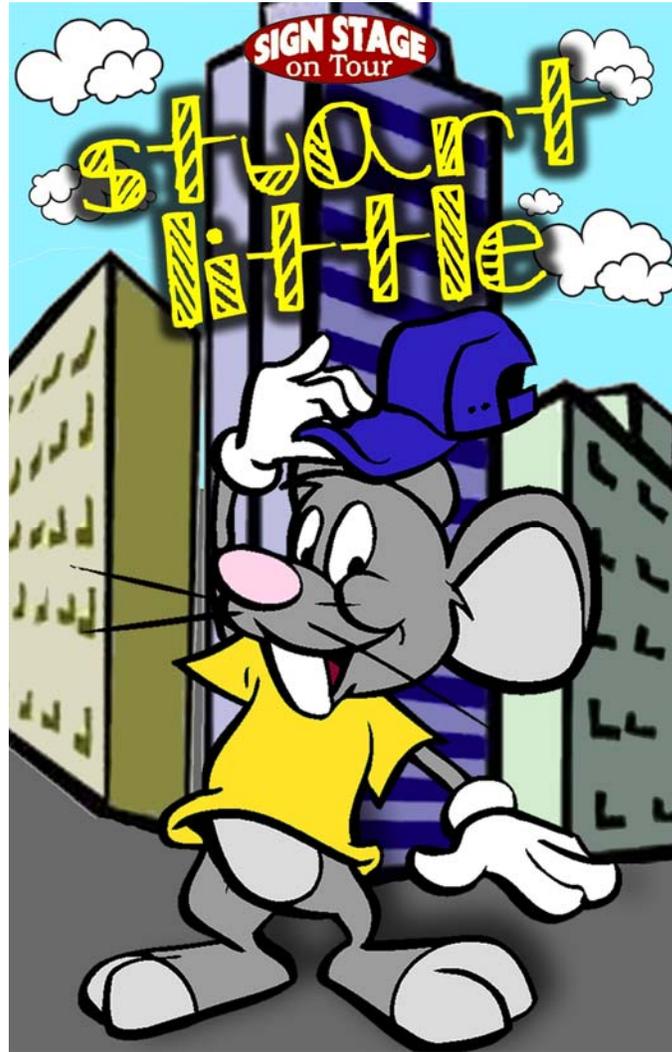


A Teacher's Guide



Stuart Little Synopsis

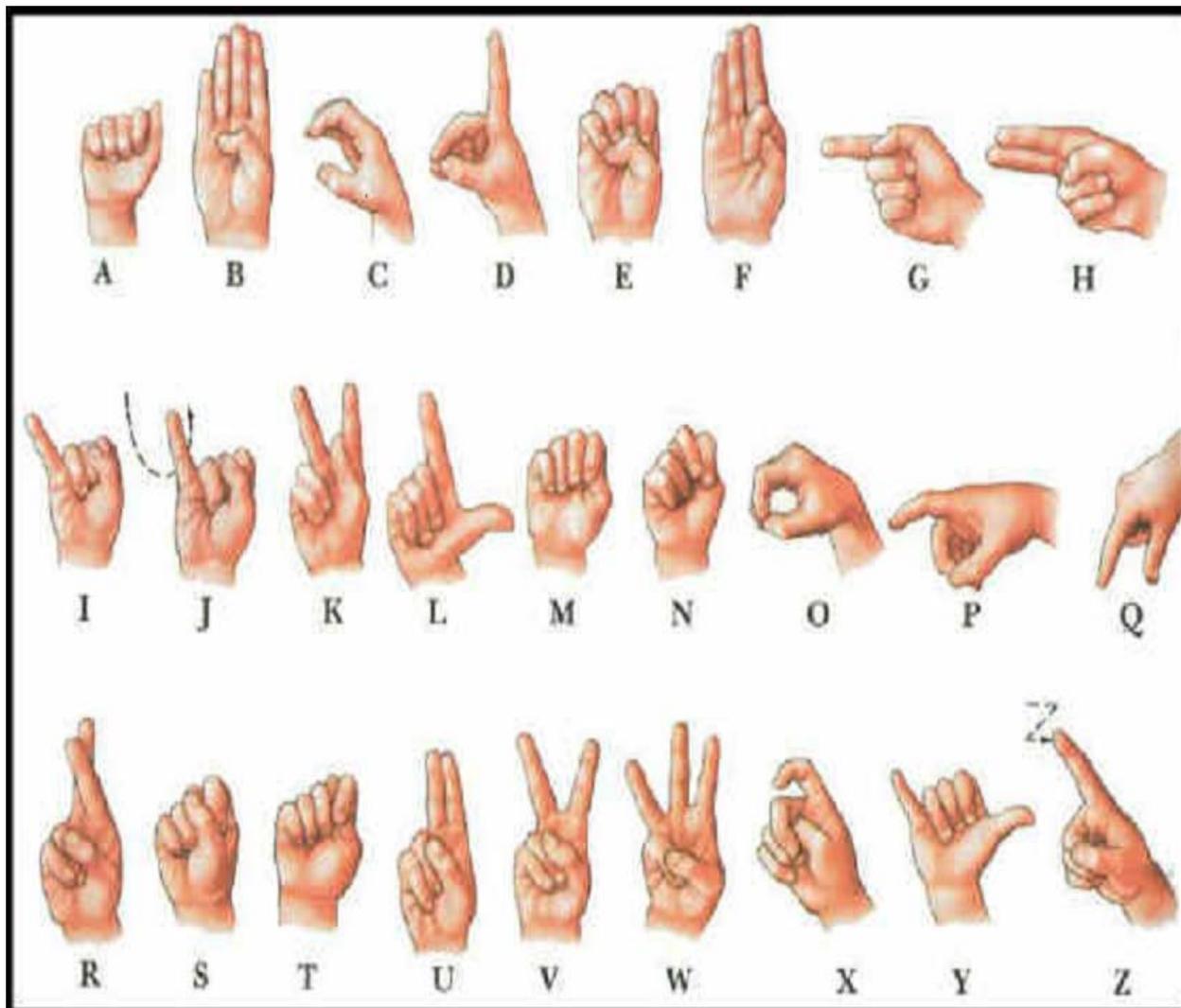
Stuart Little is a realistic fantasy about a talking mouse born into an ordinary New York Family, but the family cat wants rid of him. In a pleasant mouse like manner, shy but inquisitive, he is always getting into scrapes. It's the tale of a lone hero who leaves his family to embark on a difficult personal journey in search of what seems unattainable. The many adventures, both big and small, of *Stuart Little* are brought vividly to life in this story-theatre presentation. The acting ensemble plays many human and animal roles in a series of delightful scenes that make up the marvelous maneuverings of a mild-mannered mouse trying to survive in a "real people's world."

E.B. White (Author) Elwyn Brooks White was famously known for the children classics, *Stuart Little* (1945), *Charlotte's Web* (1952) and *The Trumpet of the Swan* (1970). However, this modern essayist was also widely known as a long standing contributor for the magazine column, "Notes and Comment" in *The New Yorker*, and for revising and adding a chapter to William S. Strunk's *The Elements of Style*. Born in Mount Vernon, New York in 1899, his writing career began after graduating from Cornell University in 1921. As an aspiring writer, White worked for United Press International, American Legion News Service, as a reporter for the Seattle Times and for an advertising agency. In addition to many published books of essays, White published two collections of poetry, *The Lady Is Cold* and *The Fox of Peapack*. E.B. White has been honored with awards for his essays and children's literature and continues to have a great influence on readers of all ages.

