

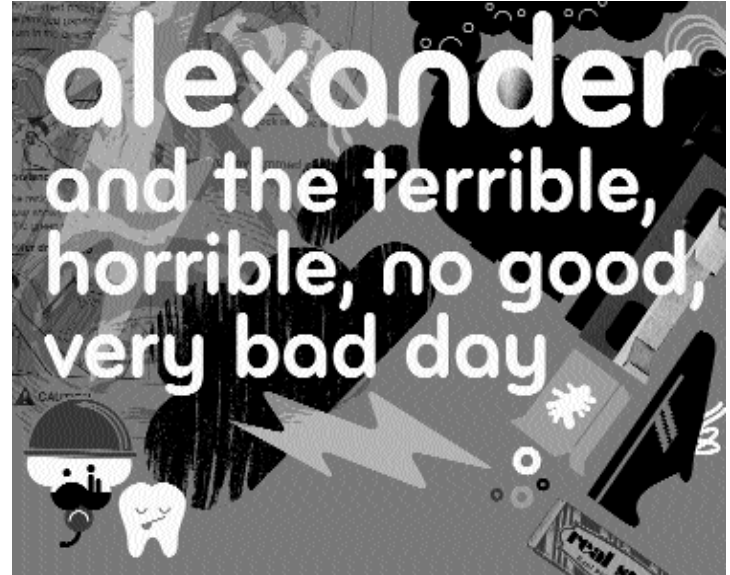
THE CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY

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:



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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 *ALEXANDER AND THE TERRIBLE, HORRIBLE, NO GOOD, VERY BAD DAY* for a fun break in your school routine as you go on a field trip. However, 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 excitement of the theatrical event itself. Even more important could be using the topics introduced by the play to springboard into other areas of your curriculum.

The Big Ideas.....



Alexander's bad day has become a contemporary classic. Its themes are universal:

- There are times when each one of us feels like everything is going wrong.
- At these times it can seem that the whole world (even including inanimate objects) are conspiring against us.
- We all have support systems – family, friends, our own imaginations – we can learn to access.
- Much is determined by the point of view we choose.



ALEXANDER wakes up with gum in his hair, trips on a skateboard, drops his sweater in the sink, and his brothers want to trade him in on a pair of roller blades. By 7:15 a.m. Alexander knows exactly what kind of day he is going to have. We know too, but still we are delighted to watch it unfold as he struggles through a day in which everything goes wrong. We recognize and empathize. We know how little things (like the wrong color of sneakers) can ruin a mood, and we learn that splashy production numbers and heart melting lullabies can help. Alexander's bad day is a colorful, imaginative, musical delight.

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Minnesota Academic Standards Addressed:

Arts: The student will understand and use artistic processes to create, perform, and interpret art works in theater. Read, understand, respond to, analyze, interpret, evaluate and appreciate a wide variety of fiction, poetic, and nonfiction texts.

Reading and Literature: Writing: The student will write in narrative, expository, descriptive, persuasive and critical modes.

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.

Theater: The student will understand components of theater including vocabulary; and create a character based on fiction of life experience using movement, voice, costume and props.

Geography: The students will use resources including maps and/or globes to locate various people, places and things.



FOR PROCEDURE OR EXACT RUNNING TIME CALL THE
 CTC BOX OFFICE: 612-874-0400.

ALEXANDER AND THE TERRIBLE, HORRIBLE, NO GOOD, VERY BAD DAY

A Synopsis of the play based on the book by Judith Viorst
Book and lyrics by Judith Viorst - Music by Shelly Markham



Alexander is a kid with a mother and father, two brothers, a cat and a really bad day on his hands. Even before he wakes up, we know the day is going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day; a THNGVBD! As he dreams, children sing, "If I were in charge of the world...I'd cancel oatmeal...and Sara Steinberg..." and just as they abolish bad days forever, his mother wakes him. This is his first frustration.

At breakfast no prize nestles in his cereal box, and the ride to school is sickening – literally. At school his teacher doesn't like his drawing of an invisible castle and she really doesn't like his singing. She says it's, "TOO LOUD," even when he whispers. Soccer and tag are miserable, partly because his friends really rub in every single mistake. It is definitely a THNGVBD. His best friend demotes him to third best friend and while Alexander is having distinctly unfriendly thoughts it's lunchtime. His friends have cupcakes and wonderful treats. His mom forgot to pack dessert!

