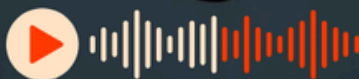


Fort Wayne
youththeatre
EDUCATION GUIDE

**MYSTERY OF THE
MURDERER
KILLING
MURDER.**



A TRUE CRIME PODCAST LIVE ON-STAGE

USING THIS GUIDE

This study guide is intended to be used before and after watching the show to help students explore and deepen their understanding of the play. Here's how you can use it in your classroom:

Class Discussion Questions - A list of questions created to encourage class discussions and/or reflections about themes and topics in the play. These questions are divided into pre-and post-show.

Pre/Post Show Activities - Activities teachers can do with their classes before and after seeing the show. Each activity has a description, rationale, list of objectives, and supplies list.

IN THE GUIDE

- About Us
- Elements of a Production
- About: The Director
- About: The Story & Playwright
- History
- Psychology
- Discussion Questions
- Activities: Games, Science, writing etc...

ABOUT: US



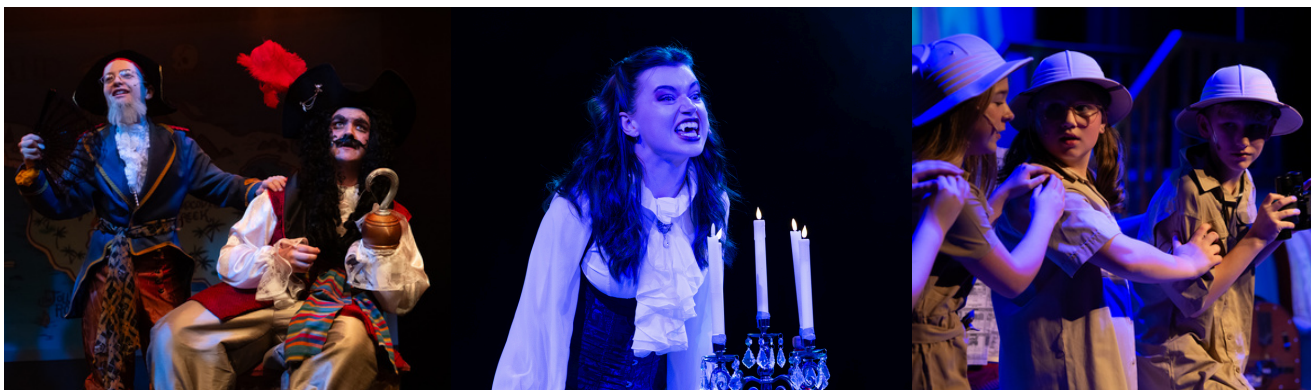
Did you know Fort Wayne Youth Theatre is the fifth oldest children's theatre in the country? Since 1934, we've been on a mission to educate, engage, and entertain through the power of live theatre.

It all started when the Old Fort Players (now Civic Theatre) imagined a place where children participated in theatre to develop poise, self-confidence, and an ability to express themselves creatively. Thus, the "Children's Theatre" was born! The very first class had 40 students – paying just \$1 for 8 weeks of lessons! Their first show, *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*, featured 75 young actors performing for audiences at the Majestic Theatre. Tickets were only 10¢ for kids and 25¢ for adults!

In 1978, Broadway actor Harvey Cocks took the lead as Executive Director, inspiring young performers for more than 40 years. In 1984, the Youth Theatre began its independent journey. Over the decades, Youth Theatre moved to different homes across the city before finding its place at Park Lake Professional Center in 2025. Today, Youth Theatre is guided by Executive Director Heather Closson, Artistic Director Christopher J. Murphy, and supported by Education Coordinator Yaro Carpenter, Creative Programming Intern Em Humbarger, and a team of amazing local artists.

Youth Theatre isn't just about what happens on stage—we take theatre into the community, too! Our touring troupe, Youth Theatre-On-The-Go, brings stories to schools, libraries, hospitals, and community centers. In 2018, our Young Heroes of Conscience series, which has celebrated inspiring figures like Anne Frank, Ruby Bridges, and Harriet Tubman, won the Mayor's Arts Award.