Read more: www.notablebiographies.com

BEFORE THE SHOW

Have students learn their name and Stuart Little in American Sign Language Alphabet



FACTS ABOUT AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE (ASL)

Many deaf people communicate with each other by using American Sign Language (ASL). ASL is a language just as French, Spanish and English are languages.

ASL is a visual language. It relies on the eyes and hands for communication. Every thought, idea, and emotion can be expressed through ASL.

When speaking, a hearing person uses changes in his/her voice to express feelings. A person using ASL will use facial expressions, body movement, and signs to make an idea clear.

A facial expression can be **exaggerated*** to place great importance on the feeling. When signing "I am happy", a smile -- big or small -- will show precisely how happy you are. Facial expressions also show the difference between a question and a statement. For example, when a person asks a question in ASL, generally his eyebrows will lower and he will tilt his head slightly.

ASL is also a **spatial*** language -- a language that uses space. Unlike English, where we must say one word at a time, someone using ASL can combine and overlap signs to express themselves. A person signing ASL will use the space around his/her body to create the language.

It is important to know that ASL is not a picture language. Watching ASL is not like playing charades. If you don't know the language, you will not be able to guess the meaning based on how it looks. You might be able to understand some signs just based on the way they look -- for instance "tree" and "sun" are fairly easy to guess. But most signs will only have meaning if you study and learn them.

