

The **Little**
Choo-Choo
That Thinks She Can
by James Still



INDIANA
REPERTORY
THEATRE

TEACHER GUIDE

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The Little Choo-Choo That Thinks She Can by James Still

A beloved story comes to life in front of your eyes as a young brother and sister, with nothing but their toy box and their own imaginations, invent a train full of friends and a big, big hill to get over. Making up the story as they go along, the two create a cast of colorful characters who try and try again until they have reached the other side of the hill. Introduce your children to the joyful experience of live theatre and the creativity of play.

Original Cover Art by Kyle Ragsdale

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| STUDENT MATINEES | 10:00AM on October 8, 9 10:00AM or 12:00PM on October 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25 February 18, 19, 20, 21, 25, 26, 27, 28 March 3, 4, 5, 6 |
| ESTIMATED LENGTH | 75 minutes, including pre- and post-show activities |
| AGE RANGE | Recommended for grades pre-K thru 3 |

STUDENT MATINEES, ARTIST IN THE CLASSROOM, AND GENERAL EDUCATION INQUIRIES

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A NOTE FROM OUR TEACHING ARTIST TEAM

Thank you for your commitment to integrating the arts into your curriculum! We hope you find this guide useful. The activities inside have been designed to use in conjunction with the IRT's Exploring Stages productions. They have been compiled and altered from numerous sources. We encourage you to do the same! Take what is listed and meld it with another activity you like using. This material is compiled for teachers working with pre-K to 1st grade students in mind. However, with some modifications it is easily adaptable for older students. You don't have to use any of the material or suggestions that aren't appropriate for your institution. Additionally, in all activities we encourage you to take suggestions from the students, as it utilizes their imaginations and past experiences. Finally, remember that all activities can be modified to fit a particular study unit. For example, if you're studying life on a farm and how a farm works, then use the I Think I Can activity and give prompts like milking a cow, planting seeds, driving a combine, feeding free range chickens, etc. Explore, create, and have fun!

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Thank you for making a field trip to IRT part of your teaching! We are certain that you and your students will come away having had a fun and educational experience. This guide is designed to help make sure you can make the experience not only a fun trip, but also a chance to engage students in class before and after you visit. You will find activities for **BEFORE YOU VISIT** which we recommend reviewing and sharing with students in advance of your performance. You will also find activities for **AFTER YOU VISIT** which are designed to help students reflect on the experience. You will also find **ANYTIME ACTIVITIES** which can be used whenever you like based on the needs of your classroom. These activities are often great to adapt for other units not connected to a field trip to IRT! Finally, you will find **RESOURCES** such as websites and books that you can check out on your own as you continue teaching.

ABOUT *The Little Choo-Choo That Thinks She Can*

The script for this production is inspired by the story of *The Little Engine That Could*. We recommend using one of the many books based on this old story.

This play also introduces some new friends to the original story – Sister and Brother – two children who love to play and explore their imaginations. Throughout the play Sister and Brother will learn about perseverance, listening, and being a good friend!

BEFORE YOU VISIT | Watching a Play

Use the questions and answers below to help explain to students who have never been to the theatre what it is like to see a play!

What is a play?

It may seem silly to ask, but going to a play is not something we are born knowing how to do. However, once we learn, it's an incredible experience we'll want to have again and again! The easiest way to describe a **play** is that it's like a movie or TV show, except that it is performed right in front of your eyes by real people!

To get technical, the most basic needs for a theatrical experience are a story to tell, actors to tell it, and an audience to hear it. **Playwrights** write plays that tell stories through dialogue and action. Taking the playwright's words from the printed page, people called **actors** use their voices, bodies, and creativity to develop characters that live on stage. **Designers** create scenery, costumes, lighting, and music that form a unique physical environment for each individual play. The person who leads this ensemble of artists is called a **director**, and they make sure that all the various elements and viewpoints come together for a unified statement that creates a satisfying experience for the **audience**. When theatre artists bring their best work to the stage, and when audiences receive that work with open minds and active imaginations, the results can be enlightening, enriching, and entertaining.

So there will be trains?

While it would be fun to have a real train onstage, part of what makes theatre special is getting to play pretend. In this performance, the actors pretend to be animals, clowns, Little Choo-Choo, and the other trains. They use their bodies, voices and imaginations to show the audience how a train might act if they had voices and bodies like us. Unlike animals or trains, actors can dance, sing, and talk. To become their animal characters, the actors will change their voices and movements. They will put on costumes, like a cape or a hat, to help show the audience when they are becoming different characters onstage.

Can I play too?

Yes! The audience is an important part of the show. Your imagination is what helps bring the story to life. When you see something funny, you can laugh. When you see something you like, you can smile. The audience will even get to sing and move along with Little Choo-Choo and her friends. The actors will invite you to use your imagination to play with them.

How should I behave?

When you get to the theatre, it's important to follow the directions of the adults helping you get to your seats. Teachers from the theatre will have instructions for you, so make sure you have your listening ears ready. Once the show begins, we will remind you to **stay seated on your pockets in the carpeted area**. The carpet is for the audience, and staying on it will keep you and the actors safe. We'll also remind you to **listen with your eyes, ears, heart, and body**. Listening to a play is how we learn the story, so we listen with our eyes by watching, our ears by hearing, our heart by feeling, and our bodies by staying seated. Remember, you are here to watch and have fun, but also to learn!

What if I feel scared?

When you do something new, it's ok to be a little scared. Just remember, everything in the play is pretend, and you are perfectly safe at the theatre. If you need a break during the show, just let the nearest adult know. Your teachers can take you to a quiet space.

I might need additional support.

If you have students on the autism spectrum or who have sensory or processing sensitivities, we have resources available. Visit our website at irtlive.com/accessibility where you can find social narratives about the theatre, as well as an additional story guide designed specifically for students with disabilities. We will also have fidgets available during the show if a student feels overwhelmed.



Students prepare to see IRT's production of Elephant and Piggie's "We Are in a Play!" in 2019. While you will be in this room, the stage will look very different! Photo by Zach Rosing.

BEFORE YOU VISIT | Reading *The Little Engine that Could*

Before you come to IRT to see *The Little Choo-Choo That Thinks She Can*, we recommend reading the book *The Little Engine That Could*. Not only will this help you to prepare for the story you're going to see, it's just plain fun! Below are some discussion questions you could use to help engage students after you read the story.

What is the engine carrying? Where is it going?

What do you think the engine should do?

How could another train help the engine?

Do you think the shiny engine will help?

Why didn't the shiny engine help? What was it already carrying?

Why didn't the black engine help? What was it already carrying?

Do you think the little blue engine will stop and help? Why or why not?

Do you think the little blue engine will be able to make it over the mountain?

What did we learn about the little blue engine?

What was your favorite part of the story?

Get To Know Watty Piper

Watty Piper is the pseudonym of Arnold Munk, author behind the classic retelling of *The Little Engine That Could* and co-owner of the publishing firm Platt & Munk. Arnold was born in Hungary in 1888, and as a child, moved with his family to the United States, settling in Chicago and later on, New York. Munk used the name Watty Piper as both an author of children's books and as the editor of many of the books that Platt & Munk published. Munk's retelling of the beloved children's tale has sold millions of copies since its 1930 publication and inspired generations to believe they can.

Companion Books Selections:

Locomotive by Brian Floca

Train by Elisha Cooper

Trains Run! by George Ella Lyon

Trains Go by Steve Light

Freight Train Donald Crews

Night Train, Night Train by Robert Burleigh

The Polar Express by Chris Van Allsburg

Corduroy by Don Freeman

Not A Stick by Antoinette Portis

Stone Soup by Marcia Brown

BEFORE YOU VISIT | Read Aloud Tips

The following tips will help make reading aloud in your classroom more fun and engaging for you and your students! Especially when working with younger students, repetition is a valuable tool for learning. These tips assume you will be reading the same story to your students more than once, and that you are coming to see a play. However, the strategies can be modified to story, anytime!

The First Reading

Consider first reading the story without interaction from the children – simply use your most expressive reading voice! The more dramatic you are, the more interested students will be. This is also excellent preparation for a trip to the theatre! Encourage active listening by adjusting your vocal tones the way an actor might. For example:

- Choose low and high voices for characters, such as a deeper voice for Big Engine, and a high voice for Little Engine.
- Embrace onomatopoeia – words that imitate the natural sound of things. Lean in to “buzzzzzing” and “riiinging”.
- Make your own onomatopoeia. Make sure the bear is “grrrrrrrowling” or the bus travels a “loooooooong” way.

The Second Reading

The second time you are reading through the story, encourage the children to be **physically and vocally interactive** with the story.

Have the children repeat how you say words and phrases expressively. Especially if a story features the repetition of a particular word or phrase, students will naturally want to join in as they pick up on your pattern.

Lead them to interact physically. Especially if your story features animals! Encourage children to scurry like mice, stomp like elephants, or zoom like an engine. For *The Little Engine That Could*, students could mime being the toys and dolls that the train is carrying. Most of these illustrations are great for mimicking!

Get them to think how the story relates to their own lives. Ask them questions about the themes of the story. In a story about belonging, ask if they’ve ever felt left out. In a story about kindness, ask them how it feels when they help a friend.

The Third Reading

The third time through the story is about making sure students are **following the plot**. This is especially important when you’re planning to see the story as a play, like *The Little Choo-Choo That Thinks She Can* at IRT!

As you go, stop to paraphrase the story. Reframe what has happened so far, or better yet, ask students to! Have students recall what they think is going to happen next. Or, if they can’t remember, make predictions!

Conclusion

Reading a story multiple times will not only help students with comprehension and other skills, it will also give them an experience akin to that of the actors they might see in a play. During rehearsal, the actors will read and work on the script for six hours a day for up to a whole month!

Before Your Visit | Using Your Imagination

One of the many exciting things that actors, designers, and directors do to put on a play is use their imaginations! Often, actors will use different costumes or props to help fuel their imagination to become the characters we see. There are other times when an ordinary object, like a square block, will be transformed by the actors to become something different! Sometimes, actors or objects do not go through a physical transformation to become something else, we just see them used in different ways and our imagination fills in the rest. The following activity will show your students how they can use their imagination to transform objects into other exciting things!

First, give each of your students a marker or crayon and ask them to identify the object. Then, tell your students that they will be transforming the object into something else by using their imagination. Start by giving some examples of what the object could be and have the students interact with the objects, pretending that it is the new thing you've described. A marker or a pencil could become.....

- A fishing pole
- A magic wand
- A toy doll
- An airplane
- A hairbrush

Encourage your students to share their ideas of what their object could become and continue to act them out with your students!

Then, give each student a piece of paper and tape the crayon or marker onto the page. Have your students draw on the page to turn their object into something different. When everyone is done, each student could share with the group what their object has become. Tell your students that this transformation, using their imagination, is the same process that they will see the actors use when they attend the play!

AFTER YOU VISIT | This Train Is....

In *The Little Choo-Choo That Thinks She Can*, we are introduced to a number of different trains. These trains are painted different colors, have different attributes that define them, and even different personalities! In this activity, you will talk with your students about the performance and have them remember the different trains from the story.

First, write the heading "This Train Is" on the top of a sheet of chart paper. Tell the students that you are going to talk about the play you saw and the trains that Sister and Brother pretended to be.

Ask the class to recall the different types of trains from the story and write them along the top of the chart paper. If the class does not remember all of the trains, be sure to fill the remaining ones in before the next step. Once all the trains are listed, draw a line beneath each train to create two columns.

Next, have the students list the different attributes for each train in one column. For example, you can list the color and quality of the Shiny New Red Engine along with his personality (snooty, mean, etc.). Then, have the class list the opposite concept for each train. List the opposite concepts side by side, in separate columns, using one color marker for the left column and another color marker for the right column to distinguish the opposite words. Talk with the class about all of the different words they created for each train.

The full list of trains from the play are:

- Little Choo-Choo
- Shiny New Red Engine
- Big Strong Yellow Engine
- Sassy Fabulous Polka-Dotted Engine

Extension Activities

You can continue the discussion by including the trains mentioned in the book. In the next class, reread *The Little Engine That Could* and review the trains with the list you created from watching the play. Are there trains in the book that were not in the play? If so, you can add them to your list. Are there trains that appear in both the book and the play? What was similar about these trains? Include any additional information that was not listed on the chart.

Now create another chart to summarize what the class learned about trains. Review each opposite concept on the first chart and then assist the children in summarizing the concept. For example: "Trains have different colors" or "Trains carry different types of things."

AFTER YOU VISIT | Everyone's a Critic

The job of a **critic** is to see a play (or a movie, or a TV show) and write about what they liked and what they did not like. This person is also sometimes called a **reviewer**. In this activity, students have the opportunity to review *The Little Choo-Choo That Thinks She Can*.

Begin the activity by leading the class in an initial discussion of the production:

- What events do you remember from the story? (After creating a list, ask students to put events into sequence.)
- Can they remember all of the characters' names?
- What kinds of costumes did the actors wear?
- What props do you remember?
- What did the set look like?
- What kinds of songs did they sing?
- What kind of dancing did you see?
- Did you see any instruments?
- What else can you remember from the performance?

Have students give the performance a rating of 1 to 5 stars. One star means they only liked it a little, while five stars mean they liked it a lot! Ask students to share their review with the class, or speak their review for you to write down (For older students, ask them to write a review of the play and provide specific examples that support their star rating). To do this, for each star, students should discuss one thing they liked about the performance. For example, for a five-star rating, one would mention at least five things they liked about the performance. For each star out of five left off the score, have your students describe one thing they did not enjoy about the performance. For example, a three-star rating would have three positive comments along with two things that needed improvement.

For the final part of their review, have students draw a picture depicting their favorite moment from *The Little Choo Choo That Thinks She Can*.

AFTER YOU VISIT | Readers Theatre

Readers Theater is readers reading a script adapted from literature, and the audience picturing the action from hearing the script being read aloud. For more about this literacy strategy, visit <http://www.scholastic.com/librarians/programs/whatisrt.htm>

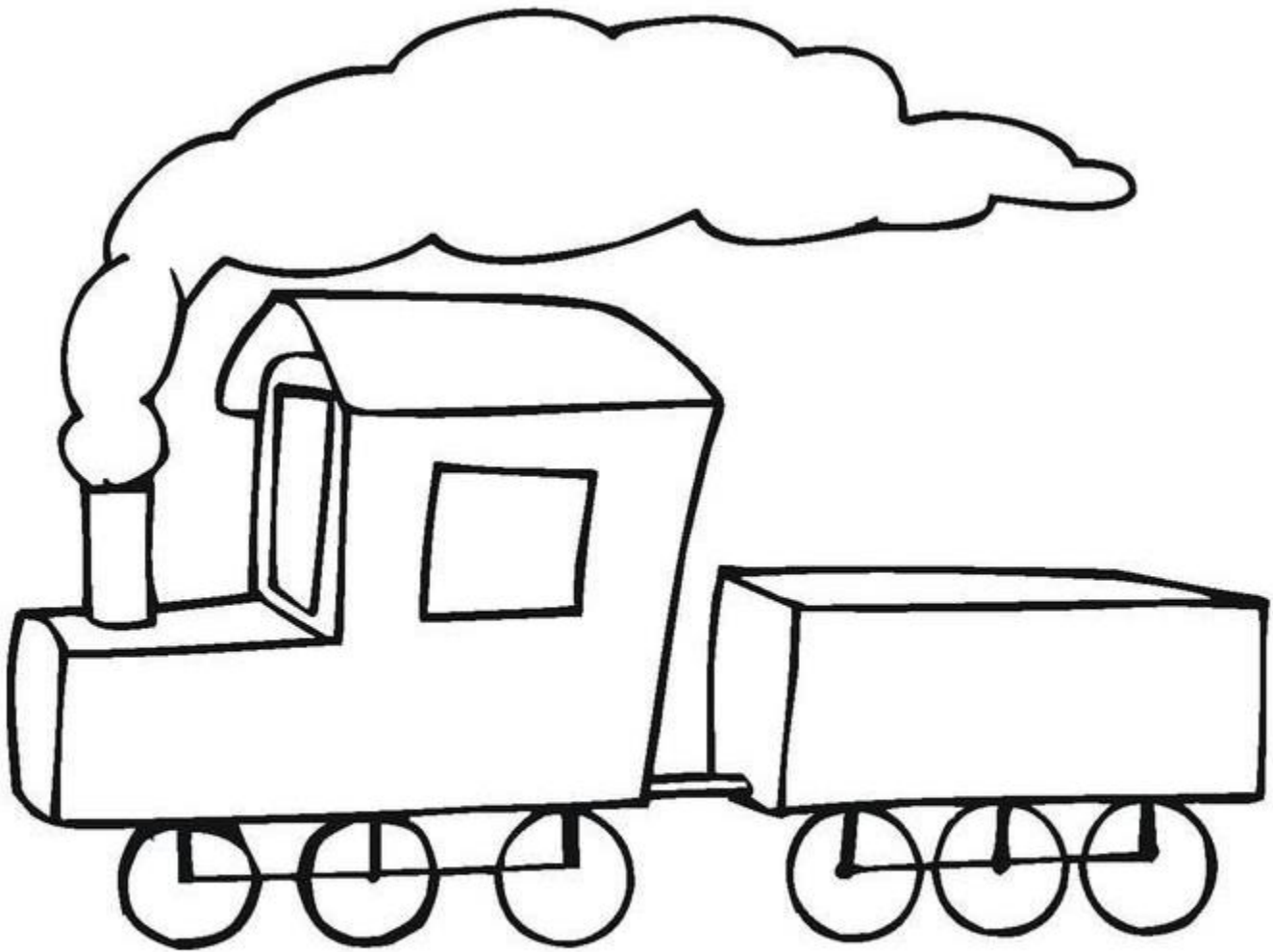
1. Read *The Little Engine That Could* to the class. Then ask students to make observations about the characters, setting, conflict, and plot. To enhance understanding, take a well-known story (such as a fairy tale) and model writing a Readers Theatre script as a whole-class activity.
2. After discussing dialogue and performance, divide the class into small groups that will create an original script using *The Little Engine That Could* book as inspiration. Allow students ample time to practice, and be sure to conference with each group to answer or clarify any questions they may have. Have each group use their train drawing from the next page as a puppet or prop to use during the final performance.

Finally, it is show time! Using either the Readers Theatre script inspired by *The Little Engine That Could* or an original story of their creation, have students perform their show for the other teams of students. For additional fun, consider filming each performance to share!

AFTER YOU VISIT | What's in Your Train?

Follow the instructions below to create your own Little Choo-Choo, then use your train to tell a story!

Little Choo-Choo gets to make a special delivery to her friends in her car. If you were a train, what sorts of things would you want to carry? Use the space below to fill in the train car with some of your favorite things!



AFTER YOU VISIT | Asking For Help

Just like Little Choo-Choo, there are times when we want to give up on a task or an activity. Sometimes this is because we think it could be too hard, or we are afraid because it is something new. However, if we believe in ourselves we can achieve our goals like Little Choo-Choo did. This lesson is designed to have your students reflect on the story and emphasizes the idea of **perseverance** - continuing to do something even though you have trouble succeeding and asking for help when we are working on something that is hard.

Prepare Students to Discuss

Start the activity by asking your students the following questions:

- What challenge did Little Choo-Choo face?
- Did Little Choo-Choo continue to try to get up the hill? What did she say as she was going up the hill?
- How did Little Choo-Choo feel when she couldn't get up the hill? What did she do?
- How did Little Choo-Choo feel when she succeeded?

Use the answers from the questions above to connect the emotions from the story to student's experiences:

- Have you ever felt like Little Choo-Choo when she couldn't get up the hill? If so, when?
- What did Little Choo-Choo say when she was going up the hill? Do you say something when you are trying to do something hard?
- How do you feel after you do something that is hard?
- Have the students come up with a class saying, like Little Choo-Choo's "I think I can, I think I can" that students can remember and use when they are doing something hard.

Activity

In an area of a room, scatter a large amount of materials on the floor. These could be bean bags, small toys, or crumpled papers, the important thing is that they are in large quantities. Give one student a container and instruct them to collect all of the materials and put them into the container. Tell the student that they only have 60 seconds to collect all of the materials (make sure to keep track of the time). If the student is having trouble, instruct another student to help them. Continue to add other students until either all the students are helping or if time has run out. At the end of 60 seconds, see if all of the materials were collected. Have the students sit in a circle and reflect on how the activity made them feel:

- On a scale from 1 to 5, 1 being not hard and 5 being very hard, how hard was this activity?
- Did you think you would be able to do it? If not, what made you keep going?
- How did it make you feel when you had help from your class? How did it feel to help someone else?

After the activity, encourage your students to use their saying whenever they are facing a difficult challenge! Reinforce that you can always ask for help when something is challenging!

ANYTIME ACTIVITIES | Guided Reenactment of the Story

The Little Engine That Could lends itself perfectly to improvisation work. A teacher can easily direct the students through the process of turning this book into a play simply through text and movement. This takes the pressure off students to remember lines or blocking, as they will simply copy what you do and say! A guided reenactment activity also serves to reinforce the themes of the story by making them personal for students and reinforces the language of the story through repetition. The guiding principle of this exercise is for students to hear the story, discuss the story, and then act out the story, so that their comprehension and retention of the story is increased. The instructions below will walk you through a guided reenactment activity.

Getting Started

First, read the story aloud using your best interactive storytelling skills. (See “Read Aloud Tips” on page 7 for advice!) Next, group students into pairs and assign them a working space. If you have an odd number, have one student be partners with the teacher. Give pairs enough room to work so they won’t interfere with other students. Assign a role to each child, with one member of each pair playing the Toy Clown and the other playing the Engines in the story. Explain to students that they are going to copy your actions and your words. Allow them to use their own ideas for how their character sounds.

Retelling the Story

Next, you’ll begin the process of performing the story. As the Engine, make a circle motion with your arms and hands, then slow to a stop. Say, “I cannot go another inch!” (pp. 8-9) Pair your dialogue with a simple movement, especially if the illustration is easy to imitate physically. Then, instruct all of the students that you cast as Engine to repeat everything with you. Repeat what you just did, slowly and clearly, as the students play along. Now, switch roles. As Toy Clown, pretend to see a shiny new engine, look at it and say, “Please, won’t you pull our train over the mountain?” (p. 12-13) Ask the students playing Toy Clown to repeat the action and line with you. Continue doing this for the rest of the story; students will eventually catch on and start repeating their part without you having to coach them.

Finishing Up

You can choose to recite the entire story, or just pick out key moments of the story to paraphrase. When you finish ask students about their favorite part of the story they just acted out, prompting them to remember specific plot points. Check for comprehension by asking students to retell the story in their own words.

Learn More

This activity was inspired in part by the following resource: <https://www.brighthubeducation.com/teaching-elementary-school/54605-role-play-reading-activities-for-elementary-students/> and by activities found in *Movement Stories for Children Ages 3-6* by Helen Landalf and Pamela Gerke.

ANYTIME ACTIVITIES | Finding Emotions in the Story

The Little Engine That Could lends itself wonderfully to the exploration and learning of emotions. Watty Piper’s words and George and Doris Hauman’s illustrations lend themselves to inform the reader how the characters are thinking and feeling.

Prepare Students to Discuss Emotions

Prior to reading *The Little Engine That Could*, choose one passage from the book. Show it to your students and have them infer or predict what the character is thinking or feeling. For example, on page 19 we see the Toy Clown looking at Little Engine who is smiling as she moves along the tracks. Ask students, “What do you think Toy Clown is feeling in this picture?” “Who does he want us to notice?”

Help Students Identify Emotions in a Story

This activity can be used before any read aloud! Create a library of “emotion flash cards” with words and pictures.

Before reading, select the emotions present in your story and review these flash cards with students. When you show the card, add a movement or sound along with the emotion. For example:



HAPPY: Make a big smile with your arms and fingers spread wide. Make a sound like “Yay!” or “Whee!”

ANGRY: Furrow your eyebrows, ball up your fists, stick out your lip, and make a growling sound like, “Grrrrrrrr!”



Create a gesture and sound for the emotions that students will encounter in the story you are reading. Review these actions several times with the pictures and tell students that each time you hold up the picture they are to do the action and say the emotion with you. Then, as you read your story, use your best read aloud emotions to cue students when an emotion is coming up. They may be way ahead of you and do the action without prompting. If they don’t, prompt them with your flash card to express and say the emotion currently being felt in the story. For example, you could pause to ask, “How do the toys feel with the Shiny New Engine refuses to help them?” You can use the illustration to guide students, then hold up your emotion flash card while the group says the emotion and does the action. For a list of possible emotions to use, visit:

<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/modules/2006/feelingchart.pdf>.

For Older Students

Consider grouping basic emotions at different levels of intensity, from the lowest to the highest level of feeling. For example, instead of mad, consider: disgusted (low), angry (medium), outrage (high). The web pages below offer several methods for categorizing emotions:

https://kids.kiddle.co/List_of_emotions

<http://changingminds.org/explanations/emotions/basic%20emotions.htm>

ANYTIME ACTIVITIES | Here To There

This is an exercise designed to introduce or reinforce emotions, and it pairs well with the activities available in “Finding Emotions in the Story” on page 16. Before you begin this activity, think about which emotions or states of being you want to explore and consider making visual aids to help prompt students.

Getting Started

Find a large open space where students have room to move. Have them all line up on one side of the room. Tell them they are going to cross the room in many different ways. Start with easy suggestions to get the activity started. “Go from here to there just walking.” Instruct students to stop, turn around, and wait for the next suggestion when they get to the other side of the room. Give them a prompt that takes them back across to where they started. “Go from here to there like you are marching in a parade.” Continue the activity, having students use their body to explore some of the physical and emotional contrasts below:

- Happy vs Sad
- Angry vs Calm
- Excited vs Easygoing
- Nervous vs Brave
- Sick vs Healthy
- Bored vs Interested

Raise the Stakes

Increase urgency and promote creativity by adding situational circumstances:

- Go from here to there like you’re on your way to a party and you’re **worried**.
- ... like you’re eating delicious cake, but you’re still **mad** at your best friend after an argument.
- ... like you have a toothache but you’re still **excited** about the soccer game.

Reinforce elements of a story or a unit of study. For example, the seasons:

- Go from here to there like you’re picking spring flowers.
- ... like you’re pulling up carrots and other vegetables in the garden.
- ... like you’re jumping into a pile of fall leaves.
- ... like you’re shoveling winter snow.

After Seeing *The Little Choo-Choo That Thinks She Can*:

- Go from here to there like you’re on a picnic in the park.
- ... like you’re on a special delivery
- ... like you’re about to take a nap
- ... like the important Shiny New Red Engine.
- ... like the Big Strong Yellow Engine.
- ... like the Sassy Fabulous Polka-Dotted Engine trying to take a nap.

After the Activity

Ask students to share how it felt to feel each of those emotions in their bodies. Could they feel a difference between moving angrily versus calmly? What was it? Did some feelings feel better than others? Why?

ANYTIME ACTIVITIES | Run Out and Come In

Inspired by “Run Just So Far & Then Stop” by Angela Russ-Ayon

To begin, have students make a tight circle around you. Tell them you are going to go through all the instructions before anyone moves.

When you call out, “RUN OUT!” everyone is going to turn around and run straight out from the circle until they hear you shout, “WAIT!” When they hear you say that, the children are to freeze where they are. Then you tell them to come back to the circle with specific instructions. “COME BACK IN MARCHING.” Then the children come back into the tight circle, matching the movement prompt you gave them. A list of suggested movement prompts is provided below. You won’t have any problem coming up with ideas of how they should come move back in! Depending on the space you are using when you do this game, your prompts can lead the children to being on the floor, “COME BACK IN LIKE A SNAKE” or flying, “COME BACK IN LIKE A BUTTERFLY.” If you have a large space kids will have lots of fun if you let them run far before saying in your big voice, “WAIT!” As with several of the other activities in this guide, you can use prompts from the unit you are studying or the story you just read. You can also reinforce counting: “COME BACK IN IN EIGHT GIANT STEPS.” Or letters: “COME BACK IN SINGING THE ALPHABET SONG.”

Prompts for “Come In”:

- Walking
- Marching
- Skipping
- Galloping
- Sneaking
- Like a robot
- Flying like a bird
- Like a monster
- Like your favorite animal (pause for students to share which animals they are)
- Floating like a leaf in the wind
- Walking in peanut butter
- Like you have ants in your pants
- Sulking because you were told you couldn’t watch a movie
- Like a dinosaur
- Like a superhero (pause for students to share which superheroes they are)

ANYTIME ACTIVITIES | Yes, Let's!

“Yes, Let’s” is an acting warmup that is great for getting the brain working. In a classroom it can help reinforce positive attitudes, support the ideas of others, learning verbs, repetition, fostering creativity, and kinesthetic learning.

Have students stand around a room with enough physical space to swing arms and legs without bumping into anyone. For this activity, you will need a Leader. For younger students, or the first time you play, we suggest the teacher be the Leader.

To start, the Leader will choose a physical action and then say to the students, “Let’s _____!” while performing the action. Then, students will repeat, “Yes, let’s!” and do the action themselves.

For example:

You might start by saying, “Let’s stand up” and the group would then say, “Yes, let’s!” as they stand up. Then you might say, “Let’s look at the stars in the sky,” and then the group would say, “Yes, let’s” while they look up as if looking at the stars, pointing to them and making “ooh” and “aah” sounds. Then go on to the next prompt, which could be something like, “Let’s march up the mountain to get a better look.” And the group then says enthusiastically, “Yes, let’s.”

Some helpful tips:

- This is an activity where the actions can be random (Let’s swing our arms, act like a mouse, brush our teeth) or you can suggest actions in sequence to guide the children on a journey.
- Eventually you want to get the game going so well that the children are giving actions. The Leader can choose students to give the next action, or you could set up a circle and have students go in order.
- To encourage language learning, have the children repeat the whole sentence. “Let’s jump up and down!” “Yes, let’s jump up and down!”
- For a large group, consider an attention getter to pause between actions so you can ensure all students are ready.

Prompts for Yes Let’s!

Let’s wiggle our fingers; Let’s shake out your arms; Let’s eat an ice cream cone; Let’s take a rocket to the moon; Let’s be squirrels and search for nuts; Let’s eat a marshmallow and broccoli sandwich; Let’s take out the trash; Let’s PARTY!; Let’s parade around the room in our silly hats; Let’s eat lunch; Let’s go on a picnic; Let’s cast a spell with our wands; Let’s drink the world’s biggest glass of water; Let’s ride a horse across the USA; Let’s wrestle an alligator; Let’s be Paw Patrol and save someone who is hurt; Let’s be mischievous fairies; Let’s walk the circus tightrope; Let’s be our favorite animal; Let’s swim in the ocean; Let’s be bees collecting nectar from flowers; Let’s scamper like mice looking for cheese

Variation: What Are You Doing?

For a challenge, consider this similar game! Put students in a circle. Have the first student mime a simple action, such as brushing teeth. The next student in the circle will turn and ask, “What are you doing?” The first student should reply with a new action that **does not match** what they’re already doing. Something like, “I’m climbing a ladder.” The second student then mimes the new action given to them by the first student – in this case, climbing a ladder. The third student asks the second, “What are you doing?” The process then continues around the circle. This activity challenges students to separate their thinking from their movement, while also encouraging them to be creative in their pantomime. For an additional challenge, consider theming the actions, such as “around the house” or “at the football game” to make students stretch their imaginations.

ANYTIME ACTIVITIES | I Think I Can!

From 101 Drama Games for Children by Paul Rooyackers and "Solo Pantomimes" by Janea at DramaNotebook.com

Have students take a place of their own around the room where they have enough room to move without bumping into anything. The children should be able to see each other. Explain to them that they are going to think of the space they are in as their stage space and this is not an activity where they will need to move all around the room.

You as the leader will perform a short mime of a simple activity. Some suggestions are below. Then ask the children to copy your mime. Do it along with them the first couple of times. Then do another mime with the students copying your action after they watch you do it. If this is going well, you will then start calling out actions for them to do their own way without copying you. You might want to start with actions very familiar to them in everyday life like eating a slice of pizza, or sipping juice through a straw. Their "acting" will then take on a life of its own. Some of the students might copy others in the group and some may ask you to show them how. If you see that you have a couple natural mimes, pick one of them to be the leader of an action!

As a note, these types of activities seem to work best for non-acting students when you begin with the familiar and then branch into the more daring suggestions!

Variations

- Add sounds to the pantomimes like the buzzing of a bee while getting honey out of the beehive. Then you can move on to simple phrases like, "Come back here!" if you are playing with a puppy and it runs away.
- Perform actions in a sequence. Start by waking up and getting out of bed in the morning. Then ask a student, "What do you do next in the morning when you get ready for school?" The student may say, "Wash my face." Then have all the students to pantomime washing their face. Continue this way until the sequence reaches a natural conclusion, or until each student in the class has contributed an action.
- Allow the basic pantomimed action to grow and take over the whole body into an absurd caricature of the original suggestion. For example, start by brushing your hair. Then brush a dog's hair. Now a horse's hair. Now a giant's hair! Now Rapunzel's hair! Now YOU are the hair!

Prompts for I Think I Can!

Brushing your teeth
Putting on your shoes
Playing ping pong
Eating a cupcake or an ice cream cone
Picking up toys
Washing your face
Putting on your seat belt
Playing with a puppy or kitten
Talking on the phone
Building a snowman
Flying a kite
Sweeping the floor
Putting on a band aid
Falling asleep
Swinging on a swing

ANYTIME ACTIVITIES | Dance Play

These dance games are easy enough for anyone to lead! They can be used when students need a break from sitting and you want to help them refocus, or they could be combined with a unit of study. Dance play allows children to develop motor skills, cognitive brain function, rhythm, music appreciation and physical awareness.

Combinations

Teach a small combination of steps that can be learned easily and repeated throughout a song. Line dances are great for this! Choose some simple movements like walking backwards and forwards, clapping, hands up, hands down and put them into a simple combination where the students count out loud as they perform the moves.

Free Dance

Free dance is as easy as turning on some music and allowing the children to move to it as their bodies are inspired. To increase its benefits and to help out children who might be intimidated, announce certain moves as you lead them. As you announce movements, consider the essential elements of dance and movement: **Space** (near/far, big/small), **Time** (quickly/slowly), **Energy** (rushed/relaxed), and **Relationship** (with a partner/all alone). Use several selections of music to engage in different ways.

Character Movement

Choose a selection of music that lends itself to certain characteristics or feelings. (For example, the Pink Panther theme evokes feelings like sneaky, sly or cautious and the Superman theme evokes feelings like bravery, power, or strength.) Play the music and have students move to it in the way that the music makes them feel. As you do the same, put words to your feelings. “This music makes me feel STRONG!” Have students name or describe their feelings as well. Do this for several contrasting pieces of music. For additional fun, add a selection of props for students to choose from as they explore the music! Making use of scarves, hats, pool noodles, or bean bags can be quite effective.

Mirroring

Mirroring (and flocking, below) is a proven component of theatre movement and dance work. To mirror, pair two students face to face. Assign one as the Leader. As the Leader moves, the other student’s job is to follow as closely as possible. Encourage Leaders to start with long, slow movements to help their partner follow along. View an example here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNe-QxsMvoM>

Flocking

Arrange students in a triangle/arrow formation with everyone facing in one direction. The student at the point is the Leader of the movement for a short time, and the “flock” behind them follows their movement, like in mirroring above. Rotate the flock so the student at another corner is the Leader. Pair this activity with classical music for an impromptu ballet! More about flocking and its function and objective can be found here: <https://dbp.theatredance.utexas.edu/content/flocking>

Prompts

Use these movement and dance verbs for any of the above activities: *sway, jump, skip, march, squat (plié), tippy toe (relevé), spin, wiggle, shake, touch toes, lift arms, wave, glide, slide, scoot, lean, lunge, count with the beat*

ANYTIME ACTIVITIES | Bean Bag Play

Bean bag work is perfect for early elementary education! It incorporates countless educational components: balance, hand-eye coordination, cooperative play, full body exercising, body vocabulary, gross motor skills, rhythm, listening, directional awareness, behavioral control, taking directions, and imaginative play.

Bean bag work varies greatly depending on students' development level. When investing in bean bags for your own room, try to find bags with lots of colors, shapes, or decoration for the most flexibility.

Below you will find a list of physical prompts that you can use with students that incorporate bean bags with movement. For any of these skills, remember:

- Safety first! Never toss a bean bag to a partner who isn't ready.
- Consider whether adding music to these activities is right for your group.
- While many students learn by doing, some learn best by watching. Consider splitting students into groups and having one be the audience while the other engages with the bean bags, switching periodically. Encourage students to support and cheer each other on as they try more and more difficult tricks!
- Don't try to do too much. Focus on only one or two skills at first, adding more slowly each time you use the bags. Remember to repeat activities multiple times, as repetition is vital to mastering skills and knowledge.
- Notice the **bolded** vocabulary in the prompts. Use these to reinforce key early learning concepts as you play!

Motor Skills Prompts

- While sitting, toss a bean bag **up** gently and catch it with **one** hand. Toss it up and catch it with **two** hands.
- Working in pairs, gently pass a bean bag **back and forth**. After a few catches in a row, scoot back a foot and try again.
- Turn just your torso to one side and toss a bean bag up gently and catch it. Turn to the other side and repeat. Now face center and repeat. (Use this exercise to reinforce **right** and **left**!)
- Shake a bean bag **up high... down low... to one side... to the other side... in a circle... in front of you... behind you**.
- Balance a bean bag on your **elbow... your knee... your foot... your chest... your shoulder... your head... your back**.
- Use a bean bag to touch your **thumb... your hip... your ankle... your stomach**.
- Squeeze a bean bag between your **knees** and **hop** around.
- Sit on the floor and squeeze the bean bag between your **ankles** and lift your legs up.
- With a bean bag on the ground, dance **around** it... jump **over** it... lay **under** it... stand **near** it... stand **far** away from it... sit **beside** it.

Imaginative Play

Imagine your bean bag is a puppy you are playing with. Imagine your bean bag is a cell phone and call someone. Imagine your bean bag is a camera and take a picture of a fantastic moment. Imagine your bean bag is a bar of soap and wash yourself all over. Imagine your bean bag is a drum and play it. Let your imagination run wild!

Finding Your Own Bean Bags

Online retailers such as Amazon have bean bags of varying quality and prices. However, consider making your own:

<https://www.thesprucecrafts.com/how-to-make-a-bean-bag-1251122>. After sewing the first few steps, consider having students help you fill the bags before you finish them!

ANYTIME ACTIVITIES | Transportation Station

In this activity, you and your students will talk about the different types of transportation we use in our daily lives. Just like Sister and Brother in *The Little Choo-Choo*, people use trains to move things from one place to another. Students will be led through a discussion then get on their feet to think about all the different ways we move around!

Ask your students if they remember how they got to school. Did they take a bus? Did a family member or friend drive them? Did they walk to the building? Once everyone has shared, continue the discussion by defining transportation.

Transportation: Moving people or things from one place to another.

Continue by having students stand in a large circle so that you can see everyone. Ask the students if they can think of ways people or things move from one place to another. For every mode of transport, have the students create a physical action and vocalization while staying in place. If the students thought of a train, you could move your hands in a circle to resemble the wheels while mimicking the “choo” of a train’s whistle.

Other modes of transportation include.....

Airplane
Boat
Car
Bicycle
Scooter
Walking or Running
Sledding
Horseback
Skateboard
Motorcycle
Subway

And many more!

ANYTIME ACTIVITIES | Cool Down Technique – Yoga

Yoga has many health benefits. It increases flexibility, improves breathing, encourages focus, and more.

Leading students in some simple yoga poses can help a group decompress. You can even theme your yoga session to a unit or story – with poses like Mountain, Tree, Rabbit, Horse, Boat, and Cat, the possibilities are endless!

No matter what pose you do, the most important thing to remember is to BREATHE! You don't have to be a trained yogi to lead your students through the basic poses you know. Just be calm, breathe, and have fun!

If you've never done yoga before, consider starting with a resource like Kids Yoga Stories at <https://www.kidsyogastories.com/yoga-in-the-classroom/>.

If you'd like to invite a professional into your classroom, consider contacting one of these Indianapolis-area yoga studios:

The Yoga Studio - www.indyyogastudio.com

Cityyoga - www.cityyoga.biz

The Hot Room - indyhotroom.com

Flourish Yoga - www.flourishyoga.biz

Yoga Matters – www.yogamattersindy.com

Dragonfly 360 Yoga & Wellness - <https://www.dragonfly360.net>

Additionally, most branches of the Indianapolis Public Library and the YMCA have yoga instruction available. Contact the one nearest you!



ANYTIME ACTIVITIES | Cool Down Technique – Relaxation Narrative

It is important to calm your group down at the end of a lot of excited physical activity. It encourages group cohesiveness, and gives students time to reflect on the work they have just done, quiet themselves, and transition to the next activity.

During any relaxation activity, it is important that students focus on their bodies only, not using their voices or worrying about what other students are doing. Being able to lay down and close their eyes is helpful, but these activities can be done sitting in a desk or chair if space is tight. The most important thing for you, the teacher, is to remember to use a calm and even tone throughout. Your voice guides students to feel comfortable enough to truly relax.

Relaxation Script

This activity is designed to help students get in tune with their bodies, finding tension and releasing it, and slowing their breath to become truly relaxed. Have students lay down on the floor, preferably on something soft like a yoga mat. Lower the lights if possible, and explain to students that you're going to take a minute to help them relax their muscles and brains.

Starting with hands or feet, ask students to tense up their muscles as tight as they can – really squeeze! – and then slowly release the tightness. Ask them to think about their muscles. How did it feel to let that go? Students should think their answers in their brain, not aloud. Repeat this for the muscles in the legs, arms, shoulders, jaw, etc.

After each muscle, take a moment to breathe deeply, asking students to think only about the air as it comes in and out of their bodies.



Sample scripts for how to do this can be found here: <https://www.innerhealthstudio.com/relaxation-for-children.html>

Guided Image Journey

An image journey asks students to create pictures in their minds. Through these images, students can focus and relax. Your narrative should focus on building an environment that students can fill in with their imaginations. Forests, beaches, or floating through clouds are very effective. You can also guide students to create their own peaceful place in their imaginations. For a variety of scripts that utilize visualization narratives, visit <https://www.innerhealthstudio.com/visualization-scripts.html>

After the Activity

Consider having students share what they saw on their journey. Ask them questions about the specific trees they saw in the forest, or what color the sand was on their beach. For further engagement, use this activity in conjunction with art time and have students create drawings or pictures of their visualizations. End the activity by complimenting students' imaginations and thanking them for sharing.

RESOURCES

Advocating for Arts Education

- Why Children's Theater Matters: http://www.education.com/magazine/article/Why_Childrens_Theater_Matters/
- Study Finds Major Benefits for Students Who Attend Live Theatre: <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/10/141016165953.htm>

Books on Teaching Theatre and Drama

- *101 Drama Games for Children: Fun and Learning with Acting and Make-Believe* by Paul Rooyackers
- *112 Acting Games: A Comprehensive Workbook of Theatre Games for Developing Acting Skills* by Gavin Levy
- *50 Early Childhood Literacy Strategies* by Janice J. Beaty
- *Beginning Drama 4-11, Early Years and Primary* by Joe Winston and Miles Tandy
- *Movement Stories for Children Ages 3–6* by Helen Landalf and Pamela Gerke
- *The Preschooler's Busy Book: 365 Creative Learning Games and Activities to Keep Your 3-to-6-Year-Old Busy* by Trish Kuffner
- *Theater Games for the Classroom: A Teacher's Handbook* by Viola Spolin
- *Up, Down, Move Around – Nutrition and Motor Skills: Active Learning for Preschoolers* by Deborah Kayton Michals
- *A Handbook of Creative Dance and Drama* by Alison Lee
- *Feelings Flash Cards: A Great Way for Kids to Share and Learn About All Kinds of Emotions* by Todd Parr

Web Resources for Theatre and Dramatic Play

- Drama Based Instruction: <http://www.utexas.edu/cofa/dbi/>
- Using Drama and Theatre to Promote Literacy Development: <http://www.ericdigests.org/2004-1/drama.htm>
- Lisa Murphy, M.Ed. aka “The Ooey Gooley Lady”: <http://www.ooeygooley.com/resources/>

Bean Bag Activities

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eiz60rIRdPE>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRxnPU7BP_o
- <http://collab4kids.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Symposium2012Rosenbrock1.pdf>
- <https://meaningfulmama.com/day-235-10-bean-bag-games-to-play-with.html>
- <http://devdelay.org/newsletter/articles/pdf/354-bean-bags-fun-with-purpose.pdf>

Songs for your Classroom

“Jack in the Box” from the Ooey Gooley Lady: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1dQUgKkxX8>

“Willoughby Wallaby Woo” a naming rhyme: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gf1FRljnzbk>

“Sing, Dance, and Play” from Baby Genius: <https://youtu.be/OAGu7gpk8rQ>

Attention Grabbers

From Dr. Jean Feldman: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vK6EKSUJ6Wg>

From *A Classroom Diva*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S4guCiBd89E>