

THE CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY

is committed to creating theatre experiences that educate, challenge, and inspire young people. It is our hope that by presenting significant themes that affect the lives of young people in our community we can help to foster dialogue and active participation in the arenas that affect their lives. It is with this in mind that we offer...



2006-2007 Season proudly sponsored by Target.



AN EXPERIENCE IN THEATRE CAN BE A GATEWAY into a greater understanding of who we are; it can enhance our understanding of life. You may come to **TALE OF A WEST TEXAS MARSUPIAL GIRL** thinking only that it is fun to break routine and go on a field trip. You may walk away having glimpsed a significant truth about the world and how we live in it. It is important to take the time to process your experience by talking and exploring the great excitement of the theatrical event itself. You can also use the time spent in the theatre as a springboard into many areas of your curriculum.

The Big Idea...

in **TALE OF A WEST TEXAS MARSUPIAL GIRL** centers on how we deal with the fact that we are all - to one degree or another - different. What happens when a very special girl is born in a "wiggly little Texas town," where even the smallest difference can brand someone "an abomination?" And, what if this girl is born with a big difference, a great, big difference, like...a pouch?

It leads to curriculum around:

- Learning to empathize with others and honor differences in others as well as in oneself
- Peer pressure or bullying
- Discovering and accepting one's identity



TALE OF A WEST TEXAS MARSUPIAL GIRL is not your typical musical! The tunes are an imaginative, totally unique blend of blues, zydeco, rockabilly, and funk, as bold as West Texas and as unexpected and unpredictable as the Marsupial Girl herself. They set the scene for this larger than life, truer than true, contemporary Tall Tale. It's a one of a kind story, about a one of a kind girl - and she's a spitfire, this one.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background: Materials that give you a deeper understanding of the show

- Tale of a West Texas Marsupial Girl, *a synopsis of the play*..... 2
- What Makes an Outsider Outside?, *discussion and activity*..... 3
- The Lemon Exercise: Difference is Essential, *a classroom activity* 4
- Peers Under Pressure, *discussion and activity*..... 5

The play in the classroom: To use either before or after the show

- Who Are You? How Do You Know?, *discussion and activity*..... 6
- Who Am I?, *a worksheet*..... 7
- What is a Marsupial?, *a research project on three levels*..... 8
- What if You Were a Marsupial?, *an art response*..... 9
- Related Resources: *to use either in preparation or in response to the play* 10

Your Feedback: 11

Minnesota Academic Standards Addressed:

Arts:

The student will understand and use artistic processes to create, perform, and interpret art works in theater.

Language Arts:

Writing, Speaking, Listening and Viewing: The student will compose various pieces of writing (informative, expressive and persuasive) and the student will communicate effectively through listening and speaking in a variety of forms.

Life Science:

Interdependence of life/Diversity of organisms: (Grade 2) The student will observe and describe some features of plants and animals that allow them to live in specific environments. (Grade 3) The student will understand that an organism's patterns of behavior are related to the nature of its environment and changes in habitat can be beneficial or harmful to an organism. (Grade 4) The student will know that living things can be sorted into groups according to characteristics, structures and behaviors, classify plants and animals according to their characteristics, and learn that the characteristics used for grouping depends on the purpose of the grouping.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PROCEDURE OR EXACT RUNNING TIME?
CALL THE CTC BOX OFFICE AT 612-874-0400.



TALE OF A WEST TEXAS MARSUPIAL GIRL

A synopsis of the play written by Lisa D'Amour

Some stories start a long time ago. Some start in your own backyard. This one starts in Texas - West Texas. Is it true or is it a tall tale? The truth is, it's both!

It's a contemporary fable about growing up (inside and out)



One day, somewhere in West Texas, a girl is born. She's got beautiful toes, a beautiful nose, all her tiny fingers and all her tiny toes but, holy puppy on a peach tree, she is something else! Something a bit like a kangaroo!! This girl is about 95% girl and about 5% marsupial. In other words, she's got a pouch. It might seem that a built in pocket would come in handy, but it doesn't always work that way.

The day the Marsupial Girl (MG) is born all the doctors quit and the nurses walk out. The town isn't ready to accept this kind of different. As Dr. Pouch, the man who makes most of the sounds in this West Texas world and who talks a wonderful, whacky slang knows right off, "Ohhh...this is gonna make people nervous!" Oh, yes, and when people are "nervous," people are mean. The Marsupial Girl and her mama live mostly on their own out on the edge of town.

