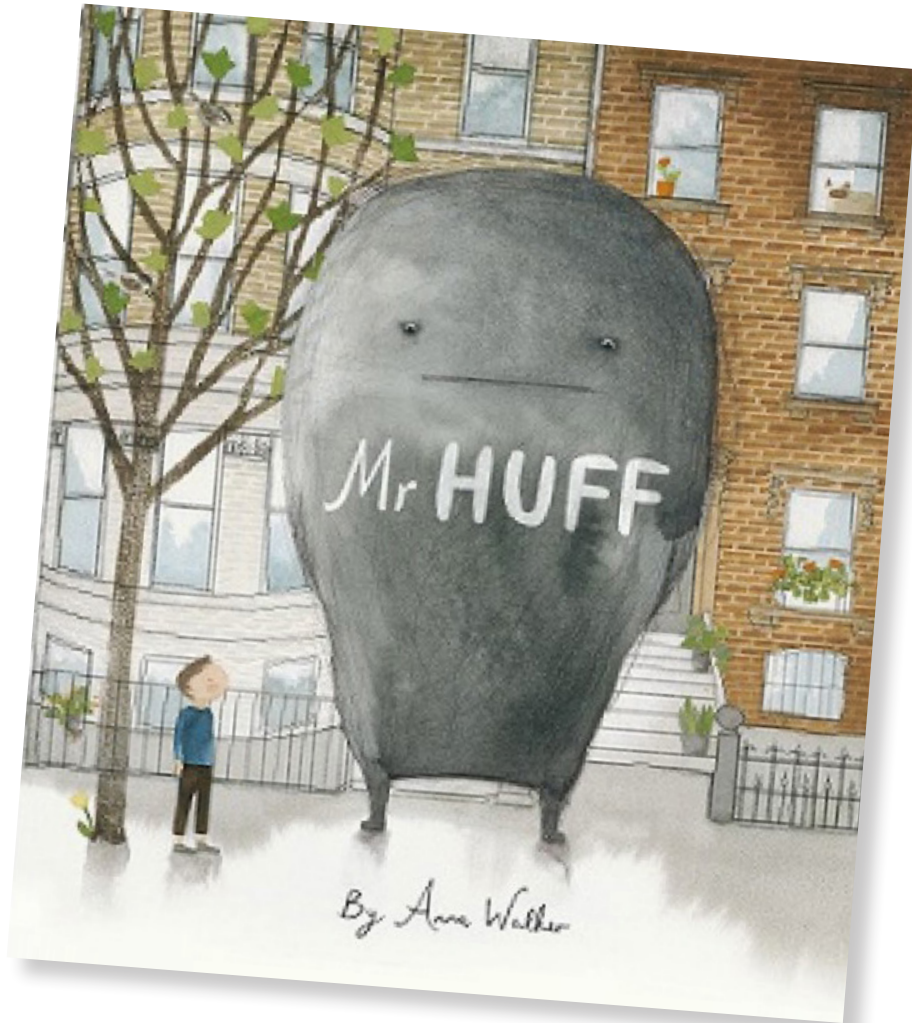


Meerkat
Productions



TEACHER RESOURCE PACK

FOR TEACHERS WORKING WITH STUDENTS
IN GRADES K/P – 6

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ABOUT MR HUFF

SYNOPSIS

Award-winning and much-loved author and illustrator Anna Walker gives us a gentle, poignant, affirming and wise picture book sure to delight all ages. Mr Huff is a story about the clouds and the sunshine in each of our lives.

Bill is having a bad day.

Mr Huff is following him around and making everything seem difficult.

Bill tries to get rid of him, but Mr Huff just gets bigger and bigger!

Then they both stop, and a surprising thing happens...

THE SHOW

During the play we watch Bill's journey as his bad mood gets worse. Using Anna's illustrations as inspiration we chose to bring some of her characters to life and get a fuller picture of the people Bill encounters in his everyday life.

The show is performed by two actors who both play multiple roles. The performers use naturalistic acting, direct audience address, audience interaction, puppetry, mime and movement, plus original songs, music and sound effects to support the story, create place and clearly demonstrate what is happening.

Mr Huff is a puppet operated by the actors and has a very distinct character that gets in Bill's way but also provides humour. As the story reaches its climax we discover the dynamics of their relationship and learn the joy that can be found again when Bill is able to accept all the different emotions that go into making him. This is most poignant in the third song when he realises, 'That's what makes me me'



INTRODUCTION TO THIS RESOURCE PACK

This resource pack is designed to deepen your students' engagement with both the book and the theatre experience before and after our visit. It includes interviews with the creative team, context for the play and in-depth classroom activities.

For teachers, this pack will:

- provide material to guide discussion about the book
- give you strategies to explore the learning potential offered by a theatre visit and how to develop children's responses
- enable you to use drama to develop literacy, particularly with reluctant writers
- increase your confidence in using drama in the classroom

The classroom activities have been designed to support and extend your students' experience of the incursion and offer teachers ways to pick up on and explore the themes in the play, before and after our visit.

We use drama and storytelling as ways of exploring ideas that are relevant to the play. We employ characteristics such as **playing and exploring, active learning, creating and thinking critically** to enable effective learning. There are also links to key areas of learning:

- **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT;**
- **COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE;**
- **PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT;**
- **EXPRESSIVE ARTS AND DESIGN**

While the activities will not take an objective led approach, teachers will be able to establish links to the relevant curriculum objectives for their particular year group and can adapt them for their particular educational setting. Our teacher resources always put drama at the centre of our activities. Working through drama allows children to explore subjects that matter to them within a fictional context, draw on their prior knowledge and apply it to new situations, develop language as they give expression to new understandings and develop emotional intelligence and critical thinking as they see things from different perspectives. It will also allow the students to take responsibility, make decisions, solve problems and explore possibilities from within the drama.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES RATIONALE

AIM

To allow the students to engage with the themes of the book and the play by exploring their own understanding and experience of feelings.

TEACHER ROLE

Many of the activities are teacher led and will require the teacher to go into role. This is not about performance, or being an actor, more about speaking from a different perspective to enable the students to enter the fictional world.

Facilitating whilst in role encourages students to explore the themes more deeply and extends the impact of the theatrical experience back to the classroom and long beyond the end of the show.



BEFORE OUR VISIT

THESE ACTIVITIES ARE DESIGNED TO EXPLORE THE THEMES IN THE BOOK. THEY WILL HELP STUDENTS TO ENGAGE WITH THE PLAY.

DRAMA ACTIVITIES TO EXPLORE FEELINGS

ACTIVITY 1: FREEZE FRAME

This activity can be used before reading the book to explore feelings. This activity prepares students to work together using common drama techniques, freeze frames and light role-play.

Part 1:

- 1) Start the session by having a discussion around the word "grumpy" – what does it mean? What other words do they know for that feeling?
- 2) What kind of things can happen to make you feel grumpy?
- 3) In pairs ask the students to think of some times when they have experienced these feelings, share some with the class
- 4) Once you have shared some ideas from the class, work out a facial expression, a sound and body language that would match these feelings
- 5) Practice these out loud
- 6) Establish a freeze frame for each feeling

Part 2:

- 1) Using the freeze frames you have agreed ask the children to find a space in the room on their own.
- 2) When you say GO everyone must walk around the room, using the whole space and walking at the same pace.
- 3) When you say STOP everyone must stop as still as a statue.
- 4) When you call out a feeling, everybody hold the freeze frame of that feeling.
- 5) When you call GO, everybody moves around the space again.

After you have played the game have a short reflective discussion:

- Do you like this feeling?
- Why don't you like it?
- What ideas do have that you could use that would make you feel better?

ACTIVITY 2: AND BETTER... / AND WORSE...

Time: 5 to 10 minutes.

This game can be played around a circle or in pairs. Choose whether to play the 'And better' or the 'And worse' version.

The leader starts everyone off with a simple story opener, e.g: - This morning it looked like it might rain

The next person must add something to the story, starting their sentence with 'And worse', for example, an 'And Worse' game might go:

- This morning it looked like it might rain
- And worse, I had to walk my dog in the park
- And worse, I slipped and fell in the wet mud
- And worse, I forgot to take my packed lunch to school
- And worse, my best friend was sick and wasn't at school today

Play the game again, but this time use, 'And better':

- This morning it looked like it might rain
- And better, I have a new rain coat to wear
- And better, I ran outside to play
- And better, my best friend came to play too
- And better, we went to buy ice creams

It's important that each new sentence builds on the existing story and that it makes the situation better, or worse, depending which version you're playing. This starts to build understanding that one thing can lead to another.

ACTIVITY 3: FORTUNATELY / UNFORTUNATELY

Time: 5 to 10 minutes.

This is a variation of the above game and can also be played around a circle or in pairs.

As before, the leader gives the group a story opener. This time, participants add to the story alternating between 'Fortunately' and 'Unfortunately' sentences. For example:

- This morning I walked my dog in the park
- Fortunately, it was a sunny day.
- Unfortunately, my dog ran away.
- Fortunately, a lady managed to catch him
- Unfortunately, the lady didn't want to give him back to me.
- Etc.

ANALYSING THE BOOK

Penguin have put together a fabulous resource to support analysis of the book. You can find a page by page guide here:

http://resource.scholastic.com.au/resourcefiles/8368985_37512.doc

PREPARING FOR THE PLAY

ACTIVITY 4:

Watch the trailer by Anna Walker on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XganveY7Us>

- How does it make you feel?
- Why does Mr Huff change from crying to smiling?
- How does this short trailer tell us the same idea as the storybook?

ACTIVITY 5: THE WINDOW GAME

Time: 5 to 10 minutes.

Bill looks out of the window at the beginning of the play, what does he see?

The exercise below aims to warm up everyone's brains and to encourage students to be willing use the first ideas that spring to mind.

- 1) Put students into pairs
- 2) Each pair is asked to imagine a large window in front of them, which they are both looking through.
- 3) The teacher gives an opening line to an improvisation; about something that could be seen through the window. For example: "Is that Mrs Smith coming down the road?"
- 4) The partners then take it in turns to add something new to the unfolding story, imagining that they're watching it through the window.
- 5) Every new sentence should begin 'Yes, and...'. For example:
 - a. Is that Mrs Smith coming down the road?
 - b. Yes, and she's wearing the butchers pyjamas!
 - c. Yes, and she looks very angry.
 - d. Yes, and she's waving her walking stick at the postman.
 - e. Etc.

ACTIVITY 6: IDEAS GENERATOR

In the book Mr Huff starts off as a small cloud. As the day goes on he grows and follows Bill around. How do you think Meerkat Productions might make this happen in the play? Discuss.

ACTIVITY 7: MAKE A PLAY (EXTENSION FOR GRADE 2 TO 6)

- 1) Split the students into small groups.
- 2) Allocate a few pages in the book to each group
- 3) Ask them to prepare a play about the pages
 - a. What is happening on the pages?
 - b. Which additional characters would you create and how? E.g. costume, puppets, etc.

AFTER OUR VISIT

MAKING THE PLAY: INTERVIEWS AND PHOTOGRAPHS WITH THE CREATIVE TEAM

Interviews with Director and adaptor Carl Whiteside and Designer Elizabeth Millington

Can you tell us why you chose to adapt Mr Huff for schools?

CW: We decided that Mr Huff represented an opportunity for us to tackle a valuable subject. This show will help teachers create a framework which will enable students, through development of Emotional Intelligence, to talk about and express feelings of anxiety and worry.

How did you develop the production from reading the book to the show?

CW: The big challenge with a picture book is that you need to develop a few pages into a 40 minute play. So, you're looking for moments that can be explored further, for example, we might see a small part of an illustration and it might be the inspiration for a scene, or a single line might become a whole song. With Mr Huff we wanted to explore Bill's feelings more and the impact they have on him and other people. So we wrote scenes based on some of the characters that appear in the book such as Bill's mum and the children in Bill's class.

EM: Being a picture book, Mr Huff already had a strong aesthetic with lovely illustrations that we used in the set design. We thought a lot about what the important elements were in the book and decided the relationship between Bill and Mr Huff was paramount. So Mr. Huff would need to be a real character that could interact with Bill. Hence a Mr. Huff puppet!

How did you create Mr Huff?

EM: When making Mr. Huff we had to take into account that only one actor would be available to move him so we decided on a wearable puppet. Then we came up with ideas to attach the puppet to the actor in a safe and comfortable way. Balancing the weight on the performers body and giving them the ability to move freely. We also made sure to use materials that were strong and light such as wire, mesh and a hoola hoop! We decided to cover the puppet with wadding which is light, soft and looks very much like the scribbly, cloudy Huff that the author depicted.



What happens in that moment when a puppet comes to life and we all believe in it together? It feels like a magical thing.

CW: It is magical. It enables us to use our imaginations, which is what is unique about theatre.

EM: When you watch a puppet perform, your brain is doing a very strange thing. On one hand you know it is just an object made of sticks and fluff. But on the other hand you are putting emotions onto the puppet because of the way it moves, breathes and looks at you. Putting life into an object is a wonderful paradox and watching a puppeteer make this happen live in front of you is all the more magical.

What was the hardest thing about staging Mr Huff?

CW: The hardest thing is helping just two actors to create so many different characters. We've worked really hard on how each character moves and speaks so it is very clear to the audience which character is which.

EM: Making a giant Mr. Huff that can be brought to life by just one actor!

What is your favourite moment in the show?

CW: It has to be in the song Me & Mr Huff when Bill realises that Mr Huff is a part of him and that he needs to acknowledge and accept him to be able to move forward. The music written by Luke Hunter really supports that moment.

EM: The bubbles!



ACTIVITIES TO EXPLORE THE THEMES OF THE PLAY

THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES ARE DESIGNED TO EXPLORE THE THEMES IN THE PLAY. THEY WILL HELP TO REINFORCE THE MESSAGES FROM THE PLAY.

ACTIVITY 8: WHAT DOES YOUR HUFF LOOK LIKE?

Using Resource B ask students to draw a picture of their huff

ACTIVITY 9: THE COLA SONG

This exercise can help students to identify their feelings.

Using Bill's song, 'The Cola song' (see Resource A for lyrics). Bill describes his feelings as yucky, blah, icky, erggh. He says he has a weird feeling in his tummy.

Discuss:

- why the feelings are described as cola
- why does Bill use words like "icky" and "blurgh"?
- how would students describe their bad feelings

ACTIVITY 10: ME AND MR HUFF SONG

- 1) Listen to the song Me & Mr Huff on http://meerkatproductions.com.au/?attachment_id=388
- 2) How does the music in the song change?
- 3) How does it make you feel?
- 4) What song can you think of that makes you feel happy?

ACTIVITY 11: DISCUSSION ABOUT THE PLAY

In the play Meerkat Productions presented Bill's walk to school twice. What were the differences between the two scenes? Discuss

ACTIVITY 12: DISCUSSION ABOUT ANXIETY

The Therapist Aid website has some useful resources for discussing Anxiety including Worry, Mindfulness and fear: <http://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-worksheets/anxiety/children>

In particular they have worksheets to help support the learning:

- Mindfulness: <http://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/mindfulness-for-children.pdf>
- Worry: <http://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/what-is-worry.pdf>
- Fear: use activity 13 to discuss this

ACTIVITY 13: FEAR

This exercise can help students to identify their own feelings.

- 1) Draw an outline of the large Mr Huff on paper to stick to the wall.
- 2) Give a sticky note to each student
- 3) They write how they feel when they have a huff.
- 4) They then stick the note on Mr Huff's body where they feel the emotion

ABOUT MEERKAT PRODUCTIONS

At Meerkat Productions our goal is to provide a theatrical experience that makes students and teachers alike lean forward and engage rather than sit back and watch passively. We want the memory of our performance to be long lasting; we want the work we do to be inspirational and we want you to be counting down the days until our next visit!

Our Book Week shows aim to support Literacy in the classroom, and we have found during our 16 year history that most Primary school teachers identify an impact, particularly in engaging lower ability children as well as increasing enthusiasm for and motivation to write.

OTHER SHOWS

DID YOU KNOW MEERKAT PRODUCTIONS ALSO OFFERS OTHER INCURSIONS?



BOOK WEEK: YOUNGER READERS ADAPTATION



ANTI-BULLYING: BULLY BULL RING



**STORYTELLING & PUPPETRY:
GOOD THINGS COME IN THREES & FRACTURED FAIRYTALES**



MATHS & SCIENCE: ADVENTURESCOPE



CHRISTMAS SHOW: RUDOLF'S RECRUITS

**FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT OUR WEBSITE
MEERKATPRODUCTIONS.COM.AU
OR GIVE US A CALL ON 1300 308 311**

RESOURCE A

COLA SONG

I don't know what it's called but it's stressing me out
A feeling deep inside don't know what it's about
It's making me sad
It's making me mad
I want to scream and shout

Chorus

I'm like a can of cola
Holding in my fizz
I feel yucky, blah, icky, eerrrrgh
I don't know what it is
I'm like a can of cola
Just wanna hit the road
I feel yucky, blah, icky, eerrrrgh
I think I might explode

I don't know what it is but my tummy feels bad
Dark and heavy the worst that I've had
It's making me low
Just want it to go
It makes me feel so sad

CHORUS

(he takes medium Huff off and big Huff appears, he sings bridge to him)

Bridge

Today I just felt silly coz you followed me around
At school, at home and in the park. But you never
make a sound
I woke up this morning and above me you appeared.
The feeling that builds inside me is making me act
weird
Sometimes I feel like an alien in a foreign land
How could anybody else ever understand?

Instrumental

(Bill and Mr Huff in bath. Mr Huff comes in with a towel around him and starts pretending to soap himself. Bill in bath, his legs up round his chest, and huddled in the corner)

Bill: (Spoken) Why did you have to follow me in here! You're taking up all of the room! It's not fair, why won't you just go away!!!! You're so big, I haven't got room for you in my life!!!! (Bill gets out of bath, Mr Huff stays in.)

Chorus

I'm like a can of cola

Bill: (Shouts at Mr Huff) Leave me alone. (Bill gets into bed and falls asleep, Mr Huff creeps in, lies down under the bed and starts snoring. The snoring wakes Bill up, he tosses and turns, eventually falling asleep.)

RESOURCE B

DRAW A PICTURE OF YOUR HUFF BELOW

