

# Big Theatre for Little People

THE PORTRAIT THE WIND THE CHAIR



By  
Y York

Directed by  
Christopher Gurr

Student Matinee  
2000-2001



Geva  
Theatre

SEASON

## Dear Educators,

What are *you* afraid of?

I'm afraid of ants. And birds. And the dark, sometimes. I'm afraid of guns. Of arts funding cut-backs. Of war. Of death. The usual.

Sometimes my fear is good. Fear fuels my passion. It keeps me safe by keeping me out of unsafe places and situations. It reminds me to live in the present.

*Lucy: ...I don't want to give anybody a little hug.*

*Minnie: Since when?*

*Lucy: No, you shouldn't hug. You shouldn't like people too much. Then you feel too bad when they die....*

*Minnie: Don't be sad in advance.... Don't waste your time on stuff that might not even happen.*

One of the reasons I do theatre, and specifically theatre for young people, is because I believe the theatre is a safe space to experience those things which frighten us or make us sad or feed our anger. The theatre provides audiences with vicarious experiences which inspire dialogue and thought, a rehearsal for life.

What follows on pages 3-10 are activities, articles, and questions written for your students. Please feel free to adapt activities for your class, as they were designed for a wide range of students. We will be sharing more information about the play and ways it might tie in to your classroom curriculum at the **teacher workshop on March 13th from 4-5:30pm here at Geva Theatre**. We invite you to join us for that event and meet some of the artists involved in creating this production.

Thank you for embracing Geva's new venture, *Big Theatre for Little People*. Thank you for not being afraid of this new thing and for enabling your students to come to the theatre to be afraid – or to laugh, to cry, to gasp, to applaud.



Amy Goeldner  
Associate Director of Education  
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### Cast of Characters (in order of appearance)

**Lucy**  
worried,  
impertinent,  
10

**Terroba**  
Lucy's sister,  
stuffy,  
nervous,  
14

**Minnie**  
fearless,  
fun,  
a tomboy,  
14

**ChairMan**  
a chair,  
ageless

*"All monsters have taken up residence elsewhere."*

Terroba

## Synopsis – The Story of the Play

Lucy, age 10, and Terroba, age 14, are sisters. Their grandmother has died and they and their mother are living in her old house. Lucy is afraid of many things in her grandma's house, including an overstuffed armchair in the living room and a life-size portrait of her grandmother as a teenager. The play begins as Lucy and Terroba come home, alone, after school one day at the beginning of an enormous windstorm. Terroba and Lucy think about going across the street to wait for their mom to come home from work but it's too windy to leave the house. Eventually the fierce storm causes the phone to go dead and the lights to go out. Terroba suggests, "If we go to sleep, we won't notice that the lights are out." When Lucy wakes up the living room has been transformed and magic things begin to happen. To tell you more would ruin the ending!

### About Writing the Play – From the Playwright, Y York

The first act of *the Portrait the Wind the Chair* came very fast, once I knew who Lucy was and what she was afraid of and why she was afraid of it. (By the way, for those of you who aren't writers, the way a writer finds out these things about a character is by writing.) But the second act came harder. Because of the nature of the play, I needed to know what the living room looked like in order to finish the script. So I started drawing the living room. I'm a terrible drawer with almost no visual sense, so these drawings were dreadful, but knowing where things were in the room allowed me to know how the room could be transformed into the second act setting. When it came time for the set designer to design the actual set for the premiere production, her design closely resembled my living room, even though she had never seen my drawings

I have lots of tricks to keep me writing. It takes a long time to write a play, and that's only if I do it every day. If I start taking a lot of breaks and vacations, then the time it takes stretches into years and years. I want to get the play done, so I can't be getting stuck. I do anything it takes to get unstuck. Mostly the form that my unsticking takes is writing. When the characters get quiet, I simply take them to a new place. For example, when Terroba and Lucy were talking about Terroba's friend Emily, I realized I didn't know enough about Emily to write the scene. So I stopped writing the scene and made Terroba describe her friend Emily to me in complete detail. Terroba's description generated everything I needed to know in order to go back and write the scene. Even though the description of Emily isn't in the play, writing it made me know how Terroba feels about Emily. I have many, many tricks like this. Sometimes I go to the library for research. If I needed to go find out how wind works, I would have done that, but only until I got re-inspired to go back to the play. Research for me means I'm stuck. I only do it to get unstuck and then I go back to the writing.

