



South Coast Repertory

STUDY GUIDE

Prepared by Literary Intern Eliana Theologides Rodriguez
and Literary Manager Andy Knight

Judith Viorst's

ALEXANDER

and the

TERRIBLE, HORRIBLE,

NO GOOD, Very

BAD DAY

based on the book by Judith Viorst
book & lyrics by Judith Viorst
music by Shelly Markham
directed by Kari Hayter



WELCOME TO THE THEATRE

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. With this play, the artists and staff of South Coast Repertory have created a special new world for you. Sometimes that world is so exciting that you can barely hold still. But remember: once the play begins, you are connected to all the other people in the audience, as well as to the actors on the stage, because you're all in the same room. The actors can see you, hear you and sense you, just as you can see, hear and respond to 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

THEATRE VOCABULARY

- **Backstage** The space behind the acting area, unseen by the audience.
- **Blocking** The movement designed by the director and performed by the actors.
- **Box Office** A windowed space at the front of the theatre building where tickets are sold.
- **Choreography** The art of creating and arranging dances onstage.
- **Cue** The last words or action of an actor immediately preceding the lines or business of another actor.
- **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 farther away.
- **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).
- **Matinee** A morning or afternoon performance of a play.
- **Props** All the hand-held items and stage furnishings, including furniture, that are physically used by the actors.
- **Rehearsal** Time performers use to practice privately before a performance in front of an audience.
- **Script** The text of the play, including dialogue and stage directions, all written by the playwright.
- **Upstage** The area of the stage farthest away from the audience and nearest to the back wall.



THE PLAY

THE STORY OF *ALEXANDER AND THE TERRIBLE, HORRIBLE, NO GOOD, VERY BAD DAY*

Alexander is having—you guessed it—a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. He wakes up with gum in his hair, trips on his skateboard and drops his sweater in sink water. At breakfast, he's the only one of his brothers who doesn't find a prize in his cereal box, and in the carpool, he's the only one without a window seat.

Perhaps he should move to Australia...

At school, all the students show the teacher, Mrs. Dickens, their drawings. Mrs. Dickens loves Audrey's drawing of a house and compliments Albert on his portrait of his family—so why doesn't she like Alexander's invisible castle? "Too much imagination," she says. Then it's time for the students to practice their singing for the school concert. Nobody wants to sing with Alexander until Mrs. Dickens makes them. He tries his very best, but is scolded for singing too loudly. Thank goodness it's time for recess.

Unfortunately, recess doesn't go much better. No one will pass the ball to Alexander in soccer or tag him in tag. "How come you're being so mean to me? I'm your best friend," Alexander asks Paul. "You used to be my best friend," Paul says. "Now, you're only my third best friend."

What a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. Things can't be this bad in Australia.

What's the only thing that could

Did you know that *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* is based on a book by Judith Viorst, with illustrations by Ray Cruz? It was first published in 1972 and has become a staple of children's literature. Viorst also wrote the musical adaptation along with composer Shelly Markham.

make Alexander's day worse? A trip to the dentist! At the dentist, Alexander grabs his face and moans, begging Dr. Fields to leave him alone. No cavities for Alexander's oldest brother... none for his middle brother... and...a big fat cavity for Alexander. At least he'll be able to find cool shoes at the shoe store.

Not! The shoe salesman finds something cool for Alexander's brothers, but Alexander only gets plain old white sneakers.

From lima beans for dinner (yuck!) to kissing on TV (double yuck!), Alexander's day doesn't seem to be ending any better than it started. Until his mother gives him some very special advice...

