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**RUNT OF THE LITTER
CURRICULUM GUIDE – GRADES 7-12**

Applause! Series
CIVIC CENTER OF GREATER DES MOINES
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CONTENTS

About the Bo Eason (playwright and actor).....Page 3

About the Performance (Runt of the Litter).....Page 3

Activities – to focus dreams..... Page 4-9

Making the 20-year plan.....Page 10

Sharing the 20-year plan.....Page 11

Post-Show Discussion.....Page 11

Your Role as an Audience Member.....Page 12

Theater Etiquette.....Page 12

About the Civic Center of Greater Des Moines.....Page 13

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Activities and discussion based on Bo Eason's "21-Day Runt Book."

ABOUT BO EASON

At nine years old, Bo Eason made a plan to play professional football in the NFL and become the best in the league at his position. Eason's lifelong plan endured a few obstacles along the way. Coming out of high school, Eason was told he was too small to play and was passed over by every college in the country. He decided to try out for a small Division II college, but after two days of practice he was sent home. Instead of packing his bags, Eason decided to stay. He showed up at practice day after day, and his desire and perseverance eventually earned him a spot on the team. Four years and seven knee surgeries later he was the first safety chosen in the 1984 NFL Draft. He went on to play five years for the Houston Oilers.



Photo courtesy of boeason.com.

Throughout his life and career, Eason struggled to escape the shadow of his older brother, Tony Eason, a talented natural athlete who played as a quarterback for the New England Patriots. Bo's determination to achieve success on his own terms was central to his accomplishments on the field has come to define his life after football.

Since retiring from the NFL, Bo Eason has turned his attention to writing and acting. He appeared in television and movies before writing his one-man play, *Runt of the Litter*, in which he also stars. Bo is currently traveling across the country, touring with his show, speaking to corporations, schools, and other groups, and presenting his 21-Day Runt Program to students.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE – RUNT OF THE LITTER

Runt of the Litter is a semiautobiographical account of Bo Eason's life and takes place within the last hour of accomplishing his 20-year plan. The play explores the talent and passion of two brothers in a family of over-achievers. When their parents assure their oldest son he is destined for football superstardom and tell their youngest son he is too small to compete, a line in the family sand is drawn that colors the rest of their lives. *Runt of the Litter* premiered in Houston and had two successful Off-Broadway runs in 2002 and 2007 at the MCC Theatre in New York. The show has received much critical acclaim, with *The New York Times* calling it, "One of the most powerful plays about sports in the last decade."

ACTIVITIES TO FOCUS THE DREAM

DREAM. SHARE. SUCCESS. – A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

While playing in the NFL was Bo Eason’s ultimate goal, he knew that achieving his dream would require hard work, dedication, and planning. To set himself up for success, Mr. Eason created a 20-year plan based on forming good habits and accomplishing small goals on a regular basis. Today Mr. Eason tours the country performing his show, *Runt of the Litter*, and speaking to groups about such topics as identifying talents, establishing goals, and realizing potential.

The following activities and discussion questions, as adapted from Mr. Eason’s *21-Day Runt Book*, encourage students to analyze their goal and make tangible plans to achieve them. The first ten activities focus on achieving a particular dream, while the last two activities ask students to incorporate that dream into a larger 20-year plan. Students may have the opportunity to share their 20-year plans with Mr. Eason during the question and answer session following the show!

Focus Activity 1: Declare the Dream

Think of a dream that you have for yourself. Make sure the dream is positive and something that would represent a BIG accomplishment in your life. If you are having trouble deciding on a dream, here are some examples to get you started:

Career: becoming a doctor, teacher, veterinarian, lawyer, etc.

Academic: graduating with a certain GPA, being inducted into National Honor Society, or being accepted to a competitive college

Sports: playing varsity basketball, receiving a sports-related college scholarship

Community: being elected to student council, volunteering a certain number of hours this year with a particular nonprofit organization

Once you decide on your dream, describe it with three adjectives:

Adjective # 1: _____

Adjective # 2: _____

Adjective # 3: _____

Now draw any symbols, shapes, or images that come to mind when you visualize your dream. Post the drawing somewhere in your home where you will see it every day.

Focus Activity 2: Find Support

Mr. Eason made a promise to his father that he would play professional football. This promise helped keep him motivated and on track to achieve his goals. Select a classmate with whom you can share your dream. Be sure your partner is someone you trust and with whom you can speak openly. Have an honest conversation about what motivated you to select your dream and what you hope to accomplish. Agree to help motivate one another toward your goals.