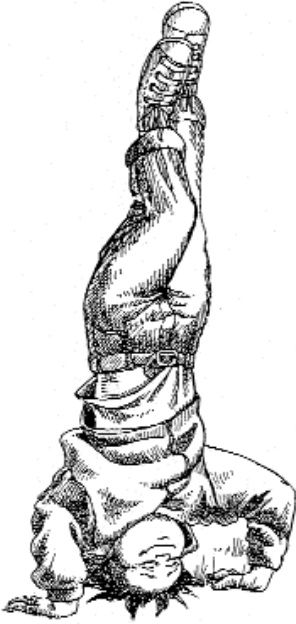
After school there's a dentist appointment, and he dreads going. He sings a song of yearning for Australia, "My day's been really yuck. My luck's been all bad luck. I'm packing up and moving to Australia...They call Australia down under because it's upside down. When here there's darkest night it's super-sunshine-bright in every right-side-up Australia town." It's a lovely fantasy, but it ends in the dentist's office where Alexander realizes even he hadn't imagined how bad it could be. This dentist is a nightmare and triumphantly finds a cavity! His brothers are both cavity free, of course. THNGVBD plus! Both brothers find cool new sneakers at the shoe store. The only ones in Alexander's size are dumb old white ones. Well, they might make him buy them, but they can't make him wear them.

The family picks up Dad from the office and Alexander does just about everything Dad says not to. He uses the Xerox machine, and calls Australia. Dad says, "Alexander...Don't-ever-come-pick-me-up-again!!" Supper is bad, TV is worse, bedtime is dismal, but as the day ends Mother sits with Alexander and listens to his woes. She tells him that some days are like that even in Australia, and she can't promise, but she thinks, and she hopes, and she wishes that tomorrow will be better.

ALEXANDER AND THE THNGVBD, the tale of a famously miserable day, is a toe tapping musical! Have a class discussion around the following idea based on experiences your students have had of both musical plays and movies: When a musical moment occurs it magnifies the intensity of an event or emotion. Think of examples. When Aladdin makes his entrance as Prince Ali in the Disney movie, Genie sings a song that makes the entrance an enormous event! When Ariel sings that she wants to be part of the world above water, all the forward moving action in the movie stops and we glimpse the profound depth of a young person's longing to grow up and experience the world. Read the book about Alexander and choose some moments you think are worthy of a musical number. As you watch the play you will see whether the playwright had any of the same impulses.



Before and After *Inference and Reflection*



A writing exercise:

BEFORE you go see ALEXANDER AND THE TERRIBLE, HORRIBLE, NO GOOD, VERY BAD DAY write an essay on what you expect to see.

Include such things as (these are just a few ideas to get you started):

What the theater will be like.

How the play will begin.

What Alexander will look like.

What kind of set there will be.

How the music will sound.

It will be particularly useful to read the book before doing the exercise, however, expectations can be inferred from thinking about the title of the play and personal history of theater experiences (or preconceptions of what theater is).

AFTER you have seen the play ask students to re-read what they wrote before the performance, and write a follow up reflection on how their expectations were met – or not. Ask for specific explanations of how and why some things were great surprises or disappointments.

A group discussion:

BEFORE you see the play make a list on the black board (or in a place where you can save it) of all the different things a person can do if he or she encounters problems in the middle of a bad day. Who or what can help? Write down as many helping resources as the class can think of, and remember to save the list.

AFTER you've returned go back to your list and talk about whether Alexander ever used any of the resources you might have used in his situation. Did he have the chance to? What might have changed if he would have? Did things get better for him if and when he did?

Compare and contrast:

BEFORE you see the play read the book.

AFTER you've returned compare and contrast the book and the musical.



From the Page to the Stage *An art activity*

The play ALEXANDER AND THE TERRIBLE, HORRIBLE, NO GOOD, VERY BAD DAY (the THNGVBD) is based on a book of the same name. It is an *adaptation*. When a writer is adapting a book into a play it is a very creative process. Many decisions must be made. In fact, many different plays, and types of plays could be made from the very same book.

Once the script is written other artists – such as set designers and costume designers – begin to make decisions, too. Composers write the music. Lighting designers decide when and where to use lighting effects, even choosing the colors of lights in a scene.

In our production of ALEXANDER AND THE THNGVBD the actors play objects as well as people. Someone plays a stuffed kangaroo. Someone plays a giant electric plug! The teacher has a blackboard on her skirt!!

Read the book on which this play is based, and then ask students to choose various directoral and design tasks. Students may:

- **Draw** a specific “stage picture,” what you would like to see one moment of a scene look like onstage.
- **Design** a costume for the teacher or dentist or shoe salesman that includes them wearing something that a teacher or dentist usually uses (but doesn't normally wear). For example, the teacher wears a blackboard skirt.
- **Design** a set for one of the locations in the play: the breakfast table, Dad's office, the shoe store, for example.
- **Design** a lighting effect for a specific moment in the play. Draw the scene as you imagine it, showing the color, intensity and focus of the lights. If it is impossible to draw the lights themselves, explain how you see the lights falling on the scene.

