BEHIND THE CURTAIN
A CREATIVE & THEATRICAL STUDY GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

By Paige Hernandez with
Music by Kris Funn
Based on “Life Doesn’t Frighten Me” by Dr. Maya Angelou
From the book And Still I Rise
Used with permission of Caged Bird Legacy, LLC
Directed by Paige Hernandez

RECOMMENDED FOR AGES 5 AND UP
MARCH 16 – 30, 2024  PUBLIC SHOWS
MARCH 19 – APRIL 5, 2024  STUDENT MATINEE

As part of DCT’s mission to integrate the arts into classroom academics, the Behind the Curtain Resource Guide is intended to provide helpful information for the teacher and students to use before and after attending a performance. The activities presented in this guide are suggested to stimulate lively responses and multi-sensory explorations of concepts in order to use the theatrical event as a vehicle for cross-cultural and language arts learning.

Please use our suggestions as springboards to lead your students into meaningful, dynamic learning; extending the dramatic experience of the play.
DALLAS CHILDREN’S THEATER, one of the top five family theaters in the nation, serves over 150,000 young people and their families each year through its mainstage productions, educational programming and outreach activities. Since its opening in 1984, this award-winning theater has existed to create challenging, inspiring and entertaining theater, which communicates vital messages to our youth and promotes an early appreciation for literature and the performing arts. As the only major organization in Dallas focusing on theater for youth and families, DCT produces literary classics, original scripts, folk tales, myths, fantasies and contemporary dramas that foster multicultural understanding, confront topical issues and celebrate the human spirit.

DCT is committed to the integration of creative arts into the teaching strategies of academic core curriculum and educating through the arts. Techniques utilized by DCT artists/teachers are based upon the approach developed in Integration of Abilities and Making Sense with Five Senses by Paul Baker, Ph.D.

TEKS that your field trip to Dallas Children’s Theater satisfies are listed at the back of this Resource Guide.

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CURTAINS UP ON PUTTING A PERFORMANCE TOGETHER

Every DCT performance you see is the result of many people working together to create a play. You see the cast perform on stage, but there are people behind the scenes that you do not see who help before, during, and after every production.

**The WRITER/ADAPTOR**
Creates a script that combines the story, the music, and the creative vision of a director.

**The DIRECTOR**
Determines the overall look of the performance.
Guides the actors in stage movement and character interpretation.
Works with designers to plan the lights and sounds, scenery, costumes and make-up, and stage actions.

**The DESIGNERS**
Plan the lights, sounds, scenery, costumes, make-up, and actions to help bring the director’s vision to life.
There are also designers who work to create the posters, advertisements, programs, and other media for the performance.

**The STAGE MANAGER**
Before the performance, they create a cue sheet to guide the crew in getting set pieces on and off the stage during the performances.
During the performance, the stage manager uses this cue sheet to direct people and things as they move on and off the stage.

**The CREW**
Build and operate the scenery, costumes, props, and light and sound during the performance.

**The CAST**
Includes all of the performers who present the story on stage.

**The AUDIENCE**
That’s right! There can be no performance without you—the audience. The role of the audience is unique because you experience the entertainment with the performers and backstage crew.
You are a collaborator in the performance and it is important to learn your role so you can join all the people who work to create this Dallas Children’s Theater production.
CURTAINS UP ON THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

Watching a play is different from watching television or a sporting event. When you watch T.V., you may leave the room or talk at any time. At a sporting event you might cheer and shout and discuss what you’re seeing. Your role as a member of the audience in a play means you must watch and listen carefully because:

- You need to concentrate on what the actors are saying.
- The actors are affected by your behavior because they share the room with you. Talking and moving around can make it difficult for them to concentrate on their roles.
- Extra noises and movement can distract other audience members.

Are you ready for your role in this performance?
Check the box next to the statements that describe proper etiquette for an audience member.