Focus Activity 3: Establish Helpful, Healthy Habits

A major part of realizing a dream is establishing habits that will put you on a successful path. These habits should be healthy, specific, and directly related to the goal you hope to achieve. Mr. Eason knew that he would have to be in excellent physical shape and possess certain skills to become a professional football player; thus, he developed daily habits of waking up at 5:00 AM to do pushups, pull-ups, and sit-ups; catching 1,000 balls; and running backward, sideways, and forward.

Other examples of habits:

Dream: making the varsity basketball team

- *Habit: completing dribbling drills for 30 minutes each day*

Dream: becoming a professional writer

- *Habit: writing in a diary for 45 minutes each day using descriptive words*



Photo courtesy of boeason.com.

Consider what habits you need to establish to reach your dream. List five habits below.

Habit # 1: _____

Habit # 2: _____

Habit # 3: _____

Habit # 4: _____

Habit # 5: _____

Researchers have found that it takes approximately 21 days of repeating an action for it to truly become a habit. Choose two habits from the list above that you can do for the next 21 days. Make a 21-day checklist that you can post in your locker, planner, or somewhere at home. Include motivational images and words on your checklist; make it something you will find encouraging. Do your habits each day and check them off.

Focus Activity 4: Start a Journal

Create a journal in which you can document the process you use to achieve your dream. Make at least three entries in the journal each week. Your entries may vary from day to day; sometimes the journal may chronicle your success, while other times your writing may express disappointment or frustration. Any and all thoughts are fine as long as they are honest and related to your ultimate goal. In each entry, be sure to include your progress in establishing your habits.

Focus Activity 5: Identify Strengths

Consider this quote from Bo Eason:

“The first time I ever played tackle football, they weighed and measured us, and the coach said I was too small. Without skipping a beat, my dad said, ‘Did they measure your heart, son?’ I told my dad, ‘My school doesn’t even have one of those heart-measuring things.’ That’s when my dad told me that I had a hidden strength...He said, ‘You have a big heart; you give your all and never quit!’”

What would you define as your “hidden strengths”? Can you talk easily with many types of people? Do you excel at organizing tasks or events? Are you a good listener and trusted confidante? List three of your “hidden strengths” below.

Strength # 1: _____

Strength # 2: _____

Strength # 3: _____

Look at your list of strengths and consider their relevance to your dream. Could any of them be helpful in accomplishing your goal? How so? If not, consider the fact that remembering these strengths can boost your self-confidence, which in turn will make you more likely to realize your dream. In your next **journal** entry, reflect on your strengths and their significance in this goal-setting process.

Focus Activity 6: Find a Mentor

Bo Eason recognized his father as a vital source of motivation and encouragement. When you are involved in a process of self-analysis and achievement, it can be beneficial to see yourself through someone else's eyes. Think about the positive people in your life and select a mentor. The mentor could be a teacher, counselor, family friend, or a relative. Talk to your mentor in person or over the phone. Describe your dream and the steps you have already taken to make it a reality. Then ask your mentor to name three characteristics or talents you have. Write them down!

Talent # 1: _____

Talent # 2: _____

Talent # 3: _____

Discuss your dream further with your mentor. Does he/she have any suggestions about steps you might take to reach the dream? Summarize your discussion in your next **journal** entry. Make a plan to check in with your mentor every couple of weeks to review your progress and seek an outside perspective.

Focus Activity 7: Recognize Obstacles

A vital part of working toward a dream is recognizing and understanding what obstacles stand in your way. Mr. Eason was smaller than most professional football players, struggled to improve his speed on the field, and had to combat others' doubts about his athletic abilities. Consider your dream and what obstacles you may or have already encountered. The obstacles could be related to talent, resources, others' perceptions, etc. Write down three obstacles below.

Obstacle # 1: _____

Obstacle # 2: _____

Obstacle # 3: _____

Now select two obstacles from the list. Brainstorm ways that you can work through the obstacles, from adding habits to your daily routine to seeking advice. Record these strategies in your **journal** as a list, a flowchart, or in any other form that you find helpful.

Focus Activity 8: Interview Your Partner

It's time to check in with your partner and discuss the progress you have made toward realizing your dream. Conduct a brief interview and write down your partner's responses. You may videotape the interview if you wish; the footage may be useful in the completion of a future activity.

