

THE ARKANSAW BEAR



GREATEST DANCING BEAR TAKES HIS FINAL BOW

Talking about life and death can be a difficult topic to discuss with young children. Not understanding how things can die can lead to confusion, guilt, and blame when death is encountered during a young person's life. In an effort to create a positive and life affirming story about death, Aurand Harris wrote "The Arkansaw Bear."

In the play, young Tish is aware that her dear grandfather is dying. Her mother and aunt are unable to comfort her, due to their own grief, so Tish retreats to her favorite tree to think about all that is happening.

She wishes on Star Bright, the first star out that night, and asks to understand why

Grandpa has to die.

Her wish is granted through meeting the World's Greatest Dancing Bear who is at the end of his career. He is being followed by the Ringmaster who needs to take him to the Great Center Ring.

Accompanied by his friend the Mime, Dancing Bear has many dances and experiences to share, but no one to share them with. He discovers that Tish has learned many things from her Grandpa and is in fact "a chip off the old block."

Through Tish's urging, Dancing Bear wishes to have someone to give his dances to so that they will live on.

Enter Little Bear, a young country bear who Tish finds out has lost his Papa and wants to find a way to honor him.

Little Bear agrees to learn Dancing Bear's dances as a way to "do something for the living" and keep the dancing tradition alive.

His legacy intact, Dancing Bear can finally take the Ringmasters' hand and exit into his next performance in the Great Center Ring.

Tish returns from the fantasy with new wisdom, ready to comfort her aunt and mother and to keep the memory of her grandfather alive through her own life.

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NEEDED: AN AUDIENCE!

We are excited to be performing our tour at your school and are aware that this may be the first life theatre event that many of your students have ever seen. Please take a moment to go over these simple guides for watching a show so students know their role as audience.

- Be an active listener as the play needs your full attention so you can follow the action.
- Allow the actors to perform during the play and ask them questions after they are through.
- Keep talking to friends to a minimum but laugh, clap and cheer for our actors.
- Remember you model behavior for your students. An attentive teacher = an attentive class.

VAPA STANDARDS

- Artistic Perception (TA1)
- Creative Expression (TA2)
- Cultural and Historical Context (TA 3)
- Aesthetic Evaluation (TA4)
- Connections, Relationships and Applications. (TA5)

THINGS TO TALK ABOUT BEFORE THE PLAY

- The Greatest Dancing Bear is part of a circus troop. Has anyone in the class ever been to the circus? What kinds of acts were there? What was their favorite act? Were there animal performers? Acrobats? (TA 3)
- In our play there is a large, beautiful tree that our main character, Tish, goes to so she can think. Does anyone in the class have a special or secret place they like to go to when they need to think? How does going to that special place help to clear your head? (TA 4)
- In our play there is a mime who is Bear's best friend. He helps him get ready for performances, gives him reassurance and helps him hide. What kinds of things do

best friends do for you? How do they help you out when things are difficult? (TA 5)

- The set for our play has one set piece, a large tree, and a backdrop which create the main setting. We also show when we are in the hospital. What are some ways that we can show the hospital without changing the set? What



choices might you make with costumes, lights or sound effects to show the other location? (TA 2)

- In the play Tish is learning that every thing has a time to live and a time to die. Star Bright tells her that it is all part of the "Great Circle of Life." What does that saying mean? How do the changing seasons help to show us a circle of life? (TA 4)
- One of the hardest things to do is to understand why things change and how to cope with change. Have a discussion about changes students have made, be it moving to a new neighborhood, house, or school. How did they handle the change? (TA 5)

THINGS TO DO BEFORE THE PLAY

Mime Time

In our play, there is a mime who only speaks through actions. Have students write down some simple phrases on a sheet of paper. Collect the sheets and see if students can act out the ideas without speaking. Possible phrases are:

I have an awful toothache.

Do you like my new shirt?