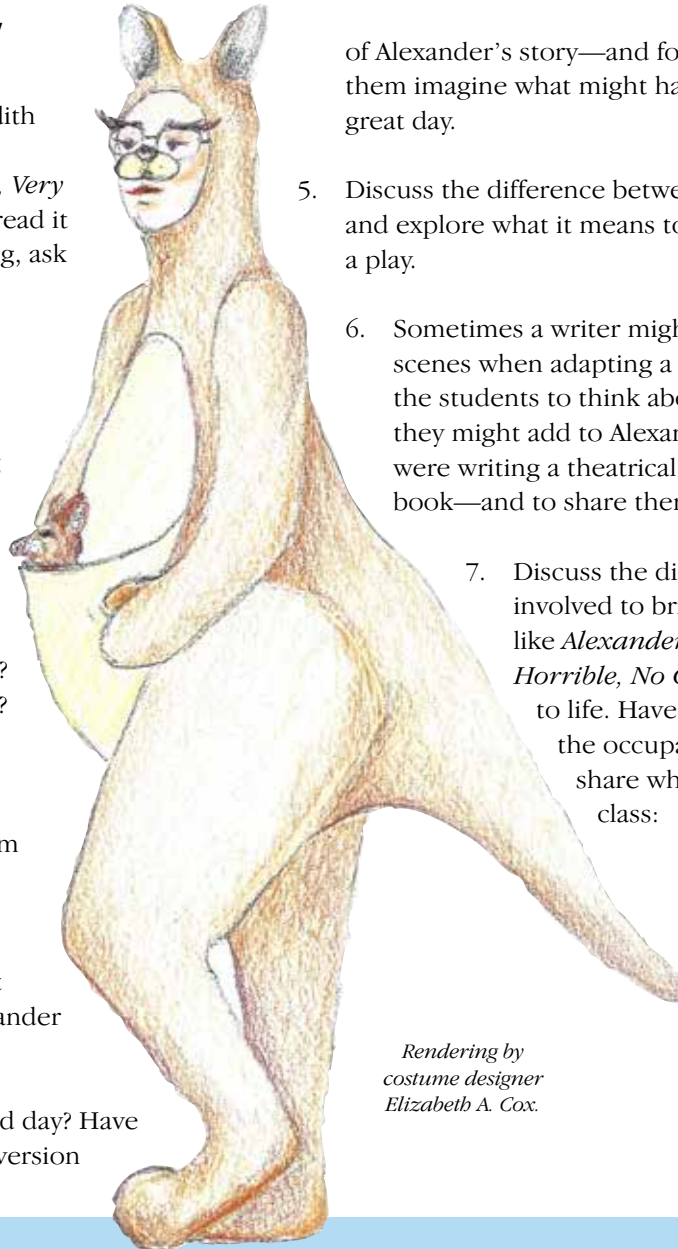
"Some days are like that," she says. "Even in Australia." But there's a bright side. Alexander's terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day is almost done. Tomorrow he can start all over again. And tomorrow's bound to be a better day.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

BEFORE THE SHOW

1. Have your students read Judith Viorst's *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* on their own—or read it aloud as a class. After reading, ask your students to:
 - a. Recall the plot's main events.
 - b. Identify the story's themes and underlying messages
2. Ask the students if they've had a bad day similar to Alexander's. What happened on their bad days? How did they get through it? What did they learn?
3. At the very end of the book, Alexander's mother gives him some special advice: "Some days are like that," she says. Ask the students what this advice means to them. What advice would they give Alexander if they were his friend?
4. What if Alexander had a good day? Have the students tell a different version



Rendering by
costume designer
Elizabeth A. Cox.

- of Alexander's story—and for this version, have them imagine what might happen on Alexander's great day.
5. Discuss the difference between fiction and drama, and explore what it means to "adapt" a book into a play.
 6. Sometimes a writer might add or remove scenes when adapting a book into a play. Ask the students to think about a scenario that they might add to Alexander's story if they were writing a theatrical adaptation of the book—and to share them with the class.
 7. Discuss the different jobs involved to bring a production like *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* to life. Have the students research the occupations on this list and share what they find with the class:
 - a. Actor
 - b. Director
 - c. Playwright
 - d. Composer
 - e. Music Director
 - f. Designer
 - g. Stage Manager
 - h. Stage Crew

WORDS, WORDS, WORDS!

