

teacher resource guide

**schooltime
performance
series**



***the boy who
grew flowers***

**arts
education
njpac**
discover. create. grow.

about the performance

Get ready for a heartwarming performance of *The Boy Who Grew Flowers*, a story about bravery, kindness, beauty in the unexpected, and embracing differences, performed by Treehouse Shakers, an acclaimed theater and dance company based in New York City.

The story, based on the children's picture book of the same title by Jen Wojtowicz, starts with a boy named Rink Bowagon, who lives in the deep country, far away from town, on Lonesome Mountain. He has the strangest family, which many townsfolk can't fathom. Rink's uncle tames rattlesnakes and a bevy of relatives are shapeshifters. This makes conversations around the dinner table a very interesting sight.

Compared to the rest of his family, Rink has a beautiful and most unusual trait. When the full moon rises in the



night sky, gorgeous flowers that smell just as sweet grow from his body. Every month when this happens, his mother would snip off the flowers and have him go to school the very next morning.

The other kids at school would ignore or shun Rink. He comes from a family so weird, so odd and distinctly uncool, they think. So Rink keeps to himself most of the time and stays shy and quiet. But one day, a new girl, Angelina Quiz, enrolls at school and Rink is smitten. Even if one of her legs is shorter than the other, she immediately gets along with the other children. Her smile, honesty, sunny disposition and kindness capture Rink's attention. Angelina also takes notice of Rink and enjoys his company.

Rink decides to ask Angelina to the school dance, and an incredible idea lights up his imagination. He makes Angelina special shoes that would accommodate her leg length differences and would help her to dance as well! So he works hard making a pair of pretty snakeskin shoes and gives it to her as a special gift, along with the flowers grown from his body.

This sparks a bond that grows between the two kids. They eventually marry and start their own family on Lonesome Mountain.

For the stage performance produced by Treehouse Shakers, audiences of all ages will be mesmerized by the stagecraft on display: creative use of puppets, light and other elements to tell the story. Modern dance routines and original, evocative music all come together to enhance the telling of the story. Kids who feel like they don't fit in will be encouraged by Rink's story and this lovely tale. The takeaway from this performance is a valuable lesson that being different is okay, and should be celebrated. Being different is a lovely, magical gift that makes the world more interesting and beautiful.

performance credits

- Adapted from the book by **Jen Wojtowicz**
- Written and Directed by **Mara McEwin**
- Choreographed by **Emily Bunning**
- Costume and Puppets by **Patti Gilstrap**
- Lighting and Set Design by **Cody Grey**
- Music by **Martyn Axe**

about the book

Jen Wojtowicz is an artist and writer who teaches art to people with disabilities. She currently lives in upstate New York with her family. *The Boy Who Grew Flowers* is her first book, which was published by Barefoot Books, an independent children's publishing company based in England. The illustrations for the book were crafted by artist Steve Adams, who is based in Montreal, Canada.

Here is what Wojtowicz had to say about the genesis of the story when speaking to Barefoot Books:

"I was inspired to write *The Boy Who Grew Flowers* by my older brother, Wally, who has autism. I have observed that when people are kind and accepting toward each other, it alleviates a lot of needless suffering."

about treehouse shakers

Treehouse Shakers is a widely-acclaimed New York City-based theater and dance company that aims to create and perform stories that are humanistic and heartfelt, and to encourage connective bonds across communities. Performances are meant to not just entertain but to also expose audiences to imaginative, powerful theater and inventive stagecraft.

Many of the company's productions feature experimental storytelling elements such as puppets, creative lighting and set design, colorful costumes and original music. Treehouse Shakers is especially known for taking the idiom of modern dance and translating it for young audiences, who are often encountering it for the first time.

Treehouse Shakers' Emily Bunning (choreographer/dancer) and Mara McEwin (writer/actor) founded the non-profit company back in 1997. Since then, the company has developed and performed 13 original dance-plays for children and adults. It has performed at schools, festivals and prestigious venues across the country, including the United Nations. The company has also been featured in numerous media outlets.

