

## STUDY GUIDE

# OWL & PUSSYCAT

A PLAY CREATED BY THE ENSEMBLE, WITH ELAINE AVILA, BILL CLARK, ARLINA AVILA-CLARK AND VINCE DELANEY

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BASED ON THE POEM BY EDWARD LEAR

DIRECTED BY RACHEL KATZ CAREY

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AGE RECOMMENDATION: 4 AND UP

## OWL & PUSSYCAT

All-ages interactive nonsense stirred with ridiculousness ~

Owl & Pussycat's escapades illuminate a love of adventure and the adventures of love.

Fur, feathers and puns will fly. (Pigs will not.)

A spectacular cross-disciplinary riff on the Edward Lear poem, *Owl & Pussycat* straddles genres, mixing up physical theater with music, poetry and an ample serving of sass.

Crossing a live-action *Rocky & Bullwinkle* sensibility with puns and poems, theater simple is busting out original songs, Shakespearean couplets, and a rolling love-fueled Pea-Green Boat in this whimsical and unexpected 'look between the lines'.

## ABOUT THE POET AND THE POEM

### EDWARD LEAR

The British poet and painter known for his absurd wit, Edward Lear was born in 1812 and began his career as an artist at age 15. Lear is more remembered for his humorous poems, such as "The Owl and the Pussycat," and as the creator of the form and meter of the modern limerick. Like his younger peer Lewis Carroll, Lear wrote many deeply fantastical poems about imaginary creatures, such as "The Dong with the Luminous Nose," or "The Jumbies", with their heads of green and hands of blue, who went to sea in a sieve.

## ABOUT THEATER SIMPLE

An award-winning, internationally acclaimed touring company, **theater simple** was founded in 1990 by artists who aim to strip the theatrical experience down to its elemental parts:

**the imagination of the actor and audience, the playwright's words and the director's vision.**

**theater simple** has built a solid international reputation producing provocative, literate, clever and original theatrical experiences. Our aim: to do plays that touch/challenge/inspire, and perhaps change artists and audiences that want theater simple.

**We build from the imagination up.**

Performing and touring internationally since 1991, theater simple has participated in international arts festivals from **East** (Spoleto Festival USA, Piccolo Theatre series, Charleston, South Carolina) to **West** (Perth International Arts Festival Fringe, Western Australia). Performing around the world, our work has received awards and accolades from audiences, media and arts councils alike in four countries on three continents.

**Each simpleton was once a kid. This is our point of entry to talking about nonsense.**

## METHODS OF DISCUSSION

Obviously, you fabulous teachers are going to know your students better than we do, and where lie their abilities and points of excitement. Our hope is to give a few general ideas of activities for younger students, and a few more elaborate ideas for those older or more ambitious. If you come up with any cool ideas, we'd love to hear them! Email us comments or questions at [info@theatersimple.org](mailto:info@theatersimple.org)

**Best wishes, and we hope to see you in the theater! Llysa Holland - theater simpleton (and Pussycat)**

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## The Owl and the Pussy-Cat

BY EDWARD LEAR

The Owl and the Pussy-cat went to sea

In a beautiful pea-green boat,

They took some honey, and plenty of money,

Wrapped up in a five-pound note.

The Owl looked up to the stars above,

And sang to a small guitar,

"O lovely Pussy! O Pussy, my love,

What a beautiful Pussy you are, you are,

You are!

What a beautiful Pussy you are!"

Pussy said to the Owl, "You elegant fowl!

How charmingly sweet you sing!

O let us be married! Too long we have tarried:

But what shall we do for a ring?"

They sailed away, for a year and a day,

To the land where the Bong-Tree grows

And there in a wood a Piggy-wig stood

With a ring at the end of his nose, his nose,

His nose,

With a ring at the end of his nose.

"Dear Pig, are you willing to sell for one shilling

Your ring?" Said the Piggy, "I will."

So they took it away, and were married next day

By the Turkey who lives on the hill.

They dined on mince, and slices of quince,

Which they ate with a runcible spoon;

And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand,

They danced by the light of the moon,

The moon, the moon,

They danced by the light of the moon.