Match these words with their definitions and then listen for them during the performance.

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 1. Tuneful | a. To feed or support |
| 2. Nourish | b. Smoke, fog or mist that fills the air |
| 3. Cherish | c. Having a pleasant and musical sound |
| 4. Haze | d. Knowledge that is gathered through experience |
| 5. Wisdom | e. Bringing or deserving of shame |
| 6. Embrace | f. To feel or show great love for someone or something |
| 7. Disgraceful | g. To hold in the arms as a way to show affection |

Answer key on p.9 of this study guide.

AUSTRALIA QUICK FACTS

Alexander says time and time again that he wants to move to Australia. Check out these interesting facts about the country—which makes up the mainland of the Australian continent—and then do some research on your own and add what you find to the list.

1. Australia is the driest of any continent on earth other than Antarctica.
2. Australia has more than 750 different reptile species. That's more than any other country in the world.
3. Australia is the sixth largest country in the world in terms of land area.
4. Koalas, marsupials native to Australia, sleep for approximately 20 hours a day.
5. People who live in the city of Sydney, Australia, are called Sydney-siders.
6. There are three times more sheep than people living in Australia.
7. In 1894, Australia became the second country in the world to grant women the right to vote.

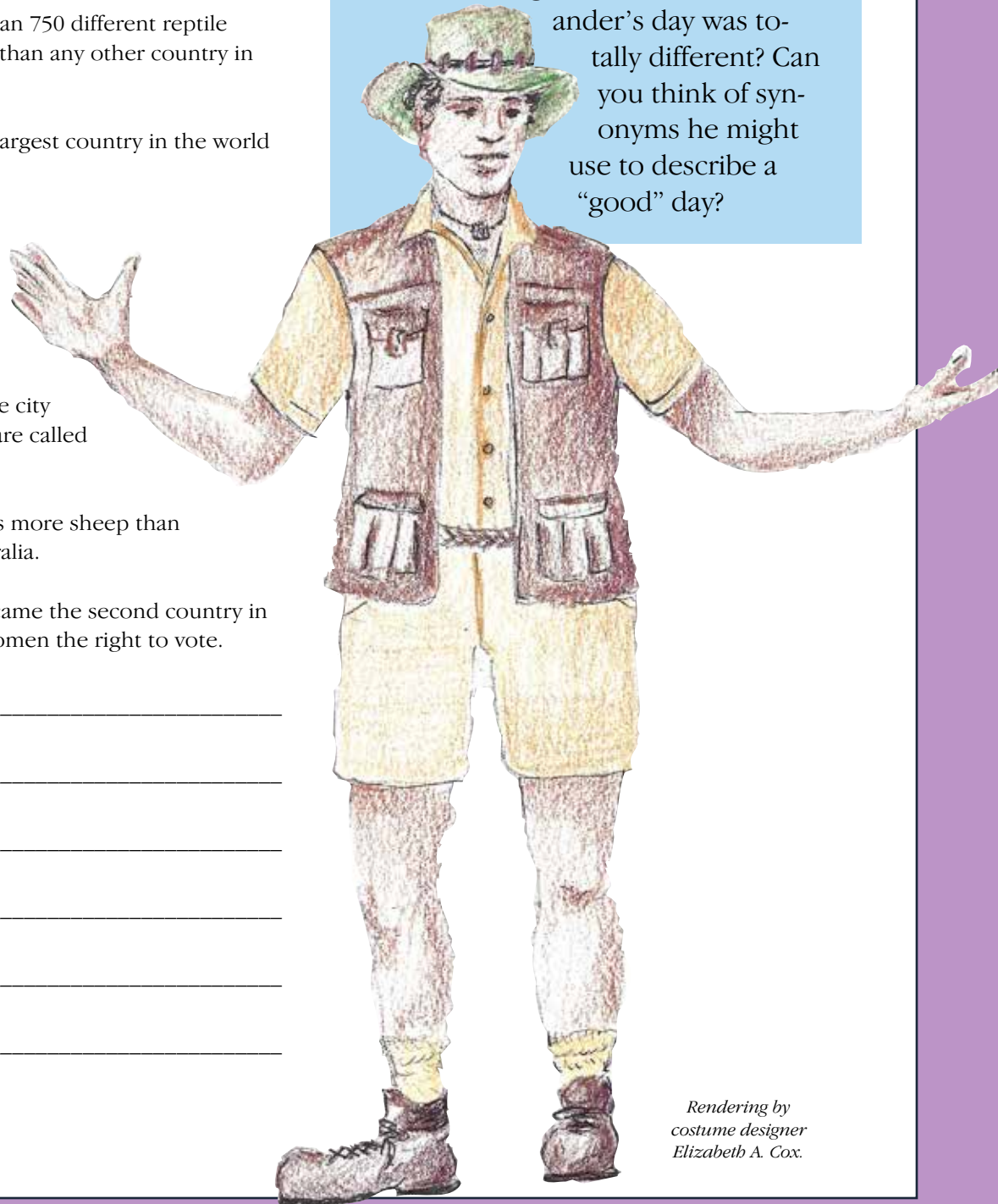
8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

