

RUFF!

By Jenifer Nii

STUDY GUIDE



PROVIDED BY BIRMINGHAM CHILDREN'S THEATRE

Performance Dates & How to Use This Guide

“Ruff!” by Jenifer Nii
Directed by Najah Ali

A “tail” of two shelter dogs:

Axel is rough and tumble, Buddy is friendly and eager.

Axel knows his way around the kennel, while Buddy is unsure in this new environment.

Seemingly two dogs from two different worlds,
can they find a way to work together to find a new home?

Ruff! loveably tackles themes of identity, self-esteem and confidence,
friendship, and the challenge of stepping forward without fear.

Performances are Thursday & Fridays at 10:00am

September 23 - October 29, 2021

Tours are available Tuesdays & Wednesdays, October 20 - 27

and Tuesdays - Fridays November 2 - November 12

(with possible extension thru November 19).

Visit www.bct123.org for more information or to book a field trip today!

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This classroom guide for “Ruff!” is designed for
Alabama students in Kindergarten - 3rd Grade.

Use this guide to prepare for your trip to the theatre with pre-show activities
and a theatre etiquette guide.

After the show, further the experience with activities that can be
integrated into your current classroom curriculum.

All activities in this guide are linked to the Alabama State
Department of Education content standards: <https://www.alsde.edu/>

(All worksheets can be found in the “Study Guide Printables” packet provided).

Lastly, we would love to hear from you! Please have your students fill out the
“Post Show Response” form in the printables packet.

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Your Role as the Audience

Dear Audience Members,

Birmingham Children's Theatre is thrilled to welcome you back to our theatre this year as a member of our audience!

A few rules we want to make sure everyone is aware of:

- Masks on! (for anyone 2 years or older)
- Cell phones off! And put away - this is a small show and those glowing screens are very distracting.

When you arrive at the theatre, our staff will meet your vehicle, guide your class to the theatre, and help you get seated. We have limited audience capacity for our shows this fall, so everyone has the ability to space out a bit more. For those of you who have come to BCT before, our Wee Folks Theatre is going to look a little different because *RUFF!* will be performed in the round! Theatre in the round means audiences sit on all four sides of the stage, and this technique is used to create a more immersive, intimate experience where we break "the fourth wall" and invite audiences into our setting and story.

In theatre, the audience is an extremely important part of our storytelling, and we need your help to make this the best show possible for you and your fellow audience members!

While the show is happening, DO

- Give your full attention to the actors and the story
- Feel free to laugh, gasp, and applaud!
- We need your help to tell the story! Our actors will let you know when and how to interact, and we encourage you to do so with enthusiasm!

And to make sure everyone can enjoy the show, we ask that you DON'T

- Talk to your friends and neighbors
- Wave, shout, or disrupt the performance

Stories create a world of imagination and fun, where the impossible comes to life. *RUFF!* is a wonderful opportunity for students in grades K-3 to experience an entertaining play that promotes a very positive and salient message about kindness to others. The show tackles themes of bullying and making judgments based on appearances, and provides age-appropriate anti-discrimination training, all wrapped up in a loveable "tail" to two shelter dogs!

We want to thank the Greater Birmingham Humane Society for partnering with us on this show, and their education team will be at each in-house performance to speak to kids about responsible pet ownership and how to treat all animals with compassion and kindness.



We're so excited to have you back in the theatre, and cannot wait to share *RUFF!* with you!

See you soon,
Birmingham Children's Theatre

About the Artists



JENIFER NII - PLAYWRIGHT

Jenifer Nii is a Salt Lake City-based playwright and a recipient of one of 10 inaugural Writers Alliance Grants from the Dramatists Guild Foundation.

Jenifer's productions include five World Premieres at Plan B Theatre Company (*Wallace*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Suffrage*, *Ruff!*, and *Kingdom of Heaven*). She is the first Asian-American playwright professionally produced

in Utah and a two-time nominee for the Harold and Mimi Steinberg/American Theatre Critics Association New Play Award (*Scarlet Letter*, *Suffrage*).

Jenifer's most recent work, *The Weird Play*, debuted as part of Plan B Theatre Company's 2017/2018 season.



NAJAH ALI - DIRECTOR

Director Najah Ali grew up in Philadelphia, PA and moved to Atlanta, GA shortly after graduating from her undergraduate BA program in theatre and math. She is always delighted to take part in Birmingham Children's Theatre's productions on the creative team or as an actor. She has previously directed the 2019 iteration of *City Mouse*, *Country Mouse* and has been seen in *The Hundred Dresses* (Peggy) and

The Snowy Day (Peter). Najah's works as a creative and/or project manager with Artists Thrive, Behavioral Health Solutions, Emily Tremaine Hall Foundation, Americans for the Arts, Badie Designs, and others. She dedicates this show to the love of her parents who are celebrating their 25th wedding anniversary this year on her birthday.

Pre-Show Activities

1. DEFINING THEATRE

What is theatre?

- What is a play?
- What kind of places do plays occur?
- Have you ever seen a play?
- What kinds of things would you like to see in a play?

Exploring the elements of theatre:

Discuss the different elements of theatre.

- Costumes
- Acting
- Lighting
- Directing
- Set design
- Dancing
- Props
- Music

Discuss how each element impacts the tone, theme, and mood of a given text.

Give the students this prompt:

- How could you use these elements to convey _____(an emotion or feeling)?
- How and why do you think your use of these elements helps to convey your message?

2. PET DRAWING: ART

Have the students draw a pet that they either already have or would like to have.