Treehouse Shakers explores themes of compassion, identity, imagination and artistic expression. The company has also featured storylines on different cultures such as West African folklore and the Middle East.



In addition to its creative work, Treehouse Shakers provides free and discounted tickets to underserved, low-income communities.

In the realm of education, Treehouse Shakers offers to young people and adults courses on dance, storytelling, writing, drama and other creative subjects. The company also has staff development workshops for educators who want to enhance the classroom environment with more arts initiatives.



in the spotlight

An interview with Artistic Director **Mara McEwin**

What was the genesis for producing a performance based on this book?

The Boy Who Grew Flowers is a favorite book for the Treehouse Shakers Artistic Leadership team, Emily Bunning and me. It has been a story we have told our own children many times that has great meaning about accepting and celebrating our unique differences, and remembering the wonderful qualities that also tie us together.

What sort of theatrical elements have you developed to tell the story and why?

We have told this story in our signature way of melding modern dance with theater, but also with many other theatrical elements. We use shadow puppetry, large shadows and rod puppets to help tell the story. The music, composed by Martyn Axe, was created to celebrate the story and movement, but is a beautiful soundtrack that can be enjoyed on its own. The performance allows the viewer to experience the story in many ways, and to be provoked to think differently while watching.

Are there any differences between the stage production and the book? If so, what are they?

Although we follow the story of the book within the play, we also needed to make the stage production a rich and full story. The picture book isn't very long, and our productions need to be within 45-50 minutes for our young audiences. We have added scenes, since a play needs language and dialogue between characters that might have originally been simply a detailed narrative within the book. The choreographer, Emily Bunning, created a rich story of movement that is carried throughout the play. One such scene is when the students attend the school dance. Emily richly carried the movement from the classroom, into the school dance sequence, making the two scenes tie together really well.

Why do you think it's important to tell this story?

It is important to celebrate our differences. The author of the book was inspired to write the story for her brother who has autism. Rink grows flowers out of his head, but the kids and townspeople don't actually know this. Instead they make fun of Rink for where he

lives, what his mother wears and the strange people in his family. In the end, he becomes the hero for helping the new girl with a pair of new dancing shoes. Together, they prove that being kind, helping one another [and] celebrating our individualities are qualities that each of us should fuel within ourselves.

Why is children's theater so important?

Theater for young people shouldn't be any different than theater for grown-ups. Young people deserve to have high-quality, highly artistic work that not only entertains, but inspires curiosity, thought and empathy, and provides an opportunity to experience exceptional art. When one is watching a play or a dance, or listening to music as a group, there is something so communal and powerful that happens within the audience. A young mind is the opportunity for an artist to fill the stage with powerful and visually vibrant images that can nourish a young person.

What has the audience reaction been like?

Why do you think they reacted that way?

The audiences who have experienced this show have truly loved the work. We have had students tell us that the show is about one's heart, and not about judging someone by their looks. Students love the shadows, the puppetry, dance and the actors. We have had students return to their classrooms really thinking about how we can all celebrate our own differences, and accept each other for who we truly are.

What do you hope audience members get from this performance?

We want audiences to not only enjoy the performance, but to be taken on a storytelling and visual journey. They are experiencing a story in a new way that we hope will inspire their own creativity and life journeys, but will also encourage them to cherish the people around them for who they truly are.

