



**Study Guide**  
for  
**OWL'S WINTER**



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The materials in this study guide were compiled or written by Ramona Brand, Director of Education at Wild Swan Theater; September 2004.

## **About Wild Swan Theater**

### **MISSION STATEMENT:**

*Wild Swan Theater is dedicated to producing professional theater of the highest artistic quality for families and to making that theater accessible to low income, minority and disabled children through low ticket prices and innovative outreach programs.*

### **HISTORY AND ACTIVITIES:**

Wild Swan Theater was founded in 1980. Since its inception, the company of professional adult actors, dancers, musicians, visual artists, and American Sign Language interpreters has performed for hundreds of thousands of children. As well as many public performances in its home base of Ann Arbor, the company tours regularly to theaters, museums and public libraries as well as offering residencies and workshops at schools and hospitals serving disabled children statewide. This year the company will give 175 performances for an audience of over 50,000 children and their families.

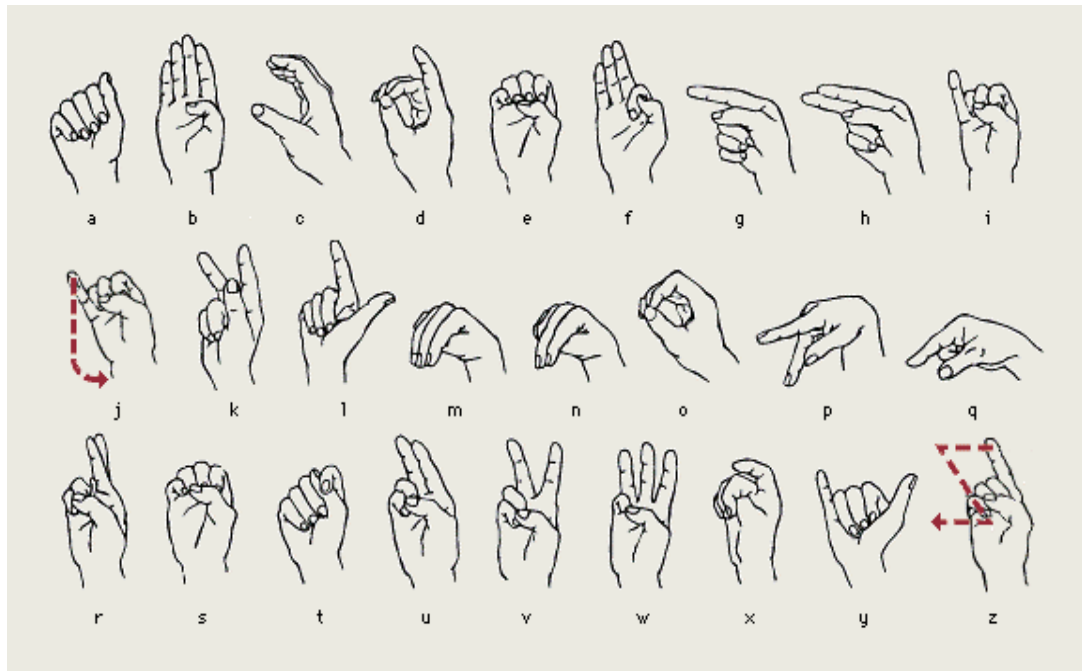
Wild Swan's performance style, which incorporates storytelling and live action with puppets, masks, music, and dance, has received critical acclaim as well as an enthusiastic following. The Detroit News has praised the work as "professional children's theater at its very best," and the Flint Museum of Art has described it as "superb theater that enhances life and its joys." Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village has called Wild Swan "one of the finest theaters for families in the nation."

Wild Swan has pioneered a number of audience accessibility measures for disabled individuals that are models in the state and have earned the praise of educators and health specialists across the country. All productions are performed in American Sign Language as well as spoken English with the signing completely integrated into the productions. Thus deaf children and adults not only have complete access to the productions but hearing children are exposed to this beautiful and poetic language. A program for blind individuals includes pre-performance backstage "touch tours". Participants have the opportunity to feel specially constructed props and masks, explore the set, and meet actors and hear the voices their characters will use. Audio-description, a simultaneous description of staging, lights, and costumes, transmitted electronically to participating audience members during pauses in the dialogue, permits audience members who are blind or visually impaired to have access to all the visual elements of the production. As a leader of disabled access in the state, Wild Swan has been a recipient of the Governor's Service Award in 1998 in the Arts in Service category and a grant recipient of Very Special Arts/Michigan for ten years.