ASL sentence structure and grammar are different from English. For instance, time is usually the first thing signed in an ASL sentence. Then the signer generally indicates the object of the sentence, then the subject, then the action. For example, the sentence "I went to the movies yesterday" might be signed in ASL as "Yesterday movie I go".

As with every language, this general structure is flexible. If you say "Last night I saw a great movie on TV" or "I saw a great movie on TV last night" or "A great movie was on TV last night", you are communicating the same information in different ways. Likewise, in ASL you can communicate the same information in many different ways.

* *Indicates words that can be used in vocabulary lessons*

THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN COMMUNICATING WITH DEAF OR HEARING-IMPAIRED PEOPLE:

- Place yourself facing a source of light (for instance a lamp or a sunny window). Keep your hands and food away from your mouth when speaking.
- You may need to get the person's attention by some visual or physical signal. For example, you might lightly touch them on the shoulder or wave your hand.
- Make eye contact with the deaf or hearing-impaired person while you are talking with him/her. This is true even if there is an **interpreter*** helping the two of you communicate.
- If the deaf or hearing-impaired person is reading your lips, look directly at him/her. Speak slowly and clearly, but do not exaggerate your lip movements or shout. Try to speak expressively -- use facial expressions, **gestures*** and body movements to make yourself clear.

WHEN YOU MEET A DEAF PERSON, REMEMBER:

Not every deaf person can read your lips. **LIPREADING*** is a learned skill. Only about one-third of English speech is visible on the lips. Some deaf or hearing-impaired people are good lipreaders because they have practiced it for a long time.

LOUD NOISES can bother deaf or hearing-impaired people who wear hearing aids. If a person wears a hearing aid, very loud sounds might even cause them some pain.

Deaf and hearing-impaired persons have **NORMAL VOCAL ORGANS**. They may speak a little more slowly than you do, or their voices may sound different from yours. Some deaf or hearing-impaired people choose not to speak if they think their voices will be difficult to understand. The more you listen, the easier it becomes to understand the speech of a deaf or hearing-impaired person.

Deaf people can do **EVERYTHING** hearing persons can except hear.

* *Indicates words that can be used in vocabulary lessons*

DEAF AWARENESS DISCUSSION QUESTION & ACTIVITIES

These questions and activities are intended to give the students some insights into the world of deafness. These things can be discussed before or after the performance, but it is suggested that you at least begin discussing these things before the students view the performance. This allows the students to partially experience the world that a deaf person lives in daily.

1. **TV:** Have students watch a television program with the sound turned off and then write about the experience. What happens when you have to pay more attention to what your eyes see?
2. **Storytelling:** Have students tell a story without their voices. *Have them move their lips* as if speaking normally and at a normal speed, but they *should not use their voices at all*. This will show how a deaf person sees a hearing person speaking. Afterwards, have the class discuss how much of the story they understood, and how easy or hard it was to read the speaker's lips or to guess what the speaker was saying.
3. **Reactions:** Have students discuss how they would honestly react if they met a person who is deaf and what they would do. How would they try to communicate? How many different ways can they think of to try to communicate?
4. **Feelings --** Have students discuss what they would feel if they could not hear.....birds singing, their parents' voices, or their favorite TV shows. How would this make them feel? What sound or sounds would they miss the most? What sound or sounds would they miss the least?
5. **Manual Alphabet (Fingerspelling) --** Have students learn, then practice the Sign Language Manual Alphabet. They can practice spelling their names, objects found in the classroom, the name of the school, etc. Once the students have learned it, set up a spelling bee. Each word must be fingerspelled rather than voiced.

CLASS ACTIVITIES

Before or After the Performance

These activities can be done with your class before or after the performance. If activities are done before, students should be familiar with the characters and story of *Stuart Little*.

1. **Writing/Discussion:** Who is your favorite character in *Stuart Little*? Why? Which character reminds you the most of yourself?
2. **Drawing/Painting:** Can you draw a picture of the boat race in Central Park?
3. **Writing/Discussion:** Why is the story of *Stuart Little* considered a “fantasy”? What is special about *Stuart Little*?
4. **Research:** Students can find information about the animals represented in *Stuart Little*: mice, cats, dogs, and pigeons. What kind of homes do those animals usually have? What do they eat?
5. **Physical Communication I:** Create a series of flashcards that have commands on them – i.e., “give me your math book” or “help me with my homework”. Give each student one or more flashcards. Pair students and ask them to communicate the command to their partner without using their voices. They can use gesture, mime or body language to communicate their commands. At the end of the exercise, ask students how they felt about communicating physically. Was it hard? Did they understand each other?
6. **Physical Communication II:** This is an exercise that many children do already! Pair students off. One student will write a word with her/his finger on the other student’s back. The other student will try to guess the word. Ask how accurate they were with their guesses.