☐ Try your best to remain in your seat once the performance has begun.
☐ Share your thoughts out loud with those sitting near you.
☐ Wave and shout out to the actors on stage.
☐ Sit on your knees or stand near your seat.
☐ Bring snacks and chewing gum to enjoy during the show.
☐ Reward the cast and crew with applause when you like a song or dance, and at the end of the show.
☐ Arrive on time so that you do not miss anything or disturb other audience members when you are being seated.
☐ Keep all hands, feet, and other items out of the aisles during the performance.
1. Draw a picture of what the audience might look like from the stage. Consider your work from the viewpoint of the actors on stage. How might things look from where they stand?

2. Write a letter to an actor telling what you liked about their character.

3. Write how you think it might feel to be one of the actors. Are the actors aware of the audience? How might they feel about the reactions of the audience today? How would you feel before the play began? What about after the show ends?

4. Which job would you like to try? Acting, Directing, Lighting and Sounds, Stage Manager, Set designer, Costume designer, or another role? What skills might you need to complete your job?
CURTAINS UP ON THEATER VOCABULARY

ACTOR  any theatrical performer whose job it is to portray a character

CAST  group of actors in a play

CENTER STAGE  the middle of the stage

CHARACTER  any person portrayed by an actor onstage. Characters may often be people, animals, and sometimes things.

CHOREOGRAPHER  the designer and teacher of the dances in a production

COSTUME DESIGNER  the person who creates what the actors wear in the performance

DIRECTOR  the person in charge of the actors' movements on stage

DOWNSTAGE  the area at the front of the stage; closest to the audience

HOUSE  where the audience sits in the theater

LIGHTING DESIGNER  the person who creates the lighting for a play to simulate the time of day and the location

ONSTAGE  the part of the stage the audience can see

OFFSTAGE  the part of the stage the audience cannot see

PLAYWRIGHT  the person who writes the script to be performed. Playwrights may write an original story or adapt a story by another author for performance.

PLOT  the story line

PROSCENIUM  the opening framing the stage

PROJECT  to speak loudly

PROP  an object used by an actor in a scene

SET  the background or scenery for a play

SETTING  the time and place of the story

SOUND DESIGNER  the person who provides special effects like thunder, a ringing phone, or crickets chirping

STAGE CREW  the people who change the scenery during a performance

STAGE MANAGER  the person who helps the director during the rehearsal and coordinates all crew during the performance

UPSTAGE  the area at the back of the stage; farthest from the audience
CURTAINS UP AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

Attending a play is an experience unlike any other entertainment experience. Because a play is presented live, it provides a unique opportunity to experience a story as it happens. Dallas Children’s Theater brings stories to life through its performances. Many people are involved in the process. Playwrights adapt the stories you read in order to bring them off the page and onto the stage. Designers and technicians create lighting effects so that you can feel the mood of a scene. Carpenters build the scenery and make the setting of the story become a real place, while costumers and make-up designers can turn actors into the characters you meet in the stories. Directors help actors bring the story to life and make it happen before your very eyes. All of these things make seeing a play very different from television, videos, computer games, or CDs of stories.

Hold a class discussion when you return from the performance. Ask students the following questions and allow them to write or draw pictures of their experience at DCT.

- What was the first thing you noticed when you entered the theater?
- What did you notice first on the stage?
- What about the set? Draw or tell about things you remember. Did the set change during the play? How was it moved or changed?
- Was there any space besides the stage where action took place?
- How did the lights set the mood of the play? How did they change throughout? What do you think the house lights are? How do they differ from the stage lights? Did you notice different areas of lighting?
- What did you think about the costumes? Do you think they fit the story? What things do you think the costume designers had to consider before creating the costumes?
- Was there music in the play? How did it add to the performance?
- What about the actors? Do you think they were able to bring the characters to life? Did you feel caught up in the story? What things do you think the actors had to work on in order to make you believe they were the characters?
CURTAINS UP ON ADAPTATION

An adaptation is a change made in something so that it can fit a new use. LIFE DOESN'T FRIGHTEN ME: I AM FEARLESS ROYALTY is an adaptation of a poem, which is meant to be read, into a play, which is meant to be performed and viewed. Paige Hernandez and Kris Funn took the work of Dr. Maya Angelou and adapted it so that it could be performed for an audience on stage.