inspired ideas in the classroom

P
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	Teacher Focus	Student Activity	NJ Student Learning Standards
P	<p>Prepare for the performance</p> <p>If you have 5 minutes... Talk to your students about what it means to be different from the majority of people around you. Talk about how the characters in the story have unique characteristics.</p> <p>If you have 10 minutes... (above conversation and...) Continue to talk to students about inclusion and what that word means. Ask students to think about a time when they may have felt different or excluded from an activity.</p> <p>If you have 20 minutes... (above conversations and...) Ask students to talk about their feelings of being different and excluded.</p>	<p>Think about how you are different and similar to other people in your class. How do you think it feels to be excluded from an activity because you are different?</p>	<p>English Language Arts NJLSA.SL1.</p> <p>Social Studies 6.3 Active Citizenship in the 21st Century</p>
E	<p>Experience the performance</p> <p>Encourage your students to pay attention to the different characters in the story and their unique characteristics.</p>	<p>What makes each character in the story unique? Think about Rink and his family.</p> <p>Is the Bowagon family different because they live apart from everyone else in town or do they live apart because they are different?</p>	<p>English Language Arts NJLSA.SL1.</p> <p>Visual & Performing Arts 1.4 Aesthetic Response & Critique</p>
R	<p>Reflect, respond and read</p> <p>Read the About the Book section in the TRG to your students. Discuss the author's inspiration for writing this story. Explain what autism is and how different it can be in each person who has it. Discuss the concept of inclusion. Show your students the video <i>Brotherly Love: An Autism Story</i>. (youtube.com/watch?v=Dx_ckSWOS6o&feature=youtu.be)</p> <p>Ask students to discuss what is special about Austin and his brother's relationship.</p>	<p>Listen to the author's inspiration for writing this story. How do you think the author feels about her brother?</p>	<p>English Language Arts NJLSA.SL1. NJLSA.SL2.</p>
F	<p>Focus</p> <p>Encourage students to think about their own unique characteristics. Facilitate the creation of a collaborative Venn diagram on the board detailing the students' differences and similarities. Draw two big intersecting circles on the board. In the area where the circles intersect, write the characteristics that students identify as being similar to others. In the areas that do not intersect, write the characteristics that are unique to students.</p>	<p>Draw or make a list of your characteristics that you think you have in common with others in your class. Now draw or make a list of characteristics that you think are different from those of your classmates. Help your teacher make a collaborative Venn diagram of the class similarities and differences. Notice how alike you all are.</p>	<p>English Language Arts NJLSA.SL1. NJLSA.SL2. NJLSA.R7.</p>
O	<p>Originate</p> <p>Make copies of Activity Sheet 1. Instruct students to trace their hand onto a piece of construction paper. Help students find a word from the Venn diagram that identifies them. Have students write that word in the middle of their tracing.</p>	<p>Look at Activity Sheet 1. Notice there is a drawing of a flower stem without a flower head. Trace your hand onto a piece of construction paper. Find a word from the collaborative Venn diagram that you believe describes you. Write that word in the middle of your tracing. Cut the tracing of your hand out of brightly colored construction paper. Glue your cutout to the top of the flower stem to complete the flower. Use additional construction paper as needed.</p>	<p>English Language Arts NJLSA.SL1. NJLSA.W2.</p> <p>Visual & Performing Arts 1.1 The Creative Process</p>
R	<p>Rehearse</p> <p>Have students share their flowers with their peers by explaining why they chose the word on their flower. Arrange the student's flowers on a bulletin board or around the room for a gallery walk. Have students walk around viewing each other's flowers. Help students to talk about the differences and similarities in their flowers. Solicit help from a visual arts teacher for ways to arrange your gallery walk or for more creative ways to make flowers from hand cutouts.</p>	<p>After you have completed your own flower, display it in the class. Can you think of other ways to create artwork from your hand cutout? All of the flowers will be included in a gallery walk. One at a time, talk about your flower and why you chose the word in the middle of your flower. Show appreciation and support to your classmates as they talk about their own flower. Notice how it feels to be included in the gallery walk.</p>	<p>English Language Arts NJLSA.SL1. NJLSA.SL2. NJLSA.SL4.</p> <p>Visual & Performing Arts 1.3 Performance 1.4 Aesthetic Responses & Critique</p>
M	<p>Make magic</p> <p>Invite other classes, teachers, and staff to your class gallery walk. Encourage your students to explain to the audience what they have learned from the story. Encourage students to talk about their uniqueness.</p>	<p>As other students, teachers and staff come into your classroom, take them on a gallery walk around the room to view the beautiful flowers everyone has created. Explain your flower and the word you wrote in the middle of your flower. Help your audience to understand the importance of inclusion.</p>	<p>English Language Arts NJLSA.SL1. NJLSA.SL2. NJLSA.SL4.</p> <p>Visual & Performing Arts 1.3 Performance 1.4 Aesthetic Response & Critique</p>

curriculum standards

NJ Arts Standards

1.1 The Creative Process

All students will demonstrate an understanding of the elements and principles that govern the creation of works of art in dance, music, theatre, and visual art.