For over 90 years, countless youth have discovered their voices, made lifelong friends, and experienced the joy of storytelling. And the story is still being written – by the young artists of today.



ELEMENTS OF A PRODUCTION

Read below to learn about the key elements that make up a theatre production!

SETS

The scenery pieces that form the area in which the performers act out the play. Sometimes scenery is very realistic, making the audience think they are inside a real house, for example. Other times the scenery is quite fanciful or limited. What different sets can you name in the show? What time and place does it look like?

LIGHTS

The lighting instruments that help to create the right atmosphere on the stage. Lights direct the attention of the audience to specific areas of the stage or to a specific performer. The lights may be different colors to add special effects such as nighttime or a storm. How do the lights in this production show changes in the time and place?

PROPS

The objects performers carry to help them act out the story. Look for important props that help define character or place. Can you name a few?

MAKEUP

The cosmetic bases, blushes, lipsticks, mascara and eye liners which helps the performer physically become the character he/she is playing. Make-up is also used so that the performer's facial features can be seen clearly under the bright stage lights from a distance. Do you notice any special make-up in the show?

COSTUMES

The clothing the performers wear. Depending on the story being acted out, this clothing may be what a character of the time would have actually worn. It may also be very exaggerated or fantastic in the case of a dream or a fairy-tale. Costumes help the audience know what a character is like or where and when he/she lived. Are the costumes drab or colorful? Do they look realistic? What do they tell you about the time and place?

BEHIND THE SCENES

Learn about the director of *The Mystery of the Murderer Killing Murder*, Amy Ross!



AMY ROSS



Amy Ross has been teaching Vocal Music and Dance with FWCS for 35 years. During her career she has directed show choirs, school musicals and choreographed everything! Theatrical roles include Nancy in *"Oliver,"* Sister Robert Ann in *"Nunsense"* and Aldonza/Dulcinea in *"Man of La Mancha,"* Mrs. Lovette (Anthony Award) in *"Sweeney Todd,"* Dolly Levi in *"Hello Dolly,"* John Adams in *"1776,"* Dee Dee Allen in *"The Prom,"* and Felicia Dantine in *"I Hate Hamlet,"* and Joann in *"Company."* Now that she is retired from teaching, she is excited to fully invest herself in our local arts community.

BEHIND THE SCENES

More about the director Amy Ross!

How old were you when you got started in directing, and what inspired you to start?

I was directing my cousins in my grandparents living room every holiday when I was a kid! I joined the Youtheater in the eighth grade and have been involved ever since!

Did you have a favorite mentor or teacher that taught you?

I learned so much from Harvey Cocks during my Youtheater days and later when he directed me as Nancy in "OLIVER!"

What does your process look like?

My background is in music, so I tend to think musically in terms of themes, dynamic contrast, pace and tone. I am also a dancer so movement is also very important to me. I also like to have a "discovery" period where we play around with new ideas and improvise together.

What is your favorite show you have ever directed?

I received a grant from Macy's Department Store to produce "Yes, Virginia! The Musical" and it was so special. It is a beautiful story with fun characters (including dancing pigeons) and a heartwarming ending!

If someone wanted to be a director, how should they start?

Acting class! Sign up and learn how to be on stage! Then, get involved in the whole process by pulling flies, painting sets, creating costumes and props, designing a lighting plot and working backstage as well. A good director is also a good producer!

ABOUT: THE STORY & PLAYWRIGHT

OVERVIEW

The Mystery of the Murderer Killing Murder is a fast-paced comedy mystery that follows a group of aspiring true crime podcasters as they travel to the strange town of Shady Grove to investigate a shocking murder. Along the way, they encounter suspicious townspeople, chaotic police officers, bizarre pudding-related scandals, and clues that only seem to make the mystery even stranger. Filled with over-the-top characters, clever humor, and unexpected twists, this spoof of classic whodunnits and true crime culture keeps audiences laughing while trying to solve the case.