*"This could be the windstorm of the century."* Terroba

This is a stage direction from the play: *When they open the door, the force from the wind blows the door open, pushes them against the wall; it takes all their effort to close it again.*

Find your own space in the room. Experiment with using your body to show you are moving against a strong wind. How can you convey this to an audience?

In the play there will be no real wind pushing the actors backwards, but they will create an illusion of strong wind through their body movements. The addition of sound to this moment can reinforce the illusion. Ask a friend (or two) to create the sound of fierce wind to underscore your movement. Ask another friend to watch and listen as you perform your movement with accompanying sound effect. How does the addition of sound help to create illusion?

Y York

**Premiere:** *a first public performance or showing of a play, opera, film, etc.*

**Resemble:** *to be similar to, to be like*

**Generate:** *to bring about or produce*

**Illusion:** *something that fools one of the senses*

## From the Director, Christopher Gurr

**Process:** a series of steps, actions, or operations that bring about or lead to a result

**Cycle:** a series of events that is regularly repeated in the same order

**Hypothesis:** a theory

When I direct a play I go through a process you could break into three parts. Before rehearsals start I go through a cycle over and over again: read the play, see the play in my mind, hear the play in my head, get a hunch, form a hypothesis or question, and then I go back and read it **again**. I'll go through this cycle as many times as I can between the time the play is given to me and the first day of rehearsal. Different questions and ideas pop up each time through. It's amazing what you can discover on the 19th go-round. Sometimes the same things keep popping up every time – I listen to those carefully. I also make lots of lists and doodles and diagrams during this part. This is my homework.

Next I need to start telling the story out loud; first to the designers working on the play, then to the actors and technicians. I want to help them see it and hear it in their minds as clearly as I do and I want them to bring to the process their own ideas and questions about the story. After all, they are the ones who will eventually be telling the story “out loud” for the audience by performing the play. This part goes on through the design process and the entire rehearsal period. It is very hard work and lots of fun.

The last step for me is to get out of the way of the play. By the time a play is near its first performance it is far too big for one person's brain to hold it or arms to carry. It has started to travel on its own energy and I can't run as fast as it will want to, what with the intense relationships each actor has built with his or her character and story, and the new energy of the audience. This step is the hardest one in many ways. One way to sum up my job as a director is like what my mother once said to describe the job of a parent, “The job of a parent is to work themselves out of a job.” I know I've done a good job when I feel the play no longer needs me in the room to take care of it.

As I read this play, the most fun thing for me is that it happens in a realistic setting – a place that could seem like home to any of us – and yet weird things happen there which change the house into something else. Something not like home. Something maybe a little scary and exciting. It's kind of like going to the theatre. We all sit in a room that really exists, in a building that really exists, in a city that is our home – and then really weird things can happen. That's a lot of fun, I think.