MG does have a marvelous relationship with Dr. Pouch who is a little like a favorite uncle, and one precious friend, Sue, who knows some of the secrets of the wonderful pouch, but when Marsupial Girl goes to school the friendship falls on hard times. It's tough to stick by a friend that nobody else even begins to understand.

MG's first lessons at school happen outside the classroom. Sue betrays her to be part of the popular crowd, people gossip, bully, and are just plain mean. Barely anybody tries to understand what it's like to be so different. And she is different. She can do things - like steal the voice right out of somebody's throat, and put it in her pouch. At first, she only steals meanness, but when everybody expects the worst of her, she stops trying to be her best. She gets blamed for stealing a knife that Sue stole to impress two other girls, and soon she starts stealing whatever she can.

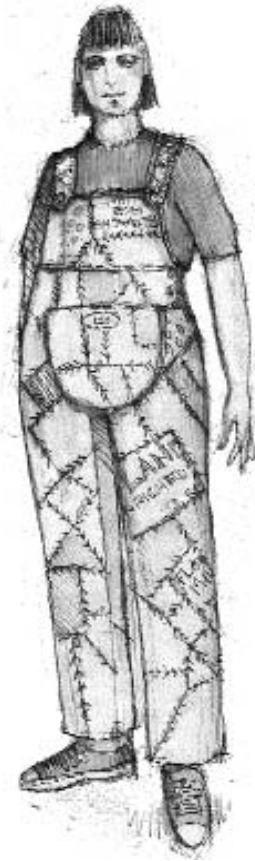
She steals insults, questions, bubble gum, a Barbie doll, cigarettes, and ribbons right out of a girl's hair. She puts it all in her pouch. She insults her teacher, her mother, even Dr. Pouch and keeps stealing until there's nothing left but her and her - big - huge - pouch. Now she's really lonesome. But Sue comes back. She admits she is the one who stole the knife and she helps the Marsupial Girl unpack her pouch. Together they put the world back in order, and in the process help other people understand that MG's just plain different. And that's a wonderful thing.

.....
NOTE: This wonderfully quirky, funny, and ultimately touching play is peppered with delightful characters, music, and sound support much of which comes from the remarkable Dr. Pouch, a storyteller a bit like the eccentric uncle we all wish we had. He functions as a **foley artist** providing a soundscape for the play. Foley artists create sound effects. We seldom see them at work, yet there is scarcely a movie that doesn't utilize their skills. **Research** what foley artists are and do, and prepare to be delighted!
.....



What Makes an Outsider Outside?

Marsupial Girl is decidedly different from the moment she is born. Nobody know anybody with a pouch like a kangaroo! She and her mother live alone together on the outskirts of town. They are outsiders.



• Ask your students to discuss some of the following questions.

- What does it mean when we say someone is an outsider?
- How do we determine who is an outsider?
- Since it takes a group to create an inside for someone to be outside of - what happens when the people inside the group feel different things about the outsider?
- How different do you have to be to be different enough to be labeled an outsider?
- Isn't everybody different from anybody else? Even identical twins are different from each other.
- What does this statement mean to you:
If you and I are exactly alike one of us is unnecessary.

• Our goal is to respond to difference in two ways:

- To have empathy for all people.
 - To go far beyond tolerating difference and learn to honor and appreciate variety.
- What is empathy? Look up the word in a dictionary and talk about what it means.
 - Together think about some examples of how you can tell how another person is feeling even if they don't say anything about it.
 - In the play there are several characters students can try to empathize with.
 - Describe the following situations and ask how the characters must feel.

Marsupial Girl is physically different than anybody else and and at school people blame her for things she didn't do. How might she feel?

Sue is Marsupial Girl's friend when they are young, but once they go to school she wants to be popular, which Marsupial Girl is not. What kinds of things might she feel?

Marsupial Girl's mother thinks her daughter is wonderful; she also knows how different she is from other kids. When she sends her daughter to school how might she feel?

Have you ever felt any of these things? What did it feel like?

WRITING EXERCISE: Describe a situation and a person with whom you *empathize*. Give us the facts. Then, write a monologue as if you are that person. (A monologue is a dramatic form in which a character speaks directly to another character or to the audience.) This will be more than facts. It will be a chance to tell how a person feels. You may choose to share your monologue by reading it aloud to the class.

