



Lower Elementary | Performance Guide



Walton Arts Center



KNUFFLE BUNNY: A CAUTIONARY MUSICAL

Just a quick trip to the laundromat with Daddy, Trixie, and her beloved Knuffle Bunny, and before you know it things go horribly, hilariously wrong. Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Musical created by the John F. Kennedy Center Arts on Tour, is based on Mo Willems's Caldecott Honor-winning book, Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale. The story is a tale of firsts: a stuffed animal's first trip in the laundry, a little girl's first words, and a father's first time to deal with his child going "boneless." Young readers will love this charming production full of adventure, song, and gigantic dancing laundry.

Common Core Learning Standards:

CC3 RL: Key Ideas and Details 2 and 3; Craft and Structure 5 and 6; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 9. CC3W: Research to Build and Present Knowledge 8. CC3 SL: Comprehension and Collaboration 1 and 3. CC3L: Knowledge of Language 3b.

Ready, Set, Show!



John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts - Knuffle Bunny Dad-Trixie

The Book

Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale is an award-winning children's picture book by Mo Willems, released in 2004. The book's unique blend of cartoons and black and white photos is a visual treat while the story is both comical and heartfelt. The book won the 2005 Caldecott Honor and a Carnegie Medal in 2007 as well as *Child Magazine's* Best Children's Book Award in 2004.

The Story

Trixie, an excited toddler, can't wait to help her father run an errand—a trip to the laundromat seems like an adventure! But her beloved stuffed bunny gets lost in the laundry. Not until the trip home does Trixie realize her Knuffle Bunny has been left behind. She is not yet able to talk or easily communicate her problem to her father. Frustrated, Trixie's emotions overcome her and she begins to bawl and goes "boneless." At home, Mom identifies the problem when she notices that the bunny is missing. Trixie's toy is finally recovered, prompting her very first words, "Knuffle Bunny!"

The Artists

Mo Willems began his career as a writer and animator for PBS's *Sesame Street*, where he won six Emmy Awards for writing. The author and illustrator of more than thirty books for children, many of them *New York Times* best sellers, has garnered three Caldecott Honors and two Geisel Medals for his efforts. *Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Musical* is his first play. Composer, Michael Silversher won a Grammy Award® for *Elmo in Grouchland* and has three Emmy nominations. Silversher co-wrote the theme songs for the Disney television series

Tale Spin and *Gummi Bears*, and has many songs in the Disney catalogue. Director, Rosemary Newcott is a recipient of the prestigious Princess Grace Foundation Fellowship.

The Performance

Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Musical lovingly celebrates the everyday adventures that come from a family outing. The production explores young children's feelings of security and love for their favorite toys, the distress of loss and the frustration of learning to communicate. With live actors, original music and song, a larger than life Knuffle Bunny, and a colorful set, students learn about family relationships, problem solving and communication.

Musical Theater

Musical theater is a special genre of theater. Music with drama helps make stories memorable. Songs in musicals express characters' feelings and advance the action. Music and drama work together. Playwrights turn the stories into events for the stage. Playwrights work with musicians and lyricists who write music and lyrics to express ideas and feeling through song. Choreographers work with the music to express musical ideas through movement.

Learning Activities

Describing

Before the performance, read aloud *Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale*. Discuss the characters, Trixie, Father, Mother and Knuffle Bunny and talk about their relationships. How do we know they care about each other? With prompts at right, ask students to describe in writing a special toy in their life that is like Knuffle Bunny.

- > What does your toy look like?
- > What does it feel like to touch?
- > How does it sound?
- > How does it make you feel?
- > What is your favorite thing about this toy?
- > How would you feel if you lost it?
- > How would you feel when you found it?

Sequencing

Read the story aloud, then explore time, order, and cause and effect. List events in random order on the board. Ask students to create a timeline in small groups. Give groups a large piece of paper with a pre-drawn timeline on it. Ask groups to position each event on the timeline. Students can present their timeline to the class. Use a clock with moveable hands to identify times that correspond with the events on the timeline.



Non-Verbal Communication

Expressing

After reading the story aloud, discuss the different emotions each character experiences.

- > How did the characters show what they were feeling?
- > Are words the only way we show our feelings?
- > In addition to words, how else do we communicate?

Ask the students to use only their faces to show different emotions and feelings such as happiness, anger, frustration, love, sleepiness, calmness and excitement.

Observing

Help students become aware of live performance, what it feels like to perform and how audience members use observation, respond to and cooperate with performers. Write simple actions on small slips of paper and put them in a bag. Actions can include reading a book, grocery shopping, sharpening a pencil, blowing out birthday candles, playing basketball, folding clothes, riding a bike, eating a melting ice cream cone, etc. Ask for volunteers to reach into the bag, pull out an action, and using only their movement and facial expressions show their action, without sounds or props. The students in the audience can raise their hands to guess what action is being shown. Ask the students:

- > How did you know?
- > What clues did you notice?



John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts - Trixie and Knuffie

Reflect and Assess

Ask the following questions. Record the group's answers on the board and discuss.

- >What did you notice about *Knuffie Bunny: A Cautionary Musical*?
- >What did you already know about the story before seeing the performance?
- >Describe the characters. Who were they? What were they doing? Why?
- >What was different about the book and the live performance?
- >What did you like most about the live performance?
Costumes? Set? Props? Voices? Songs?
- >Would you have performed the story differently? How?
- >How did the music help tell the story?
- >How did the performance make you feel?
- >What moment in the play do you remember most?
- >What questions do you have?

Ask students to draw their favorite scene or part of the performance and share drawings of the performance with the class.

Learn More Online

- >Official website of the author Mo Willems
<http://www.mowillems.com>
- > Kennedy Center website
<http://www.kennedy-center.org/>

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Colgate Classroom Series performances help students meet Common Core Standards.

Learn more at:
www.waltonartscenter.org

Walton Arts Center Learning & Engagement

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