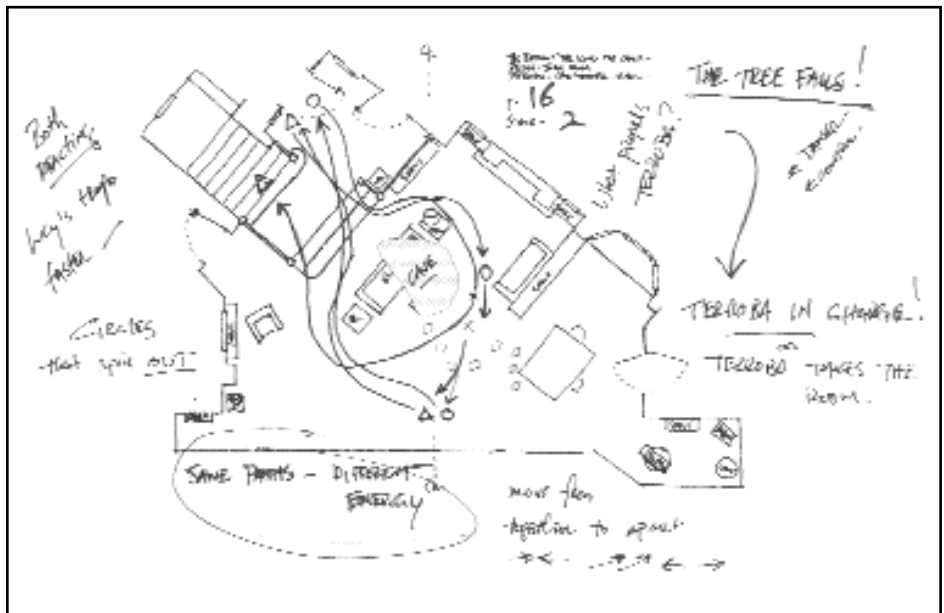
The director and actors rehearsed 6 days a week, five hours a day for four weeks to get the play ready for you. After the rehearsal day was over, homework began. What kind of homework do you think an actor does? What kind of homework does a director do every day in between rehearsals?

How do you think the presence of an audience – of *you* in the audience – changes a play? What makes going to see a play different than watching something on TV or seeing a movie? Which, if any, of those things are related to the audience?



Christopher Gurr

**Realistic:** closely resembling real life or nature



Christopher creates diagrams like this one to help himself visualize the actors' movement, also called blocking, on stage.

## Be A Text Detective

Reading a play is different than reading a book or a story. Plays are not meant to be read, they are written to be performed. When you read a play you need to use play-reading skills – visualize the lights and set, hear the sound effects, imagine how actors might move or speak as a character.

Reading a play can also be like looking for clues. Information that is useful for actors, directors, or designers may be found in dialogue or stage directions. Below is a page from the script of *the Portrait the Wind the Chair*. In it are clues about how the set should look, how the characters should act, what props we need, what costumes are necessary.

As you read this section try to find the clues a theatre artist would look for – they may be in the dialogue or the stage directions.

Think like a Designer – visualize the set and costumes.

Think like a Director – think about how the story is told, the beginning, middle and end of the scene.

Think like an Actor – think about the characters, their lives beyond what the script tells you.

Make a list of the clues you find. Compare your list with the class. When you come to see the play notice how the "clues" you found appear in the production in the form of set pieces, costumes, or actions.

**Visualize:** *to form a mental image of, to see in your mind*

**Dialogue:** *the words spoken in conversation by the characters of a written work, as a play*

**Stage Direction:** *an instruction written into the script, indicating stage actions, movements of performers, or production requirements*

### Page 8 THE PORTRAIT THE WIND THE CHAIR Act I

*(Unseen, LUCY stands in the kitchen doorway, still with letters, book bag, and also a broom.)*

**LUCY.** Who you talking to? *(TERROBA screams. LUCY screams.)* Don't scare me! Don't scare me!

**TERROBA.** Scare YOU?! *(Best.)* What are you doing here?! You have tutoring!

**LUCY.** No tutoring. Because of the storm.

**TERROBA** *(starts upstairs. With finality).* I've got homework. *(LUCY remains where she is with coat on, throws newspaper and mail on the floor. TERROBA stops.)* What? What now?

**LUCY.** You know what.

**TERROBA** *(sighs).* You have to get over this.

**LUCY.** Well, I'm not over it yet. Okay?!

**TERROBA** *(opens closet. Over-loud for LUCY's benefit).* What have we here? Coats coats and more coats. And overcoats, and boots. And coat hangers. All monsters have taken up residence elsewhere. *(TERROBA starts to close closet.)*