SYNONYMS

A synonym is a word that has the same (or almost the same) meaning as another word. And Alexander uses a lot of them when describing his “bad” day. Can you think of other synonyms for “bad”—besides terrible, or horrible, or no good? And what if Alexander’s day was totally different? Can you think of synonyms he might use to describe a “good” day?



*Rendering by
costume designer
Elizabeth A. Cox.*

AFTER THE SHOW

Discussion About the Theatre

Hold a class discussion when you return from the performance and ask the students about their experience attending live theatre

1. What was the first thing you noticed about the theatre? What did the stage look like?
2. Discuss the technical elements of the production—the set, the costumes, the lighting and the sound. Ask the students what they liked best and why. How did these elements help tell the story of Alexander and his terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day?
3. Discuss the ways in which this musical was surprising. Was the story told in the same way that you imagined it would be?
 - a. How did the songs add to the storytelling?
4. How is attending a live performance different from attending a movie? How does your experience change when you know that the story is being performed live and that the actors can see and hear you?

Discussion about the Play

1. What was your favorite moment in the play? What was the funniest? What was the most surprising?
2. Did you notice any differences between the book and the musical adaptation? How did that change your understanding of the story?

3. “Breaking the fourth wall” is when actors directly acknowledge and/or speak to the audience. How did Alexander break the fourth wall? Have you seen this device used anywhere else—for example, in television or movies?
4. When was Alexander treated unfairly in the musical? How did he navigate those situations? Would you have dealt with them any differently—and if so, how?



