



E. B. White's *Stuart Little* Study Guide

Pre-Show Discussion

Teachers, please read the following to your students before attending the production.

A Message from Stuart Little

Dear Friends,

I am very excited that you have decided to come and see my show! Some of you might have seen my movie and others might have read my book, but soon you will see me live on stage.

What does that mean? Well, live theater is a marvelous journey that you and I and the other actors on stage get to take together. It is an exciting experience for everyone because you never know what can happen! My friends and I are just birds, mice, cats and people like you, and every time we get in front of an audience we open ourselves to the magic of possibility. We are ready for anything to happen, and often, crazy and fun things do occur that we never planned. That is why we love it so much.

So how can you be involved? Well, the first thing that you should know is that live theater is very different from going to the movies or watching TV. Movies and TV are flat pictures that were recorded days or weeks or even years ago. You can watch the same TV show over and over and it will always be the same. Plus, the people on TV cannot hear you if you talk to them. The people in a movie don't know if you are sitting in your seat or running around the room. But at my show, I can see and hear you. I will know what you are saying and doing, just like you will know exactly what I am saying and doing. **What do you think that this means?**

(Teachers: Discuss how basic classroom etiquette also applies to the theater. Have the students generate a list of classroom rules that they think should also be followed in the theater. For example: no food or drinks, staying in your seat, listening to the actors and not their neighbors.)

Now just because we all have to be on our best behavior at the theater doesn't mean that we can't have fun!

Please laugh if something is funny, or cry if something is sad. You can clap along with the music or even sing if you know the words. WE hope you enjoy the show.

Sincerely,

Stuart Little

Stuart Little – About the Book

Stuart Little is an adventurous tale of bravery, humor, and true friendship. In the story, Stuart Little is no ordinary mouse. Born to a family of humans, he lives with his parents, his older brother George, and Snowbell the cat. The Littles accept young Stuart into their family unquestioningly--with the exception of Snowbell who is unable to overcome his instinctive dislike for the little mouse and plots to get rid of him. Another new arrival to the house is Margalo, a beautiful bird who loves to whistle. In Margalo, Stuart finds a best friend and playmate. However, Snowbell isn't too thrilled to now be living with a mouse and a bird. Fearing for her safety, Margalo flees the Little house and heads to the north. Stuart's greatest adventure comes when he ventures away from home for the first time in his life, determined to find his best friend again. What he finds is adventure aplenty as he meets new friends, sails on a boat, and outsmarts a couple of hungry cats. But will he find his friend?

About The Author

Elwyn Brooks White was born in Mount Vernon, New York in 1899. For many years, he was contributing editor of The New Yorker magazine. However, E. B. White is best known for his children's books. The character of Stuart Little first appeared to E. B. White in a dream in the 1920s. White wrote a few episodes about this boy who looked like a mouse and then tucked the stories away in a drawer, thinking he might one day share them with his nieces and nephews. Some twenty years later he expanded and collected the stories as Stuart Little, published in 1945. It was White's first children's book. His second book was Charlotte's Web in 1952, which is one of the most popular children's books of all time and was named as "the best American children's book of the past two hundred years" by The Children's Literature Association. From 1933 E. B. White lived on a farm in Maine with his wife Katherine. He died in 1985.

"...Stuart Little appeared to me in dream, all complete, with his hat, his cane, and his brisk manner. Since he was the only fictional figure ever to honor and disturb my sleep, I was deeply touched and felt that I was not free to change him into a grasshopper or a wallaby...." - **E. B. White**



STUART LITTLE

The following California State Standards are applicable to our production of Stuart Little. Please see and apply many of the included activities.

Visual and Performing Arts

Artistic Perception 1.0, 1.1, 1.2 – Processing Analyzing, and Responding to Sensory information through the language and skills unique to a theatrical experience.

Creative Expression 2.0, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 – Creating, Performing and Participating in Theatre

Historical and Cultural Context 3.0, 3.1, 3.2 – Student understands context by analyzing the role of theatre, film, television, and electronic media in the past and present.