JACK CANFORA



Jack Canfora is an award-winning playwright whose work has been produced Off-Broadway and at theaters around the country. He is known for writing plays that balance humor, heart, and interesting characters. Some of his best-known plays include *Poetic License* and *Jericho*, which was named a "Critics' Pick" by The New York Times. Critics praised *Jericho* for its mix of wit, emotion, and powerful storytelling.

His other productions include *Place Setting*, *The Source*, *Fellow Travelers*, and *Tennessee Williams: A Life*, featuring actors such as Eli Wallach, Harris Yulin, and Mercedes Ruehl. Over the years, Canfora has received several honors for his writing, including two Edgerton Playwriting Awards and a 2016 Webby Award for Best Writing in a Web Series.

In addition to writing, Canfora is also the Artistic Director of New Normal Rep, an online theater company focused on new plays and performances. He lives in New York with his two children and two dogs.

THROWBACK: 2020

Read below to learn more about how this musical was created.

The Mystery of the Murderer Killing Murder takes place in March 2020, during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, many people were stuck at home, isolated from friends, school, work, and normal routines. As communities shut down and uncertainty grew, people searched for ways to stay connected, entertained, and informed.

One form of entertainment that became especially popular during this time was podcasts. Many people listened to podcasts while stuck at home because they created a sense of connection and distraction during an uncertain time.

About COVID-19

COVID-19 was a worldwide pandemic that began spreading rapidly in 2020. The virus changed everyday life for people across the globe, leading to school closures, canceled events, lockdowns, and long periods of isolation. Many people stayed home for weeks or months while communities worked to slow the spread of the illness.

The pandemic affected people in different ways emotionally as well. Feelings of stress, uncertainty, loneliness, grief, and boredom became very common during this time. Because people were spending so much time at home, many turned to things like streaming, social media, video games, and podcasts for comfort, entertainment, and connection.

Today

Even though the height of the pandemic has passed, COVID-19 still affects people today in many ways. The experience changed how people connect, communicate, learn, and spend their time. It also brought more attention to conversations about mental health, grief, burnout, and isolation, especially for young people. Many habits that became common during 2020, like virtual meetings, online entertainment, and podcasts, are still a big part of everyday life. Looking back at this time through theatre and comedy can help audiences reflect on both the challenges and the shared experiences that shaped an entire generation.



TRUE CRIME

Read below to learn about the True Crime genre of media.

What Is True Crime?

True crime is a genre of storytelling based on real crimes and real events. True crime stories can be found in podcasts, documentaries, books, television shows, movies, and online videos. Many focus on mysteries, investigations, unsolved cases, or the people involved in crimes.

Why Are People Interested in True Crime?

Many people enjoy true crime because it combines mystery, storytelling, and problem-solving. Audiences often become interested in trying to figure out what happened or why people made certain choices. True crime can also help people better understand human behavior, justice systems, and how communities respond during difficult situations.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, true crime podcasts became especially popular. Many people listened to them while isolated at home because they provided entertainment, distraction, and a sense of connection.

Ethics and Respect in True Crime

Even though true crime can be entertaining, it is important to remember that many true crime stories are based on real people and real tragedies. Behind every case are victims, families, friends, and communities who may still be affected by what happened.

Because of this, creators and audiences should think carefully about how crime stories are discussed and shared. Important questions include:

- Is the story being told respectfully?
- Are victims being treated like real people instead of entertainment?
- Is the focus on facts, or shock factor?
- How can storytellers balance entertainment with empathy?

Media & Mental Health

True crime can be interesting, but some true crime media may be too intense or mature for younger audiences. Many podcasts, documentaries, and shows include topics like violence, grief, fear, and real-life tragedy. It's important to protect your mental and emotional wellbeing and choose media that feels safe and appropriate for you. If something feels overwhelming, it's okay to take a break or choose lighter content instead.



DISCUSSION AND STUDY QUESTIONS

This activity is best suited for grades 1-6

Pre show discussion:

1. If you started a podcast with your friends, what would you talk about?
2. Why do you think people like to listen to scary stories?
3. What is the difference between a guess and a fact?
4. Do you like watching and listening to scary things? What is it?
5. What kind of clues can solve a mystery?

