



THE BOXCAR CHILDREN

Welcome to the activity guide for The Kate Goldman Children's Theatre production of *The Boxcar Children*. We know that the best trips are the ones that become a part of enhanced curriculum or part of your family stories. This is a dynamic way to build on the experience of seeing literature come to life.

These activities are designed to help prepare a child for a visit to the theatre and to acquaint teachers and parents with the literature and author. There are exercises for before and after the show, as well as information kids need to think more about what they've just seen. Thank you for making us an educational resource!

Please discuss theatre etiquette and theatre conventions with your young play-goers. The rules for going to a new place are not meant to be overly restrictive. Everyone is more comfortable when they know what is expected!

BEFORE THE SHOW

Etiquette

If your children are young, it is interesting to begin by introducing the word, "etiquette," and asking what they think it might mean.

If your children are a bit more sophisticated, then you can ask for synonyms for "etiquette" which may include "manners," "rules," "good behavior," "conduct," or even "decorum," "comportment," "protocol," and "propriety."

Good News!

Your children already know good theatre etiquette if they can sit still and listen to you read a story, or if they can go to an assembly and be attentive. "When we go to the theatre, just use your story time manners." is a fine way to start. *The Boxcar Children* is quickly-paced and designed to keep the attention of our young patrons.

In the theatre, there is no such thing as being "fashionably late."

Everyone should arrive at least 10-15 minutes prior to "curtain time." Curtain time is when the show starts, and we cannot rewind a performance if you arrive late. Trips to the bathroom and drinks of water are best taken care of before the show begins. You wouldn't want to miss anything.

You could have heard a pin drop!

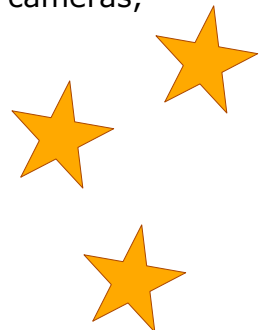
Since a theatre is acoustically designed for sound to travel, audience members should turn off all cellular phones and pagers.

Well, hush my mouth . . .

Save your questions and observations for intermission or after the show. If you talk during the performance, you will miss part of it and could make it difficult for others around you to hear.

This is strictly off the record.

It is against copyright laws to record a play in any way. Please do not use cameras, video equipment, or any other recording devices.



Theatrical conventions are those common practices in the theatre that are accepted by all in attendance. Many of these customs are traditionally accepted by the audience, even by children, without request. However, some may need explaining or discussion.

THEATRICAL CONVENTIONS

Performance space: Performers are physically separated from the audience. They perform on a stage or in a specifically defined area. The audience sits outside that area in seats that are collectively called the "house." Patrons should not enter the stage area or handle anything they see on stage.

Use of lights: The **blinking** of lights in the lobby is a signal for the audience members to take their seats and that the play will begin in about five minutes. **Dimming** of the house lights inside the theatre is a signal that the play is about to begin. **Blackouts** (all lights out briefly) are used as a special effect or to show the passing of time at the end of a scene.

Playbill: A theatre program, or playbill, gives written information about the actors and the production. In the Kate Goldman Children's Theatre, the children receive a special playbill, P. Bill, Jr. It also contains special activities for kids.

Intermission: An intermission is a pause in the performance which lasts about 15 minutes or only about five minutes for school matinees at the Kate Goldman Children's theatre. It is a time when audience members can stand and stretch or talk quietly as the crew changes the set.

Applause: In the theatre, the audience shows its appreciation of a performance by a polite clapping of hands. Usually applause comes at the end of a scene, an act or for a curtain call. If a particularly exciting moment, song, or special effect occurs during the play, an audience may spontaneously applaud.

Curtain call: At the end of a performance, all the actors come back onto the stage to take a bow and acknowledge the audience's applause.



Whether it is your first time to the theatre, or you're an old pro, there are always more things to learn about being in a play or producing a play.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Are the actors scared to perform?

Some actors are a little nervous, but that feeling usually goes away once they walk out onto the stage.

Where do the actors go when they walk off the stage?