- Now, how do we learn to value what is different?
- Make a list on the board of all the things in the world that are more precious/more valuable because they are rare or even one-of-a-kind.
Example: diamonds, art, custom built cars.
- Why do we not feel the same way about people?
Or do we? When? Talk about that.

(exercise on page 4)



The Lemon Exercise: Difference is Essential

Use this classroom exercise as you talk about honoring difference.

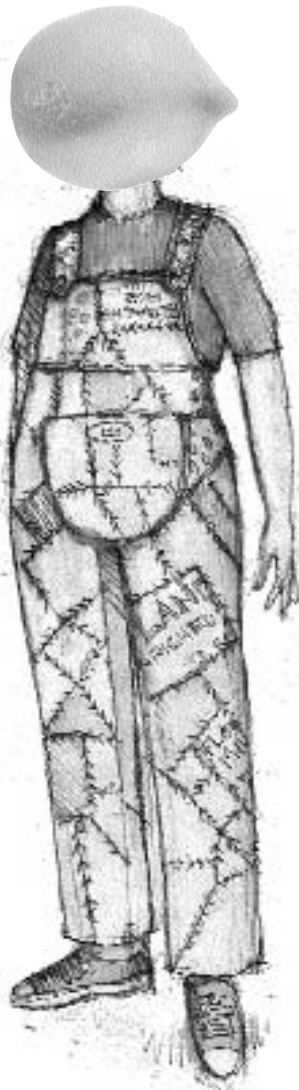
You will need: A bag or box of lemons

Play:

- Divide the students into small groups.
- Hold up a lemon.
Have the students give five words that describe a lemon, i.e. yellow, funny-shaped, etc.
- Have each group pick a spokesperson.
- The teacher has a bag of lemons with at least 5 more lemons than there are number of groups.
- Each spokesperson picks one lemon from the bag and returns to his/her group.
- The teacher gives the students 5 minutes to look at the lemon and figure out what makes it unique.
Each group names their lemon.
- At the end of the time return all lemons to the bag.
- Shake or stir the bag or box.
- Distribute one lemon randomly to each group.
- The entire group must then decide if in fact it is their original lemon. If they decide it is not, then the spokesperson returns to the bag to try again.
- Continue play until every group has found their own lemon.

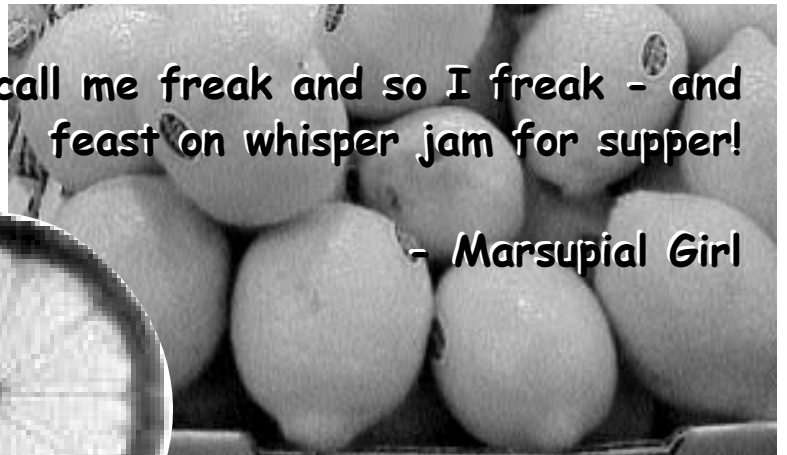
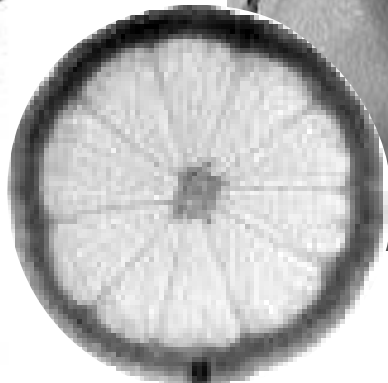
(You might want to follow up this exercise by making lemonade!)

Discussion: At first glance, the lemons all look alike, but with closer inspection it is easy to determine that every lemon has its own unique set of characteristics, which became valuable to each group during the game. The same is true for people. Have a discussion about the game but also the deeper implications in dealing with fellow students and their unique characteristics. Why do people pick on others for their unique characteristics, rather than valuing them? You may wish to refer to Marsupial Girl, and how she is picked and rejected for her uniqueness.



