

Classroom Resource Guide

POINT PARK UNIVERSITY'S
PITTSBURGH PLAYHOUSE

PLAYHOUSE
JR.

Cast of characters

- Mole
- Rat
- Otter
- Toad
- William the Horse
- Chief Weasel
- Badger
- Billy Hedgehog
- Randolph Hedgehog
- Innkeeper
- Weasels, ferrets, stoats, field mice, travelers, policemen

Time: Yesterday

Place: In and around the riverbank

Who are these wild animals?

Split the class up into small groups of 2-3 students each. Assign each group a different animal or character from the cast of characters to the left. Have the students brainstorm what they think that animal might be like if it were a person. Tall, short, outgoing, shy, fun, grumpy, etc. For younger classes, it might be helpful to provide photos of the animals and a word bank on the board with vocabulary about personality traits. Once the students have an idea of what their character might be like, have them present to the class. After reading about the plot of *the Wind in the Willows* or after seeing our musical, revisit the class' descriptions and discuss their perceptions.

Plot Summary of *The Wind in the Willows*.

The arrival of spring and fine weather outside, the good-natured Mole loses patience with spring cleaning. He flees his underground home, emerging to take in the air and ends up at the river, which he has never seen before. Here he meets Rat, who at this time of year spends all his days in, on and close

by the river. Rat takes Mole for a ride in his rowing boat. They get along well and spend many more days boating. One summer day, Rat and Mole disembark and pay a visit to Toad. Toad is rich, friendly and kind-hearted, but aimless and arrogant; having recently given up boating, Toad's current craze is his horse-drawn caravan. He persuades the reluctant Rat and willing Mole to join him on a trip. Toad soon tires of camp life and sleeps-in the following day to avoid chores. Later that day, a passing motorcar scares the horse, causing the caravan to overturn into a ditch. Rat threatens to have the law on the motorcar drivers while Mole calms the horse, but Toad's obsession for caravan travel is immediately replaced by a motorcar fascination.

Mole wants to meet the respected but elusive Badger, who lives deep in the Wild Wood, but Rat—knowing that Badger does not appreciate visits—tells Mole to be patient and wait and Badger will pay them a visit himself. Nevertheless, on a snowy winter's day, while Ratty dozes, Mole impulsively goes to the Wild Wood to explore, hoping to meet Badger. He gets lost in the woods, sees many "evil faces" among the wood's less-welcoming denizens, and surrenders to fright and panic and hides, trying to stay warm, amongst the sheltering roots of a tree. Rat, finding Mole gone, guesses his mission from the direction of Mole's tracks and, equipping himself with a pistol and a stout stick, goes in search, finding him as snow begins to fall in earnest. Attempting to find their way home, Rat and Mole quite literally stumble across Badger's home—Mole barks his shin upon the boot scraper on Badger's doorstep. Badger and warmly welcomes Rat and Mole to his large and cozy underground home, providing them

hot food and dry clothes. Badger learns from his visitors that Toad has crashed six cars, has been hospitalized three times, and has spent a fortune on fines. Though nothing can be done at the moment, they resolve that once spring arrives they will make a plan to protect Toad from himself; they are, after all, his friends and are worried for his well-being. With the arrival of spring, Badger visits Mole and Rat to take action over Toad's self-destructive obsession. The three of them go to Toad Hall, and Badger tries talking Toad out of his behavior, to no avail. They put Toad under house arrest, with themselves as the guards, until Toad changes his mind. Feigning illness, Toad bamboozles the Water Rat (who is on guard duty at the time) and escapes. He steals a car, drives it recklessly and is caught by the police. He is sent to prison on a twenty-year sentence.

Badger and Mole are cross with Rat for his gullibility, but draw comfort from the fact that they need no longer waste their summer guarding Toad. However, Badger and Mole continue to live in Toad Hall in the hope that Toad may return. Meanwhile in prison, Toad gains the sympathy of the Gaoler's daughter who helps him to escape disguised as a washerwoman. Though free again, Toad is without money or possessions other than the clothes upon his back, and is pursued by the police. After catching a lift on a train, Toad, still disguised as a washerwoman, comes across a horse-drawn barge. The barge's owner offers him a lift in exchange for Toad's services as a washerwoman. After botching the wash, Toad gets into a fight with the barge-woman, who tosses him into the canal. In revenge, Toad makes off with the barge horse, which he then sells to a gypsy. Toad subsequently flags down a passing car, which happens to be the very one which he stole earlier. The car owners, not recognizing Toad in his disguise, permit him to drive their car. Once behind the wheel, he is repossessed by his former passion and drives furiously, declaring his true identity to the passengers who try to seize him. This leads to an accident, after which Toad flees once more. Pursued by police, he runs accidentally into a river, which carries him by sheer chance to the house of the Water Rat.