Consider these questions for discussion before you attend the DCT production:

• What kinds of things did Paige Hernandez and Kris Funn have to consider in writing a script and music of the poem?
• If she were still alive, what kinds of things would Dr. Maya Angelou find important about adapting her poem?
• Do you think the performance will be shorter or longer than the poem?
• What will the characters look like? How will they match the descriptions in the poem by Dr. Maya Angelou? What differences can you expect?
• What about the poem? What changes might you expect in adapting it for the stage? Why would these changes be necessary?

After the performance, consider these questions:

• Were there any characters or events that were in the poem but not in the play? Why do you think these choices were made?
• Did the changes make the poem or the play stronger?
• What do you think the set and costume designers need to consider when bringing the poem to the stage?
• What things helped to tell the poem on stage?
• What story were you most interested in? Why?

Use the following template to illustrate the similarities and differences between Dr. Maya Angelou’s poem and DCT’s performance of LIFE DOESN'T FRIGHTEN ME: I AM FEARLESS ROYALTY.
LIFE DOESN'T FRIGHTEN ME: I AM FEARLESS ROYALTY
COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Poem

Both

Play

Both

Both
DR. MAYA ANGELOU was a U.S. writer, performer, and professor. She was best known for her poetry and several books based on her life, especially *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970).

Angelou was born Marguerite Johnson on April 4, 1928 in Saint Louis, Missouri. Her parents separated when she was very young. For much of her childhood, she lived with her grandmother and brother in Stamps, Arkansas. Her brother gave her the nickname Maya.

In 1940 Maya went to live with her mother in San Francisco, California. There she finished high school and had a son. She worked at various jobs, including waitress, cook, and dancer. During this time she began to use the last name Angelou.

In the 1950s Angelou moved to New York City where she developed her many talents. She studied dance with the famous modern dancer Martha Graham. She wrote and sang songs, some of which she recorded. She earned a role in the opera *Porgy and Bess*, and she went on an international tour with the show. She joined the Harlem Writers’ Guild, a group that encouraged her to write.

In the early 1960s Angelou lived in Egypt and Ghana. She worked as a writer and an editor for foreign publications. After moving back to the United States, she was active in the civil rights movement.

In the 1960s and ’70s Angelou wrote television and movie screenplays. She also acted in the TV series *Roots* (1977). In 1981 Angelou became a professor at Wake Forest University in North Carolina. During the 1990s she acted in movies and also directed a film, *Down in the Delta* (1998).

Throughout her life, Angelou wrote poetry and stories based on her experiences. Her first autobiographical book, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, was published in 1970. Over the next several decades, she published many other autobiographies and collections of poetry. She also wrote children's books.


Excerpted from: kids.britannica.com/kids/article/Maya-Angelou/399338
PAIGE HERNANDEZ is a multidisciplinary artist who is critically acclaimed as a performer, director, choreographer and playwright. As an AEA Equity actress, Paige has performed on many stages throughout the country. She has collaborated with the Lincoln Center and has been commissioned by several companies including the National New Play Network, the Smithsonian, The Kennedy Center, La Jolla Playhouse and the Glimmerglass Festival. She is the recipient of an Individual Artist Award from the Maryland State Arts Council as well as four Helen Hayes nominations for choreography, directing and performance. Paige has also been named a “classroom hero” by The Huffington Post, a “Citizen Artist Fellow” with the Kennedy Center, “40 under 40” by The Washington Post and one of “Six Theatre Workers You Should Know” by American Theatre magazine. Her work on inclusive spaces and theatre-based trauma informed practices has received international acclaim and garnered her such acknowledgement as the inaugural Victor Shargai Leadership Award and a repeat keynote speaker and presenter for Disney. Paige was recently appointed to the Maryland State Arts Council by Governor Wes Moore. She is elated to be the Associate Artistic Director of Everyman Theatre in her hometown of Baltimore, MD. With her company B-FLY ENTERTAINMENT, Paige continues to develop and tour original work internationally.