Where are we going now? (TA 2)

Our Own Circus

Creating a circus in the classroom can be a fun way to introduce the event to children who have never gone. Have students come up with some ideas for circus acts that can be written on the board. Once there are ideas, break the class into smaller groups—each one assigned a different act. Play the Ringmaster yourself and announce each act to allow students to share their dramatic creations. (TA 2)

California's Flag Bear

In our play there is a friendly dancing bear, but in reality bears are some of the fiercest creatures in nature. Because of their strength the bear is found on the California State Flag. Included in this guide is a flag fact sheet and coloring page to help kids learn all about our State Flag. (TA 5 Social Studies)

"That's not a quick one-two-buckle-my-shoe wish. No. That's a think-and-show-it, then you-know it, come true wish."

-Star Bright

Fantasy Sequence

In our play Tish uses her imagination to go to the place where she meets the World's Greatest Dancing Bear. In theatre this is called a fantasy sequence. Allow students to experiment with this convention by creating a scene that at one point shows what is going on in one of the characters imaginations. Once kids have had time to plan, share the scenes and have the rest of the class talk about when the scene was reality and when it was fantasy. (TA 1)

Let's All Dance!

You don't need fancy dance steps to have a good time! Even though the Dancing Bear has lots of dances, students can share steps they know with each other. Put on some fun music, make a circle and let each child show a dance step that the rest of the class can follow! (TA 5)

DISCUSSIONS FOR AFTER THE PLAY

- At the end of the play Tish is able to understand that even though her grandfather must die, he will stay alive in her heart and her memory forever. What are some things that happened in the story that helped her to realize this? How did Little Bear give her hope to go on? (TA 4)
- In our play the costumes are created to show not only who is who, but who they would be in the circus. Did you have a favorite costume? Could you guess the character's role in the circus as well? What would you have dressed the actors in? (TA 2)
- Tish makes a wish on a star to learn why things have to die, especially her grandpa. If you could make a wish on a star like Tish did, what would you like to understand that you may not understand now? (TA 4)
- In the play, each character was a symbol for someone or something else. For example, Dancing Bear was a symbol for Tish's grandfather. What do you think the other characters were symbolic of? There are no right or wrong answers, only ideas. (TA 4).
- The actor playing the mime in the play had the difficult task of creating pantomimes to show what he wanted to say. How do you think the actor prepared to play this role? What types of qualities should an actor playing the mime have? Did you understand what our mime was saying? (TA 4)



THINGS TO DO AFTER THE PLAY

Legacy Talent Show

We all have skills, stories, songs, or even dances that other special people in our lives have taught us. Allow students some time to think of something they were taught by someone else and share it for the class. (TA 2)

Design Time

The setting of our play is in Arkansas. Tish even mentions how it was known as the state of many bears. If the play were to change location and be set in California, what might you change about the scenery. Allow students some time to draw their new setting at any of California's deserts, beaches, or forests. Where might Tish go instead of the tree? (TA 1)

The Life of A Tree

Trees all have a life cycle that is measured by its rings. Have

students study the tree ring on the activity page and answer the questions about the life of that particular tree. (TA 5—Science)

Good Grief

The Arkansaw Bear can help us understand that it is good to grieve the loss of someone and gives some suggestions on how to help cope with their loss. Have students create a memory collage of things that remind them of their loved one so they can remember them and cope with their loss. (TA 5—Art)

Waltzing Around

In our play Dancing Bear shares traditional dances such as the waltz, polka and tarantella. Learning to waltz can be a fun activity for students to practice coordination and rhythm. Follow the dancing feet on the activity page for some easy dancing. Once kids get the

hang of it, they can try partnering up. Some good songs for waltzing are:

You Light Up My Life

Some Day my Prince Will Come from Snow White

Moon River

Excerpts can be found at:

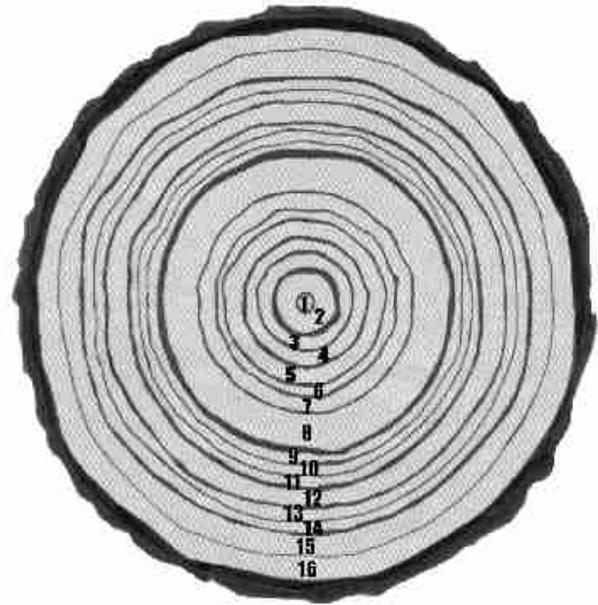
www.ballroomdancers.com



THE LIFE OF A TREE

A tree's age can be measured by counting its rings. The picture on the right has the rings numbered for this tree. A larger space between rings shows it was a very wet year, a narrow space, a dry year. Use the picture and see if you can answer the questions about the tree.

1. The tree was cut down three years ago. What year was that?
2. How old was the tree when it was cut?
3. What year did the tree start growing?
4. Find the ring that grew the year you were born. Was it a wet or dry year?
5. In what year of growth was there the least rainfall?
6. In what year of growth was there the most rainfall?



CALIFORNIA'S BEAR

- Our state flag was adopted in 1911 and features a grizzly bear and a star. It was first flown in the town of Sonoma. Color the flag with these directions:
- The star is red
- The background is white
- The bear is brown
- The ground is green
- The writing is brown
- There is a red stripe at the bottom.



DANCING BEAR'S STAGE



See if you can correctly identify these stage terms in this picture of the Dancing Bear.

Costumes are what the character wears. What makes up bear's costume?

Props are things that characters carry. What props can you see onstage?

Instruments light the stage. Can you find the lighting instruments?

The Great Center ring is part of the set. What else can you see that would be part of the set?

Now have fun coloring Bear's stage!

WALTZING FOR BEGINNERS!

Waltzing is easier than you think.

Start with both feet together.

Step to the right on your right foot.

Bring the left foot next to the right foot.

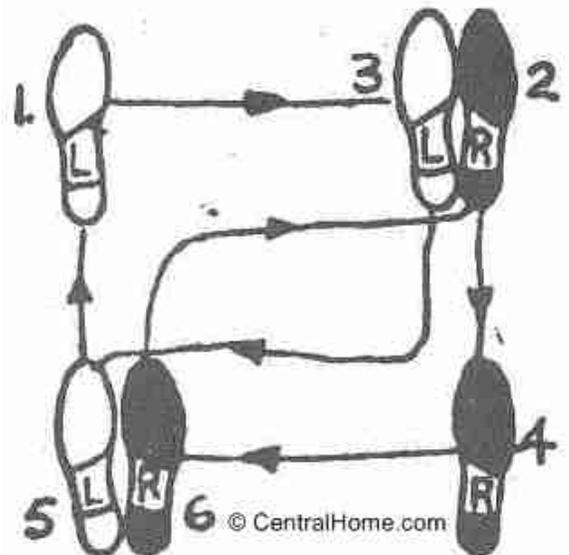
Step back with the right foot.

Step to the left with the left foot and bring the right foot next to it.

On your next step put your left foot forward and put the right out on the right to repeat the pattern. Now you're doing the box step!

For samples of songs you can waltz to visit:

www.ballroomdancers.com



CHILDREN AND GRIEF

REPRINTED FROM THE WEBSITE OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF CHILD AND ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY

When a family member dies, children react differently from adults. Preschool children usually see death as temporary and reversible, a belief reinforced by cartoon characters who die and come to life again. Children between five and nine begin to think more like adults about death, yet they still believe it will never happen to them or anyone they know.