Put all the designs in a gallery on a wall of your classroom and you will have the beginnings of a production design of your own. When you return after seeing the play it will be fun to **compare and contrast** your ideas with those of the designers who created our production.



Synonyms and Antonyms



We all know that Alexander has a bad, bad, bad, bad day. It sounds much more dreadful if we say it is a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. All of the words used in the second sentence are **synonyms** for “bad.” The words have the same or similar meanings.

Think of another synonym for “bad,” and write it here:

What if Alexander would have had a good day? Then the title of the play would contain **antonyms** for “bad,” words that have the opposite meaning. Think of some antonyms for “bad” to complete this title – which will mean exactly the opposite of the title of the play.

Alexander and the _____, _____, _____, _____ Day.

Fill in the blanks below with synonyms and antonyms for the underlined word in each instance.

Alexander woke up feeling miserable. He was completely _____(synonym), which was odd because he usually woke up _____(antonym).

When there was no prize in his cereal box he was disappointed. He was _____(synonym) because his brothers got prizes. If he would have gotten a Spiderman decoder ring he would have been _____(antonym).

He thought the dentist was scary. In fact the dentist was _____(synonym). He liked the donut maker better. She was _____(antonym).

The shoes he bought were ugly - at least he thought so. In fact he thought they were _____(synonym). Both of his brother’s shoes were _____(antonym).

By bedtime Alexander was tired. His bad day had left him completely _____(synonym). His mother helped him see that in the morning things might look better when he was _____(antonym).

An extension of this activity for older students:

- Rewrite a section or incident from the book *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* using as many synonyms as possible. (Each student will need to work directly from a Xeroxed copy of a page from the book so that s/he may circle the words being changed.)
- Have students circle the corresponding synonyms in their writing as well.
- Then ask students to write a second, opposite version of the incident by finding antonyms for each word they have circled.
- Have students identify the antonyms by underlining.
- Ask students to read their anonym stories aloud to enjoy the vocabulary pool – and quite likely, a few laughs.



Could It Get Any Worse? *A creative writing exercise*

We have all had bad days. That is partly why the incidents in Alexander's day are funny and awful at the same time. We recognize them, and we can imagine a million more things that could happen on any given day – to Alexander or to us.

Use your imagination to fill in the blanks below. The wilder the better! Just be sure to make your story plausible. In other words, make it believable even if it's extreme.

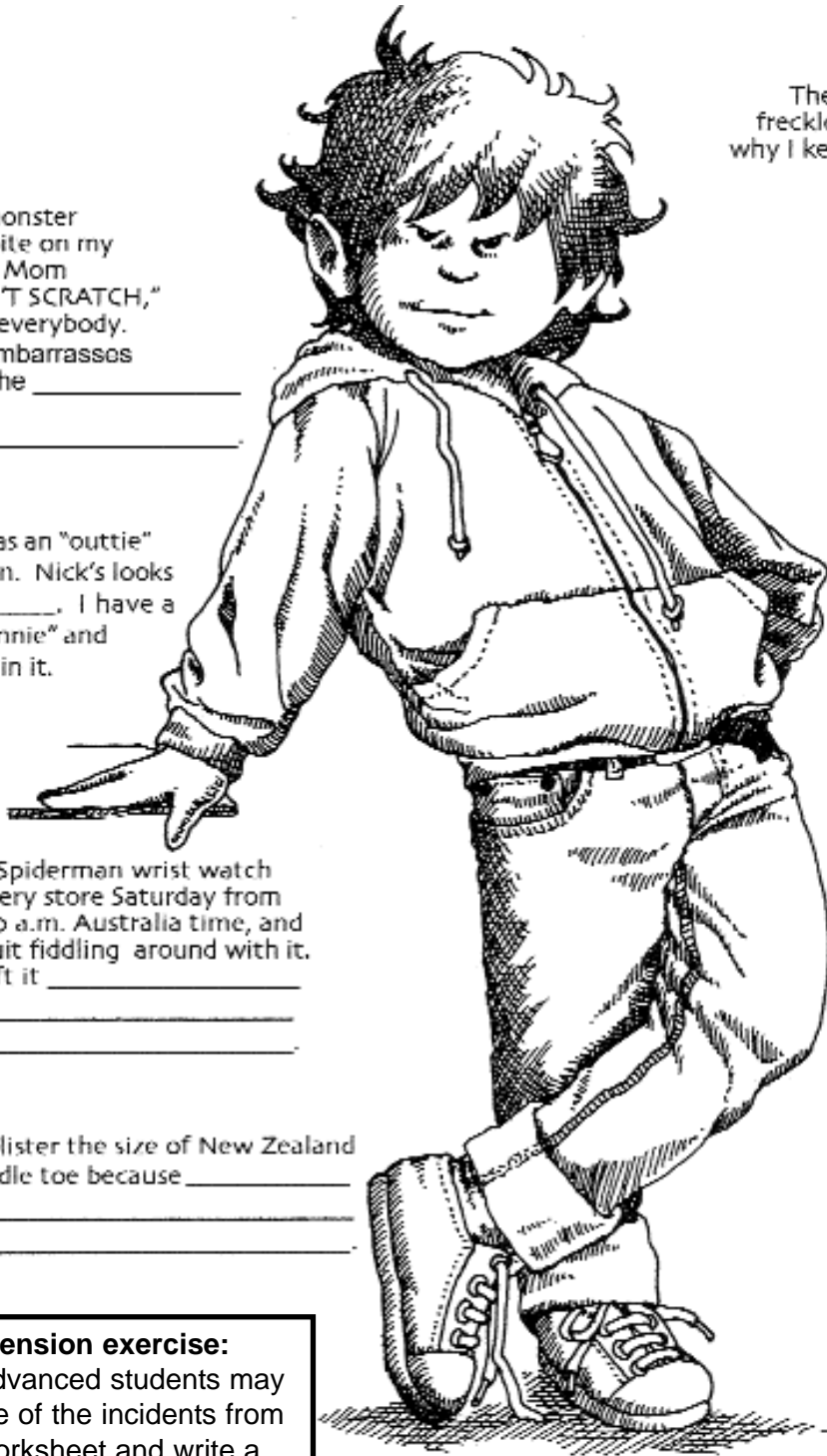
There's a monster mosquito bite on my elbow that Mom says, "DON'T SCRATCH," in front of everybody. She also embarrasses me when she _____