CLASS ACTIVITIES

After the Performance

1. **Writing/Discussion:** Ask students about their reactions to the performance of *Stuart Little*. Had they ever seen a deaf person speaking with sign language before? Did the show change their feelings about deaf people and their understanding of deafness?
2. **Writing:** Stuart goes on an adventure to rescue Margalo. Ask your students if they have “gone on an adventure” that they can share with the class.
3. **Writing/Discussion:** In the show, Stuart meets Leroy, a bully, in Central Park. Ask students to define what a bully is and how they should react. How can friends help?
4. **Sign Song:** In the show, students will have seen our actors perform a “sign songs”. Divide the class into several groups and ask them to pick a simple song to perform. Have some of the students sing the song, while others communicate the song’s meaning through physical communication – mime, gesture, etc. After students perform their songs, ask the rest of the class how the visual performance added to or changed their appreciation of the song.
5. **Writing:** Stuart makes many friends in the story. What makes someone a friend? How do you treat a friend? Write an ending to the part where Stuart meets Margalo.
6. **Writing/Drawing:** Margalo travels away from New York City. Pretend you are Margalo and create a postcard and write to Stuart about where you are and what you are doing.

Sign Stage on Tour

The history of Sign Stage on Tour is found in the history of Cleveland Signstage Theatre. Cleveland Signstage Theatre (formerly Fairmount Theatre of the Deaf) was founded in 1975 by one deaf actor, Brian Kilpatrick, and one hearing actor, Charles Saint Clair. This unique form of theatre integrated the experiences of two distinct cultures. Its mission was to present engaging educational programs that involved theatre arts, American Sign Language and Deaf issues in order to create greater sensitivity to deafness and other diversity issues and to improve social and learning skills and self-esteem of deaf individuals. Combining the beauty of American Sign Language, the imagination of mime and the richness of theatrical text, Signstage Theatre explored new manifestations of traditional performance art.

In July 1990, Signstage Theatre became the first professional theatre company in the United States lead by a deaf artistic director, Shanny Mow. In the fall of 1993 it became the first theatre to have a deaf Business Manager, Kian Guan Au. In 1996 Aaron Weir became its second deaf Artistic Director, and in 1998 he became the first deaf individual to hold the position of General Manager for an American theatre

Signstage Theatre won four local Emmy Awards and two Cleveland Drama Critics Circle Awards. In 1991, it was the first recipient of the Ohio Governor's Award for Arts Outreach. Internationally, the theatre represented the United States at the 8th International Pantomime Festival of the Deaf in Brno, Czechoslovakia and the Jerash Festival in Amman, Jordan. In 2002, Signstage Theatre performed its deaf theatre adaptation of *Snow White* at DeafWay II in Washington D.C., the largest most well attended deaf arts festival in the world.

In the fall of 1995, Signstage Theatre began touring with its first ever National Tour *Children of a Lesser God* to 32 cities in nine weeks. In the spring of 1997 they began to tour children's theater with *Winnie the Pooh*, visiting 63 cities performing for over 162,000 children and adults. Through 2000, Signstage Theatre continued to present at least one annual children's theater touring company, traveling coast to coast.

In 2001, with the cooperation and emotional support of Cleveland Signstage Theatre, a new touring company was born. Sign Stage on Tour was created as an equal but separate "touring arm" of Signstage Theatre. Created by William Morgan (Signstage Theatre's then current artistic director) and Erin LaFountain (Signstage Theatre's then current Administrative Assistant), the name was slightly different but the distinctive technique of sign language theatre continued unchanged. When you attend a Sign Stage on Tour performance, you see a unique integration of spoken English and American Sign Language presented on stage... simultaneously. You see the signing of the characters as they speak their lines. You'll also hear the voice of the same character spoken by a hearing actor. Hearing actors with wireless microphones supply the voices of each of the characters as they sign their lines. Very quickly, you will become accustomed to this new way of enjoying theatre. You will be amazed and delighted with the unique experience that is Sign Stage On Tour!

**When you watch a Sign Stage On Tour performance...
"You'll See Things You've Never Heard!"**

For more fun activities visit the websites below:

<http://www.signingtimekids.org/index.php>

http://www.kiddiesgames.com/en/sign_language_games.php

<http://pbskids.org/arthur/print/signdesign/>