The Snowy Day and Other Ezra Jack Keats Stories
March 9-10, 2020

Applause Series Inquiry Guide
Keats’ neighborhood comes to life in this funny adaptation of the collected stories: *Whistle for Willie, Goggles!, A Letter to Amy*, and *The Snowy Day*. A classic since its publication in 1962 and winner of the Caldecott Medal, *The Snowy Day* was one of the first picture books for young people to feature an African American protagonist and is still beloved today.

Follow Peter and his friends through winter, spring, summer and fall as they romp and play, start snowball fights and make snow angels, journey in space and under the sea, and more, all in this imaginative musical play. Using shadow puppetry and Ezra Jack Keat’s collage style of illustration, the story is brought to life on stage. *The Snowy Day & Other Stories* celebrates the magical possibilities of childhood and the challenges of growing up.
The Company

Childsplay is a professional company based in Arizona made of adult actors who teach and perform for young audiences and families. The internationally recognized theatre company believes that young people deserve to experience theater of the highest artistic quality. Childsplay has performed for more than 5 million children and adults and performs for 250,000 children, teachers and families a year.

Childsplay believes that by continuing to create original theatre and connecting to young people’s learning potential, they can build a generation of creative learners, innovative thinkers, and dynamic leaders.

The Mission

Since 1977, Childsplay has been committed to its mission:

“To create theatre so strikingly original in form, content or both that it instills in young people an enduring awe, love, and respect for the medium, thus preserving imagination and wonder, those hallmarks of childhood that are the keys to the future.”

It’s the heart and affection for the material that makes Childsplay’s production work as well as it does….your children will still relate to challenges of childhood as experienced by young Peter. It will stir the imagination and make their lives all the richer.”

—Valley Screen and Stage: David Appleford’s Film and Theatre Reviews
Ezra Jack Keats was a Caldecott Medal-winning picture book author and illustrator. He was born on March 11, 1916, to Polish-Jewish parents living in Brooklyn, New York.

Keats first worked as an illustrator and was published in various magazines. He also illustrated children’s book covers. In 1960, he co-authored *My Dog Is Lost!* with Pat Cherr and began writing and illustrating his own books shortly after. In total, Ezra Jack Keats wrote and illustrated 22 children’s books, including *Peter’s Chair*, *Whistle for Willy*, and the timeless classic *The Snowy Day*.

The books focus on learning new things—how to whistle, outwit a tougher kid, or cope with emotion. The struggles of childhood are the same whether you were born in 1960 or 2020, which makes the books beloved in the past and today. Ezra Jack Keats was a pioneer in American children’s literature. He based the lives of his multiracial characters on his childhood neighborhood—filled with loving parents, friends, and pets. It was unusual in the 1960s for a book to feature a black child as the main character. In fact, *The Snowy Day* was one of the first books to include children of different races living their ordinary lives in the city. He wanted no child to be an outsider. “If we could see each other exactly as the other is,” he wrote, “this would be a different world.”

Keats died at the age of 67 on May 6, 1983.
5 facts about The Snowy Day

01. This book was especially important because it was one of the very first picture books in which the main character was African American. Ezra based the character of Peter on a series of photos he had cut out of Life magazine in the early 1940s. Ezra had noticed that the main characters in the books he illustrated were always white. That didn’t seem fair to other children, who deserved to see characters in books that looked like them. He decided that Peter would be the hero of his story because “he should have been there all along.”

02. The ChildsPlay production uses collage modeled on Ezra Jack Keats illustration style to create their sets. They also use shadow puppets to play many different characters with only three actors on stage.

03. The Snowy Day was the first children’s picture book with an African American protagonist to win a major children’s book award, the Caldecott, in 1963.

04. For The Snowy Day, Ezra created beautiful collages (art made by sticking various different materials such as photographs and pieces of paper or fabric on to a backing) with patterned wallpaper, fabric, stamps, ink, oilcloth and more. Keats used cut-outs and gouache paint to make city scenes—diverse neighborhoods, apartment buildings, graffiti, and a lot of color and energy.