## LET'S PLAY! LANGUAGE

**Turkey el Urkey needed a little help writing the wedding vows – (or wedding promises), so she asked for help-**

### NOUNS

A **noun** is a person, place or thing.

Owl & Pussycat go to sea in 'a beautiful Pea Green Boat'

So, **BOAT** is a noun, like sea, ukulele, honey, cat, owl

What are some other nouns in your house? In your classroom? Do you remember any from the play?

### VERBS

Owl likes to sing and play a small guitar. (in this case, a ukulele). What Owl can do is a **VERB**.

- ❖ **SING** is a verb.
- ❖ **PLAY** is also a verb. Piggy Swims, Turkey Teases
- ❖ Can you remember any other VERBS in the play?  
(serenade, jump, run, fight, invent, tell, steal, argue, laugh, capsizes, shipwreck, marry, smooch, fish etc., etc.)

### ADJECTIVES

In the poem and in the play, there are words that describe things (nouns) or actions - these are adjectives. For instance – the first line of the poem:

*The Owl & the Pussycat went to sea in a beautiful Pea Green Boat -*

**Adjectives** here are 'beautiful' and 'pea-green'.

- ❖ Can you think of adjectives to describe honey? Money?
- ❖ Can you and a friend come up with a list of adjectives you saw (or you think would be fun) for Piggy, Turkey, Owl and Pussycat?

### ADVERBS – descriptive FLAVORS for words

*Sweet, sour, fast, slow, happy, silly, grouchy, hungry, sad, sleepy, stealthily, shyly*

- ❖ Can you think of any other words that describe something else? Can you describe the pirate chase in lots of adverbs? How about the storm?

### BUILDING BLOCKS

- ❖ Idea points:  
A song can be thought of as a musical poem  
How can words be music?  
Can music be set to words?
- ❖ **Can you think of any words that SOUND like what they are?**  
*Example: bubble, whisper, bang*  
Say these words like their meaning.  
How can you sing this? Fast or slow?

### FAST OR SLOW IS ALSO CALLED TEMPO IN MUSIC.

- ❖ How does TEMPO change how the word feels or sounds? Can you describe it?
- ❖ Try saying BUBBLE sloooooowly, but keep repeating it.
- ❖ Now do it again as fast as you can. How does it change in your mouth? In your head?
- ❖ What happens if you change your voice up and down the scale? (Really high up in your head, then really low in your chest.)
- ❖ Try the word ICICLE. Can you make it sound like glass? Like an iceberg?

### TIE IT ALL TOGETHER

#### ACTIVITY - A 'SINGING' MAD LIB!!

Have kids get paper and pencil, either singly or in teams  
Encourage them to choose different nouns and verbs each time  
Make a list of:

**NOUN1**  
**NOUN2 - A PLACE**  
**ADJECTIVE**  
**NOUN3 - ANIMAL**  
**VERB1**  
**NOUN4**  
**NOUN5**  
**VERB2**  
**ADVERB1**  
**NOUN6**  
**NOUN7**  
**ADVERB2**

At this point it might be fun to write ONE set of words up on the board, so everyone can see it, choosing from among the groups or students  
Then - The teacher gets to read the 'song' with the 'ingredients' in their places.

#### ***If you REALLY want to giggle, SING IT.***

(to the tune of *Home, Home on the Range*)

**ANNOUNCE:** (NOUN1), (NOUN1), ON THE (PLACE/NOUN2)  
- THE (ADJECTIVE) TRUTH-

(singing if you can)

OH GIVE ME A (NOUN1)  
WHERE THE (NOUN3) (VERB1)  
WHERE THE (NOUN4) AND THE (NOUN5) (VERB2).  
WHERE SELDOM IS HEARD A (ADVERB1) (NOUN6)  
AND THE (NOUN7) ARE NOT (ADVERB2) ALL DAY.

### NONSENSE, TALL TALES & IMAGINATION

**Nonsense** stories and poems have always captured the imagination –  
They are called 'nonsense' for the fact the ideas in them are absurd or make no sense.