When an actor stands on the side of the stage where the audience cannot see him, but he can see the stage, he is standing "in the wings." Some actors may have enough time to go their dressing rooms, which are down the hall from the theatre, or perhaps they wait in the Green Room, which is a place for actors to relax.

Who gives you your costumes?

There is a costume designer who draws a picture or "rendering" of what she thinks the character should look like. The costume is then sewn, purchased, borrowed, or "pulled." We say that we pull a costume when we go into our huge storage room to find a costume that has already been used in another production.

Why do you turn off all the lights sometimes?

We turn off the lights at the start to let everyone know that the play is beginning. Sometimes, after a part of the story is finished, we turn off the lights to change the scenery; we're asking your imagination to take you to a different time or place.

Is this the actors' real job?

All of the actors in *The Boxcar Children* are volunteers. During the day they work as teachers, students, bankers, architects and in many other professions. Our crew and ushers are also volunteers.

How do I get involved in the theatre?

Take classes! Audition for a role! Volunteer backstage or as an usher! There are brochures outside the ticket office that describe a variety of opportunities. Or visit us at www.dmplyhouse.com. We are very proud of our volunteer corps!



The Boxcar Children

Adapted by Barbara Field from the book by Gertrude C. Warner

Synopsis

The play begins with a shock. Henry, Jessie, Violet, and Benny are sitting outside an office, having nearly drowned. Their parents were not as fortunate; they died leaving the four children orphaned. Here's the conversation the children overhear:

- Mrs. Alberts. *The county can probably find permanent homes for the three older ones—foster homes on farms somewhere that they can earn their own keep, but that little one—he's a problem.*
- Officer Banning. *The problem will solve itself, I reckon. Like I said, some relative will step forward as soon as they hear the news, and take the problem off our hands...*

To avoid being split up, and before the grown-ups can act, the four children take off on their own.

Life on the run is cold and frightening, but they persevere by encouraging one another and relying on their resourcefulness. After a couple of nights sleeping out in the open, they discover an abandoned boxcar that becomes their home. Henry ventures out and finds work with Dr. Truman, and with his earnings he is able to purchase food and other necessities. The others discover a nearby dump where they find things to outfit their refuge. They combine their talents and resources to create a safe home for themselves.

Dr. Truman comes across a notice in the newspaper offering a reward for news about the children and puts the facts together. He teams with a kindly social worker, Sarah Calder, to bring the children to their grandfather, a wealthy mill owner whom they had never met. They resist until Violet becomes very ill and needs the help of her grandfather.

When the children get to know him, they realize how kind he is and are comfortable joining his household. Sensing that they miss their old home, their grandfather surprises them by having the boxcar moved onto his estate—complete with the cracked cups from the dump and four beds made of pine needles.

ASIDE TO TEACHER AND PARENTS: The book upon which this play is based is published by Albert Whitman and Company. It is divided into chapters that are easy to read in short sessions. The book is 156 pages. The best preparation for attending this play is to read the book aloud.



About the Author

Gertrude Chandler Warner

Gertrude C. Warner was born in Putnam, Connecticut, on April 16, 1890. From the age of five, she dreamed of becoming an author. She wrote stories for her Grandfather Carpenter and each Christmas she gave him one of these stories as a gift.

Her childhood days were filled with reading, playing with a favorite dollhouse, trips to her grandparents' farm, and picking wildflowers. She learned to play the cello and later, as an adult, played the pipe organ.

Due to ill health, Ms. Warner never finished high school. She left in the middle of her second year and studied with a tutor. Then, in 1918, when teachers were called to serve during World War I, the school board asked her to teach first grade. She had 40 children in the morning and 40 more in the afternoon. Ms. Warner wrote, "I was asked or begged to take this job because I taught Sunday school. Believe me, day school is nothing like Sunday school, and I sure learned by doing—I taught in that same room for 32 years, retiring at 60 to have more time to write." Eventually, Ms. Warner attended Yale, where she took several teacher training courses.