Post show discussion:

1. Which character changed the most throughout the story?
2. Did the podcast help the town, hurt the town, or both?
3. How did the show represent what life was like in 2020?
4. How did they solve the mystery?
5. What would you do if you lived in Shady Grove?

REVIEW

Using the template below, write a review after the play!

Title: _____

Director: _____

Genre (check all that apply)

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| ☐ Abstract | ☐ Historical |
| ☐ Adventure | ☐ Musical |
| ☐ Autobiographical | ☐ Mystery |
| ☐ Comedy | ☐ Puppetry |
| ☐ Drama | ☐ Tragedy |
| ☐ Fairytale | ☐ Other |

Plot - Give a basic summary of the story.

Setting - Describe the location/environment the story took place in.

REVIEW

Characters - Which characters stood out to you?

My Review

My Rating



PUDDING RECIPE

Best suited for 1-5 grade.

Healthy Chocolate Pudding

This creamy healthy chocolate pudding recipe is surprisingly easy to make!

Prep Time: 5 minutes minutes

Cook Time: 10 minutes minutes

Total Time: 15 minutes minutes

Yield: 3 servings

Ingredients

2 cups milk of choice OR canned coconut milk

heaping 1/8 tsp salt

1/4 cup dutch cocoa powder

1/3 cup sweetener (sugar, pure maple syrup, erythritol, or honey)

1/2 cup milk of choice + 3 tbsp cornstarch

optional 3 oz chocolate chips or broken-up bar

3/4 tsp pure vanilla extract

Instructions

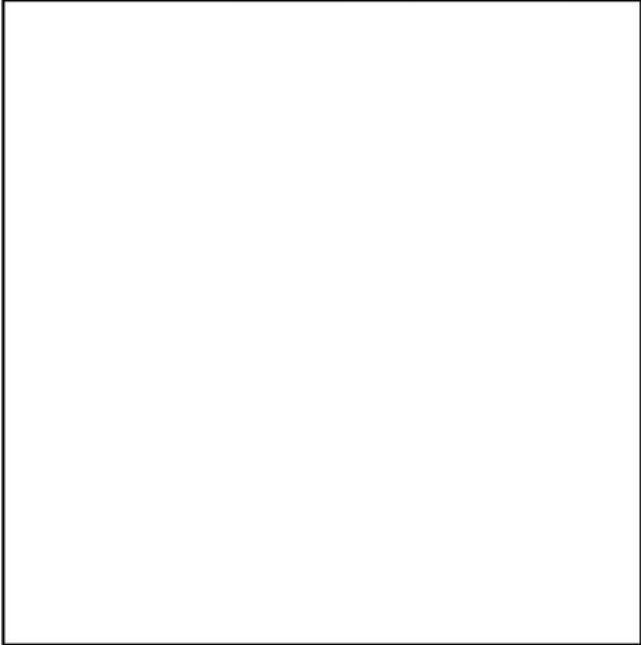
Heat the 2 cups milk of choice in a saucepan with the salt, cocoa powder, and sweetener. Meanwhile, whisk the cornstarch and 1/2 cup milk in a small bowl until dissolved. When the 2 cups milk are warm, add the cornstarch mixture and bring to a boil. Once boiling, stir constantly for 2 minutes. Lower to a simmer for an additional minute, then turn off the heat. Once the heat is off, stir in the vanilla and broken-up chocolate pieces until the chocolate melts. Transfer the pudding to the refrigerator to thicken. It gets thicker the longer it sits and will be ready to consume after a few hours or overnight.

*Note: I've not tried arrowroot and have only tried this recipe with Dutch cocoa powder so can't vouch for the taste if regular unsweetened cocoa powder is used in its place. But you are always free to experiment!



WRITING

Develop your ideas for a *killer* podcast!



Draw your podcast's logo!

