by Heather Smith  
*Recycle Every Day* by Nancy Elizabeth Wallace

#### Environment

*Window* by Jeannie Baker  
*What Planet Are You From, Clarice Bean?* By Lauren Child  
*Who Killed Cock Robin?* by Jean Craighead George  
*Judy Moody Saves the World* by Megan McDonald

#### Collections

*Hannah's Collections* by Marthe Jocelyn  
*The Room of Wonders* by Sergio Ruzzier  
*Kid Collectors: The Incredible Collecting Book* by K. D. Kuch  
*Kids Collect: Amazing Collections for Fun, Crafts and Science Fair Projects* by Dan Hubley

#### Friendship

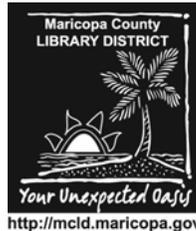
*Mis Amigos/My Friends* by George Ancona  
*Nice New Neighbors* by Franz Brandenburg  
*Baby Mouse: Queen of the World* by Jennifer L. Holm

#### Loyalty

*Chato Goes Cruisin'* by Gary Soto  
*King of the Wind* by Marguerite Henry

#### Building

*Building Beavers* by Kathleen Martin-James  
*The Changing City* by Jorg Muller  
*The Little House* by Virginia Lee Burton



#### Habitats

*Crinkleroots Guide to Knowing Animal Habitats* by Jim Arnosky  
*Animal Habitats: Discovering How Animals Live in the Wild* by Tony Hare  
*By Lakes and Rivers* by Tessa Paul  
*The Changing Countryside* by Jorg Muller  
*Cat* by Juliet Clutton-Brock  
*Shaker Lane* by Alice Provensen  
*The Bear Who Wanted to Be a Bear* by Jorg Steiner

## 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 help with 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. Check out the newly updated 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.

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:

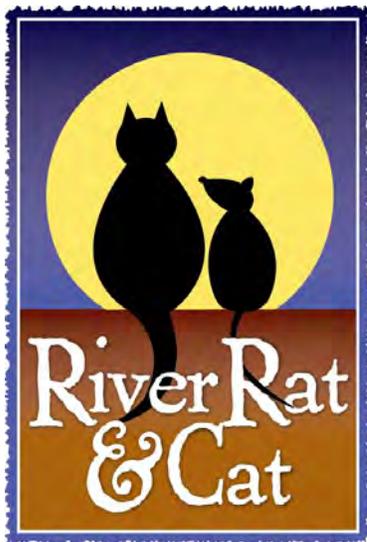
Childsplay, Inc.  
PO Box 517  
Tempe, AZ 85280  
Phone 480-350-8101 or  
1-800-583-7831 (in-state)  
Email us at: [info@childsplayaz.org](mailto:info@childsplayaz.org)  
Web Site: [www.childsplayaz.org](http://www.childsplayaz.org)



**"True friendship is a plant of slow growth, and must undergo and withstand the shocks of adversity before it is entitled to the appellation."  
- George Washington**

## Want some drama in your classroom?

If you would like help incorporating drama into your curriculum or would like to have one of our actors teach in your classroom, Childsplay can help. We offer a variety of residency and teacher training experiences. We can also help you incorporate the pre and post-show activities in this preview guide. For more information, contact Debra K. Stevens at [dstevens@childsplayaz.org](mailto:dstevens@childsplayaz.org) or 480-350-8101



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- Wells Fargo

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Today you saw a production of *River Rat and Cat* performed by Childsplay. Here are some things to think about and some activities to do now that you've seen the show!

Tell your family and/or friends about the play you saw. . .

◇ Tell them about the story and the characters: What happens in the beginning, the middle and the end of the play? How many characters can you remember? Which character was your favorite and why? What were some of the things the characters did? What was your favorite part of the play?

◇ Tell them about the costumes, scenery, props, lights, and sound effects from the production. Draw pictures to help describe things you talk about.

◇ Tell them about something new that you learned from the play.

In the play, Rat talks about his "windfall." A windfall is a sudden or unexpected piece of good fortune or personal gain. Think about different kinds of "windfalls." Winning the lottery, having a lot of rain after it's been very dry, or getting a lot of presents on your birthday are all examples. If you could receive any kind of "windfall," what would you want it to be? If you could wish for a "windfall" for a family member or friend, what would it be?