Excerpted from: www.paigehernandez.com/#bio

KRIS FUNN was born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland. He began playing the trumpet at age four and took up the double bass at age 14 upon entering high school. Through the instruction of his father, Charles Funn, Kristopher performed his first professional bass gig the same year he began learning the instrument. Other early accomplishments included winning the “unsung hero” at the Fish Middleton jazz competition at the East Coast Jazz festival, also in the first year of instruction. At age 18, Kristopher attended Howard University to study Computer Science while also performing in the Howard University Jazz Ensemble for two years. After graduating with an honors degree in computer science, Kristopher decided to pursue a career as a professional jazz musician, performing in several venues in the Baltimore/Washington D.C. metropolitan areas.

At age 23, Kristopher began touring internationally with alto saxophonist Kenny Garrett. Since then, he has traveled to every major jazz festival in the world, touching six continents performing with artists including Christian Scott, Joey Alexander, Sean Jones, Kamasi Williams, Benny Golson, Bruce Williams, Nicholas Payton, Warren Wolf, Pharoah Sanders, Jeff Lorber and many others. Kristopher appears on several recordings including the Grammy nominated albums “Emancipation Proclamation”, “Ancestral Recall”, and “AXIOM” by Christian Scott. Kristopher released his debut album, Cornerstore, in 2017 and he continues to perform professionally in the Baltimore/Washington D.C. area when not touring internationally. Since 2018, Kristopher is part of the jazz faculty at the Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins.

Excerpted from: funndamentals.com/#bio
CURTAINS UP ON DISCUSSION

Use the following questions to lead a discussion with students after attending DCT’s performance of LIFE DOESN’T FRIGHTEN ME: I AM FEARLESS ROYALTY.

- Who is “fearless royalty”?
- What does that royalty come with (clue: it’s something that goes on your head)?
- What happens to Splenda Jay during the boxing match?
- Why does the dancer feel like they don’t belong?
- Describe what happens when the dancer meets the “panthers.”
- How do the characters feel during the storm?
- What makes them feel better?
- What happens when the characters play the video game?
- What story were you most interested in? Why?

CURTAINS UP ON WRITING

I’m not a writer who teaches. I’m a teacher who writes.  
Dr. Maya Angelou  
2008 USA Today interview

Dr. Maya Angelou was a prolific writer and a long-time professor at Wake Forest. Watch the very brief video of Angelou describing the challenge of being a writer:


As a class, discuss her advice. What do you think? Do you agree or disagree? How could you apply her words of wisdom to your own writing? Using what Angelou said as a jumping off point, create a list of ideas about how your students can improve their own writing (the list should reflect the writing level of the class). Post the list somewhere in the class and remind students to refer to it any time they need inspiration for their writing projects.

Organized by: Jessica Colaw
CURTAINS UP ON FUN WITH MATH

LIFE DOESN’T FRIGTEN ME: I AM FEARLESS ROYALTY is adapted from a poem. Obviously, theater and poetry have a connection. But, did you know that math and poetry also have a strong connection? Check out some of the following information to see that relationship in action:

**Poetry Formulas**
One of the primary characteristics shared by many forms of poetry and math is the use of formulas.

How does poetry use formulas? Many forms of poetry use numeric formulas. The formulas usually indicate a prescribed number of syllables that define the type of poem, or poetic form used. For example:

- **Haiku.** A haiku is a poem of three lines and a total of 17 syllables: five syllables on the first line, seven on the second line, and five on the last line.
- **Sonnet.** A sonnet is a poem of 14 lines, with 10 syllables on each line.
- **Cinquain.** A cinquain poem is a verse of five lines that do not rhyme.

As a class or individually, try to write a poem or two in one of the styles above.

**Snowball Poem**
A snowball is a poem in which each line increases or decreases by one letter, word, or syllable. Here’s one with syllables.

```
I
wasn’t
about to
try this but I
wanted to see how
hard it would be
to complete.
It’s hard.
Darn.
```

Now, have your class write their own snowball poem.
**Fibs Poem**
Model your poems on the Fibonacci sequence: in a Fib, each line’s syllable or letter is the sum of the previous two lines: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21 …

I
am
tired
of writing
so many poems
in such a short amount of time.
Please read this poem and at least let me know it’s worth it.