VOCABULARY

Podcasting vocab

PODCAST

A blend of "iPod" and "broadcast," it represents audio or video content delivered via RSS feed to computers or mobile devices.

"My little brother loves listening to a story podcast before nap time."

EPISODE

An individual audio file within a series.

"I can't wait to watch the next episode of my favorite podcast!"

FEED/RSS FEED

The web address you subscribe to, which allows apps to check for new episodes automatically.

"I used the RSS feed to get new episodes of my favorite podcast delivered automatically."

HOST

The person speaking, interviewing, or guiding the podcast.

"My teacher will host our classroom podcast this week."

PODCAST FORMAT

The structure of the show, which can be solo (monologue), co-hosted, interview-based, panel, or storytelling.

"Our podcast to be in story telling format, using different voices, and sound effects."

PODCAST INTRO/OUTRO

The opening and closing sections, often with music.

"My friend is writing our podcast intro, and outro music with a custom voice clip greeting."

SHOW NOTES

A web page accompanying the episode containing links, summaries, and resources mentioned.

"You can find the links to all of the things we've talked about today, in the show notes."

RIDDLE SOLVING

See how many riddles you can solve!

1. If you've got me, you want to share me; if you share me, you haven't kept me.
2. Where does today come before yesterday?
3. The more of this there is, the less you see.
4. You walk into a dark, cold room that contains a kerosene lamp, a candle, and a fireplace. What would you light first?
5. People make me, keep me, change me, and raise me, even though I can be very dirty.
6. What breaks yet never falls, and what falls yet never breaks?
7. What has many keys but can't open a single lock?
8. What goes through cities and towns, but never moves?
9. What can you hold in your left hand but not in your right?
10. You see a boat filled with people. It has not sunk, but when you look again you don't see one single person on the boat. Why?
11. Rough and gray as a rock, I'm plain as can be. But deep inside there's great beauty in me. What am I?
12. What's the only thing you can put in a bucket and make it lighter?
13. I'm odd, but take away one letter and I become even. What am I?
14. How can the number four be half of five?
15. I have keys but no locks. I have space but no room. You can enter but you can't leave.

1) A secret 2) The dictionary 3) Darkness. 4) A match. 5) Money 6) Day and night. 7) A piano. 8) A road 9) Your right elbow 10) The people were all married 11) An oyster 12) A hole. 13) Seven 14) In Roman numerals, four is "IV," which makes up half the letters in the word "FIVE." 15) A keyboard

PRINT DUSTING

Be a detective! Learn about fingerprinting, then try it out!

Fingerprints are the tiny raised ridges and patterns found on our fingers and thumbs. Every person has unique fingerprints, which means no two people have the exact same pattern. These ridges help us grip objects and hold things more easily.

Scientists, detectives, and law enforcement officers use fingerprints to help identify people and solve mysteries or crimes. By comparing fingerprints left behind on objects, investigators can look for matches and gather clues about who was present. Fingerprints are one of the oldest and most reliable forms of identification used today.

What you'll need:

Cocoa powder (or other very finely milled powder)
Small dry brushes with long bristles
Clear tape
A smooth surface
Black paper

Instructions:

Begin by choosing a smooth, dry surface such as a desk, plastic folder, or tabletop. Wipe the surface clean so there is no dirt or moisture.

Press your thumb firmly onto the surface for a few seconds. Even if you cannot see it, your fingerprint has been left behind because of the natural oils on your skin.

Dip a small dry brush lightly into cocoa powder. Gently brush the powder over the area where you placed your fingerprint. Be careful not to press too hard, or the print may smudge.

As the powder sticks to the oils from your fingerprint, the print pattern will begin to appear. Continue brushing lightly until the fingerprint is clearly visible. Tear off a small piece of clear tape and carefully press it over the fingerprint. Smooth the tape gently so it picks up the powdered print.

Slowly peel the tape away from the surface. You have now "lifted" the fingerprint.

Place the tape onto a piece of dark-colored paper so the fingerprint is easier to see and study.

Observe your fingerprint closely. Try to identify whether your print is an arc, loop, or whorl pattern. Compare your fingerprint with classmates and notice how each print is unique.