Interview questions:

1. What habits did you establish to realize your dream? Have you stuck to them?
2. What strengths have you identified in yourself? How are they related to your dream?
3. Who is your mentor? What guidance has he/she provided?
4. Have you maintained your journal? Has writing down your reflections been productive or useful? How so?
5. What obstacles have you encountered? Have you done anything to overcome them?
6. Has any aspect of your dream changed throughout this process? What led to the change? Is this change positive or negative?
7. (Based on the information your partner has shared, what other questions do you have for him/her?)

When you have recorded your partner's thoughts, switch roles and answer the questions yourself. Make a copy of each set of written responses so that you can reflect on what you and your partner had to say.

Focus Activity 9: Reflect on Personal Leadership

Think about the situations in your life when you have demonstrated leadership. Maybe you organized a school project with your peers, offered guidance to a younger sibling, or identified a need in your community and worked with others to meet it. Make a list of three areas of your life or specific situations in which you have demonstrated leadership.

Area # 1: _____

Area # 2: _____

Area # 3: _____

Looking at the list above, think about how these experiences can help you achieve your dream. Do the experiences afford you specific skills that you may not have considered before? Did they boost your self-confidence or change the way you think of yourself? In your **journal**, draw parallels between your past leadership experiences and the process of leading yourself toward your dream.

Focus Activity 10: Support Leadership

Life is not all about leadership; sometimes we need to collaborate with others to reach a common goal or support them as they strive to achieve personal goals. Reflect on situations in which you have actively supported someone else's leadership efforts. List three of those situations below.

Situation # 1: _____

Situation # 2: _____

Situation # 3: _____

What did you learn from the situations above? How do those experiences relate to the discussions you have had with your partner about his/her dream? Ask yourself the following questions:

- Have I given my partner the opportunity to discuss his/her dream openly and honestly?
- Have I provided specific, constructive feedback (when appropriate) about my partner's habits, strengths, recognition of obstacles, etc.?
- Moving forward, what can I do to help make him/her as successful as possible?

Have another conversation with your partner about his/her dream. Can you help your partner with his/her habits or have more regular discussions about each other's progress? Consider other ways in which you could help ensure your partner's success.

MAKE A 20-YEAR PLAN

You have taken many steps toward making your dream a reality. To reflect on what you have accomplished and continue to look toward the future, you are now going to consider how your dream fits into your own 20-year plan. If your dream is to be successful in a certain profession, you may realize your dream near the end of your 20-year plan. If your dream is to graduate with a certain GPA or make the varsity basketball team, you may achieve your dream in the near future and move on to other dreams that make up your 20-year plan.

Draw a diagram, make a list, or find another way to write down the highlights of your plan. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Where do I want to be in 20 years? What is my ultimate goal?
- What is the first step I can take right now to reach my goal?
- What are the logical steps between where I am and my ultimate goal?
- Which people should I surround myself with to make my plan happen?



Photo courtesy of boeason.com.

EXAMPLE:

First step: job shadow a veterinarian and ask questions about the profession

- meet with a counselor/advisor to make a plan for your high school courses, focusing on science and math
- identify a mentor who will support and encourage your 20-year plan
- achieve as high a GPA as possible and work at veterinary clinics during the summer
- identify colleges with strong science programs
- apply to college and graduate from high school
- study in college, work/intern at veterinary clinics during the summer
- check in regularly with college advisor to ensure you are completing the necessary courses
- apply to veterinary school and graduate from college
- complete veterinary school
- secure a position in a veterinary practice and work for several years
- save money and develop a business plan

Ultimate goal: establish your own veterinary practice

Now map out your own 20-year plan, keeping in mind that you will add more detailed steps as you become more knowledgeable about your ultimate goal. If the dream that you have been working toward fits into your 20-year-plan (and hopefully it does), be sure to include it!

SHARE THE PLAN

It is time to share your 20-year plan with your classmates. Find a creative way to share the process you used to work toward your dream and include material from several of the activities you have completed. Then demonstrate how your dream fits into your 20-year plan. You can create a video, write and perform a song or skit, make a large collage, or use another artistic medium to express yourself and your journey. Below are some more details about the different types of projects you can create.

Video: Create a 5-10 minute video. Interview your mentor; include footage from the interview with your partner, and film objects, scenes, or activities related to both your dream and 20-year plan. Include music that inspires you.

Skit: Write and perform a five-minute skit. The characters can be fictional or real, and you may choose to play all the characters yourself or have your partner or another friend help you. You may reenact conversations and situations you have encountered as you have worked toward your dream, depict scenes that may play out in your 20-year plan, or create fictional scenes that communicate your journey. If possible, include simple sound or lighting effects to enhance your skit.