Give a Fibs Poem a try, too!

CURTAINS UP ON SEL

Although it is titled LIFE DOESN’T FRIGHTEN ME: I AM FEARLESS ROYALTY, fear is something the characters deal with throughout the play. And, fear is something we all experience here and there in our own lives. But, there’s something that we can use to combat our fears: courage! As a class, check out the following books that promote courage:

*Courage* by Bernard Waber
This book looks at and discusses different types of courage and the various everyday situations your students might face that require them to have courage. Activities can include getting learners to make a list of how they show courage throughout every day.

*I Am Stronger Than Anxiety* by Elizabeth Cole
Your students might be experiencing some anxiety. Working on a class task of brainstorming different strategies to help work through overcoming anxiety will definitely give them an extra dose of courage.

*I Am Courage* by Susan Verde and art by Peter H. Reynolds
Help your students embody courage and learn about different aspects of this quality. Ask them to discuss with a partner what resilience looks like and to create a definition of courage. By doing this you help to build bravery in your students!

Excerpted from: teachingexpertise.com/classroom-ideas/15-activities-on-courage-for-elementary-students/

CURTAINS UP ON ART

In 1993, *Life Doesn’t Frighten Me* by Dr. Maya Angelou, illustrated by Jean-Michel Basquiat, and edited by Sara Jane Boyers was released. Basquiat was a famous artist whose style was heavily influenced by New York’s graffiti scene. Check out basquiat.com to learn more about him and his work.

Basquiat-Inspired Art

**You will need:**
- the picture book *Life Doesn’t Frighten Me* (if you can’t find the book itself, search for a reading of it on YouTube).
- markers, crayons, paints, paintbrushes, pencils, etc.
- paper

Begin by looking through *Life Doesn’t Frighten Me* as a class. Really take a good look at all the pictures. What do you see? How do you think Basquiat created the illustrations? Pass the book around and trace the various lines, thinking and talking about the process behind their creation. Then, instruct the students to create an illustration for the book utilizing the paper and drawing/painting materials. They shouldn’t just copy a picture, but be inspired by what they saw in the book and make their own illustration. When everyone is done, encourage volunteers to share their illustrations. Don’t forget to celebrate everyone’s unique artistic perspective!

Created by: Jessica Colaw
CURTAINS UP ON SET DESIGN

When you come to Dallas Children’s Theater to see a show, what do you see on stage? Everything you see has been thoughtfully designed by a set designer to help tell the setting of the story. If your class has already seen LIFE DOESN’T FRIGHTEN ME: I AM FEARLESS ROYALTY, discuss the set design you saw on stage. If you haven’t been to the theater yet, talk about what you think the set might look like.

Ground Plan DIY

Now it’s your students’ turn to play the role of set designer. One of the ways a set designer prepares the set is by creating a ground plan (a bird’s eye view of the stage). Instruct your students to utilize the following ground plan template to create a unique set for LIFE DOESN’T FRIGHTEN ME: I AM FEARLESS ROYALTY. Is there anything they think is important to include? Anything they wouldn’t? This play is unique in that it is an adaptation of a poem; how does that fact inform their designs? When the students have completed their projects, put the ground plans up around the classroom and have a gallery walk to check out everyone’s different viewpoints!

Created by: Jessica Colaw
CURTAINS UP ON THE CROWN

FEARLESS ROYALTY
And with royalty comes…
The Crown!
When you wear your crown,
it’s known all around…
That you are ENOUGH.

Just like the lines from LIFE DOESN’T FRIGHTEN ME: I AM FEARLESS ROYALTY states, you (we all) are enough! And, now it’s time to celebrate the crown you wear by making a crown!

Materials Needed Make the Crown Craft:
• Paper Plates
• Glue
• Paint
• Sequins, acrylic jewels, or glitter

How to Make a Crown:
• Bend paper plate in half
• Cut vertically up the middle (3/4 of the way to the edge) of plate
• Unbend paper plate and cut horizontally across the cut you just made (essentially creating a + in the center of the paper plate)
• Cut diagonally between each cut you just made (creating 8 triangular slices in the center) – the points of the triangles will point up when the crown is worn.
• Paint, and decorate the crowns with either sequins, acrylic jewels, or glitter.
• Let the crowns dry, then enjoy!