1.2 History of Arts & Culture

All students will understand the role, development, and influence of the arts throughout history and across cultures.

1.3 Performance

All students will synthesize skills, media, methods and technologies that are appropriate to creating, performing and/or presenting works of art in dance, music, theatre and visual art.

1.4 Aesthetic Response & Critique

All students will demonstrate and apply an understanding of arts philosophies, judgment and analysis to works of art in dance, music, theatre and visual art.

National Arts Standards

- 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.
- 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
- 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
- 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

new jersey student learning standards

English Language Arts

NJLSA.R7.

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

NJLSA.W2.

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization and analysis of content.

NJLSA.SL1.

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively

NJLSA.SL2.

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

NJLSA.SL4.

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience

Social Studies

6.3: Active Citizenship in the 21st Century

All students will acquire the skills needed to be active, informed citizens who value diversity and promote cultural understanding by working collaboratively to address the challenges that are inherent in living in an interconnected world.

FIND THE STANDARDS

For more detailed information on the standards, visit these websites:

NJ ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

state.nj.us/education/cccs/2016/ela

NJ SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

state.nj.us/education/cccs/2014/ss

NJ WORLD LANGUAGE STANDARDS

state.nj.us/education/aps/cccs/wl

NJ ARTS STANDARDS

state.nj.us/education/cccs/2009/1.pdf

NATIONAL ARTS STANDARDS

nationalartsstandards.org

cultural connections

Celebrating Neurodiversity

The Boy Who Grew Flowers was inspired by the author's brother who has autism. Jen Wojtowicz's motivation in writing the story was to encourage empathy and compassion towards those who may be different, like her brother.

People with autism, and similarly Asperger syndrome, often experience social isolation because they don't fit the mold of the vast numbers of people who are neurotypical. Communities that are not aware of autism may shun those who have it because of their atypical behavior. Until the 1980s in the United States, many people with undiagnosed autism and other mental or physical development issues would be locked away in institutions where they would be heavily medicated, according to a 2015 article in *Spectrum*. For many years, even when the practice of institutionalization became less prevalent, school systems proved inept at providing therapeutic and educational services that would help children with an atypical mental or physical makeup, according to another article on the Interactive Autism Network website.

Thankfully, there has been a sea of change in recent years in treating autism, Asperger syndrome and other neurological and physical differences. Many school districts now offer progressive and comprehensive therapies to children, after years of advocacy work by parents.

Moving away from the old school method of simply labeling these conditions as pathological, researchers have also made steady inroads in studying autism and other mental differences in a serious, progressive way. These innovative studies have yielded insights that autism, Asperger syndrome, ADHD, OCD and the like are not errors to be fixed, but are simply normal traits that make up the vast tapestry of the human gene pool. Secondly, neurodiversity is analogous to biodiversity. Pioneering research has suggested that neurodiversity persists in the human population because these conditions are important evolutionary adaptations and may confer certain advantages for survival in the world.

Studies have shown that people on the autism spectrum are uniquely adept at identifying and remembering minute details and have enhanced sensual perception of the world around them. This heightened sense of the environment may have contributed to a community's survival. A gene linked to novelty-seeking behavior is connected to ADHD.

Could it be that ADHD persists in the human population because people with ADHD are more inventive and creative than neurotypical people? Research suggests this, according to an article in *AMA Journal of Ethics*.