They call me freak and so I freak - and
feast on whisper jam for supper!

- Marsupial Girl



Peers Under Pressure

Marsupial Girl has a much easier time in the world before she goes to school and begins to deal with peer pressure and bullies. Not only does it make her friendship with Sue difficult, but it is confusing. People expect the worst of her, and after awhile she begins to fulfill their expectations.



• Ask your students to discuss some of the following questions.

- How does social pressure influence individual choices?
- What are some of the ways a person can be influenced by "what everybody is doing?"
- What is a clique?
- What is a bully? How is bullying different than teasing?

Here are some facts about bullying. Talk about whether or not they seem true or familiar in your school.

Almost half of all children say they have been bullied in school.

Bullies are usually people who have been bullied.

Bullies may have social status, but they seldom have friends.

Boys bully more than girls.

Boys bully more physically than girls.

There are six kinds of bullying. Have you heard about:

Verbal bullying: name calling, mocking, and laughing at someone.

Emotional bullying: leaving someone out on purpose; spreading rumors.

Physical bullying: kicking, hitting, pinching, hair pulling, etc., or threats.

Racist bullying: racial slurs, offensive gestures; making degrading jokes.

Sexual bullying: unwanted physical contact; inappropriate comments.

Cyber bullying: forwarding or spreading hurtful images and/or messages through camera cell phones, instant messaging or the internet.

- What do you do if you or a friend are being bullied?
- What do you do if you want to stop being a bully?
- Does this statement seem true to you: If you expect the worst of people that is what you will get. What does that mean? Do you think if you expect the best of people, it helps them do better?

DRAMA ACTIVITY: Pair students or divide into groups of 3 or 4. Ask each group to think of a situation that involves peer pressure or bullying. Have them write a short scene showing the characters and the conflict. The scene must have TWO DIFFERENT ENDINGS. One resolves itself in a destructive way and the other resolves itself in a positive way. Rule: no violence! Perform the scenes first one way and then the other.

- Discuss why it is important to find positive ways to resolve conflict?

.....

• **NOTE:** For further information on bullying, how it affects learning, and what can be done about it, go to:<http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/emotion/bullies.html> or to <http://www.kidshealth.org> where you can enter the word "bully" into the search box and follow the link that applies to the age group or need that interest you.

.....



Who Are You? How Do You Know?

We encourage people saying, "be yourself," "be who you really are," but how do any of us come to know who we are? How do we find a sense of identity?



Kangaroo: a kangaroo is a pouched mammal classified as a marsupial.

Girl: a girl is a female human being in the process of growing up. Often like an outsider, she is trying to figure out who she is and whether it is wonderful or horrible to feel different from just about everybody else on the planet. (This is also true for boys, who are male human beings in the process of doing the same things.)



We collect information about ourselves in order to figure out who we are. There are many things that determine how we see ourselves. Explore this idea together as a class:

- Write four headings on the board:
 - What we do / What we feel /How others see us / What we want to be or believe.
- Write examples of the kinds of things we know about ourselves under each heading.
 - Examples (respectively): I'm a skater / I love animals / People say I sing well / I want to be a good friend or I believe I should be kind to others.

LARGE GROUP ACTIVITY- COLLECTIVE POETRY:

- Write a group poem using the list you've made. Begin, "You ask us who we are. We are people who..." Choose several items from the first column and complete the sentence with the verbs. Then, "We feel..." Choose several items from the second column and list only the emotion words to complete the sentence. Use the same process for the remaining columns: "People tell us we..." and "Every day we grow toward being..." Finally, finish, "That is who we are."

A finished poem will read something like this:

You ask us who we are.

We are people who skate, dance, sleep, babysit and play basketball.

We feel love, hate, love, love, worry, sadness and love.

People tell us we get mad too easily; we sing well, talk too much; are trustworthy.

And every day we grow toward being kind to others, good friends, better at school; dentists.

That is who we are!

INDIVIDUAL POETRY WRITING / ART ACTIVITY:

- Each student can collect material for a personal poem using the diagram on page 7.
- If you have the resources create portraits.