## American Sign Language Alphabet

When you come to see *Owl's Winter*, you will notice that American Sign Language Interpreters are part of the play. They are signing the dialogue of the show for audience members who may have difficulty hearing. American Sign Language is a language used by the deaf and hearing impaired community. Using sign language in Wild Swan Theater shows enables more people to enjoy a theatrical production.

Below is the basic sign language alphabet. Can you make the letters of the alphabet using the chart?



Practice using the signs for Owl. These signs are used in the Wild Swan Production of *Owl's Winter*.

To make the sign for **Owl**, make a circle with each fist around your eyes as if you had eye glasses. Rotate the circles back and forth to make the sign for owl.

Finger spell some of the following words: owl, tea, bumps, winter, moon.

## About The Performance:

Wild Swan Theater, Ann Arbor's highly acclaimed theater for family audiences, presents a special production for young children. *Owl's Winter* is a delightful collection of stories based on Arnold Lobel's *Owl at Home*, carefully created to engage the littlest theater-goers. The performance is approximately 45 minutes in length, appropriate for children aged 3-8, and is performed by 2 professional actors and is charmingly accompanied by original flute music. The warmth and humor of these stories will delight you and your preschool or early elementary school aged students. Children will help Owl make discoveries through lots of audience participation and a special surprise at the end.

## About The Stories:

Owl and the Moon: The moon seems to follow owl home while he is out for an evening stroll. In this sweet story Owl makes friends with the moon and is sad to say goodbye.

Upstairs and Downstairs: Owl loves his upstairs and his downstairs. Can he be in both places at once?

The Guest: Who is knocking on Owl's door? Owl lets winter in and finds winter to be an unruly guest.

Strange Bumps: Owl encounters strange bumps at the end of his bed as he lays down to sleep.

Owl and Cricket: Owl wants to sleep and cricket is making music. What will happen?

Tearwater Tea: Owl makes tearwater tea when he runs out of the real thing.



# About Arnold Lobel

Arnold Lobel wrote and illustrated many, many books during his lifetime. His drawings of cats, mice, pigs, and other animals are favorites of children everywhere. Arnold Lobel used to tell stories and illustrate them to entertain his classmates when he was a young boy. He said that taking books out of the library was one of the things he loved to do most when he was a child.

Arnold Lobel grew up in Schenectady, New York, where he lived with his grandparents. When he graduated from art school, he married Anita Kempler, and they moved to New York. He and his wife had two children, Adam and Adrienne.

When he first started drawing pictures for children's books, Arnold Lobel got many of his ideas from the cartoons his children liked to watch.

## Other Books by Arnold Lobel:

***Frog and Toad are Friends***

***Frog and Toad All Year***

***Days with Frog and Toad***

***Grasshopper on the Road***

***Mouse Soup***

***Mouse Tales***

***Small Pig***

***Uncle Elephant***



## Language Arts Activities for pre-K-2:

1. Decorate a shoebox to make it look like mailbox. Have children draw or write letters to Owl. Deliver the letter and then have the children read their letters to Owl. (You can use puppets or stuffed animals to represent Owl or other characters in the stories.)

2. Write a letter to Owl at Wild Swan Theater about attending the performance. Tell him what you liked about the play. Send it in the mail or by e-mail.

Owl  
Wild Swan Theater  
410 S. Maple Rd.  
Ann Arbor, MI 48103  
Or [wildswan@wildswantheater.org](mailto:wildswan@wildswantheater.org)

3. Together with your students list all the words that can be used to describe owls and their activities. Use the template on the next page to write poems or stories about owls.

## Dramatic Play Ideas:

1. Read the story The Guest. Have the students pretend to be winter and make the noise of wind blowing, become the snow falling, become owl shivering, owl shoveling snow and trying to close the door against the wind. Pretend to walk against the wind, pretend to walk in deep snow, pretend to be very cold and then warm up near a fire.

Ask your students what kind of activities they do in the winter. Pantomime making snowmen, snow angels, sledding, snowball fights, building a snow fort, sledding etc. Pretend to put on lots of winter clothes and then show how wearing lots of clothes affects the way you move.

Take your students on a “walk through the seasons”. Ask your students for suggestions of what they do in different seasons and then pretend to act them out as a group.

2. Read the story Owl and the Moon. Make moon puppets by cutting large round circles from cardboard. Cut two large circles from white construction paper for each circle of cardboard. Have your students glue the construction paper onto the cardboard and then glue or tape the moon onto a dowel. Students can decorate the moon with glitter or other shiny craft materials.

Read the story Owl and the Moon out loud. Have your students hold their moon puppets and pretend to be moon following owl while you are reading the story. Practice moving and stopping when owl moves and stops.