- ❖ Can you think of any examples of nonsense in the poem?
  - *A CAT and a BIRD falling in love, eating only honey for a year and a day, etc*

- ❖ Another kind of nonsense poem you might recognize part of it, then it veers in an odd yet silly direction – for example-  
 “TWINKLE, TWINKLE LITTLE BAT-  
 HOW I WONDER WHERE YOU’RE AT –  
 UP ABOVE THE SKY SO HIGH,  
 LIKE A TEA TRAY IN THE SKY... “ *LEWIS CARROLL*

A **tall tale** is a distinctly American story form that celebrates an ordinary citizen’s ability to overcome obstacles. Of course, the heroes of tall tales are anything but ordinary, for instance, in our story they are animals. And therein lies the fun and charm of the stories. For instance, Piggy and Turkey began to tell tall tales to feel like part of the story, and to try to one-up each other.

- ❖ Is there a story that could happen with objects in your classroom or house? What kind of adventure could the chalk and the blackboard have with each other? Or the Erasers? A sock and a can of beans? Plants in the garden?
- ❖ Discuss the traits that could make these ‘THING’ characters "larger than life." Brainstorm a list of the different characters in the play.
- ❖ Have students draw a picture of a THING character, and then have them discuss in groups why they could admire these characters.

### THE LANGUAGE OF TALL TALES

- ❖ Have children collect **adjectives and descriptive phrases** that are used to describe the characters in either the play or the tall tales they created. Write the names of the characters on one set of index cards and the descriptions on another set and play a matching game. The children should notice that the adjectives often apply to more than one character.
- ❖ Play with the language of tall tales. Tall tale heroes were brave, strong, big, fast, smart, tough, strange, tireless, ornery, funny, talented, etc.
- ❖ In fact, they could outdo just about everybody with everything they did. Use these descriptors, and any others the class can come up with, and play a response game –  
 HOW BIG WAS HE? Or HOW FAST WAS SHE? “He was sooo big, \_\_\_\_\_” “She was sooooo fast, \_\_\_\_\_”

### TIE IT ALL TOGETHER! WRITING ACTIVITY.

- ❖ Create a newspaper with your class. Have the children write and illustrate newspaper articles telling about the Adventures of the ‘Things’ in their lives. Be sure to talk about the structure of a newspaper article (headline, byline, dateline, story).
- ❖ Alternatively - try a PEOPLE magazine format.

### MATHEMATICS & MUSIC

**Music in 4 counts** - at each beat a child makes a noise - a clap, or bang or yelp. It keeps passing along. The idea is to keep the beat steady.

And kids can practice counting to four, just like a sound technician.

**Play follow the leader** with tempo and rhythm - let children take turns leading. Explain the importance of being a good leader as well as a good follower.

**Make a song together!** Using a familiar tune, change the words to suit your mood!

## SOCIETY & HEALTH

*Owl & Pussycat* entertains and provokes conversations about the true meanings of friendship and love of different types. (love of people, romantic, 'love' of food, etc)

- ❖ What else do characters love – or NOT love- in the play?
- ❖ Have you ever had a quarrel with someone you like? How did you resolve it? Was is uncomfortable or scary? What happened then?

## THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

the play also explores a theme of friendship –

Here are a few ideas to get your students talking and exploring ideas around this

### FRIENDSHIP

- ❖ Ask students to define friendship.
- ❖ Everyone looks for different things in friends, but there are some universal characteristics of true friendship. Have the class list these qualities on a chart. How do Owl, Pussycat, Piggy and Turkey demonstrate their friendship? How do Turkey and Piggy get along?

### Discussion points:

- ❖ Do you have friends that like the SAME things you do? Talk about this.
- ❖ Do you have friends that like DIFFERENT things than you? Discuss.
- ❖ How does having interests the same or different work for you and your friends? Do you like it when they begin to like something you love?

## INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

### ART

Many destinations have travel posters to encourage folks to come visit.

- ❖ Ask each student to design an advertising poster for The Island.
- ❖ Some students may enjoy writing and illustrating a newspaper ad for Turkey's wedding services.
- ❖ How would the location affect the poster design?
- ❖ Discuss how art and advertising affect a potential audience.
- ❖ What do you think of the poster for the play? What other design might be good for the play *Owl & Pussycat*?