Anthony has an "outtie" belly button. Nick's looks like a _____. I have a plain old "innie" and there's lint in it.

I wore my Spiderman wrist watch to the grocery store Saturday from 1:30 to 2:30 a.m. Australia time, and Dad said quit fiddling around with it. I think I left it _____

There's a blister the size of New Zealand on my middle toe because _____

Extension exercise:
More advanced students may pick one of the incidents from the worksheet and write a short story relating the details of the event.



There's a Bermuda Triangle of freckles on my forehead which is why I keep forgetting 6 x 7 and the 14th president. It also is the reason than I _____

It's really hot in my classroom, but I have to keep my sweat-shirt zipped because _____

There's absolutely no, not even one, dog hair on my pants because _____

I slid into third yesterday and got tagged out. I tore my black blue jeans and Paul said it was just a scratch even though the blood dripped on my sock. And the only Band-aids left were _____



You Think Alexander Had It Bad... *A physical memory game*

Alexander could have simply had a bad day, but instead he had a terrible day. For him it wasn't just one bad thing that went wrong, but a long list of one thing after another. In this game you will construct your own long list of atrocities describing as a group a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day unlike any other.

How to play:

- All players stand in a large circle.
- The first player says "I woke up this morning and..." The player relates something that happened. For example: "I had gum in my hair." The player must physicalize what they say, i.e., put gestures with it; act it out. For example: The player pretends to yawn as s/he says "I woke up this morning," and pretends to find a wad of gum in his/her hair as s/he says, "I had gum in my hair."
- Next, everyone standing in the circle says what the first player just said as they also repeat his/her actions.
- In unison the circle says, "I'm having a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day."
- Continue around the circle one player at a time, each time repeating what all the previous players have said and done. The list gets longer and longer as you go. Choose an interval - say every 3 or 4 players - at which to repeat the title phrase. It will function a little like the chorus of a song. Note that the physicality of the actions often helps remember the words.
- The goal is to be able to go all the way around the entire circle remembering what everyone said and did. If you can do that you should have an excellent day!

TIP: A large class may be divided into two circles that play the game simultaneously.

A Very Quiet, Sitting Still, Introspective Variation

Play a similar game as a quiet group activity. This is a particularly elastic activity (it takes whatever time you have).

Each student will need a whole sheet of paper.

- To begin have each student write, "When I woke up this morning..." and complete the sentence with something awful that happened, i.e. "I had gum in my hair."
- Next, everyone passes his/her paper to the student on his/her left, and writes a new sentence underneath the first one. "Then at breakfast there was a button in my oatmeal."
- Continue "traveling" the papers around the room - each student writing a DIFFERENT sentence each time - until the pages are full (or you are out of time).
- Read aloud and enjoy!



It Depends On How You Look At It *A theater game*

The story of Alexander's horrible day is told entirely from his **point of view**. Any story changes according to who is telling it. For example, if Alexander's brother Anthony was doing the telling, the story of the dentist would be triumphant rather than disappointing.