05. 2020 is the 125th Anniversary of the New York Public Library and they’ve revealed that The Snowy Day is the #1 circulating book in the Library’s history since it opened its doors in 1895! Children and families checked out The Snowy Day 485,583 times, reminding us of the importance of diversity in children’s literature so children of all races can see themselves in the stories they read.
Enduring Understandings

Overarching (aka, "big") ideas that are central to the core of the music discipline and may be transferred to new learning beyond the music.

People use theater to express themselves—across time and region. The lives of Ezra Jack Keats’ fictional characters were based on his neighborhood. The lives of writers (and creators in all mediums) are often based on or inspired by their lives and experiences.

The stories focus on an African-American boy. Though stories are located in a particular time, place and person, we find commonalities with the stories’ characters and recognize our shared common goals, feelings and experiences of being human.

Compelling Questions

Found in the following inquiry pages, COMPELLING QUESTIONS deal with curiosities about how things work, invite interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts, and address unresolved issues that require students to construct arguments in response.
Inquiry 01

Ezra Jack Keats wrote and illustrated many books for children.

What can you learn about Ezra Jack Keats life that impacted his writing and illustration?

**Goal:**
Research and draw inferences using text
Connect past to present with supporting evidence

**Research:**
Visit the Ezra Jack Keats Foundation and explore his biography, the history, and characters that he created.
Use the note page on [page] take notes on new or important details.

**Consider:**
The performance was based on books that were written in 1962. Was it important that the characters of Peter and his family were black? Is it important now? Why or why not?

Have students weigh in on their reasons before and after exploring the website and share their responses in small groups.
Inquiry 02

The performance tells the story of Peter’s ordinary, everyday life—it is not the story of a hero or a celebrity.

Why might have Ezra Jack Keats written the story about an ordinary kid? Why might the theater company have decided to bring it to the stage?

Goals:
Connect text to self
Use funds of knowledge to share stories

Consider:
Have students discuss and record answers on white board or post-its.

Click here to explore some other books about ordinary kids and have students compare the story to Peter’s or their own.

What kinds of stories do you have about your ordinary, everyday life? How can you share those stories with others?

Have students write a nonfiction story about a moment in their own lives, focusing on really capturing the sensory details of that experience to help the reader be able to imagine what it was like to have that experience too.

Publish the books (www.storybird.com, www.storyjumper.com and www.littlebirdtales.com are some of our favorite sites) or fold and staple some paper for a low-tech creation. Invite an audience to read or listen to the stories of the kids in your school.
Inquiry 03

How do actors make decisions from the book about how to behave on stage?

How does the book become a play?

Goals:
Consider an Actors’ Job
Use kinetic movement to engage with a text

ACTORS AS CLOSE READERS:
Theater is a collection of choices. A choice is an artistic decision that is made to show a component of the character’s personality, the story, or the theme. An actor’s job is to draw evidence from the text to make choices that bring characters to life on stage.

Activity:
What can you learn from a picture? Look at illustrations in the book The Snowy Day. Describe what you see. Who are the characters? What are the characters doing? With your body, mirror what you see the characters doing. Can you tell how the characters feel? Now, make a choice and try to move your body in a way you think those characters would move. Make another choice and use your voice in a way that you think those characters would use their voices. Now, using your body and your voice, bring one of the pictures from the book to life!

Students can put their scenes together to tell the whole big story of Peter’s day or use the activity to examine more closely any visual text and connect to the story.

Reflect:
Ask students to consider:
“Did you learn anything more about Peter from acting out the pictures?”

“How did you make a good guess about what the characters were feeling even if the words didn’t tell you?”

“How can you use this activity to understand other pictures or stories?”
Reflection
Talk Back

Listen to music while responding to these questions in whatever format makes sense to you—writing, drawing, recording a video or a responding with technology.

What did you see? What was your favorite part?
What did you hear?
What did you imagine? What idea came to your mind?
What do you wonder about?

We love to hear from you. Please send any of your responses to the performance to us at education@dmpa.org. We’ll share the responses with actors and Applause Series donors.