**LUCY.** Not so fast. *(LUCY pokes in closet with broom. She jumps back frightened.)* Oh!

**TERROBA.** What?

**LUCY** *(realizing).* Oh, it's just a jacket. Okay.

**TERROBA.** Give me your coat. *(Tries to take LUCY's coat.)*

**LUCY.** Don't touch me.

**TERROBA.** I was just going to hang it up.

**LUCY.** Here. *(LUCY tosses the coat on floor. TERROBA hangs it up.)*

**TERROBA.** You are so messy. Put that stuff [letters] on the table.

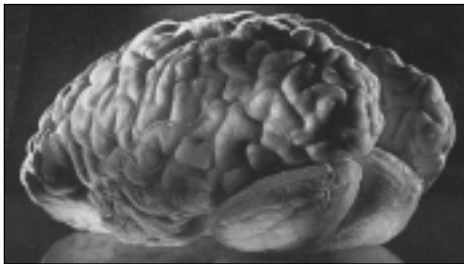
**LUCY.** I don't know why I have to bring in the letters every day.

## The Science of Fear

If we were to go back in time to meet the first human beings we would find that one of the things we have in common is the feeling of fear. While the things we are afraid of would be slightly different – we might not be afraid of a woolly mammoth if we saw one – many of the things we are afraid of, an early human would be too. Some of our fears are a direct result of the world our human ancestors lived in. Those ancient people who were afraid of, and avoided, poisonous snakes lived to see another day. And that fear of fangs was passed on to those survivors' offspring.

All animals have a fear instinct, often referred to as “fight or flight.” When we encounter something that is dangerous certain things happen within our bodies. These reactions are not controlled by our conscious minds. The body prepares itself to either fight the danger or flee away from it. A burst of the hormone adrenaline makes the heart race fast. Breathing increases. Blood leaves the skin and digestive system to go to the brain and muscles. Turning pale and having “butterflies in your stomach” are the trade-offs for being physically ready to face an emergency. If an animal (a human, for example) has hair, the hair stands up (goosebumps), making the animal look bigger, and better able to protect itself. Again, those animals who used their fight or flight instinct well survived and passed along these behaviors to their offspring.

In the brain a small almond-shaped area called the amygdala receives and handles information related to fear. When the amygdala receives information – like the sight of a snake on a ground or a scratching at your bedroom window – it starts a variety of processes. First it triggers the fight or flight reactions – increased heartbeat and breathing, etc. At the same time the amygdala sends slower signals to the cerebral cortex for a more advanced analysis. Using information from many parts of the brain the initial information may be interpreted more fully – the snake is really a stick, or the scratching at the window is the branch of a tree and not a monster. The cortex then sends a message back to the amygdala. You may have already felt the initial jolt of fear but any further alarm signals are stopped.



*The Human Brain*

**Cerebral Cortex:**  
*the piece of the brain that controls movement, speech, hearing, and vision*



**Are you afraid of anything? How do you deal with your fears? Is it ever good, or helpful, to be afraid?**

**Adrenalin can be a good thing – especially for actors. Why do you think the nervous energy caused by adrenalin might be useful for an actor?**

**Writer Vince Rause overcame his fear of roller coasters by riding them again and again. You can hear audio of his roller coaster rides on [www.discovery.com/exp/rollercoasters/rollercoasters.html](http://www.discovery.com/exp/rollercoasters/rollercoasters.html). Does doing something you're afraid of again and again help you to be less afraid?**

*“Don't enrage the Queen, or you will be sorry.”* Lucy

Do this activity in small groups or by yourself. Choose a quote. Think, or talk, about what it means. The quote might not be literal, it might not follow the exact meaning of the words. Some of the people quoted here were speaking poetically, using language in a creative way. Think, or talk, about real life examples of this quote, or situations in which this quote would be useful. Illustrate the quote with a picture of one of your examples, or a visual metaphor of your own.

Find out about the person who said your quote. Is there something in that person's history, or the time in which they said or wrote the quote, that makes the quote easier to understand? <http://www.s9.com/biography/> is a site that can give you a little more information about these people.