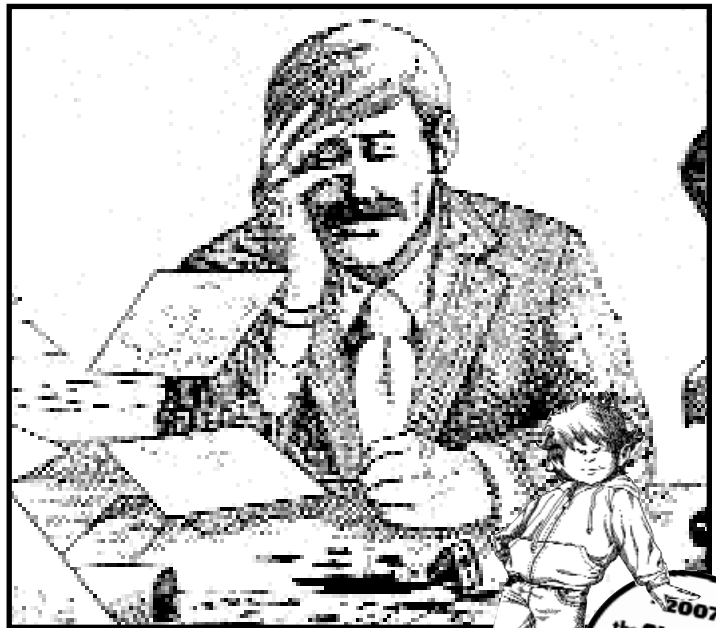
One of the primary tools for coping with a bad day is realizing that it is only bad from where you are standing – it's not bad for everybody everywhere, or even for you always.

To play the game:

- **Prepare the class** for the game with a discussion/brainstorm about the dentist scene in the play. Point out that there are several characters in the scene: Mother, Alexander, his 2 brothers, and the dentist.
 - What lets us know that the story we have been told is from Alexander's point of view?
 - What differences might have occurred if one of the others told the story?
 - How would the mother have described it? The dentist? One of the brothers?
- Once that is accomplished **divide the class into groups of 3's**. (If the class doesn't divide evenly, groups of 2 will work better than groups of 4.)
- Let each group **think of a story** that has 3 characters (or the same number of characters as are in their group). Coach them to look for a story where the characters are likely to have quite different reactions to the shared incident that is the core of the scene.
- Once they determine a story ask them to role play, or **act it out, 3 different ways**. Each way must be from a different character's point of view.
- After each set of scenes has been performed ask the class to **identify the point of view** in each re-enactment of the incident.

Alexander's terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day is funny – to us, not to him.

- Why is it we can laugh at a blooper when it involves someone else, but not when it happens to us?
- Why do we sometimes find we can laugh about it later?
- How does that connect to and reflect on perspective, or point of view.



Australia on \$0 a Day A geography research lesson

Alexander dreams of Australia. Evidently he believes that in Australia there would be no troubles. He sings a song, yearning for the charms he imagines the continent possesses. Can it be true? Is Australia the perfect land of his fantasies?

Do individual **research projects** in order to find out. As a class you will be able to assemble quite a lot of information.

- Direct different groups of students to various areas of investigation. Have some students focus on **geography**, others on **animal life** (particularly that which is unique to Australia), **major cities**, **population** groups, etc.
- Ask students to use their research and **present their findings to the class** in one of the three following forms:

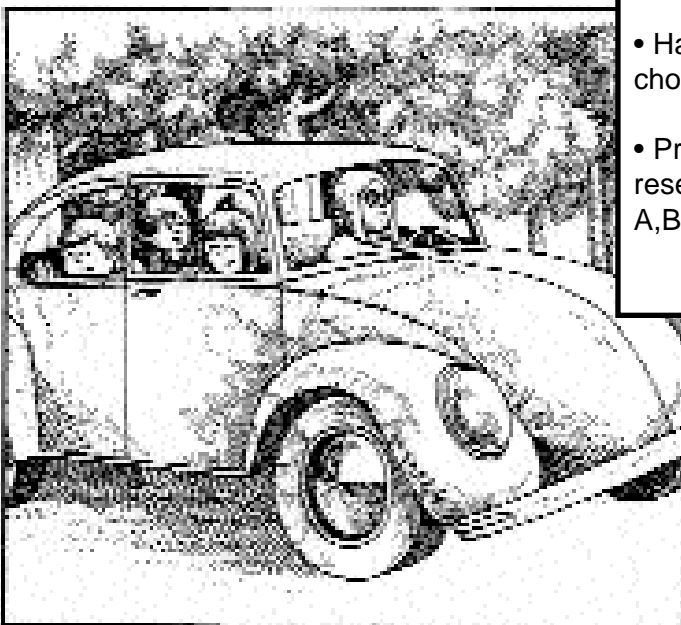
A. As a written travelogue. To do this the student will create a facsimile of a travel journal containing information on their area of expertise. For example, if they studied koalas their travelogue might take the form of a journal entry recounting a visit to the outback and the details of a koala sighting. It might even be decorated with a "photo" and a eucalyptus leaf from the site.