Toad now hears from Rat that Toad Hall has been taken over by weasels, stoats and ferrets from the Wild Wood, who have driven out Mole and Badger. Toad realizes what good friends he has and how badly he has behaved. Badger then arrives and announces that he knows of a secret tunnel into Toad Hall through which the enemies may be attacked. Armed to the teeth, Rat, Mole and Toad enter via the tunnel and pounce upon the unsuspecting weasels who are holding a party. Having driven away the intruders, Toad holds a banquet to mark his return, during which he behaves both quietly and humbly. He makes up for his earlier wrongdoings by seeking out and compensating those he has wronged, and the four friends live out their lives happily ever after.

Meet the author of *Wind in the Willows*: Kenneth Graham

Kenneth Grahame was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on March 8, 1859. Shortly after Grahame's fifth birthday, his mother died of scarlet fever after giving birth to another son. Soon after, the Grahame children went to live with their grandmother. At the age of 9, Grahame began attending St. Edward's in Oxford. He did well at school, achieving awards in Latin, theology and rugby. Despite his intellectual capabilities, Grahame lacked the money to study at Oxford. He took a job at the Bank of England, where he worked as a clerk. This position brought Grahame to London, where the bank was based. During his early years in London, Grahame became involved in local literary circles. He started out publishing essays in small publications. He then branched out to publish in literary magazines, including the *St. James Gazette*, the *National Observer* and *The Yellow Book*. Several of the essays he wrote were about a family of orphaned children called The Olympians. In 1895, 18 of these short stories were

published in a collection called *The Golden Age*. A second collection, *Dream Days*, was published in 1898. Although little known today, *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days* were acclaimed at the time of their initial publication.

'The Wind in the Willows'

In 1897, Grahame met Elspeth Thompson. They married in 1899. The Grahame's had a son named Alastair, who was born with disabilities including blindness in one eye. When Alastair was a young boy, his father invented bedtime stories about a toad to soothe him to sleep. Within a few years, Grahame had written down his stories in letters to his son, adding the characters of Mole, Rat and Badger. He then compiled his stories into *The Wind in the Willows*. After several rejections, the book was published in October 1908. While the critical reception was chilly, the book was a commercial success. A prominent fan of the book, United States President Theodore Roosevelt, requested to meet Grahame during a 1910 visit to Oxford. Grahame's literary success came at an opportune moment.



Before you visit

You'll be watching *The Wind in the Willows* with a lot of other people, not to mention dozens of actors, actresses, and people backstage who all need to know what's going on at all times. Here are a few rules to remember before you see the show

- Use the restroom before the show begins. Only get up if it's an emergency, and try to leave quietly.
- You may laugh when it's funny, or cry when it's sad, but please don't talk! The actors can hear you, even if you're whispering.
- The performers love applause so make sure you let them know you like the show by clapping at the end of the songs and at the end of the show. If you really liked it you can stand up and clap at the end. This is called a standing ovation.
- Please do not eat or drink anything inside the theatre.

Fun facts to amaze your friends

- Frogs don't actually drink water with their mouths; they drink it through their skin. A frog's skin absorbs water when it is in the water so its body gets all of the hydration that it needs that way and the frog doesn't need to drink with its mouth.
- Frogs hibernate in the wintertime.

- Frog fossils have been found all over the world except in Antarctica, probably because it is too cold all year round there for frogs to live. Some of the fossils that have been found are as old as dinosaurs!
- Rats do not have any thumbs.
- Rats have excellent memory. Once they learn a road path, they will never forget it.
- A mole's diet consists mostly of earthworms. Yuck!
- Moles are not nocturnal, they sleep at night and are awake in the daytime just like us!
- Moles only eat in silence; they won't chow down until its quiet!

The Elements of a Play

Plot: The sequence of events that takes place in a play.

Conflict: The struggle between two opposing forces.

Character: A person or figure who undertakes the action in the plot.

Dialogue: Spoken conversation between two or more characters.

Setting: The particular time and place in which the plot occurs.

Key elements of theatre

Collaboration

Collaborating, or working with a group of people towards the same goal, is a very important part of theatre. Unlike painting, sculpting, or playing an instrument, theatre is a form of art that takes many different people to create the final project. For example, *The Wind in the Willows* had dozens of people to help! There were directors and producers that instruct the actors what to do, set designers that make the stage look like the woods or , costume designers that create the clothes, and tons of people back stage making sure it all runs smoothly. It takes patience, planning, and a willingness to work together to make a good production.

Discussion questions: It can be hard to work with so many other people on the same project. What are some problems you can imagine coming from working with so many people? Compare this problem to a problem you've faced in your own life. How would you resolve this problem?

Storytelling

What is a play? It has actors but it's different from a movie. It tells a story, but it's different from a book. So what exactly is it? A play is a story about a character, told through action and dialogue for a live audience. When telling a story, especially on stage, there are many things to consider. How many characters are in the story? What is the conflict? How will it be resolved? Does the main character get what he or she wants in the end? Is there a lesson learned?