## MUSIC

- ❖ Ask students to remember the types of music in the opening recitation of the poem. (waltz, Charleston, Hula, Tango)
- ❖ Divide the class into small groups and ask them to select one type of music that goes with a specific dance or movement style and research it. For example: One group may research waltzes, another musical comedy, and another 1950's rock and roll. Or 80's hair bands. Each group should also find an example of their type of music to play for the class.

## DRAMA: WRITING:

There are many things all around us. Have students write a short scene in which a classroom thing wanders accidentally into the kitchen. What can happen?

Have students break into groups and read them aloud, with 'cartoon voices'.

## DRAMA: CHARACTERIZATION AND PERSONALITY: THINKING LIKE AN ANIMAL!

- ❖ What sort of personality does Owl have? How is that different from Pussycat?
- ❖ How is Piggy different from Turkey?
- ❖ If you were Pussycat, and you wanted to dance, how do you think it would go?
- ❖ What sort of dance would PiggyWig do? Turkey?
- ❖ What sort of song should Owl write? What about Pussycat?
- ❖ Write a four-line song for Turkey or Piggy. [see also extended activity] Would another style of music suit them?

## GEOGRAPHY

### LOOK AT A BIG MAP OF THE WORLD

- ❖ Can you identify where there are islands in oceans? Islands in lakes?
- ❖ How did people get around if they didn't have cars or airplanes?
- ❖ What might they take on a journey?

### IMAGINE IT –

- ❖ If you were to imagine yourself as the size of a crayon, can you describe how you'd get to the edge of your bed down to the floor, and to the door or the nearest body of water?

### DRAW A MAP OF AN ADVENTURE

- ❖ ~perhaps getting from your desk to outside, or to the library or the cafeteria, or from the driveway into the place you live.
- ❖ What sort of dangers might you be facing? What sort of helpful tools might you need to consider? (Hmm – is a paperclip helpful? What might you do with it?)
- ❖ Might a pet be helpful or hazardous?
- ❖ What would you eat and where might you find it? (Remember, you are crayon-size. So your hands and mouth and stomach might be pretty small.)

**HOPE YOU HAD FUN!** Consider telling us about it... [info@theatersimple.org](mailto:info@theatersimple.org)

BONUS POEM: in the style of Edward Lear by Vic Hugo

*THE BALLAD OF THREE CATS AND A BANANA*

Phoebe and Zoey and Lily-Joanna  
 Set out to sea on a half-ripe banana  
 Their sail was a very peculiar bandana  
 Their oars were popsicle sticks  
 Phoebe, the eldest, sat up very straight  
 Zoey was slowest and always ran late  
 Two lunched on three truffles from a small  
     Wedgwood plate  
 Whilst Lily-Joanna did tricks  
 Phoebe hummed tunes from a Polish Bolero~  
 Zoey dreamed of a languid blond gypsy vaquero~  
 Lily-Joanna felt cold as Point Barrow,  
 And wished they'd go home again soon  
 The banana went ripe and glowed gold like the sun  
 Three kitty cats danced on the rim of a bun  
 Their movements so perfect they seemed as but one  
 'Till they landed just south of Rangoon  
 The spot where they landed was Balderdash Bay  
 The people they found there were giddy and fey  
 Although they were welcomed, they chose not to stay  
 So they borrowed a hot-air balloon.

Four days and five nights they flew without sails  
 Their passports kept neatly tucked under their tails  
 At last they came down by a castle in Wales  
 Where they settled for good it would seem

The air was perfumed with the fragrance of coal  
 What passed for a moat was a bottomless hole  
 Dug with great flair by a frivolous mole  
 (Their adventure was aught but a dream)

A dream whose main purpose was never made clear  
 Filled with much pleasure and a snippet of fear  
 A lot of champagne and a drizzle of beer  
 A great plenty to eat and to drink.

The moral of this tale is, I fear, quite obscure  
 It has something to do with the texture of fur  
 And how often the moon is a bothersome blur  
 But worth looking into, I think.

**Interesting sidenote and discussion**

Mr. Vic has been writing and working on this poem for 30 years... he'll change a word here or there, always refining it, to make the poem better in his mind.

The most recent change was in the first paragraph – what is now 'half-ripe banana' used to be 'unripe banana'.

What might have been a reason to change it? Speculate and discuss.