Once when she was sick and had to stay home from teaching, she thought up the story about the Boxcar Children. It was inspired by her childhood dreams. As a child, she had spent hours watching the trains go by near her family's home. Sometimes she could look through the window of a caboose and see a small stove, a little table, cracked cups with no saucers, and a tin coffee pot boiling away on the stove. The sight had fascinated her and made her dream about how much fun it would be to live and keep house in a boxcar or caboose. She read the story to her classes and rewrote it many times so the words were easy to understand. Some of her pupils spoke other languages at home and were just learning English. *The Boxcar Children* gave them a fun story that was easy to read.

Believe it or not, librarians protested the book because the children were having too good a time without parental control. Ms. Warner said, "That is exactly why children like it!"

Gertrude Chandler Warner died in 1979 at the age of 89 after a full life as a teacher, author, and volunteer for the American Red Cross and other charitable organizations. After her death, Albert Whitman & Company continued to receive mail from children across the country asking for more adventures about Henry, Jessie, Violet and Benny Alden. In 1991, Albert Whitman added to *The Boxcar Children Mysteries* so that today's children can enjoy many more adventures about this independent and caring group of children.

Reprinted from the website of the Albert Whitman & Company, publisher of the [Gertrude Warner Boxcar Children Mysteries](#).

Recycle It!

Encourage your children to think of all the things the boxcar children used as substitutes for necessary items. Have them try to recall at least five things that the children recycled into something useful.

The first, most obvious example of recycling was the boxcar itself! It was abandoned by the railroad, but it made a great shelter for them. Their refrigerator was a hole in a rock behind a waterfall, sand was used as scouring powder, a stump for a step, pine needles for soft beds, and a ladle was a stick with a tin can tied to it. Their store was the nearby dump where they scavenged dishes and cups and the wheels with which to make a wagon.

Teachers: Divide the class into small groups and let them brainstorm at least three new uses for each of the materials listed below that might be found at a dump:

- Egg cartons
- Baby buggy
- Flower pots
- Old tires
- Wooden crate

Now have them consider of all the things a school throws away during one week. Have the small groups interview the lunchroom staff, the main office staff, the librarian, and other teachers to get a list of things that are tossed. Could any of that be used for a new purpose?

Matching Slang Terms

Slang is playful language that is made up by a group. It can be a large group like teenagers who call each other "dude" and their friends "dog," or a smaller group like actors who say the theatre is "dark" when there are no shows that day. Almost every group has slang words, including railroad workers. Match the slang word with what it really means:

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Brass hat | a) Caboose |
| 2. Crummy | b) Railroad fireman |
| 3. Frog | c) Fastest speed |
| 4. Gandy Dancer | d) Railroad big boss |
| 5. Highball | e) Conductor |
| 6. Piggyback | f) Where two rails come together |
| 7. Skipper | g) Track worker |
| 8. Tallow pot | h) Trailer on a flat car |

Answers: 1-d, 2-a, 3-f, 4-g, 5-c, 6-h, 7-e, 8-b

It is probably easy to figure out why a trailer on a flat car is called a "piggyback," or why the conductor is called a "skipper," but have your children try to figure out why a fireman is called a "tallow pot."

Inspired by the website posted by Oregon Children's Theatre: www.octc.org/study

Times Were Tough!

An Explanation of The Great Depression for Elementary School Students

In the 1930s when *The Boxcar Children* takes place, times were tough. It is a time known as The Great Depression because many people were out of work, the farmlands were too dry to produce enough food and the government had a difficult time taking care of everyone.

Children had it tough, too. Many children had to quit school to work long hours in factories in order to help support their families. Some schools were closed completely because there wasn't enough money to pay teachers.

However, many people look back on this as a happy time because people really needed to pull together to help one another.

President Roosevelt created several projects which included building roads and dams, writing plays and painting murals, and creating public parks all of which put many people back to work.

Here are some really good things that also happened during the tough times, that you still enjoy today!

- Dr. Seuss began writing for children.
- The game Monopoly was created.
- The Empire State Building was completed.
- In 1935, Congress declared "The Star-Spangled Banner" as the national anthem

Times Were Tough!

An Explanation of The Great Depression for Middle School Students

From the 1930s to the beginning of World War II, America experienced a period of extreme economic crisis known as The Great Depression. The Depression followed the Stock Market Crash of 1929. Many people lost all of their savings and had to start all over again.