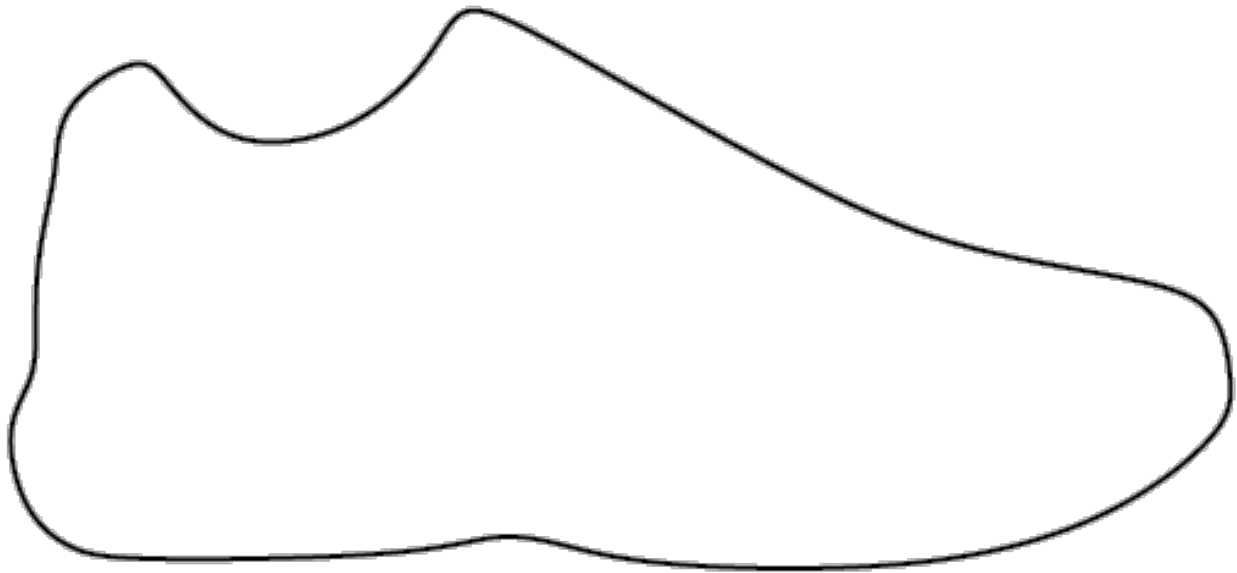
Renderings by
costume designer
Elizabeth A. Cox.

ACTIVITIES

Alexander fantasizes about living in Australia. What country would you like to visit most? Pick a spot that sounds exciting to you and do some research—and then write five interesting facts below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

In the musical, Alexander and his family take a trip to the shoe store. Alexander's brothers both get fun, colorful shoes—but the store only has plain white shoes in Alexander's size. Design and color in the white shoe outline below to create the shoe you'd want to buy.



LETTERS OF THANKS

Give the students the opportunity to write letters of thanks to SCR describing the most memorable aspects of attending a performance of *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*, and what they enjoyed most about their visit to SCR.

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

ACTIVITIES

Letters to Alexander: At the very start of the play, members of the ensemble write letters to Alexander describing their bad days. What would your letter to Alexander say? Perhaps you'd describe your most recent bad day. Or perhaps you'd talk about a good day you'd had. Or perhaps you'd even give Alexander some advice on how to get through a tough day. Write your own letter to Alexander below.

A large, blank, cream-colored sheet of paper with a spiral binding on the left side, tilted slightly to the right, intended for writing a letter to Alexander.

RESOURCES

More About the Author/Adaptor

Judith Viorst's official website:

<http://www.judithviorstwriter.com/>

Judith Viorst on the Simon & Schuster website:

<https://www.simonandschuster.com/authors/Judith-Viorst/707395>

An interview with Judith Viorst from *Scholastic Magazine*:

<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/qa-judith-viorst/>

More About the Composer

Shelly Markham's bio on the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television website:

<http://www.tft.ucla.edu/2015/01/shelly-markham-2/>

More About the Show's Director

Kari Hayter's official website:

<http://www.karihayter.com/>

More About *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*

Book Resource From Teaching Children Philosophy:

<https://www.teachingchildrenphilosophy.org/BookModule/AlexanderAndTheTerribleHorribleNoGoodVeryBadDay>

Study guide from Orlando Shakespeare Theater's production of the musical:

<https://www.orlandoshakes.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Alexander-Study-Guide.pdf>

Enrichment guide from First Stage's production of the musical:

https://www.firststage.org/Documents/First%20Stage%20PDFs/Enrichment%20Guides/Alex_EG_FINAL.pdf

More About Australia

National Geographic Kids:

<https://www.natgeokids.com/za/discover/geography/countries/facts-about-australia/>

Facts About Australia from Experience Oz:

<https://www.experienceoz.com.au/en/australia-facts>

31 Weird Facts About Australia That Will Amaze You:

<https://landlopers.com/2014/03/09/australia-facts>

Vocabulary answer key:

1.c, 2.a, 3.f, 4.b, 5.d, 6.g, 7.e