## Fear Quotes



Eleanor Roosevelt

*You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face.... You must do the thing you think you cannot do.*

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884 - 1962)

*Fear is an emotion indispensable for survival.*

Hannah Arendt (1906 - 1975)

*Fear always springs from ignorance.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 - 1882)

*Fear has its use but cowardice has none.*

Mahatma Gandhi (1869 - 1948)

*We must build dikes of courage to hold back the flood of fear.*

Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929 - 1968)

*Fear an ignorant man more than a lion.*

Kurdish Proverb

*Boldness can mask great fear.*

Marcus Annaeus Lucanus (39 - 65)

*To fear is one thing. To let fear grab you by the tail and swing you around is another.* Martin Luther King, Jr.

Katherine Paterson (1932 - \_\_\_\_)



Shirley MacLaine

*The more I traveled the more I realized that fear makes strangers of people who would be friends.*

Shirley MacLaine (1934 - \_\_\_\_)

*Or in the night, imagining some fear,  
How easy is a bush supposed a bear!*

*A Midsummer Night's Dream Act V. i.*

William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616)

*Curiosity will conquer fear even more than bravery will.*

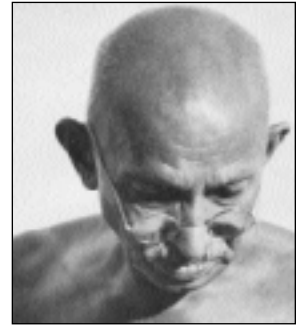
James Stephens (1882 - 1950)

*Fear grows in darkness; if you think there's a bogeyman around, turn on the light.*

Dorothy Thompson (1894 - 1961)

*Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear – not absence of fear.*

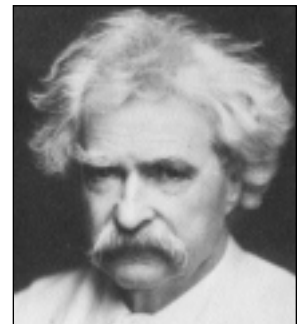
Mark Twain (1835 - 1910)



Mahatma Gandhi



**Metaphor:** A figure of speech in which a word or phrase that is ordinarily associated with one thing is applied to something else, thus making a comparison between the two



Mark Twain

*"Don't be ridiculous. Nothing's under the sofa."* Lucy

## About the Costumes

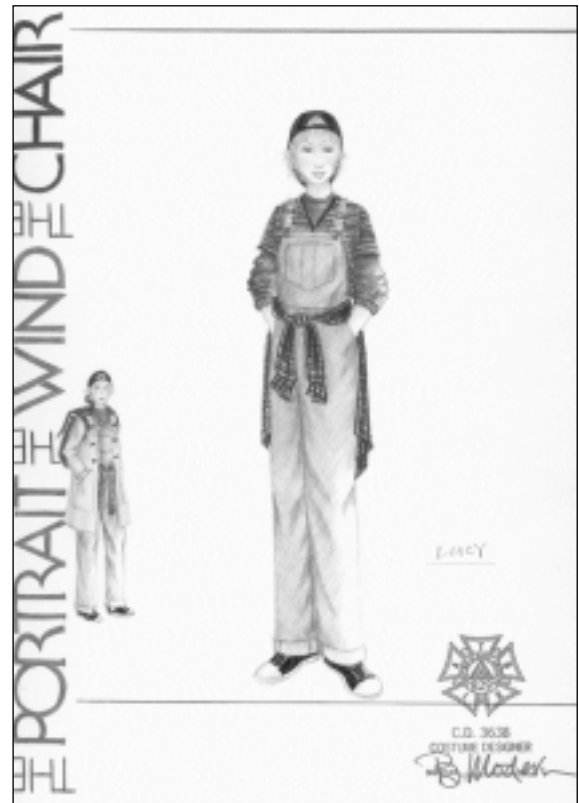
B. Modern is the Costume Designer for our production of *the Portrait the Wind the Chair*, the person who decides what clothes the actors will wear. Sometimes a play is set in modern-day. In that case the costumes are often bought at a store. Other plays involve clothing specially designed and built for the production. Costumes are always built, or bought, to fit the actor who will wear them. One of the first things an actor will do when she or he comes to Geva is go to the costume shop to get measured – neck, waist, arms, legs, even head measurements! Here is what B. Modern had to say about designing the costumes for this play.