- If they don't have it make sure they give their imaginary pet a name
- Have the children describe what that pet is like.
- Have them explain how they would care for the pet.
- Finally, explain the implications of not caring for your pet properly and explain why it is important to be a good pet owner.
- Make a list of things good pet owners would do and a list of what bad ones would do and explain why they are either good or bad behaviors.

3. FRIENDSHIP EXERCISE

- Have the children describe what they would do to make friends with people if they didn't know anyone there.
- Separate the kids into groups and have them write and perform a skit revolving around the making of friends in an unknown environment.
- This should not only be a creative outlet but also a way for them to practice being good audience members.

Pre-Show Activities

THEATRE ETIQUETTE

Here are a few things you can discuss with your class to help them understand what to expect at a live theatre production:

- Theatre features live on-stage actors. They have spent many weeks rehearsing for the performance.
- The audience is a very important part of the performance. Appreciation and enthusiasm for the performers is shown by close attention and participation and applause at the proper times. The success of the play depends on the appropriate interaction between cast and audience.
- The theatre is a very special place. Its atmosphere is entirely different from your home where the television is always available.
- It is easy to identify with live actors. You can see how they use their bodies and voices to convey different emotions.
- Actors wear costumes and make-up to help create the impression of the characters they play.
- There is much more to most live performances than actors. Special sets, effects, lighting, music, costumes, and of course, the audience add to the total experience.

Introduce your students to the following theatrical terms:

| | | | | | |
|----------------|------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|---------------|
| Box Office | Program | Props | Lobby | Actor | Balcony |
| Reserved Seats | Overture | Director | Stagehand | Scenery | Orchestra Pit |
| Acts & Scenes | Spotlights | Stage | Usher | Makeup | Play |
| Producer | Costumes | Curtain Call | Musical Theatre | Playwright | Proscenium |

Discuss the role of the audience and proper theatre etiquette:

- Arrive early so that you do not miss anything and so that you will not disturb the rest of the audience while trying to get comfortable in your seat. Lights go out before the curtain goes up and seating is very difficult after that.
- It is easier for you (and the rest of the audience) to see and hear the performance if you stay in your seat and listen very carefully. Be careful not to kick your feet or hit someone else's seat with your feet.
- In most theatres you are not allowed to eat or chew gum. Not only does it ruin the theater, but it also distracts from your concentration.
- Try your best to remain in your seat once the performance has begun. Be sure to use the restroom before the show starts. In long performances, there will be an intermission. However, there is usually no intermission in a performance of the Primary Players since our shows are about one hour in length.
- Although you may wish to say something to the actors while they are on stage, you need to hold your thoughts. You may disturb their concentration.
- Sing or participate if and only if you are invited to do so. Your participation is often very important.
- Listen to how the music sets the moods and affects your own feelings.
- Show the cast and crew your appreciation for their hard work with applause. Do this when you like a song or dance or joke at the end of the show.

Activities for the Classroom

1. COMPARE AND CONTRAST EXERCISE

Using a venn diagram, the students identify the similarities and differences between *Ruff!* and a fairy tale or story of their own choosing.

2. EXPLORING THE MEANING OF HOME: DISCUSSION

Have the children sit in a circle and one by one answer these questions. Allow for discussion and debate to occur.

- What does the word home mean to you?
- Describe home using your five senses, what does it taste like, smell like, sound like, feel like, what does it look like?
- What words do you associate with the word home?
- What would it be like if you couldn't be home anymore? How would that make you feel?

Next explore together how the concept of home can be different for different people and different cultures.

Explore the importance of having a home.

- What would it be like to not have a home?

Finally make sure to stress that home means different things to different people and there is no right or wrong way to define the concept of home.

3. GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES/BACKGROUND STORY EXERCISE

Define what background story or given circumstances means.

- Have the children individually explain the term and then describe what the given circumstances for *Ruff!* are.
- Have them describe how those given circumstances impacted the characters and their actions in the plot.

Define the term super objective for them.

- Have them identify the super objectives of each character (what do they ultimately want)
- What is stopping them from getting that thing?
- What do they do to overcome said obstacle?

Next have them describe what potentially occurs after we have left the world of the play.

CONT.

Activities for the Classroom

4. ONE WORD STORY EXERCISE

- Sit the students in a circle on the ground.
- Start with a prompt (i.e. once upon a time there was a princess who wanted to be an astronaut).
- Moving clockwise each student needs to add one word to this story until you feel like it has been completed.

5. THEME/MAIN IDEA EXERCISE

- Split the children into groups.
- Have the children identify the main idea and some of the themes of *Ruff!*
 - Remember there is no right or wrong answer, it's up to their interpretation of the text.
- Have them write a short 5-10 minute play based off of their main idea.
 - One person needs to do the blocking, another the writing, another one should draw the set, and another draw the costumes.
- Finally perform the short plays for the class!

6. FREYTAG'S PYRAMID

Have the children identify the beginning, middle, and end of the play. Then, using the worksheet on page 2 in the "Study Guide Printables" packet, fill in Freytag's pyramid.

7. RHYME PANTOMIME

- Sit the students in a circle and give them this prompt:
- "I am thinking of a word that rhymes with _____ (car, bat, wave, etc.. make sure whatever it is that it is action heavy).
- Next a student who has a word in mind should raise their hand and be selected. Once selected they should enter the middle of the circle and pantomime the word they had in mind.
- Then have the other students guess which word they are pantomiming.
- The student who gets it right is now able to call out their own prompt:
"I am thinking of a word which rhymes with _____."

8. ABC'S PANTOMIME

- Sit the students in a circle.
- Going clockwise, each student must pantomime something that begins with each letter of the alphabet starting with A and ending with Z.



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THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

QUESTIONS? CONTACT DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION,
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