Collage: Create a large collage of your dream and 20-year plan on poster board or foam board. The collage should include several types of media, including photos, writing, drawing, paint, or three-dimensional objects. Remember, there is no audio component to your project, so be sure to communicate your journey clearly through visual cues.

Website: Make a website dedicated entirely to your dream and 20-year plan. Include text, photos, and if possible, audio and video. The site should have at least seven pages that describe you, your new habits, and the dream you hope to achieve, and how all of those components fit into your 20-year plan.

SHARE YOUR PLAN WITH BO!

As you complete the project described above, think about how you would describe your 20-year plan to Bo Eason. During the question and answer session following the show, you may have a chance to share your plan with him!

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION

One of the major themes of *Runt of the Litter* is the main character's rivalry with his brother. In his own life, Bo Eason also struggled to achieve football success in the shadow of his brother, a talented professional football player. Discuss the role of competition as motivation for realizing a dream. Do you think it's better to strive for greatness by focusing on your personal dreams or by concentrating on beating a competitor? Can both methods lead to success?

YOUR ROLE AS AN AUDIENCE MEMBER*

Attending a live performance is a unique and exciting opportunity. Unlike the passive experience of watching a movie, audience members play an important role in every live performance. As they act, sing, dance, or play instruments, the performers on stage are very aware of the audience's mood and level of engagement. Each performance calls for a different response from audience members. Lively bands, musicians, and dancers may desire the audience to clap and move to the beat, while other performers may want the audience to focus silently on the stage and applaud only during natural breaks in the performance. Audience members can often take cues from performers on how to respond to the performance appropriately. For example, performers will often pause or bow for applause at a specific time.

As you enjoy the show, consider the following questions:

- What kind of live performance is this (a play, a dance, a concert, etc.)?
 - What is the mood of the performance? Is the subject matter serious or lighthearted?
 - What is the mood of the performers? Are they happy and smiling or somber and reserved?
 - Are the performers encouraging the audience to clap to the music or move to the beat?
 - Are there natural breaks in the performance where applause seems appropriate?
-

THEATER ETIQUETTE*

Here is a checklist of general guidelines to follow when you visit the Civic Center:

- Leave all food, drinks, and chewing gum at school or on the bus.
- Cameras, recording devices, and personal listening devices are not permitted in the theater.
- Turn off cell phones, pagers, and all other electronic devices before the performance begins.
- When the house lights dim, the performance is about to begin. Please stop talking at this time.
- **Talk before and after the performance only.** Remember, the theater is designed to amplify sound, so the other audience members and the performers on stage can hear your voice!
- Appropriate responses such as laughing and applauding are appreciated. Pay attention to the artists on stage—they will let you know what is appropriate.
- Open your eyes, ears, mind, and heart to the entire experience. Enjoy yourself!

*as adapted from the Ordway Center for the Performing Artist study guide materials.

ABOUT THE CIVIC CENTER OF GREATER DES MOINES

Opened in 1979, the Civic Center of Greater Des Moines has become a cultural landmark of central Iowa. The mission statement is the guiding philosophy in everything the organization pursues; the Civic Center is committed to engaging the Midwest in world-class entertainment, education, and cultural activities. A member of national organizations including The Broadway League, the Independent Presenters Network, and International Performing Arts for Youth, the Civic Center has achieved a national reputation for excellence as a performing arts center. Four performing arts series currently comprise the typical season—the Willis Broadway Series, the Prairie Meadows Temple Theater Series, the Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield Family Series, and the Applause Series. The Civic Center is also the performance home for the Des Moines Symphony and Stage West.

In keeping with the vision in which the Civic Center was created, the organization is a private, nonprofit organization and is an integral part of the central Iowa's cultural community. Through the education programs, the Civic Center strives to engage our patrons in arts experiences that extend beyond the stage. Master classes bring professional and local artists together to share their art form and craft, while pre-performance lectures and post-performance Q&A sessions with company members offer ticket holders the opportunity to explore each show as a living, evolving piece of art. Through the Applause Series—curriculum-connected performances for school audiences—we encourage local students to discover the rich, diverse world of performing arts. During the 2009-2010 season, the Civic Center will welcome more than 26,000 students and educators to 11 professional productions for young audiences.



Study Guide Resources

Bo Eason & Runt of the Litter:

<http://www.boeason.com/default.asp?id=86>

The Civic Center of Greater Des Moines:

<http://civiccenter.org>