B. Create a travel ad for either a magazine or newspaper. Choose images to support text you write in order to convince people to visit Australia. Focus on a particular experience you want a visitor to have while traveling to this highly recommended location.

C. As a video taped – or live – presentation by a travel agent whose purpose it is to tell the viewer why they should visit Australia. This can (and should) contain a wealth of details uncovered with research.

An alternative activity:

- Talk about Alexander's fondness for Australia as a class all together, and use that as a prompt for each student to identify a place they personally yearn to visit. It may be they know a great deal about their fantasy destination, or they may simply imagine it to be wonderful.
- Have students investigate their personal choice of a fantasy getaway.
- Proceed to utilize the research as outlined by A,B, or C above.



What's In A Name?

A worksheet about redefinition



The title phrase of the play is repeated over and over again. It is part of the pattern of Alexander's day. In fact, once Alexander starts expecting his day to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day he notices every incident that makes his day fit that description. He collects evidence that his day is "bad."

Alexander *defines* what is happening by looking at it according to his expectations.

List three things Alexander says that make you know he thinks his day a bad day?

What if he would have used a different phrase to describe his day? Would he have noticed different things about what happened during the very same day? What difference would there be if he had called his day a Hard To Do It, I Can Make It, No One Can Get Me Down Day? What would he say about the three incidents you listed above?

Think of a phrase that you could use that would make you notice everything great – or funny, or sad, or mad – about a day. In other words, pick a way of feeling and make a title for the day that would make you notice all the things about that day that fit the title. Here is an example: I'm having a Wonderful, Beautiful, So Good, Very Right Day!

We don't walk around thinking we are making up titles for our days, but we do get in the habit of thinking that way. Sometimes we don't realize what we're doing. Do you think you can change from one kind of day to another while the day is happening simply by changing the title of the day? Why or why not?



Safety Valve A box making activity

Sometimes you just can't seem to shake a bad day. It could help to have a place to get rid of your "blues." **Make this box** and use it as a place to put feelings you want to get rid of.

Use the **directions below** and the **pattern on the next page** to make your box.

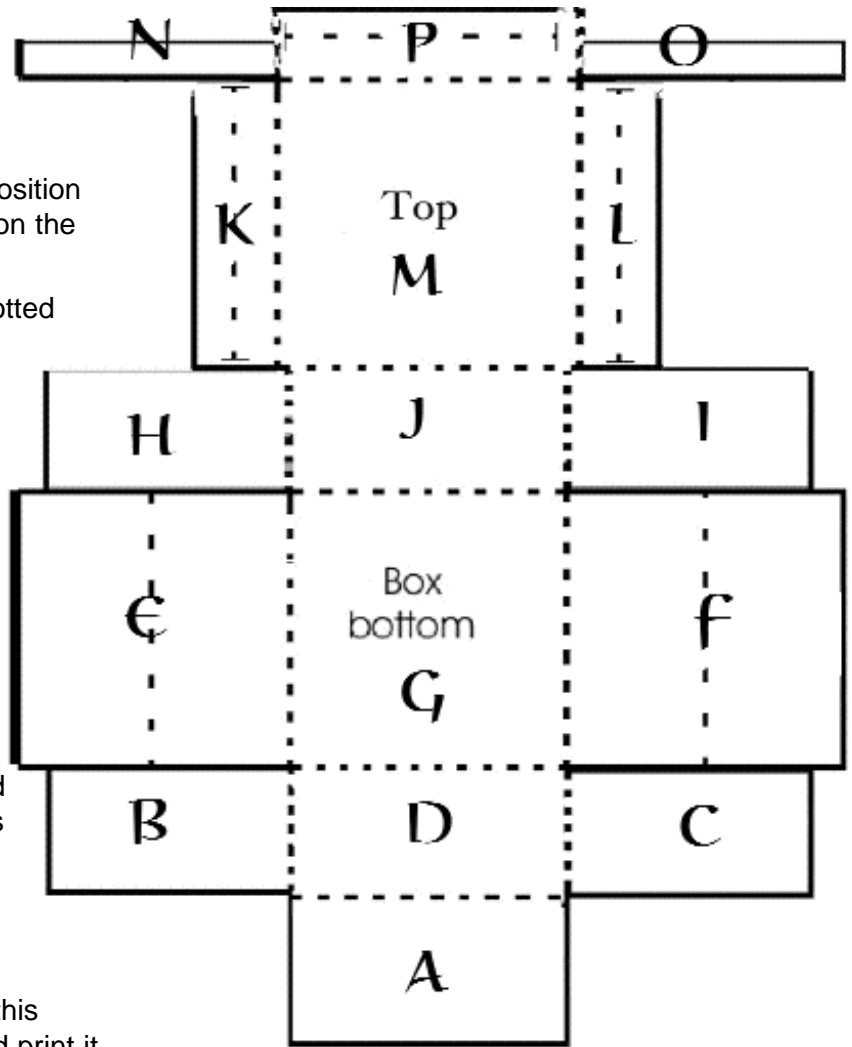
When your box is made you can think about what you want to put inside it, open it up, and think your feelings into it. (You could also write on a piece of paper to put inside or put some other small object inside that reminds you of what you are feeling). Then you can put the box away and the feeling with it. By the time you open the box again, the feeling may have disappeared.