*The first thing I do is read through the script. I generally take notes as I read. Then I talk to the Director. I ask a lot of questions and I listen as he tells me what his ideas about the play are. Then I go back and read the play again. I start to make drawings as I think about the play. I tend to draw and think simultaneously – my hand is like an appendage to my brain. It's almost as if the rest of my body is just watching the drawing and thinking as it happens.*

*For this play I had to design costumes for two very real people. I researched their costumes by looking at real girls – in airports (I've been traveling a lot lately) or in malls. From the script I know something about the personalities of these girls and I designed their clothes to reflect that. Lucy is very imaginative and she doesn't seem to care much about other people's opinions. Her clothing is much more colorful and distinctive than Terroba's, who is more withdrawn and doesn't like to call attention to herself. Terroba's clothing is that of a serious, logical, shy individual.*

*Sometimes clues in the script help me make decisions about a costume. Sometimes a costume has to do something and that helps me to decide what it looks like. Sometimes the costume can come out of my imagination – my creativity is the only limitation.*

*"I told Mom and Dad to call you Lucy or don't bring you home from the hospital." Terroba*



**Simultaneous:**  
existing or occurring  
at the same time

**Appendage:** a part of  
the body that comes  
out of another part

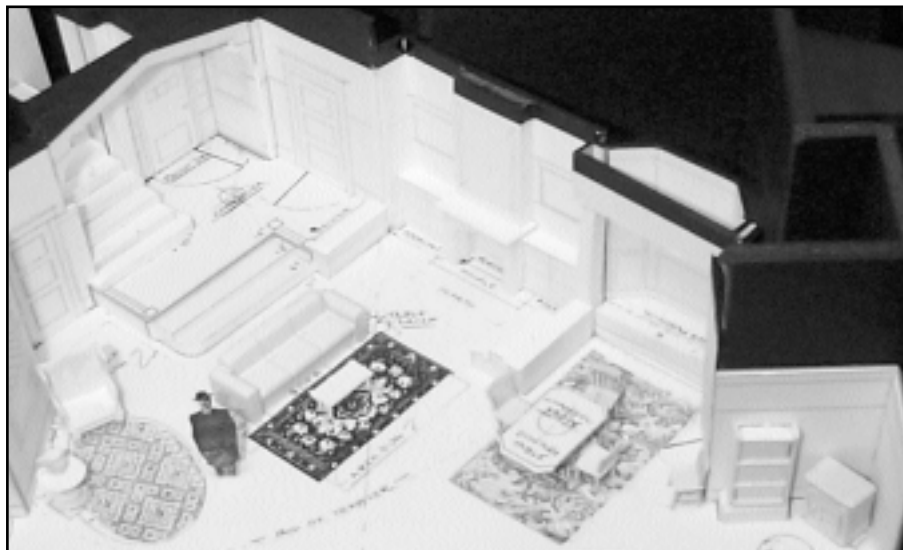
**Distinctive:** serving  
to identify,  
characterize, or set  
apart from others

## About the Sets

Our set designer, John King, worked together with our Director, Christopher Gurr, to decide what the set for the play would look like. John King wrote this about designing the set.

*The first thing a Set Designer tries to do is fit all the requirements that come from the script onto the stage. For a realistic set like this one that means fitting things like the front door, closets, staircase, fireplace, kitchen door, etc. into relationships that make sense. Would the kitchen door be right next to the front door in a real house? Probably not. Getting all the requirements to fit on stage in a realistic way can be a difficult trick especially in a small space like Geva's Nextstage.*