The drought and dust from the Dust Bowl destroyed America's farmland and caused many Americans to lose their jobs and homes. People everywhere struggled just to keep food on the table or clothes on their backs. Thousands of people from small towns and big cities took to the road searching for a better life elsewhere in the country, but most of these travelers found that each new town they entered was experiencing the same hardship as the last. One in four (25%) of America's workers were without jobs.

Some of these travelers were called hobos, and they made their living doing odd jobs for people they met along their journey. Other travelers found themselves living in Hoovervilles, campsites named for President Herbert Hoover, the man many people blamed for their hard times.

Children did not have it any easier during the years of the Depression. Many had to quit school to go to work. Many schools closed because there was no money to keep them open. About 3 million students were forced to leave school due to the school's lack of money to stay open. And there were no laws protecting children so often they had to work long hours at difficult jobs. About 250,000 young people were homeless during the early years of the Depression. Many of these children were orphaned.

The Great Depression was not a time of constant sadness, however. When Americans found themselves without the luxuries they had once been able to afford, they learned how to reuse items and make do with what they had. People began to appreciate even more the things in life that can't be bought, like the generosity and kindness of friends, family, and even strangers.

Talk About It!

Some of this will sound familiar to students whose families are struggling under the current economic crisis. Sometimes studying a work of literature or era of history can be a good jumping off point for students to talk about their own circumstances.

If there's a word that represents a resounding theme in American's response to The Depression it would be "resourcefulness." Americans did not dwell on problems; they got busy and solved them. How can your students respond to their current status with resourcefulness?

My, My, How Things Have Changed: Comparing Prices in the 1930s to Now

According to the Mooresville Times, between 1932 and 1933, nearly 80 years ago, prices for everyday items were very different than today. Have your children estimate what they think the cost of each item would be today, and then have them find ads in newspapers that quote the real current price.

	1930	YOUR ESTIMATE	2010
Bread	\$.05		
Maxwell House Coffee-1 lb. can	\$.32		
Movie ticket	\$.10		
3 Milky Way Candy Bars	\$.25		
3 Cans Campbell's Tomato Soup	\$.19		
Haircut	\$.25		
Broom	\$.29		
Ladies Shoes	\$ 3.50		
A Year Long Subscription to the Newspaper	\$ 1.50		
Electric Refrigerator	\$99.50		
4 Car Tires	\$ 6.50		

Follow-up Discussion

Once the children have filled in the chart, it is important to discuss the results. Where did you find the real prices? Did you read newspapers, magazines, go on-line, ask a parent, or make a phone call? Were your estimates lower or higher than the real prices? (Students are generally good at guessing if they have purchased an item like a candy bar or movie ticket.) How come things cost so much more now than in the 1930s?

Aside to Teacher and Parents: If you wish to take this one step further, have your children interview someone who remembers the 1930s. This would have to be senior citizens in their 80s or 90s. The main question is: "How are things different than now for kids in the 1930s?" It is guaranteed that they will hear some interesting stories!

Boxcar Children Word Search

Look for the list of words within the puzzle. They may be going across, down, or diagonally, and they may be backwards or forwards. Good luck!

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

HUNGRY
VIOLET
WAGON
GRANDFATHER
PINE NEEDLES
LEMONADE
TABLECLOTH

BAKERY
BENNY
JESSIE
ORPHANS
APPLE
LAWNMOWER
ALL FOR ONE

HENRY
BOXCAR
RICH
DUMP
DOCTOR
MOXIE
CHILDREN

More Word Play Fun

Write the words "The Boxcar Children" across the top of a sheet of paper and then see how many new words you can make from the letters in the title of the play ("box," "her," "race"). For an extra challenge, find words that have to do with the story ("hide," "care," "tear").

AFTER THE SHOW

Now that you have seen the play, there are several language arts opportunities that will help build on the enthusiasm with which your students left the theatre.

Talk About It!

When you read a book, your imagination determines what the characters and different places look like. Did the characters in the play look differently than you imagined? When the children began to live in the boxcar, there was not a real boxcar in the theatre. How did the play help your imagination see a boxcar? When did the play show you real things, and when did you have to use your imagination?