Excerpted from: whereimaginationgrows.com/easy-crown-craft-kids/

CURTAINS UP ON MORE

More books by Dr. Maya Angelou:
Kofi and His Magic
My Painted House, My Friendly Chicken, and Me

Books about Dr. Maya Angelou:
Who Was Maya Angelou? by Ellen Labrecque (Author), Who HQ (Author), Dede Putra (Illustrator)
The Story of Maya Angelou by Tiffany Obeng
Rise!: From Caged Bird to Poet of the People, Maya Angelou by Bethany Hegedus (Author), Tonya Engel (Illustrator)
Maya Angelou: Journey of the Heart by Jayne Pettit (Author)
T.E.K.S. SATISFIED BY
LIFE DOESN’T FRIGHTEN ME: I AM FEARLESS ROYALTY

110.2 – English Language Arts and Reading, Kindergarten
  • b.10 - Composition: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts - writing process. The student uses the writing process recursively to compose multiple texts that are legible and uses appropriate conventions.

110.3 - English Language Arts and Reading, Grade 1
  • b.11 - Composition: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts - writing process. The student uses the writing process recursively to compose multiple texts that are legible and uses appropriate conventions.

110.4 - English Language Arts and Reading, Grade 2
  • b.11 - Composition: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts - writing process. The student uses the writing process recursively to compose multiple texts that are legible and uses appropriate conventions.

110.5 - English Language Arts and Reading, Grade 3
  • b.11 - Composition: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts - writing process. The student uses the writing process recursively to compose multiple texts that are legible and uses appropriate conventions.

111.2 – Mathematics, Kindergarten
  • b.3 - Number and operations. The student applies mathematical process standards to develop an understanding of addition and subtraction situations in order to solve problems.

111.3 – Mathematics, Grade 1
  • b.3 - Number and operations. The student applies mathematical process standards to develop and use strategies for whole number addition and subtraction computations in order to solve problems.

111.4 – Mathematics, Grade 2
  • b.4 - Number and operations. The student applies mathematical process standards to develop and use strategies and methods for whole number computations in order to solve addition and subtraction problems with efficiency and accuracy.

111.5 – Mathematics, Grade 3
  • b.4 - Number and operations. The student applies mathematical process standards to develop and use strategies and methods for whole number computations in order to solve problems with efficiency and accuracy.

117.102 – Art, Kindergarten
  • b.2 – Creative expression. The student communicates ideas through original artworks using a variety of media with appropriate skills. The student expresses thoughts and ideas creatively while challenging the imagination, fostering reflective thinking, and developing disciplined effort and progressive problem-solving skills.

117.105 – Art, Grade 1
  • b.2 – Creative expression. The student communicates ideas through original artworks using a variety of media with appropriate skills. The student expresses thoughts and ideas creatively while challenging the imagination, fostering reflective thinking, and developing disciplined effort and progressive problem-solving skills.
117.108 – Art, Grade 2
  • b.2 – Creative expression. The student communicates ideas through original artworks using a variety of media with appropriate skills. The student expresses thoughts and ideas creatively while challenging the imagination, fostering reflective thinking, and developing disciplined effort and progressive problem-solving skills.

117.111 – Art, Grade 3
  • b.2 – Creative expression. The student communicates ideas through original artworks using a variety of media with appropriate skills. The student expresses thoughts and ideas creatively while challenging the imagination, fostering reflective thinking, and developing disciplined effort and progressive problem-solving skills.

117.104 – Theatre, Kindergarten
  • b.5 – Critical evaluation and response. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances.

117.107 – Theatre, Grade 1
  • b.5 – Critical evaluation and response. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances.

117.110 – Theatre, Grade 2
  • b.5 – Critical evaluation and response. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances.

117.113 – Theatre, Grade 3
  • b.5 – Critical evaluation and response. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances.