

SOUTH COAST REPERTORY TEACHER'S GUIDE

to the
2007-08 Theatre for Young Audiences
Production of



Adapted by
DAVID WOOD

Based on the Book by
ROALD DAHL

Directed by
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Part I: THE PLAY

The Source

Roald Dahl's captivating novel, *The BFG*, was first published in 1982 in Great Britain and shortly thereafter in the United States to great success and has since become regarded as a classic work of contemporary children's literature. Following is an excerpt from the review which appeared in the January 9, 1983 edition of the *New York Times*:

"Sophie, an 8-year-old orphan, is kidnapped by the BFG (Big Friendly Giant) and taken to Giantland, where she sees [other] giants who, unlike the gentle title character, eat children... [and] are disdainful of the BFG for his kindness and vegetarian ways. Mr. Dahl offers just what many children like: humorous yet chilling descriptions of the giants and their evil doings. The BFG knows his colleagues may knock him about but will not kill him; spunky little Sophie, however, is always in danger. [. . .] Children will enjoy this book. Many adults will dislike it. Thus, *The BFG* is a success since it allows children a recognition of the habits, dreams and humor that they alone possess. Mr. Dahl appeals to a child's sense of justice, morbidity and humor. An occasional humorous finger poked at the established habits of the world should harm no one and delight many."

Roald Dahl's characteristically dark humor, whimsical use of language, and unique combination of fairytale and contemporary storytelling are faithfully adapted to the stage by playwright David Wood, who also wrote the script for last season's TYA production of *James and the Giant Peach*. Wood's script of *The BFG* was first performed at Wimbledon Theatre in 1991, with dozens of productions since then both in England and here in the states, including Dallas Children's Theater, the Children's Theatre Company in Minneapolis, and Seattle Children's Theatre.

Meet the Writers

Roald (roo-aal) **Dahl** was born in Wales in 1916 of Norwegian parents, grew up in England and lived there for most of his life. At the outset of World War II, he joined the Royal Air Force and became a fighter pilot. After being injured by machine gun fire, his pain was so severe that he was sent back to England on the disabled list. He was then reassigned to Washington DC, where he accidentally began his career as a writer in 1943 by writing his first children's book, *The Gremlins*. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt read the book to her grandchildren and invited Dahl to have dinner frequently at the White House. He returned to England in 1945, and published his first collection of short stories for adults in 1946. Not until 1961, when *James and the Giant Peach* was published in America, did he realize that he had found his true calling. Until his death in 1990, Dahl was one of the most popular writers of literature for young readers the world over, with more than a dozen children's books to his credit. Today, he is widely acknowledged as a literary genius who changed the course of children's literature forever. In 2000, Roald Dahl was voted the U.K.'s favorite author, surpassing Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and even J. K. Rowling of *Harry Potter* fame.

David Wood wrote his first play for children in 1967 and has since created more than sixty plays and adaptations that are performed for young audiences all over the world. He was dubbed “the national children’s dramatist” by Irving Wardle of *The London Times* and has recently published *Theatre for Children: Guide to Writing, Adapting, Directing and Acting* co-written with Janet Grant and published by Faber. He is also a director, actor, magician and proprietor of Whirligig Theatre, which tours children’s theatre productions in Britain. Other Roald Dahl books adapted for the stage by David Wood include *James and the Giant Peach*, *The Witches* and *Fantastic Mr. Fox*. Many years of writing for children have taught Wood what youngsters are interested in and what they respond to: “A story well told will hold their attention and trigger their imaginations. I try to make it impossible for audiences to take their eyes off the stage for fear of missing something. The purveyors of adult theatre should cherish and nurture the work we do to promulgate the idea of theatre as a leisure activity. In spite of competition from computer games and videos, the communal experience is much more memorable and life-affirming than the solo experience in front of a small screen. For me, children’s theatre has been a career, a challenge, a frustration, a passion. The rewards (not always financial) have been huge—there is nothing, no nothing, like sitting in a full house of children, listening, laughing, thinking and truly enjoying themselves.”

Synopsis

The play opens as Sophie’s birthday party is in full swing. Sophie and her friends (Daniel, Katherine, Rebecca and Sam) are playing blind man’s bluff. When a friend gives Sophie a copy of *The BFG* as a birthday gift, they decide to act out the story using puppets and masks—and Sophie’s dad gets cast as The BFG himself!

The story begins at the “witching hour,” when an orphan named Sophie is snatched out of her bedroom by a terrifying giant and whisked away to Giant Country. Instead of being eaten alive, Sophie is relieved to learn that she has been snatched by a Big Friendly Giant who’s strictly vegetarian. The BFG tells Sophie how he mixes up dreams to blow through a trumpet into the minds of sleeping children. Although he treats her with kindness, Sophie quickly learns that the same cannot be said for the rest of the nasty giant clan: Bloodbottler, Fleshlumpeater, Bonecruncher, Meatdripper, Childchewer and Gizzardgulper. Forming a most unlikely alliance, Sophie and the BFG band together to stop them from gobbling up the children of London.

With Sophie’s mother enlisted to play the part of the Queen of England, they’re off to Buckingham Palace. The BFG mixes up a special dream for the Queen, who discovers Sophie in her royal bedroom when she awakens. Sophie tells her that the terrible dream was true, which causes the Queen to deploy the Air Force and the Army to round up the big bad giants and drop them into a deep hole forever. Sophie’s reward is being invited by the Queen to live with her at Buckingham Palace and The BFG, who must return to Giant Country, agrees to visit them once a year.

Gobblefunk

Roald Dahl loved playing with language and inventing new words. Although he was famous for using made-up words in many of his books, this talent is most apparent in *The BFG*, whose gigantic characters have their own highly distinctive way of speaking. Dahl created more than 200 new words for *The BFG*, which were later collected and published as the “Gobblefunk Dictionary.” Gobblefunking isn’t all that difficult, once you get the hang of it. Here are a few tips from the official Roald Dahl website to help you get started:

1. Some of the best gobblefunks are words that don’t exist (yet) but should because they sound just right for the thing they are describing. For example, “delumptious” sounds a bit like “delicious” and a bit like “scrumptious,” but it is brand new and just right.
2. Some of The BFG’s best gobblefunks are when he mixes up words and phrases, such as “dinghummer” and “hippodumpling.” The poor fellow knows exactly which words he wants to say, but “somehow they come out all squiff-squiddly.”
3. A good way to start gobblefunking is to mix two words together. For instance, to describe a “disastrous catastrophe,” The BFG came up “catasterous disastrophe.”
4. More advanced gobblefunkers are ready to start coming up with strange similes. The main rule to follow when creating a gobblefunk simile is to make sure the comparison makes no sense whatsoever; i.e. “deaf as a dumpling” or “helpless as horsefeathers.”

PART II: IN THE CLASSROOM

Before the Show: Read About It! Think About It!

These introductory exercises are designed to prepare students for their visit to SCR. Try to complete as many as possible before seeing the production. The more they learn about what they’re going to see, the more benefit they are sure to derive from the experience. (Please note: Parenthetical data refer to specific domains, strands, and standards for Grades 3 and 4 in the curriculum areas of English-Language Arts or Visual and Performing Arts.)

1. Introduce Roald Dahl’s novel *The BFG* to the class by either reading aloud, or asking students to read aloud. **(Reading Grades 3 & 4 - 2.2, 2.3)**
2. Ask students to:
 - a. Identify the main events of the plot, their causes, and their effects on future actions. **(Reading Grades 3 & 4 - 3.2)**
 - b. Discuss the traits of major characters, their motivations and contributions to the dramatic action. **(Reading Grade 3 & 4 - 3.3; Theatre Grade 4 - 1.2)**
 - c. Identify speakers or narrators. **(Reading Grade 3 - 3.6)**
 - d. Determine underlying theme or message. **(Reading Grade 3 - 3.4)**
3. Discuss the differences between realism and fantasy. Could any of these events really happen? Ask students to name other types of fantasy writing, such as fairy tales, legends, fables, and myths. Have them talk about what they like and dislike about this literary genre, identifying universal themes, character types, and actions. **(Reading Grade 3 – 3.2, Grade 4 – 3.1)**
4. Allow students to retell or dramatize this story by employing different vocal tones and attitudes to explore multiple possibilities in a live performance. **(Theatre Grade 3 – 2.1; Grade 4 – 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1)**
5. Examine the structural differences between fiction and drama. **(Theatre Grades 3 & 4 – 1.1; Reading Grades 3 & 4 - 3.1)**
6. Explore what it means to “adapt” literature from one form to another, specifically from fiction to drama. Discuss various ways that the content of books might have to change in order to be

suitable for staging using information in the book, as well as prior knowledge of the conventions of live theatre. **(Reading Grade 3 - 3.1; Theatre Grades 3 & 4 - 1.1)**

7. Ask students to make predictions about the play they're going to see based upon their knowledge of the source text, as well as other works by Dahl they may have read or seen on film. For example, not every character in the book appears in the play. Which ones do you expect to see onstage? How do you imagine Giantland will be recreated onstage? What will the scenery, costumes and props look like? Will there be music? If so, how will it sound? **(Theatre Grades 3 & 4 - 1.1; Reading Grade 3 - 2.4; Grade 4 - 2.3)**

After the Show: Talk About It! Write About It!

1. Discuss ways in which the play differed from students' predictions. **(Listening and Speaking Grade 3 - 1.1, 2.0; Grade 4 - 1.0, 2.1)**
2. Ask children to use the vocabulary of theatre (see Part IV of this guide) to describe the performance. **(Theatre Grade 3 - 1.1, 4.1; Grade 4 - 1.1, 4.3)**
 - a. How did the actors look (costumes, makeup, movement)?
 - b. How did the stage look (scenery, lighting, props)?
(Visual Art Grade 3 - 1.5, 4.1; Grade 4 - 3.1, 4.1)
 - c. How did the play sound (music, singing, special effects)?
(Music Grades 3 & 4 - 4.1, 4.2, 5.1)
3. Give students an opportunity to create their own variations of the play:
 - a. Tell the story from the point of view of another character.
 - b. Choose another ending by rewriting the last scene.
 - c. Add a brand new character and see what happens.
 - d. Imagine a continuation: what happens after the last scene?
4. Story circle – One person begins a story featuring Sophie from *The BFG* and a character from another book by Roald Dahl, such as James from *James and the Giant Peach* or Charlie from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. The first person stops after a few sentences. The next person picks up the story and continues it, then stops. Next person adds to it and so on until the tale comes to a resolution. A title can be provided to guide the exercise.
5. Dramatize original stories featuring other “giants” from the animal and/or plant kingdoms. Personify the objects by giving them names and human characteristics, à la Roald Dahl. **(Theatre Grade 3 - 5.1; Grade 4 - 5.2)**
6. Ask students to come up with definitions for nonsense words taken from The Big Friendly Giant's imaginative vocabulary. Following this exercise, have students locate each of the words in Roald Dahl's book and discover how context offers clues to the meaning of even nonsensical language. **(Reading Grades 3 & 4 - 1.0)**
7. Using a globe or map have students locate London, England; identify Buckingham Palace, Regent's Park, and London Zoo **(History-Social Science Grade 3 - 3.1)**
8. Ask students to write letters of thanks describing the most memorable aspects of attending a live performance of *The BFG*, and what they enjoyed most about their visit to SCR. **(Writing Grade 3-2.3; Grade 4-2.1; Written and Oral Conventions Grade 3 & 4-1.0)**

**South Coast Repertory
Attn: TYA
PO Box 2197
Costa Mesa, CA 92628-2197**

PART III: AT THE THEATRE

Welcome to the Argyros

The 336-seat Argyros Stage is the newest theatre space at SCR. It opened in 2002 with a huge celebration and we are delighted that thousands of Orange County school children fill this state-of-the-art facility each season to enjoy our Theatre for Young Audiences productions. The Argyros is a proscenium theatre designed to provide audiences a feeling of intimacy, with no seat more than 39' feet from the stage.



Theatre Etiquette

Theatre is an art form that depends on both the artists and the audience. A performance is influenced by an audience, just as an audience is influenced by a performance. The artists and staff of South Coast Repertory are creating a special new world for you to visit. When you walk into the theatre, you will feel that behind the curtain lies the secret of that new world which is about to come to life before your eyes. Sometimes it's so exciting, you can barely hold still. But remember that once the play begins, you have a very important job to do. Everybody in the theatre is a part of the play. You are connected to all the other people in the audience, as well as to the actors on the stage. They can SEE you, HEAR you, FEEL you, just as you can SEE, HEAR, and FEEL them. Your attention, involvement, responses, and imagination are a real part of each and every performance. The play can actually be made better because of you!

Student Tips for Theatre Trips

- * Stay with your group at all times and pay attention to your teachers and chaperones.
- * Listen carefully to the SCR staff member who will board your bus with last-minute tips.
- * Take your seat in the theatre **before** going to the bathroom or getting a drink of water.
- * Make yourself comfortable while keeping movement to a minimum.
- * Please do not stand up, walk around, or put your feet on the seat in front of you.
- * Absolutely no chewing gum, eating, or drinking in the building.
- * No backpacks, cameras, or electronic devices are permitted in the theatre.
- * Feel free to talk quietly in your seats before the show.
- * The performance begins when the lights dim to a blackout and the music starts to play.
- * Show your appreciation by clapping for the actors at the end of the play.
- * After the lights come back up, wait for the ushers to escort your group out of the theatre.

* Programs for the group will be given to teachers following the performance.

Filling the Bill

Everyone who attends a Theatre for Young Audiences performance at SCR receives a program, also called a playbill. Patrons at weekend public performances receive their programs from the ushers upon entering the theatre. At the conclusion of each weekday matinee, teachers will be given programs for their students which can be distributed back in the classroom.

In addition to the customary information about the play and the players, the program for *The BFG* also contains these features and activities that students will have fun working on after the show, either in class or at home on their own.

“Do the Monster Match” – matching game using both real and imaginary “giants”

“Saving Miss Sophie” – help Sophie get through the maze to find The BFG

“Ears to You” – directions for making a pair of giant BFG ears from paper plates

Chapter One from the novel

What’s New in the Theatre Shop

PART IV: EDUCATION STATION

Five Strands of Arts Education

Students in a comprehensive program are expected to master the standards of an arts discipline, which includes the following five strands:

1.0 Artistic Perception refers to processing, analyzing and responding to sensory information through the use of the language and skills unique to dance, music, theatre and visual arts.

2.0 Creative Expression involves creating a work, performing and participating in the arts disciplines. Students apply processes and skills in composing, arranging and performing a work and use a variety of means to communicate meaning and intent in their own original formal and informal works.

3.0 Historical and Cultural Context concerns the work students do toward understanding the historical contributions and cultural dimensions of an arts discipline. Students analyze roles, functions, development in the discipline, and human diversity as it relates to that discipline.

4.0 Aesthetic Valuing includes analyzing and critiquing works of dance, music, theatre or visual arts. Students apply processes and skills to productions or performances. They also critically assess and derive meaning from the work [. . .] and from performances and original works based on the elements and principles of an arts discipline.

5.0 Connections, Relationships, Applications involves connecting and applying what is learned in one arts discipline and comparing it to learning in the other arts, other subject areas and careers. Students develop competencies and creative skills that contribute to lifelong learning.

From the California Visual and Performing Arts Framework

“A discussion of the arts focuses on how people communicate their perceptions, responses, and understanding of the world to themselves and to others. Since their first appearance thousands of years ago, the arts have been evolving continually, exhibiting the ability of human beings to intuit, symbolize, think and express themselves through dance, music, theatre and the visual arts. Each of the arts contains a distinct body of knowledge and skills that characterize the power of each to expand the perceptual, intellectual, cultural and spiritual dimensions of human experience.

[. . .] Education in the arts is essential for all students. California’s public school system must provide a balanced curriculum, with the arts as part of the core for all students, kindergarten through grade twelve, no matter what the students’ abilities, language capacities or special needs happen to be. Each of the arts disciplines maintains a rich body of knowledge that enables the students to understand their world in ways that support and enhance their learning in other core subjects. In addition, through this rich body of knowledge, students learn how each of the arts contributes to their own sensitivity of the aesthetic qualities of life. Students learn to see what they look at, to hear what they listen to, feel what they touch and to understand more clearly what they integrate into their own experience.

Basic Theatre Vocabulary (*Theatre 1.1*)

Acting The process by which an individual interprets and perform the role of an imagined character.

Action The core of a theatre piece; the sense of forward movement created by the sequence of events and the physical and psychological motivations of characters.

Ad-Lib To extemporize stage business or dialogue; to make it up as you go along.

Apron The area of the stage that extends toward the audience, in front of the main curtain.

Backstage The space behind the acting area, unseen by the audience.

Balcony An upper floor of seats projecting out over the main seating area of a theatre.

Blocking The movement and stage business, designed by the director and performed by the actors.

Boxes Seats separated from the main seating area located on the upper level near the stage.

Box office A windowed space at the front of the theatre building where tickets are sold.

Business Any action performed on stage.

Character The role played by an actor as she or he assumes another’s identity.

Choreography The art of creating and arranging dances onstage.

Conflict The problem or incident that creates the action and is resolved by the end of the play.

Costume The carefully selected or specially designed clothing worn by the actors.

Cross The actor's movement from one stage location to another.

Cue The last words or action of an actor immediately preceding the lines or business of another actor.

Dialogue The stage conversation between characters.

Diction The clarity with which words are pronounced.

Director The person who oversees the entire process of staging a theatrical production.

Downstage The part of the stage closest to the audience. At one time stages were raked, or sloped, with the lower (“down”) part closest to the audience, and the higher (“up”) part further away.

Ensemble A cast of actors working together effectively to present a theatrical performance.

Flats Canvas or wood-covered frames that are used for the walls of a stage setting.

Green Room A room near the stage where actors await entrance cues and receive guests. The room’s name comes from Elizabethan times, when actors waited on a real “green” (or patch of grass).

Improvisation The spontaneous use of movement and speech to create a character.

Lobby The public waiting area outside the theatre space.

Mezzanine Lower level seating area beneath the balcony overhang.

Monologue A solo speech during which the character reveals personal thoughts.

Narrator A character who tells the story of the play directly to the audience.

Orchestra Lower level seating area immediately in front of the stage.

"Places" Direction given by the Stage Manager for actors to be in position before each act begins.

Plot The "what happens" in a story: beginning (the setting, characters, and problem); middle (how the characters work to solve the problem); and the ending (resolution of the problem).

Project To speak loudly so the entire audience can hear you.

Props All the stage furnishings, including furniture, that are physically used by the actors.

Proscenium Stage A traditional theatre with a proscenium arch framing the stage.

Run Length of time the play will be presented (i.e two weeks, two months, two years).

Script The text of the play, including dialogue and stage directions, all written by the playwright.

Set All of the scenery that makes up the physical environment of the world of the play.

Stage Left That part of the stage to the actor's left when the actor faces the audience.

Stage Manager The person who supervises the physical production of a play and who is in charge of the stage during the performance.

Stage Right That part of the stage to the actor's right when the actor faces the audience.

Strike Dismantling the set, costumes and props at the end of the run of a show.

Theme The central thought, idea, or significance of the action of a play.

Upstage The area of the stage farthest way from the audience and nearest to the back wall.

PART V: RESOURCES

Children's Books by Roald Dahl

The BFG
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (DVDs 1971, 2005)
Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator
Danny, the Champion of the World
The Enormous Crocodile
Esio Trot
Fantastic Mr. Fox
George's Marvelous Machine
The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me
The Gremlins
James and the Giant Peach (published 1961; DVD 1996)
The Magic Finger
Matilda (published DVD 1996)
The Minipins
The Twits
The Vicar of Nibbleswicke
The Witches (DVD 1990)

Web Links

BFG's D.I.Y Dream Catcher http://www.teachervision.fen.com/tv/printables/penguin/dahl_4.pdf

Crazy Words in *The BFG* http://www.gigglepotz.com/smartkids_crazywords.htm

Creative Writing Ideas <http://www.teachingideas.co.uk/english/creative.htm>

David Wood's official website www.davidwood.org.uk

Free-hand Shadow Puppets <http://www.shadow-puppets.com>

Giants in Mythology [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giant_\(mythology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giant_(mythology))

Giants on the Earth <http://www.stevequayle.com/giants/articles/giants.of.earth.html>

Homemade Puppet Ideas <http://jas.familyfun.go.com/sendpage?page=sendpage&dest=print>

Make a Shadow Puppet Theatre <http://www.osv.org/kids/crafts2.htm>

Novel & Picture Book Activities <http://www.canteach.ca/elementary/novel13.html>

Reader's Theater Script for *The BFG* <http://bms.westport.k12.ct.us/mccormick/rt/rtscripts/rtsbfg.htm>

Reading Activities http://www.gigglepotz.com/themes_bfg.htm

Roald Dahl's official website www.roalddahl.com

Roald Dahl Fan site www.roalddahlfans.com