The words "cat" and "rat" rhyme. What other words rhyme with "cat" and "rat?" List as many as you can think of:

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 \_\_\_\_\_

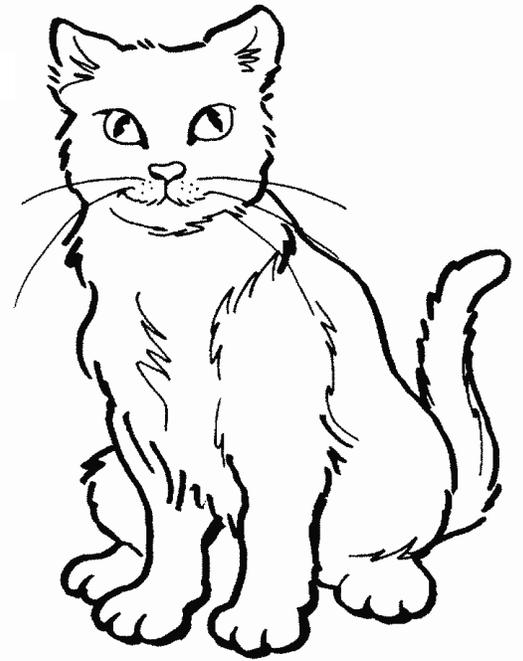
**WORD SEARCH**

Find and circle the words in the puzzle below:

BEAVER	CAT	DAM
FRIENDS	POCKETS	RAT
RIVER	TIRES	TREE
WINDFALL	WORRYSTONE	

C	N	E	D	T	U	R	R	F	U
S	M	N	F	A	B	I	D	A	M
B	T	O	O	R	V	X	I	K	L
E	L	T	E	E	I	T	B	L	C
A	E	S	R	E	A	E	A	U	F
V	C	Y	D	C	E	F	N	H	P
E	G	R	S	K	D	R	U	D	I
R	E	R	F	N	F	W	T	L	S
T	R	O	I	S	E	R	I	T	M
U	I	W	P	O	C	K	E	T	S

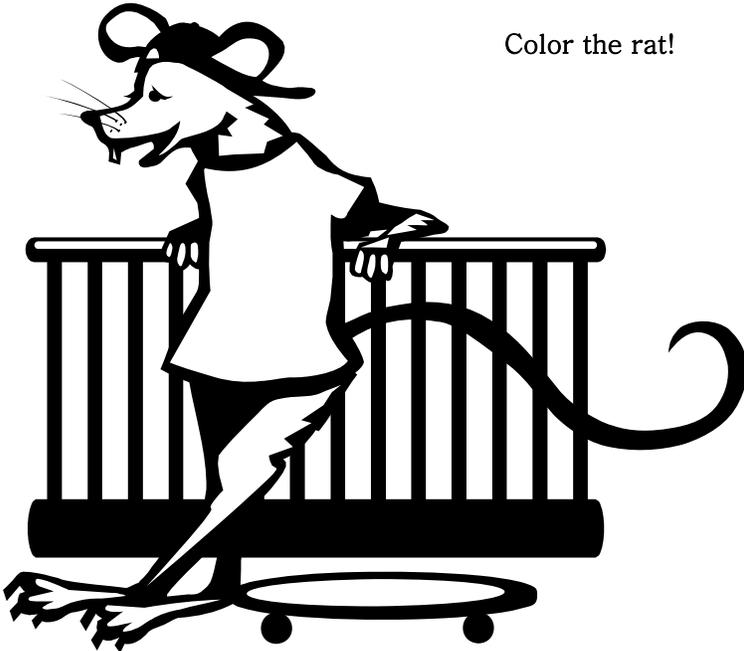
Color the cat!



**River Rat loves his worry stones!**

Worry stones are smooth, polished stones with a thumb-sized indentation. They originated in Ancient Greece. It is believed that holding one between your index finger and thumb while slowly rubbing it will lessen your worries. Do your parents or teacher ever tell you to stop fidgeting? Sometimes rubbing a worry stone can help you to focus and become calmer which will help the fidgeting! Find a rock or stone that you can use as a worry stone. You can look for one while on a hike or buy one in a store. Keep it in your pocket and use it when you feel worried, frustrated or scared.

Color the rat!



River Rat loves to collect things. He is a pack rat. Do you collect anything? If so, what do you collect?

I collect \_\_\_\_\_

How many items are in your collection?

\_\_\_\_\_ items.

If you don't have any collections, write down three things you would like to collect.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

In the play, Dale Beaver wants to build the biggest dam ever. Have a competition with a friend (or several friends) to see who can build the biggest "thing." Choose something like a card house, building blocks, rubber band ball, foil ball, or whatever! Put a time limit on your challenge and find an adult who can judge the competition.