YOU WILL NEED: a large roll of butcher or craft paper, a variety of art supplies

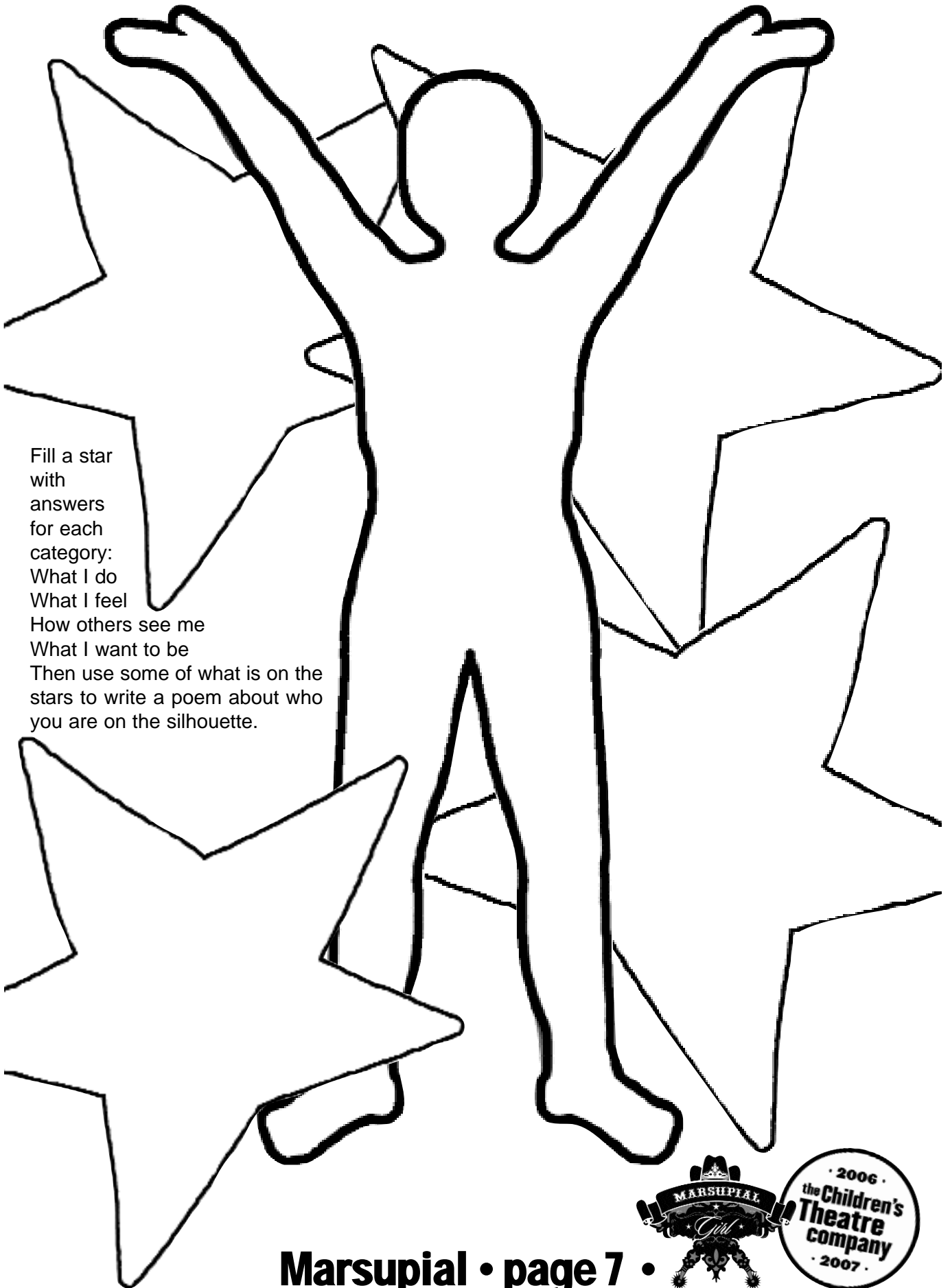
- Have each student lie down on a large piece of paper.
- Have students work in pairs to trace the outline of their bodies onto the paper.
- Then write, draw, or collect pictures from magazines to fill in the outline.
- This can be a long term project that will result in a unique self portrait that can be displayed in hallways before being taken home.

Discuss whether you learned anything about who you are by doing the activities. What did you learn?



Who Am I?