A play does not present every single event from the original story. For example, in the book, the children find a dog named Watch. Watch does not appear in the play. What other differences were there between the book and the play? Are there some parts you wish they would have left in?

When the children ran away, they stopped back at home to pick up useful things to take with them. They had a short time, and they could not carry much. It was useful to take money, but it was comforting to take a picture of their mom and dad. If you were going away and could only take three things, what would you take and why would you choose them? Are the items useful or comforting? Why is it important to have both?

Draw About It!

1. The children's grandfather wants them to be happy in their new home with him so he relocates the boxcar. They can stay there when it pleases them. If you were allowed to redecorate a room any way you wish, what would it look like? Pretend that before work on your new room begins, you must provide a drawing of what the room looks like. What special things does your room have?
2. Pretend you are the printer who must make the reward poster for information about the missing children. Make a poster that has a picture of the children, their names, the amount of the reward, and who to call.

Write About It! What Do You Think? Write a Review

When you tell a friend that they should see a movie or read a book that you really like, you have given that movie or book a "review." Usually you tell them about your favorite parts as well. A review can also be given to a play. It is a way to tell others if you liked the play that you saw. We would like our elementary school friends to write a few sentences and draw a picture of the play that we can display in the lobby of the Kate Goldman Children's Theatre.

Sentence #1:

The Boxcar Children was a _____ play.

Aside to Teacher and Parents: Encourage your children to brainstorm many adjectives. "Good" is a good place to start, but there are other descriptive words as well.

Sentence #2:

This play was about

Aside to Teacher and Parents: It is difficult to summarize what the play was about in one sentence. The summary can be about the plot or the meaning of the play or both.

Sentence #3:

My favorite part of the play was when _____

Aside to Teacher and Parents: Encourage children to offer a clear, detailed description.

(Optional) Sentence #4:

I have one question about the play that makes me curious. I would like to know _____.

Now draw a picture of your favorite part and mail it to us at:

The Des Moines Playhouse
831 42nd Street
Des Moines, IA 50312

We will display as many reviews as we can and your class will also receive a thank you note with answers to any questions they may have posed.

Aside to Teacher and Parents: We would love to receive a written response of your evaluation of the play, too. And of course, if you would like to include a picture, that would be great!

Act it Out! A 5 Minute Quiet Time Activity

Here is a brief, calming-down activity. Have the children rest their heads on their desks or tables and go through this imaginative experience. Remember to soften your voice, read slowly, and pause between imagination prompts. Enjoy!

“When the Alden children first run away, they spend their nights sleeping outdoors under the stars. Imagine that you are sleeping in the woods on a bed of pine needles . . . feel a nice, cool evening breeze blow across your face . . . relax and imagine what sounds that you might hear . . . imagine what you might see at night that you may not see during the day. . . . imagine the special smells that there are outdoors . . . after a while you drift off into a peaceful sleep . . .now imagine what may wake you up in the morning . . . stretch and imagine what you will tell everyone about your night under the stars.”

Design Your Own Set for Boxcar Children

Part A: Designing the boxcar.

Have children draw a picture of what they want their boxcar model set to look like. Encourage them to make it different from the set they saw used in *The Boxcar Children*. They can choose to make the boxcar whatever color they wish. The model may include any of the set pieces listed below. Students may also add other set pieces if they wish.

Boxcar	Table
Trees	Chairs
Fire circle	Shelves
Crate	Sleeping Quarters
Laundry Line	Table Cloth

Part B: Building the Model

Now use the design to build a model. You will need:

shoebox	markers
glue	scissors
assorted construction paper	leaves, small twigs
plastic wrap	popsicle sticks
cardboard, or poster board	assorted fabric samples or felt

Encourage children to use recycled items from home to use in their boxcar model.

What to Do:

1. Cut a square in the lid of your shoebox. This will be the door.
2. Cover the entire shoebox in construction paper.
3. Glue your boxcar (the shoebox on its side) to a large piece of cardboard or posterboard.
4. Using items you collect around the house or the classroom, create miniature set pieces to place around and inside the boxcar.