Aesthetic Valuing 4.0, 4.1, 4.2 – Responding to, analyzing and critiquing theatrical experiences

English – Language Arts

Writing 1.0, 1.1, 1.2 – See writing activities

Listening and Speaking – 1.0, 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.5 - During the Q& A with the actors

Comprehension

Organization and delivery of Oral Communication

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Friendship

1) Stuart makes friend with all types of characters - most of which are very different than he is. To Stuart it doesn't matter if someone is a bird or human, short or tall, young or old, he simply accepts people as they are.

Think about your own friends. How are your friends different from you? How are they like you? How is this a good thing? What do you learn from friends who are different?

2) Stuart also has a special friendship with Margalo. Discuss the important qualities of their friendship. What actions did you see them take in the play that proves their friendship?

3) In the play, Stuart is unable to become friends with Snowbell. Why do you think Snowbell refuses to be Stuart's friend?

Friendship Activities

- Write a letter to someone in class thanking them for being a good friend. Then stand up in class and read it sincerely to them.
- Make Special Friend awards for everyone in class. Then create a ceremony where everyone receives his or her awards. Use as many theatrical devices as you can: lights, music, costumes and sets (re-arrange desks).
- Create a wanted poster advertising the ideal friend.
- Write or improvise a scene between Snowbell and Stuart where Stuart is successful in winning Snowbell as his friend. Be clear about why Snowbell has a change of heart. Perform your scene for the class "in character," which means giving the characters very specific cat and mouse characteristics. You can imitate the actors in the play or try your own interpretation.

The Search

1) At the end of the story, Stuart is still searching for Margalo. How does he feel as he begins his journey? Do you think he ever finds her?

The Search Activities

- Pretend you are Margalo. Write Stuart a series of postcards telling him about your travels. Draw a picture on the front of the card of the place you are visiting and write a letter on the back. Be sure to address it correctly.
- Compose a journal for Margalo, describing the exotic places she is visiting.
 - Research different states or countries so you can accurately describe the sights and sounds.
- Pretend you are Stuart. Send the Little Family a series of emails detailing your adventures as you search for Margalo.
- As a class, brainstorm alternative endings to the play. Then have each student pick his or her favorite option and write out a 1 – 2 page scene with dialogue. Be sure to include stage directions for the actors. Have the author then watch other people perform this scene for the class and give positive, yet critical feedback on how they would like the scene staged and performed.

Fun Facts

- 1) Mice are members of the order Rodentia.
- 2) Over half of all mammals are rodents.
- 3) Mice originated in Asia about 40 million years ago.
- 4) House mice were unknown in the US before the American Revolution, when they arrived as stowaways on ships from Europe.
- 5) Most sounds made by mice are too high pitched for us to hear.
- 6) Despite their big, bright eyes, mice are nearsighted. Fortunately, they do have some night vision.

7) Mice have sixteen teeth adapted for gnawing and nibbling

Poetry

Chose one of the following poetry formats and create a poem to express your feelings about the play, one of the characters, or a specific scene. Illustrate your poem.

1. Acrostics: Acrostics are poems that use the letters of a specific word to begin each line.

CAT
Causing Stuart headaches
Acting mean
Trouble always follows

2. Haiku: Haiku is an elegant form of Japanese poetry. The lines don't rhyme, but they follow a pattern.

Line 1 – 5 syllables Stuart just a mouse
Line 2 – 7 syllables Defeated his scary foe
Line 3 – 5 syllables All for a true friend

3. Ballad: A free form of poetry that typically has a simple rhyme scheme.

Racing in his car
Stuart cannot get very far
Without the help of a friend
He'll be lonely 'til the end

OTHER FUN ACTIVITIES

1. Draw your own picture of Stuart Little.
2. Put together your own "book of rules" as a class or as an individual project. Make sure every rule has a good reason behind it.
3. Write a letter to the actors, or director, or the Playhouse about our production of *Stuart Little*.
4. Write your own ending to the play and try and act it out. Does Stuart keep on traveling? Does Margalo and Stuart travel together or return to their home? Do they meet other friend along the way and take them home, too?