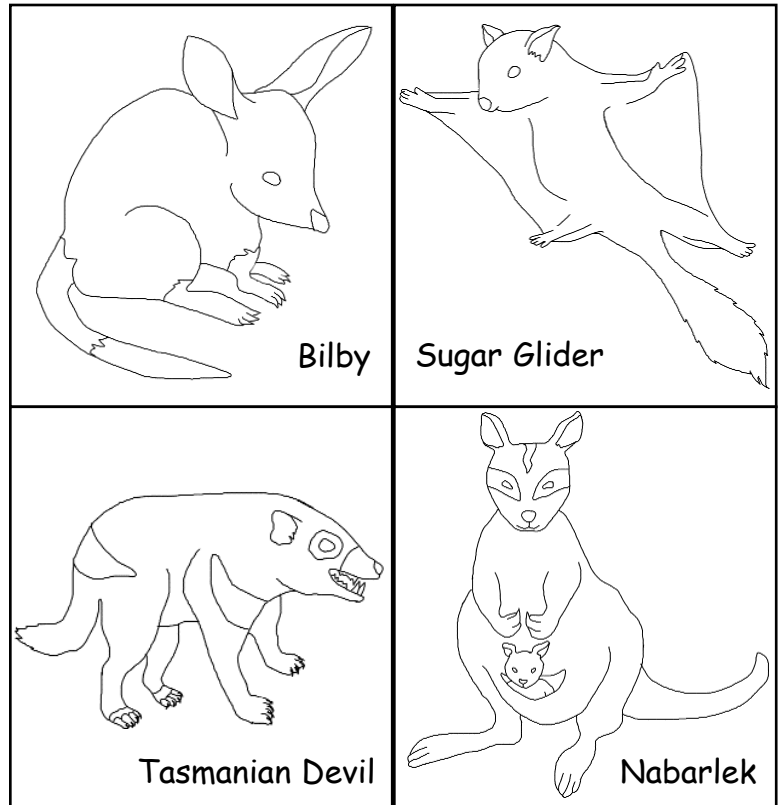
Fill a star with answers for each category:
What I do
What I feel
How others see me
What I want to be
Then use some of what is on the stars to write a poem about who you are on the silhouette.



What Is a Marsupial?

Is she a Sugar Glider?
 Is she a Wallaroo?
 A Tasmanian Devil?
 Boodie Boodie
 Boodie Boodie
 Brush Kangaroo?
 Agile Wallaby,
 Pig-footed Bandicoot,
 Black-striped Wallaby,
 Marsupial Mole?
 Little Northern Native Cat,
 Feathertail Glider,
 Queensland Koala,
 Long-nosed Potoroo.
 Boodie Boodie
 Boodie Boodie
 Brush Kangaroo?

- Dr. Pouch



The lyrics above are one of the first responses people have when they see Marsupial Girl. Every one of the animals named in the song are real marsupials. Most of us had no idea there were that many different kinds of marsupials on the planet!

A RESEARCH PROJECT ON MARSUPIALS: The following websites are good resources:

www.kidcyber.com.au and look for: Mammals, Marsupials and Monotremes

OR go to one of the sites below:

www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/mammal/marsupial/marsupial.html

42explore.com/marsupial.htm

www.enchantedlearning.com/coloring/marsupial.shtml and scroll down to find many of the marsupials named in the song

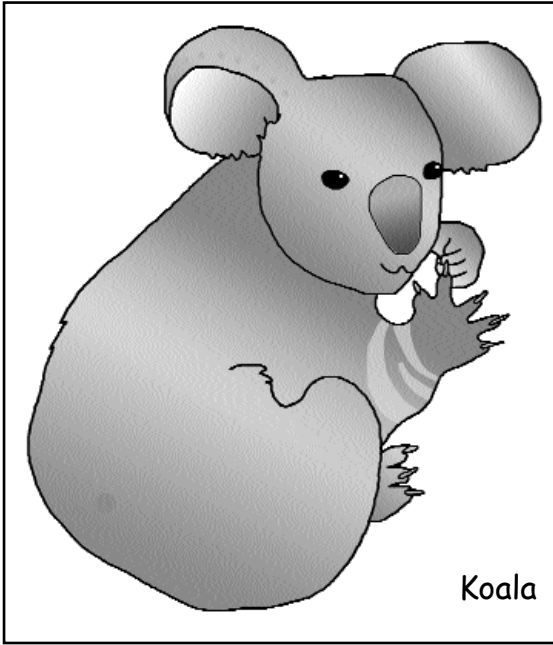
- **Basic Research:** Have students find a picture of one marsupial that interests them, explain why it is called a marsupial, and color it in its natural habitat. The pictures on this and page 9 could help or many are available at the Enchanted Learning address above.