One-word story

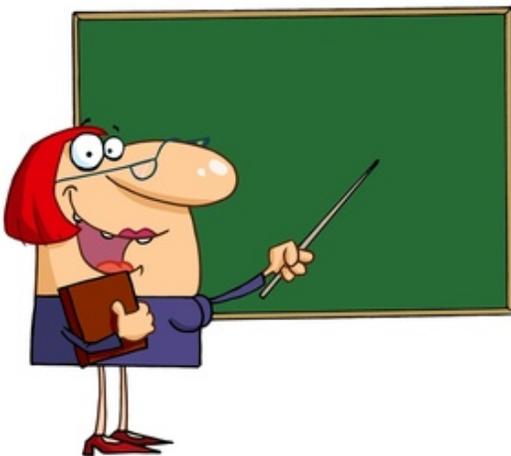
This activity work best if the class is arranged into a circle so that everyone can see each other. One person from the group will start a made-up story by saying the first word only. The person to the left will say the next word in the story. As it travels around the circle, each person will continue by adding one word each to the story at a time. When the story feels complete you can end it and start a new one! Start with a theme, like "Adventure" or "Wild animals" to kick things off.

Chalk Talk: Play versus book

What makes seeing a play different from reading a book? What about behind the scenes? How is creating a play different from creating a book?

Draw a line down the middle of the chalkboard. On one side of the like write PLAY, on the other side write BOOK. Have everyone in the class grab some chalk and begin to fill up the chalkboard writing things that they know about plays and books on the correct sides. Keep it to simple phrases and not whole sentences, so that everyone will have a chance to write multiple ideas. Some might fit into both columns, others will not. Feel free to list everything you can think of!

Once everyone has had a turn or two, or when the board is full, sit back and examine the work. What is done differently with the creation of a play and the creation of a book? How about the difference in audiences? Talk with your students about what to expect when you come to the Pittsburgh Playhouse.



Scrambled eggs

Divide participants into four-five small groups. Stand in the center of the space and have everyone space themselves so that they are an equal distance from you. Explain to the groups that you will be asking them to meet certain challenges and that the first group to complete the challenge and bring the best result to you in the center will receive a point. Emphasize that the groups must work together to solve the challenge and that they must solve it

completely before sending a team member to you. No cheating and no coming half way! Here are some samples to get you started, but you may have particular requests for some groups.

64 cents

A ring and a key

A tube of lip balm

Two photo ideas of two different people

Two different shoes tied together

An object whose name starts with (you pick the letter)

The next level of this game is a little bit more complicated. Give the students a specific amount of time to create the following objects using only their bodies- everyone must be involved as part of the object requested. For an example, if you suggest a car, four students could be the wheels, and a driver might sit on the backs of the students to mimic driving. Start off by allotting 45-60 seconds to complete the task and then decrease the time for each object as you progress. Some examples that work well include:

Firetuck

Toaster

Blender

Fold-out couch

Lawnmower

After the challenges, have the students sit and facilitate a discussion. Talk about the challenges they faced and how the exercise relates to the importance of collaboration. What strategies helped solve the conflicts? Did everyone have an equal voice? Was it harder or easier to be a part of the group as the time decreased?

Be the Designer!

On the last page of this packet, you will find a person-shaped template. Make enough copies so that each student has one. Instruct the students to pick a character from the play. On the template provided use markers, crayons, glitter, fabric swatches, and cut outs from magazines to design the costume for that character. You can make this a group activity by assigning the students to small groups and ask them to come up with coordinating design elements. After the students have finished their design ask them to share and explain it to the class.

You Might Not Believe This: (works best with 3rd grade and above)

Each student starts with a blank piece of paper. Instruct the students to write only the phrase, “you might not believe this but,” on the first line of the paper then complete the sentence. Each student should then pass the paper to another student and they will continue the story by writing one or two sentences or until he or she feels they can continue with the next story. The stories should be written in the first person narrative style. After a few minutes ask the students to finish their stories. When all are finished allow some time for sharing and reflection. Talk about the element of conflict and how the students worked to build and resolve the conflicts.

Setting and opening line

Assign the students (or allow them to choose) a partner. On the boards write two columns: setting and opening line

Under the setting column:

By the riverbank

In a dark cave

A secret tunnel

Dance floor at a party

Space shuttle

A courtroom

Under the opening line column:

“I don’t know what I’m doing here”

“Let’s pretend that yesterday never happened”

“You’re the last person I thought I’d run into here”

“This must be the place”

“Who died and made you boss?”

“What will it take to get rid of you?”

Each pair of students will pick an opening line and begin writing a scene based on this. The only rules are: it must start with the first line, take place in the setting and have only two characters.