Everyone's finger prints
follow a type of pattern.
Can you identify yours?

FINGERPRINT PATTERNS



loop



whorl



arch

MYSTERY ON AIR

Turn your classroom into a podcast studio!

Students will work alone or in small groups to create a short audio segment inspired by real podcasts, radio shows, and dramatic storytelling.

Objectives:

- Students will practice:
- Speaking clearly and confidently
- Creative storytelling
- Teamwork and listening skills
- Organizing ideas
- Using voice and sound to entertain

Challenge:

Try to include:

- A fun introduction
- Clear speaking
- At least one sound effect
- A strong ending

Step 1: Choose a Podcast Type

Have your students pick a genre of podcast. Some ideas are:

- Book/Movie/TV Review
- History
- Social Media Trends
- "A Day in my Life" Audio Diary
- Field Trip Recap
- School News Report
- Interview of a classmate/teacher/coach
- True Crime

Reflection Questions:

- What part was easiest?
- What was challenging?
- Did your group work well together?
- What would you improve next time?
- What podcasts or radio shows inspired your idea?

Step 2: Plan Your Episode

Answer these questions before recording:

- What is your podcast called?
- Who is speaking?
- What is your topic?
- Will you use sound effects or music?
- How will you keep listeners interested?

Podcast Tips:

- Speak slowly and clearly
- Face the microphone
- Don't interrupt others
- Use expression in your voice
- Have fun and be creative!

Step 3: Record!

Students can use:

- Phones or tablets
- Chromebook microphones
- Simple voice recorder apps

SECRET MESSAGE

Solve the code! Best suited for grades 1-5.

Figure out which letters the symbols stand for to crack the secret message!
The same symbol always means the same letter. Have fun solving the mystery!

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
												
N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
												

YOUR TURN!

Best suited for grades 2-12.

Your Screen Froze Game

This is an acting/drama game designed for a virtual (Zoom/Teams) setting that captures the chaotic, high-stakes, and often comedic tension of 2020 remote communication.

Objective: To maintain a dramatic or mundane scene while navigating intentional technical disruptions.

Setup

Players: 3-6 players.

Setting: Video conferencing platform (Zoom, Google Meet).

Roles: Players are acting out a scene (e.g., a high-stakes business meeting, a family dinner, a tense breakup, a job interview) that takes place entirely online.

The Mechanic: A designated "Director" (or players take turns) will shout "FREEZE!" at random intervals.

Rules of Play

The Freeze: When "FREEZE!" is called, the targeted player must immediately hold their current pose and facial expression. They cannot speak or move.

The Chaos: While one person is frozen, the other players must continue the scene, reacting to the frozen person's awkward pose as if it is normal.

The Un-Freeze: After 10-15 seconds, the director says "Resume." The frozen player must immediately continue speaking exactly where they left off, or immediately pivot to a new, panicked topic as if nothing happened.

Zoom Specifics: Encourage participants to use real 2020 tropes: muting by accident, having a pet interrupt, looking at another screen, or pretending to be in a tropical location.

2020 Scenario Ideas

The High-Stakes Pitch: A team trying to impress a client, but the CEO keeps freezing in a ridiculous, open-mouthed expression while proposing a "disruptive" idea.

Virtual Holiday Dinner: Tensions run high with extended family, but whenever a touchy subject (politics, 2020 lockdowns) is brought up, someone freezes, forcing others to talk over them.

The Remote Job Interview: An applicant trying to appear professional while their screen freezes, making them look panicked and shaky, forcing them to blame "weak Wi-Fi."

Winning the Game

The "winner" is the person who can maintain the dramatic tension best while navigating the technical issues, or the person who makes everyone else break character first.

Dramatic Focus

The drama comes from the contrast between the urgency of the dialogue and the absurdity of the frozen, digital image. The game explores themes of isolation, loss of control, and the performative nature of online interaction during 2020.

YOUR TURN!

Best suited for grades 4-12.