- **More Advanced:** In addition to the basic research, have students report on the environment in which their subject animal is found and how the animal is adapted to its environment (what traits has it developed to flourish where it lives). Emphasize any impact changing environment has had on the animal population.

- **Advanced:** In addition to the prior assignments have the students classify their subject animal in a variety of ways and explain how the classifications serve to both group and specify the animal. For example, an opossum is an omnivorous nocturnal mammal as well as a marsupial.



What If You Were a Marsupial?



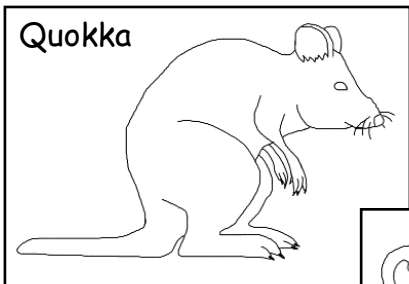
Koala

AN ART RESPONSE: This play is about a girl born with ONE marsupial trait – a pouch. What if she had been born with some other trait? What might she look like? Draw what you can imagine. There are several other marsupials on this page that might inspire your drawing.

- OR... Imagine a boy or girl born with a trait from some other species. What would Amphibian Boy look like or Flamingo Girl? Draw what you envision.

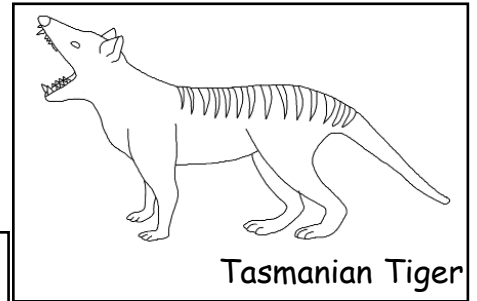
- Tell your class about your drawing. How do you think the person you drew would get along in your school or at home? What special skill might he or she have that is part of being different?

- Write a tall tale about how your creature got its unique look and skills. Focus on how your character feels about being one of a kind.

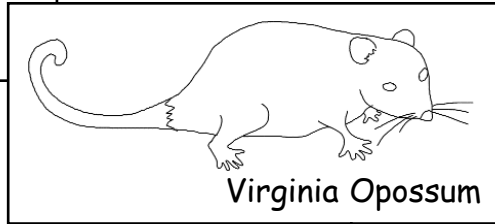


Quokka

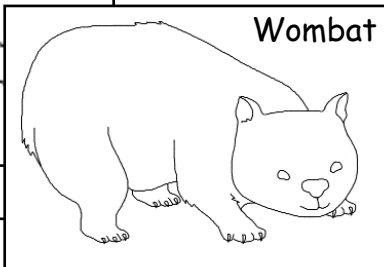
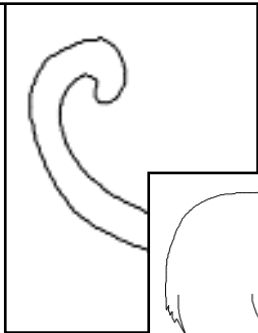
- Make a class book of mythical animals by combining all your drawings and explanations.