To Make A Box:

1. Begin with the paper in this position with the side you want to be on the **OUTSIDE** facing **DOWN**.
2. Fold everywhere there is a dotted line, and then unfold again.
3. Begin to form the box by I and C toward each other and folding F down so that flaps I and C are caught between the two halves of F.
4. Repeat the process with H, B, and E.
5. Fold A down and press into the interior so that it holds the sides in place.
6. Flaps N and O fold into K and L in a similar manner to steps 3 and 4.
7. Close the lid on your box.

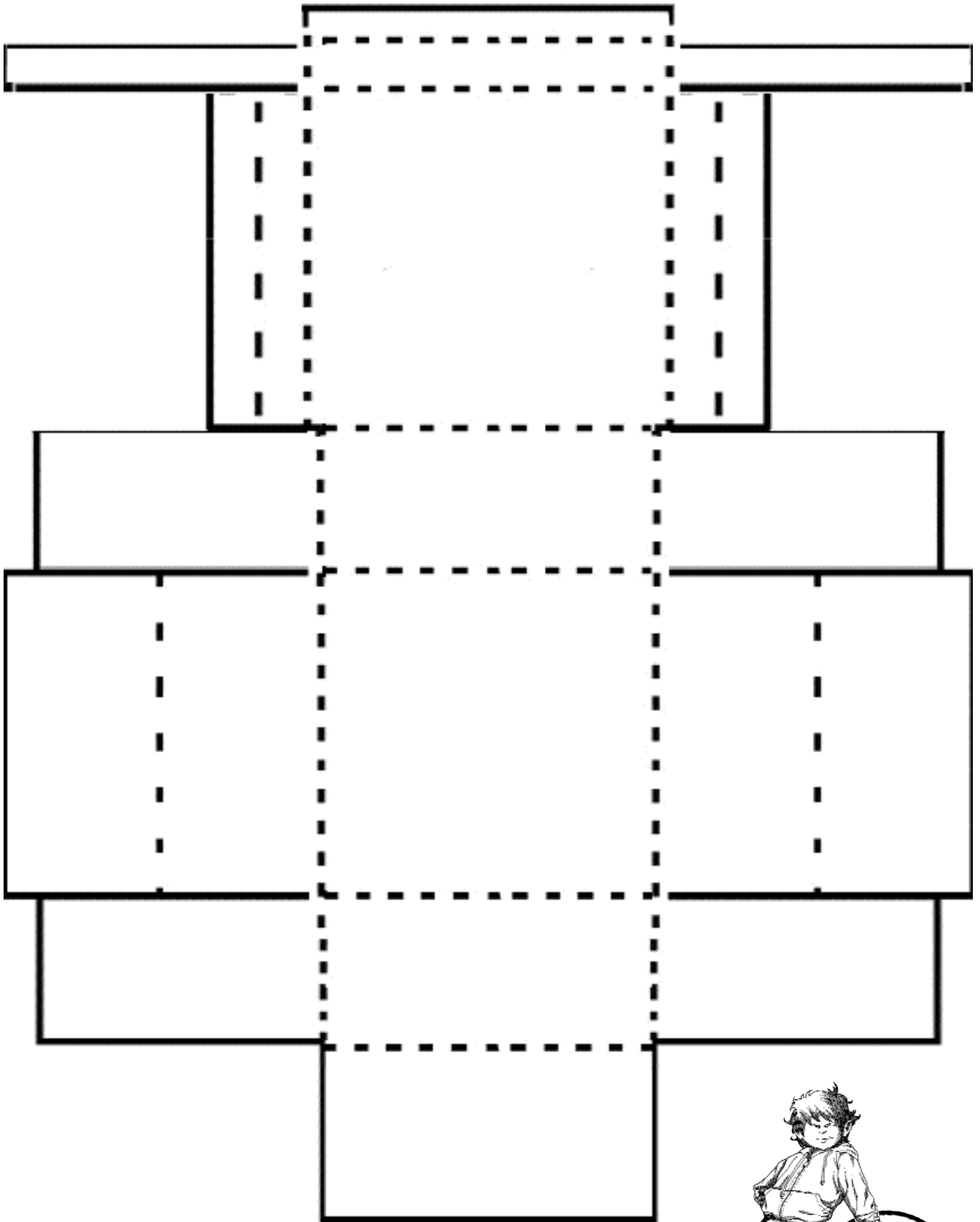
TIPS:

- Enlarge the pattern portion of this page as much as possible and print it onto **CARDSTOCK**.
- Cut out the pattern accurately.
- It is easier to color or paint **BEFORE** you fold.
- It is easier to glue decorations on to the box **AFTER** you fold.
- A little bit of tape or glue stick can be useful, but is not necessary for the box to hold its shape.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

THE CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY • 2400 3rd Ave. S. • Mpls, MN 55404 • TIX : 612-874-0400 • 07-08 SEASON www.childrenstheatre.org



**Box
Pattern**

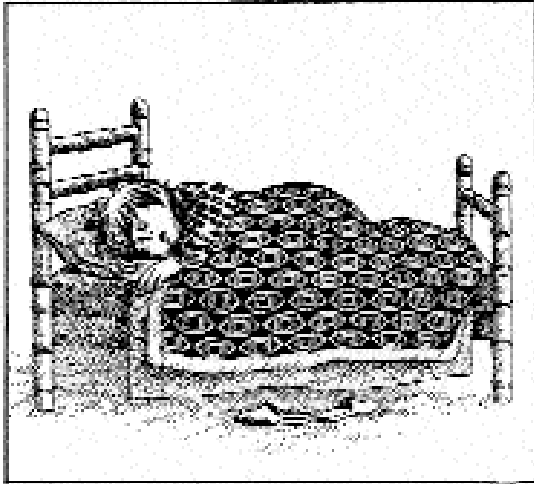


A Wonderful Wish

A poetry writing activity

At the end of Alexander's day his mother sings him a beautiful song, and although it doesn't change how miserable he has been, it does give him hope that tomorrow will be better. It also helps him remember that no matter how bad his day is there is someone who cares very much about him.

Read the lyrics, or words, of Alexander's mother's song (*below*), and then **write a poem** of your own. Think of someone you care very much about. Imagine what you would like to wish for the one you care about when they are feeling bad or sad. What would that person most like or need to feel better?



I Wish You

I wish you,
 I wish you these wishes,
 Cool drinks in your glasses,
 warm food in your dishes,
 People to nourish and cherish and love you,
 A lamp in the window
 to light your way home in the haze.
 I wish you the sweetest of nights
 and the finest of days.

To write your poem:

Who are you writing about? _____

What are some of the things you wish for her/him? _____

Start your poem with the words, "I wish you..." and repeat those words at least once more before the end. You can choose whether or not you want your poem to rhyme. Work on your poem here:



Related Resources

Very bad and other emotional days

Any one of these books could be used for a compare and contrast type analysis alongside ALEXANDER AND THE TERRIBLE, HORRIBLE, NO GOOD, VERY BAD DAY.



Bartholomew and the Oobleck, by Dr. Seuss.

Tired of rain and snow, the King commands his magicians to make a new kind of weather, but when oobleck falls in sticky greenish drops, he has a very bad day.

Harriet, You'll Drive Me Wild, by Mem Fox.

When a young girl has a series of mishaps at home one Saturday, her mother tries not to lose her temper--and does not quite succeed.

Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse, by Kevin Henkes.

When Lilly's teacher asks her to wait before showing her new purse, she does something for which she is very sorry – and finds out tomorrow will be better.

Michael Rosen's Sad Book, by Michael Rosen.

A man tells about all the emotions that accompany his sadness over the death of his son, and how he tries to cope.

My Friend is Sad, by Mo Willems.

When Gerald the Elephant is sad, Piggie is determined cheer him up, but finds after many tries that it only takes the simplest thing to change Gerald's mood.

Today I Feel Silly & Other Moods That Make My Day, by Jamie Lee Curtis.

A child's emotions range from silliness to anger to excitement, changing every day.

Toot & Puddle: You Are My Sunshine, by Holly Hobbie.

Puddle cannot make his friend Toot stop moping no matter what he tries - until a huge thunder-storm clears the air.

Walter Was Worried, by Laura Vaccaro Seeger.

Children's faces, depicted with letters of the alphabet, react to the onset of a storm and its aftermath in this picture book, accompanied by simple alliterative text.

Yesterday I Had the Blues, by Jeron Ashford Frame.

A boy ponders a variety of emotions and how different members of his family experience them, from his own blues to his father's grays and his grandmother's yellows.



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)

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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 **Gregory Smith**, Director of Education

This Study Guide was written by Chris Kliesen Wehrman, August 2007.
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