One Word at a Time Game

How To Play:

Form a Circle: Participants stand or sit in a circle to establish a clear turn-taking order.

Start the Story: The first person starts with one word (e.g., "Once,"), the next says one word ("upon"), and so on ("a," "time," etc.).

Keep it Flowing: Go around the circle rapidly, allowing the story to take unexpected, often humorous, turns.

Punctuation: Players can say "full stop" or "period" to indicate the end of a sentence.

Objective: The goal is to build a coherent narrative together rather than trying to force a specific, pre-planned plot.

Tips for Success

Listen Actively: Pay close attention to the word immediately preceding yours to ensure the story makes sense.

Don't Overthink: Free your mind to allow spontaneous contributions; do not pre-form a story in your head.

Keep it Simple: Small words (like "and," "the," "he") are often necessary for the story to flow.

Show Related Prompt:

Host your own impromptu podcast, by having 2 people tell a story about a murder, or mystery that took place, in front of a group, or into a recording device.

GET INVOLVED

Fort Wayne Youtheatre
ACADEMY
of Performing Arts

ACTING | DANCE | VOICE
TECH THEATRE | PRIVATE LESSONS

**Learn More by visiting fwyt.org
or by scanning the QR code below!**



Write us a letter!

We'd love to know what you thought of the show, what other shows you'd love to see us perform, or any questions you have for our staff, cast, or crew about Youtheatre!

Send correspondence to:
Fort Wayne Youtheatre
2426 Lake Ave.
Fort Wayne, IN 46805

FURTHER RESOURCES

Want to dive even deeper? Here are some additional resources that connect to the themes of this production!

[Make Your Own De-Coder](#)

[Mystery Detectives! A Kid-Friendly Podcast](#)

[Printable Detective Mystery Activity](#)

[NPR's Student Podcast Challenge](#)

[PBS Kids Podcasts](#)

[Wink Murder Game](#)

Suggested Reading

Elementary:

- 7 Ate 9 by Tara Lazar
- The Upper Case: Trouble in Capital City by Tara Lazar
- Time Flies by Tara Lazar

Middle:

- Murder is Bad Manners by Robin Stevens
- Enola Holmes Series by Nancy Springer
- Aggie Morton: Mystery Queen Series by Marthe Jocelyn

High:

- The Naturals Series by Jennifer Lynn Barnes
- One of Us Is Lying by Karen M. McManus
- Firekeeper's Daughter by Angeline Boulley



Language Arts

STANDARDS

Most Youth theatre productions are literature-based and on the recommended reading list of the Library of Congress.

Language Arts Standard: Perceive, identify, describe and analyze the distinguishing characteristics of form, structure and style of story.

- Retell story identifying plot, theme, characters, and setting.
- Recall story plot utilizing chronological order.

Language Arts Standard: Evaluate Theatre/Literary work based on critical perception and analysis.

- Share perception of theatre experience in the area of voice, movement, mood and motivation.
- Make suggestions for alternative endings.
- Analyze and critique story and performance through creative writing.
- Create a similar story through creative writing.

Language Arts Standard: Use Theatre /Literary work to develop affective areas of self-concept, problem solving and interpersonal skills.

- React to feelings of self and others within a production.
- Identify conflict within story as it relates to self and others.
- Compare and contrast problems and resolutions found in different stories and real life situations.
- Express personal attitudes, values, and belief systems as it relates to theatre piece.
- Interact freely in conversations, class discussions and dramatic activities.
- Contribute to the solving of problems through dramatization/improvisation.

Language Arts Standard: Examine Theatre /Literary work in a historical and multicultural context.

- Identify similarities and differences between characters from diverse cultures depicted.
- Identify historical differences/figures in different time frames depicted in story.
- Identify significance of historical aspects in story.

Exploring Aesthetics: A Philosophical Basis for Life!

- Attending live theatre helps children value its importance to the community and helps develop a lifelong commitment and love of Theatre and Literature. Students experience aesthetic growth through appreciation of Theatre.
- Students discover through experience that making art is an essential human activity. It requires collaboration, and enhances creative thinking.