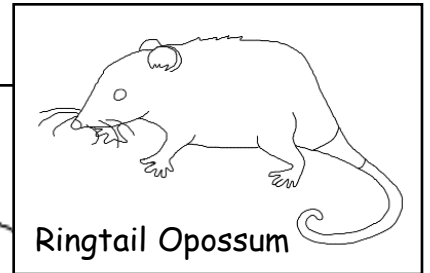
Tasmanian Tiger



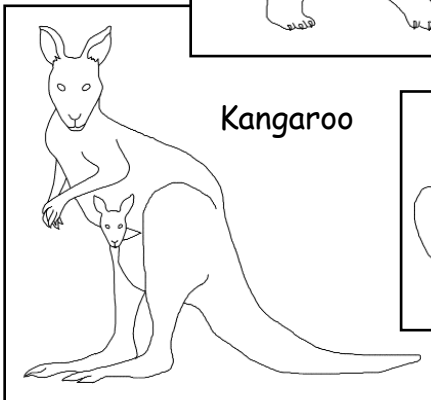
Virginia Opossum



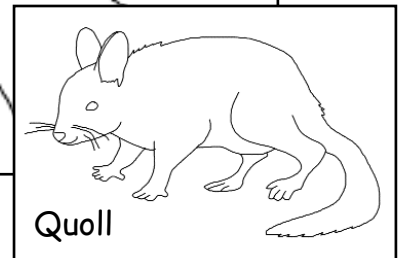
Wombat



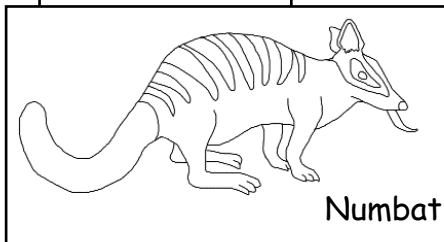
Ringtail Opossum



Kangaroo



Quoll



Numbat



Related Resources

In each of these books a young girl finds that what is most unusual about her - what it is that keeps her from "fitting in" - is exactly the thing that makes all the difference in the end.

The Case of the Missing Marquess: an Enola Holmes Mystery, by Nancy Springer. *Enola Holmes, much younger sister of detective Sherlock Holmes, must travel to London in disguise to unravel the disappearance of her missing mother. (Ages 8 to 12)*

Molly Moon's Incredible Book of Hypnotism, by Georgia Byng. *Unlucky and unloved, Molly Moon, living in a dreary orphanage in a small English town, discovers a hidden talent for hypnotism and hypnotizes her way to stardom in New York City. (ages 8 to 12)*

Olivia Kidney, by Ellen Potter. *Twelve-year-old Olivia explores her new apartment building and finds a psychic, talking lizards, a shrunken ex-pirate, an exiled princess, ghosts, and other unusual characters. (ages 10 to 14)*

Princess Academy, by Shannon Hale. *While attending a strict academy for potential princesses with the other girls from her mountain village, fourteen-year-old Miri discovers unexpected talents and connections to her homeland. (ages 8 to 12)*

Roxie and the Hooligans, by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor. *Roxie Warbler, the niece of a famous explorer, becomes stranded on an island with a gang of school bullies and a pair of murderous bank robbers. (ages 6 to 10)*

Sahara Special, by Esme Rajii Codell. *Struggling with school and her feelings since her father left, Sahara gets a fresh start with a unique teacher who supports her writing talents and the individuality of each of her classmates. (ages 8 to 12)*

Simply Sarah, by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor. *Sarah longs to find a way to be someone special, and when her friend's Chinese restaurant needs more customers, she finds a way to save it. (ages 6 to 10)*



These costume designs by Richard St. Clair give you a glimpse of the style in which the play is done. For another style preview, you might listen to some gutsy blues or hill music. The soundscape of the play is a spicy and soulful blend of rockabilly, country, blues and funk.

Feedback your response is invaluable. Please take a moment to respond. Thank you.



1. Did using this Study Guide add to your theater experience?
 Yes Some No

2. How much of the Study Guide did you read?
 Didn't have time About a quarter All

3. What do you think of what you read? Mark as many as apply.
 Useful Enjoyable
 Nothing new Not for my students

4. Did you get the Study Guide in time to prepare to see the play?
 Yes No Comment _____

5. What sections of the Study Guide did you find most important?

6. How did the experience of preparing for and then seeing the play impact you students?

7. Did you spend more time working with the material BEFORE or AFTER the play?
 Before After About the Same

8. Which of the following best describes you?
I teach: middle school high school
 home school
 other _____

Comments: _____
(continue on separate page if desired)

MAIL TO: CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY • 2400 3RD AVE. SO. • MPLS, MN 55404 • ATTN: EDUCATION DEPT. OR EMAIL: gsmith@childrenstheatre.org

The Children's Theatre Company, awarded the 2003 Regional Tony Award for sustained artistic excellence, is nationally and internationally acclaimed as America's flagship theatre for young people and families. Each year, CTC's public performances, school matinees, regional tour performances, and Theatre Arts Training Programs serve nearly 330,000 people.

Peter Brosius, Artistic Director

Teresa Eyring, Managing Director

Gregory Smith, Director of Education

This Study Guide was written by Chris Kliesen Wehrman, December 2006.
Thanks to: Katie Leo, Gregory Smith and the Hennepin County Library.
Costume designs by Richard St. Clair. Images are intended for educational use only.