*Then, collaborating with the Director, the Set Designer begins to work out the "character" of the house. How does a house or a room get to look the way it does? Some of that information can be found in the script if you look for it and some of it the Director and Designer imagine based on what might have happened. This play tells us that the house belonged to Minnie, Lucy and Terroba's grandmother. It doesn't tell us when she moved into the house but the Director and I think it was more than 50 years ago. We also think that the house might have been built even 30 or 40 years before that! So this house should look like it was built 90 years ago. Houses from that time don't look like most houses do today. They were often smaller with lots of dark wood, stained glass windows, and wood panel doors. We found pictures in books that show us this kind of house. Then there's the furniture and other stuff in the room. Some of these things might be 90 years old but probably many pieces are newer than that. So the Set Designer, with lots of help from the Scene Shop and the Props Department, chooses paint colors, furniture, and props, to create the house that Lucy and Terroba live in.*



*The Set Model for the Portrait the Wind the Chair.*

**Requirement:** something needed or demanded

**Collaborate:** to work together on a project

**Upholster:** to provide furniture, such as chairs or sofas, with coverings, cushions, stuffing, springs, etc.

How did your house come to look the way it does? If your family were characters in a play what things in your house would tell us something about your story or your personalities? A specific piece of furniture? A painting? A knickknack?

The Geva Theatre Props Master says, "The scene shop builds the room and props puts everything in it." In other words, the scene shop will build the floor and walls and the prop shop buys, makes, or finds everything to go inside the "room." A props artisan may be responsible for reupholstering furniture, buying a table lamp, or painting a life-size portrait. What other things might you find in a living room that our props shop had to find or make? When you sit in the audience before the play, take a minute to notice the props on stage.

*"Gramma said the hurricane wind felt like a big monster shaking the house." Terroba*

## **The Audience – The Final Piece**

*“The public sometimes thinks an artist is a television set – something comes out, nothing goes back. They don’t realize that if they can hear me, then I can hear them – their coughs, the electronic beeps from their wristwatches, the squeaking of their shoes.... The art of performance depends on the relationship between the musician and the audience. In the concert hall, each motionless listener is part of the performance. The concentration of the player charges the electric tension in the auditorium and returns to him magnified....The audience grows together and becomes a group. There’s the impression of a journey undertaken together and a goal achieved.”* **Pianist Alfred Brendel**

This is a quote from a musician, but everything he says applies to the theatre, too. When you come to see a play, the actors are aware of you. Unlike a movie or a television show, the audience can affect or influence what happens on stage. Actors can hear the audience laugh, cry, become restless, or become still and silent with concentration. The mood of the audience can affect the mood of the performance – this is why we say that no two performances are alike, because no two audiences are the same.

We hope you enjoy the show. While you sit in the audience, please remember that you are a part of the theatre journey. You do not take that journey alone; please respect the people who are on the journey with you and allow them to enjoy the play also.

**The audience is the final piece of the process – without an audience, the actors would still be rehearsing. By adding the audience the play becomes a performance!**

## **Tell Us What You Think**

Please write to us or send us pictures! We will be posting selected student responses to the play on our website, [www.gevatheatre.org](http://www.gevatheatre.org). We are always interested in knowing what our audiences think about our plays, especially...

- The most fun part
- The part that surprised you
- The most exciting part
- The part you talked about on the bus on the way back to school
- The first thing you told your family about the play when you got home
- The part you’d like to see again
- The part you thought about the most after
- The moment where you noticed the set
- The minute where you noticed a costume
- The most interesting sound you heard
- The part where something unexpected happened

*“Don’t fink on me or you’re toast, okay?”* Minnie

## For Younger Readers

*Life Doesn't Frighten Me At All* poem by Maya Angelou, paintings by Jean-Michel Basquiat

*Grandmother Bryant's Pocket* by Jaqueline Briggs Martin, pictures by Petra Mathers

*Kate's Giants* by Valiska Gregory, illustrated by Virginia Austin

## For Intermediate Readers

*Getting Near to Baby* by Audrey Coulombis

*Words of Stone* by Kevin Henkes

*The Young Oxford Book of The Human Being: The Body, The Mind, and the Way We Live* by David Glover

*Big Head! A Book About Your Brain and Your Head* by Dr. Pete Rowan, illustrated by John Temperton

## For Teachers

*The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life* by Joseph LeDoux

*The Science Time Book of the Brain* edited by Nicholas Wade

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*"I know torture, I've lived with children."*

ChairMan

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