Adding to a child's shock and confusion at the death of a brother, sister, or parent is the unavailability of other family members, who may be so shaken by grief that they are not able to cope with the normal responsibility of childcare.

Parents should be aware of normal childhood responses to a death in the family, as well as signs when a child is having difficulty coping with grief. It is normal during the weeks following the death for some children to feel immediate grief or persist in the belief that the family member is still alive. However, long-term denial of the death or avoidance of grief can be emotionally unhealthy and can later lead to more severe problems.

A child who is frightened about attending a funeral should not be forced to go; however, honoring or remembering the person in some way, such as lighting a candle, saying

a prayer, making a scrapbook, reviewing photographs, or telling a story may be helpful. Children should be allowed to express feelings about their loss and grief in their own way.

Once children accept the death, they are likely to display their feelings of sadness on and off over a long period of time, and often at unexpected moments. The surviving relatives should spend as much time as possible with the child, making it clear that the child has permission to show his or her feelings openly or freely.

The person who has died was essential to the stability of the child's world, and anger is a natural reaction. The anger may be revealed in boisterous play, nightmares, irritability, or a variety of other behaviors. Often the child will show anger towards the surviving family members.

After a parent dies, many children will act younger than they are. The child may temporarily become more infantile; demand food, attention and cuddling; and talk baby talk. Younger children frequently believe they are the cause of what happens around them. A young child may believe a parent, grandparent, brother, or sister died because he or she had once wished the person dead

when they were angry. The child feels guilty or blames him or herself because the wish came true.

Children who are having serious problems with grief and loss may show one or more of these signs:

- an extended period of depression in which the child loses interest in daily activities and events
- inability to sleep, loss of appetite, prolonged fear of being alone
- acting much younger for an extended period
- excessively imitating the dead person
- repeated statements of wanting to join the dead person
- withdrawal from friends, or
- sharp drop in school performance or refusal to attend school

If these signs persist, professional help may be needed. A child and adolescent psychiatrist or other qualified mental health professional can help the child accept the death and assist the others in helping the child through the mourning process.

PDF versions of this document can be found at: http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/children_and_grief

DIRECTOR'S NOTES—KAMALA KRUSZKA

Since the loss of my first child, I have been made aware of the struggles families face when encountering grief, and often children can be left behind.

In the US there is an uncomfortable feeling that surrounds discussing dying, death, and grief with children as if the subject is something they do not need to have exposure to. That in some way their innocence will be lost if they understand that death and dying are inevitable parts of our lives.

I am of the opinion that we do our children a disservice when we fail to talk to them about death and grief. Loss and learning to cope with loss is a universal event in all our lives. Giving children the knowledge, support, and understanding needed to cope with losses helps them through grief and like Little Bear, they become a resource to teach others and comfort those who

are grieving.

Beginning a discussion about dying with your child can be difficult, but using a play, such as "The Arkansaw Bear" to help start that discussion can give teachers and parents the resource needed to get kids asking the questions they have about life and death. It can also allow parents the opportunity to share their personal spiritual beliefs about death and the afterlife.

I have found that grief meets us all on the road of life and knowing that the feelings we experience, the guilt we may encounter, and the fear we bear are all part of the package. Helping children understand that these are normal feelings when encountering loss helps them to grow into maturity able to handle struggles with hope, resilience, and courage

CSU BAKERSFIELD CHILDREN'S THEATRE TOUR 2010

Sources used to make this study guide

Arkansaw Bear graphic used with permission from :
The Anchorage Press, Louisville, Kentucky
The University of Texas at Austin: Graphic Design Dept.

California Bear Flag Activity found at:
www.enchantedLearning.com
www.applesfortheteacher.com

Tree Ring Activity found at:
www.learn.org/lessons/
UNCArchaeology7102002445

Additional copies of this guide can be found on the productions page at:
www.csub.edu/~kkruszka