

Town Hall Theatre's
The Ransom of Red Chief

Teacher Resource Guide
Brittany Hinkle, Education Director

ABOUT THE PLAY

Two desperate cattle rustlers kidnap the mayor's son, Johnny, hoping to get a quick installment of ransom money and skidaddle out of town. The two crooks soon discover they got more than they bargained for when their hostage turns out to be a regular "Dennis the Menace"! The joke is on them when they try to give the imp back only to find that the townspeople think the kidnappers should pay *them* to take Johnny back!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



(O. Henry)



(O. Henry's Childhood home)

O. Henry (1862-1910) was a prolific American short-story writer, a master of surprise endings, who wrote about the life of ordinary people in New York City. A twist of plot, which turns on an ironic or coincidental circumstance, is typical of O. Henry's stories.

William Sydney Porter (O. Henry) was born in Greenboro, North Carolina. His father, Algernon Sidney Porter, was a physician. When William was three, his mother died, and he was then raised by his paternal grandmother and aunt. William was an avid reader, but at the age of fifteen he left school, and then worked in a drug store and on a Texas ranch. He moved to Houston, where he had a number of jobs, including that of bank clerk. After moving to Austin, Texas, in 1882, he married.

In 1884 he started a humorous weekly *The Rolling Stone*. When the weekly failed, he joined the *Houston Post* as a reporter and columnist. In 1897 he was convicted of embezzling money, although there has been much debate over his actual guilt. In 1898 he entered a penitentiary at Columbus, Ohio.

O. Henry moved to New York City in 1902 and from December 1903 to January 1906. His best-known work is perhaps the much-anthologized "The Ransom of Red Chief. O. Henry published 10 collections and over 600 short stories during his lifetime. O. Henry's last years were shadowed by alcoholism, ill health, and financial problems. He married Sara Lindsay Coleman in 1907, but the marriage was not happy, and they separated a year later. O. Henry died of cirrhosis of the liver on June 5, 1910, in New York.

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PRE PERFORMANCE

PERFORMANCE SPECIFIC VOCABULARY: (<http://www.wordcentral.com>)

Diatribes-Function: noun: a bitter or angry attack in speech or writing

Impudent-Function: adjective: showing scorn for or disregard of others

Palatable-Function: adjective: agreeable to the taste

Pervade-Function: verb: to spread through all parts of

Surreptitious- Function: adjective: done, made, or acquired in secret

Comply- Function: verb: to act in agreement with another's wishes or in obedience to a rule

Apparition- Function: noun: an unusual or unexpected sight, a ghost

Bedlam- Function: noun: a place or scene of uproar and confusion

Deleterious- Function: adjective: harmful or noxious

Commend- Function: verb: to give into another's care, to speak of someone or something with approval

THEATRE VOCABULARY LIST

(As listed in the Stage One educational tools website, www.stageone.com)

Acting: pretending to be a character.

Beginning, Middle, End: Three parts of a story.

Characters: A person portrayed in a drama novel or artistic piece.

Conflict: The struggle between the opposing forces, ideas or interests in a play.

Courage: The spirit that enable one to face danger and fear with confidence and resolution, bravery.

Dialogue: A conversation that takes place between two or more characters that expresses thoughts, feelings and actions.

Facial Expression: The manner in which an actor uses his or her face to portray an emotion.

Improvisation: Using a character to express thoughts and feeling or to act out a scenario without prior rehearsals.

Movement: How the actor uses his or her body to create a character.

Plot/Storyline: The action of the story, the development of the story, has a beginning, middle and end.

Point of View/Perspective: Feelings, opinions, and experiences that effect the reader's outlook.

Setting: Time and place where a story occurs.

Teamwork: Working together as a team.

Three tools of an actor: Voice, body and the imagination.

Vocal Expression: The way the actor uses his or her voice to express an emotio

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THEMES TO LOOK FOR

Courage	Teamwork, or lack thereof!
Friendship	Overcoming fears
Respect for others	Helpfulness
True friendship	Innovation
Recognizing one's strengths	Technological Advancement

POST PERFORMANCE

DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think that Sam and Bill, the two adult characters, are friends? Are they only friends because they could make money together? Do they really like each other?
2. Have you ever felt like someone was only being friends with you for a purpose other than your friendship? What were their reasons?
3. Throughout the play Sam keeps buying “newfangled” inventions to show Bill and to aid them in their endeavor. What new inventions would you create and why? What do you think that it would have felt like to be the first one of all your friends to own a record player or CD player when they were first introduced?
4. Johnny was very creative and funny when he was trying to annoy his kidnappers. What can you do to make sure you are never kidnapped? What would you say if a stranger approached you after school or when you were playing?
5. How can you show respect for yourself, family members, teachers and friends on a daily basis? What sort of things should you do or not do?

WRITING PROMPTS

1. What qualities make a good friend? Who is your best friend and why?
2. Can you describe a time when you and another person tried to use teamwork to overcome a situation and it did not work? Why not? What could you do next time to make it more effective next time?
3. Describe a time when you had to act courageous. Were you scared at the same time or did you have a plan?
4. What kinds of things are you scared of and why? What could you do to try and overcome your fear? Are there some fears that cannot be overcome?
5. Describe something that you do well. Have you invested many hours of practice or does it come naturally like Johnny and his imagination?

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

1. His mother used a little sugar to make the medicine more _____.
 2. He _____ (ly) looked at his notes during the test.
 3. I _____ (ed) with their request to stop parking on the lawn.
 4. After his _____ at the meeting they don't let him talk any more.
 5. Most of your grandparents would consider today's kids much more _____ than kids used to be.
 6. After three days without sleep, he started seeing _____ (s) and spirits.
 7. The sub had no class management skills, and so second period was _____.
 8. The _____ effects of smoking on your health are well-documented.
 9. The thick smoke _____ (ed) the building, so he had to crawl to safety.
 10. The teacher _____ (ed) him for his recent hard work.
- 2.

diatribe, impudent, palatable, pervade, surreptitious, comply, apparition, bedlam, deleterious, commend

Across

1. Do what you're told.
5. Easily "swallowed."
6. Harmful.
7. A "going off" sort of thing.
8. Offensively disrespectful.

Down

2. Spread throughout.
3. Are you seeing things?
4. Chaos.