Under this growing movement recognizing neurological differences as a positive, the neurodivergent and their advocates, such as parents and psychologists, have advocated that these differences are not pathological. Neurodiversity advocates have called for inclusion in society and for work and classroom accommodations. Companies have taken notice that people who are different could be just as capable as others. For example, there has been a trend among some tech companies to hire people on the autism spectrum because of their high capacity in analyzing vast amounts of data and their adeptness in dealing with complex systems, according to a 2017 article in the *Harvard Business Review*.

Some people with neurological and physical differences have also taken it one step further by challenging ableist thought and language that diminish or discriminate people like them. Disability rights advocates are championing that people with conditions like autism don't need to be fixed, but instead need accommodation, and people who are different shouldn't be patronized, but they should be held up as inspirational figures so that able-bodied people can feel better about themselves.

"Just like most forms of discrimination, ableism often shows its ugly face from nondisabled people with good intentions. Unfortunately, good intentions never solved any problems," writes Leah Smith, a disability advocate for the Center for Disability Rights. "The best way to de-root ableism in our everyday lives is to ensure that there's always a seat at the table for those who are like you and those who are not, but also checking ourselves on how we treat people with disabilities once they are at the table. As simple as these sounds, de-rooting ableism is often as simple as just treating disabled people like you would anyone else. Novel idea, I know."

vocabulary

Ableism

Prejudice or discrimination against people who have neurological, physical, intellectual and psychiatric differences from the majority of society. This type of discrimination may take the form of physical barriers that impede wheelchairs or walkers. Other forms of ableism includes labeling differences as pathologies that need to be fixed or holding up people with disabilities as inspiration for able bodied people. Many disability advocates find this inspiration fodder patronizing and dehumanizing.

Autism

A complex neurological condition that often manifests in repetitive or rigid behavior, difficulty in engaging in social interaction, and sensitivity to stimuli like crowded, noisy spaces. People's degree of autism varies, from severely nonverbal to high functioning, thus leading medical professionals to call it autism spectrum. Scientists have performed studies that suggest autism arises in people due to genetics and/or environment. Numerous peer-reviewed studies have shown that there is no link between vaccination and autism.

Inclusion

Inclusion in the context of human society is the practice of including or accommodating people who are different from the majority. These differences, which may include race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and ability, have usually caused people to be overlooked or discriminated against

Modern Dance

A genre of theatrical dance that arose in the late 19th century and early 20th century in the United States and Europe as a rejection against the strictness and formality of classical ballet. Early modern dancers sought greater freedom of movement and expression than what was possible in ballet. Over the years, the definition of modern dance has morphed to include dance that addresses contemporary issues and/or movements inspired by folk dances from Africa, Japan and different cultural groups, other than from the Western World.

Neurodiversity

The concept that neurological differences are a normal part of the human gene pool and are not errors to be fixed. It's a point of view that sees differences in cognitive ability and function to be celebrated and accommodated and not as pathologies. Australian sociologist Judy Singer first coined the term neurodiversity in her 1998 paper, according to the website Spectrum Suite.

Neurotypical

Refers to people who don't have autism or other neurological differences, such as ADHD, OCD, dyslexia, central auditory processing issues, etc.

Pathology

A general term for disease, an abnormal condition, or a deviation that is harmful.

Puppets

Small figures, typically of a human being or animal, made of various materials and manipulated by hand. Examples include the Muppets and characters found on *Sesame Street*.

Shadow Play

Shadows are a dark shape or area that is formed when an opaque object is placed in front of a light source. Shadow play happens when people use puppets, props or their bodies to make shadows on a wall or another material in order to convey information, to entertain, or to tell a story.