Use this chart to connect the elements of theater to what you see on stage. Choose one aspect to focus on or take some mental notes to reflect on after the performance.

THEATER GLOSSARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THOUGHT</th>
<th>ACTION</th>
<th>CHARACTERS</th>
<th>LANGUAGE</th>
<th>SPECTACLE</th>
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<tr>
<td>The big picture of the play</td>
<td>The events of a play; the story as opposed to the theme; what happens rather than what it means.</td>
<td>These are the people presented in the play that are involved in the perusing plot.</td>
<td>The word choices made by the playwright and the enunciation of the actors of the language.</td>
<td>The spectacle in the theatre can involve all of the aspects of scenery, costumes, and special effects in a production.</td>
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<tr>
<td>GENRE: relating to a specific kind or type of drama and theater such as a tragedy, drama, melodrama, comedy, or farce.</td>
<td>CONFLICT: the problem, confrontation, or struggle in a scene or play; conflict may include a character against him or herself, a character in opposition to another character, a character against nature, a character against society, or a character against the supernatural.</td>
<td>BELIEVABILITY: theatrical choices thought to be true based upon an understanding of any given fictional moment, interpretation of text, and/or human interaction.</td>
<td>DIALOGUE: a conversation between characters.</td>
<td>NON-REPRESENTATIONAL MATERIALS: objects which can be transformed into specific props through the imagination.</td>
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<td>GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES: the underlying actions and events that have happened before the play, story, or devised piece begins.</td>
<td>OBJECTIVE: a goal or particular need or want that a character has within a scene or play.</td>
<td>IMPROVISE: the spontaneous, intuitive, and immediate response of movement and speech.</td>
<td>IMPROVISE: the spontaneous, intuitive, and immediate response of movement and speech.</td>
<td>PRODUCTION ELEMENTS: technical elements selected for use in a specific production, including sets, sound, costumes, lights, music, props, and make-up, as well as elements specific to the production such as puppets, masks, special effects, or other storytelling devices/concepts.</td>
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<td>FOCUS: a commitment by a participant to remain in the scope of the project or to stay within the world of the play.</td>
<td>PLOT: a narrative as revealed through the action and/or dialogue; traditionally, a plot has the elements of exposition, inciting incident, conflict, rising action, climax, and resolution or falling action.</td>
<td>SCRIPT: a piece of writing for the theater that includes a description of the setting, a list of the characters, the dialogue, and the action of the characters.</td>
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<td>STAGING: patterns of movement in a scene or play.</td>
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<td>IMAGINARY ELSEWHERE: an imagined location which can be historical, fictional, or realistic.</td>
<td>INNER THOUGHTS: the underlying and implied meaning or intentions in the character’s dialogue or actions (also known as subtext).</td>
<td>MUSIC: Music can encompass the rhythm of dialogue and speeches in a play or can also mean the aspects of the melody and music compositions as with musical theatre.</td>
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<td>THEME: the aspect of the human condition under investigation in the drama; it can be drawn from unifying topics or questions across content areas.</td>
<td>MOTIVATION: reasons why a character behaves or reacts in a particular way in a scene or play.</td>
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<td>THEATRICAL CONVENTIONS: practices and/or devices that the audience and actors accept in the world of the play even when it is not realistic, such as a narrator, flashback, or an aside.</td>
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Discuss

Use the glossary to select a few elements to focus on during the performance and then talk about what you saw on stage.
Guide Sources

Explore
ChildsPlay Research Guide
https://www.holdenarts.org/snowyday

Ezra Jack Keats Website
https://www.ezra-jack-keats.org

The Snowy Day Read Aloud
https://www.ezra-jack-keats.org/read-aloud/the-snowy-day/

Teaching Resources
https://www.ezra-jack-keats.org/section/for-educators/

Reading
The following website provides a comprehensive book list
https://dda7f721-81fd-4b46-bacb-a3842b64881b.filesusr.com/ugd/a6bc53_3a45313bb5e448a6a10356474c200a7.pdf
1. **Important Idea!**

2. **Connection: Text to Self, Text to World, Text to Text**

3. **I Wonder . . .**