Stagecraft

A general term that refers to activity in a theater's backstage, whether before, during or after a performance. Usually it refers to the technical aspect of staging a performance such as writing the play, light and set design, costume and makeup, musical composition, etc.



resources

Websites

Treehouse Shakers

treehouseshakers.com

Barefoot Books

barefootbooks.com

The Boy Who Grew Flowers, book summary

publishersweekly.com/978-1-84148-686-4

The Geekly Reader: *The Boy Who Grew Flowers*

by Jen Wojtowicz (art by Steve Adams)

wired.com/2008/07/the-geekly-re-1-3/

Jen Wojtowicz

barefootbooks.com/profile/5748/

jennysdresserdrawer.com

Steve Adams, Illustrator

steveadamsillustration.com

painted-words.com/portfolio/steve-adams/

What is Neurodiversity?

autismawarenesscentre.com/un-adopts-new-goals-disabilities/

The Myth of the Normal Brain: Embracing

Neurodiversity

journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/myth-normal-brain-embracing-neurodiversity/2015-04

Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage

hbr.org/2017/05/neurodiversity-as-a-competitive-advantage

The missing generation, article on adults with autism

spectrumnews.org/features/deep-dive/the-missing-generation/

#Ableism, Center for Disability Rights

cdrnys.org/blog/uncategorized/ableism/

Videos

Treehouse Shakers' *The Boy Who Grew Flowers* Promo

vimeo.com/358424253

The Boy Who Grew Flowers Written by Wojtowicz

Illustrated by Steve Adams, READ ALOUD

youtube.com/watch?v=yVES2NuBg6k

Treehouse Shakers 20th Anniversary Gala Video

youtube.com/watch?v=SFIX5xBqWUI

Human Neurodiversity Should Be Celebrated, Not

Treated as a Disorder | Op-Ed | NowThis

youtube.com/watch?v=aWxmEv7fOFY

Overcoming Ableism: What You Don't Know As An Able

Bodied Person | Naty Rico | TEDxUCIrvine

youtube.com/watch?v=X1xnyVCBYNQ

Books

Spaghetti in a Hot Dog Bun:

Having the Courage To Be Who You Are

by Maria Dismondy (writer) and Kim Shaw (illustrator)

Cardinal Rule Press, 2008

The Invisible Boy

by Trudy Ludwig (writer) and Patrice Barton (illustrator)

Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2013

All My Stripes: A Story for Children with Autism

by Shaina Rudolph, Danielle Royer and Jennifer Zivoian

Magination Press, 2015

I See Things Differently: A First Look at Autism

by Pat Thomas

B.E.S. Publishing, 2014

Uniquely Human: A Different Way of Seeing Autism

by Barry M. Prizant

Simon & Schuster, 2015

NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism

and the Future of Neurodiversity

by Steve Silberman

Avery, 2015

njpac staff

(partial listing)

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the arts in your school

In-School Residencies: Drama + Social Studies. Dance + Math. It all adds up in NJPAC's In-School Residencies in which professional teaching artists partner with educators to bring the arts into the classroom. Each 7- to 10-week program culminates in a student performance or an interactive family workshop. All programs address state and national standards. NJPAC is the regional provider in New Jersey for international arts programs like the NJ Wolf Trap Program and Dancing Classrooms Global.

Assemblies: NJPAC presents engaging school assembly programs that are presented by professional artists that invite students into the enchanting world of live performance. NJPAC's assembly series promotes cultural awareness and invigorates learning by presenting works that are connected to your school's curriculum.

Professional Development: NJPAC Professional Development engages classroom teachers, arts specialists and teaching artists as integrated teams that combine arts pedagogy, content, classroom management and social behavioral strategies to ignite and inspire arts-rich classrooms. Working as a team empowers teachers to share practice and strategy. Our goal is to inspire artistic and intellectual capacities in students, building competence and confidence in both students and teachers.

study the arts at njpac

Saturday Programs: NJPAC's Saturday programs are geared towards students at every level—from those who dream of starring on Broadway to those who are still learning their scales. Students work with professional artists to build technique and develop their own creative style in film, contemporary modern dance, hip hop, jazz, musical theater and symphonic band.

Summer Programs: Want to begin to explore the arts? Or immerse yourself in the study of one genre? Then join us at NJPAC next summer in one of seven programs that spark the creativity in every child through the study of music, dance and theater.

For more information or to schedule an appointment, please call our education sales team at 973.353.7058 or email artseducation@njpac.org. Visit njpac.org/education

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