Have students role play different ways to say good bye to people. Use different emotions: sad goodbyes, happy goodbyes, mad goodbyes, sleepy goodbyes, excited goodbyes etc.

Large motor play: Play Follow the Leader using different movements. Have students take turns being the leader and the followers.



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# Facts about Owls

Have you ever heard that an owl can turn its head completely around? Or that owls are blind in daylight? Or that the feather tufts on an owl's head are its ears? Or that if you hear an owl it means bad luck? These are all misconceptions that have been passed down through generations.

Let's set the record straight. Owls can rotate their heads three-quarters of the way around. They cannot move their eyes from side to side but have extremely flexible necks and can move their heads rather quickly - thus the illusion of a complete turn. Owls see perfectly well during the day, and exceptionally well at night.



Owls have the best hearing of all birds. Their ears are located on the sides of their heads and are hidden by feathers. The so-called "ear-tufts" on the top of the head aid in camouflage and recognition between individuals and have nothing to do with hearing.

If you hear an owl calling, consider yourself fortunate.... even more fortunate to observe one in the wild.

Owls are predators - they catch, kill and eat other animals in order to survive. This predation is neither cruel nor wasteful and has been going on for millions of years. It seldom upsets anything except perhaps a few people. An owl killing and eating another animal is no different from a robin eating a worm or a gull eating a fish.



Although some owl species are diurnal (active by day), most owls hunt at night. Although some owl species are diurnal (active by day), most owls hunt at night and are seldom observed by humans. Because of this nocturnal (nighttime) existence, they are little known and often misunderstood, even though some owls live their entire lives in close proximity to people.

*(Snowy Owls hunt at any time of day, adapting to the Arctic's long summer days and equally long winter nights)*

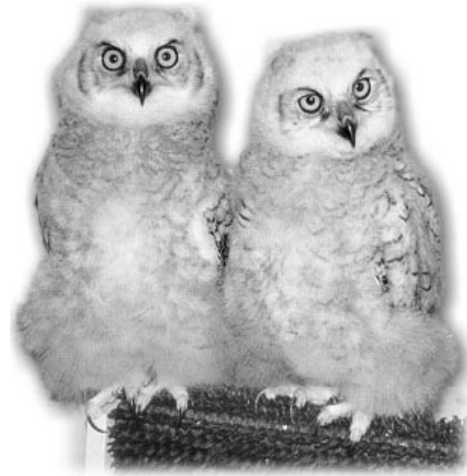
Hunting at night, owls use their extraordinary vision and excellent hearing to locate their prey. Special adaptations such as wide wings, lightweight bodies and unusually soft, fluffy feathers allow them to fly silently. Owls seize their prey, usually a rodent or other small mammal, and kill it with their powerful feet. If the prey is small enough, it is swallowed whole; otherwise the food is torn apart by the owl's strong, hooked beak.

The owl's digestive system assimilates the nutritious portions of the prey; the undigested parts, such as hair, bones, claws, teeth, etc., are regurgitated in the form of pellets. These pellets, found at roosting sites, can be examined to determine the owl's diet.

There are eighteen species of owls in North America. Some species, like the Screech Owl and the Great Horned Owl, live in one place year round; others, like the Saw-whet Owl and the Short-Eared Owl and the Burrowing Owl will travel long distances.

All owls are protected by state and federal regulations. It is illegal to capture or kill an owl; it is also illegal to possess an owl, living or dead, without the proper permits from local state governments, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Owls pose no threat to humans, although adult birds will defend their territory and their young against any intruders, human or otherwise. Unfortunately, superstitions and the untruths about owls will persist which have subjected this group of birds to unwarranted suspicion and persecution. We hope, with the knowledge and understanding of the owl's true character, these fears and misgivings will be replaced by tolerance and respect for these unique birds.



<http://www.birds-of-prey.org/educate/owls.htm>

### **Owl Projects:**

Make a larger than life classroom owl to hang on your wall or from the ceiling.

<http://familycrafts.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?zi=1/XJ&sdn=familycrafts&zu>  
= <http://www.dltk-kids.com/animals/mbigowl.html>

### **Whooooo's that Owl:**

Have your students research one of many types of owls. Make a habitat diorama or create posters to show the similarities and differences between types of owls.

Here are some types of Owls. Do some owl research to come up with more.

Barn Owls

Elf Owl

Great Horned Owl

Spotted Owl

Eastern Screech Owl

Great Gray Owl

Snowy Owl

Whiskered Screech Owl

To learn more about Owls use this link:

<http://www.geocities.com/Baja/Cliffs/4490/owlsintro.html>

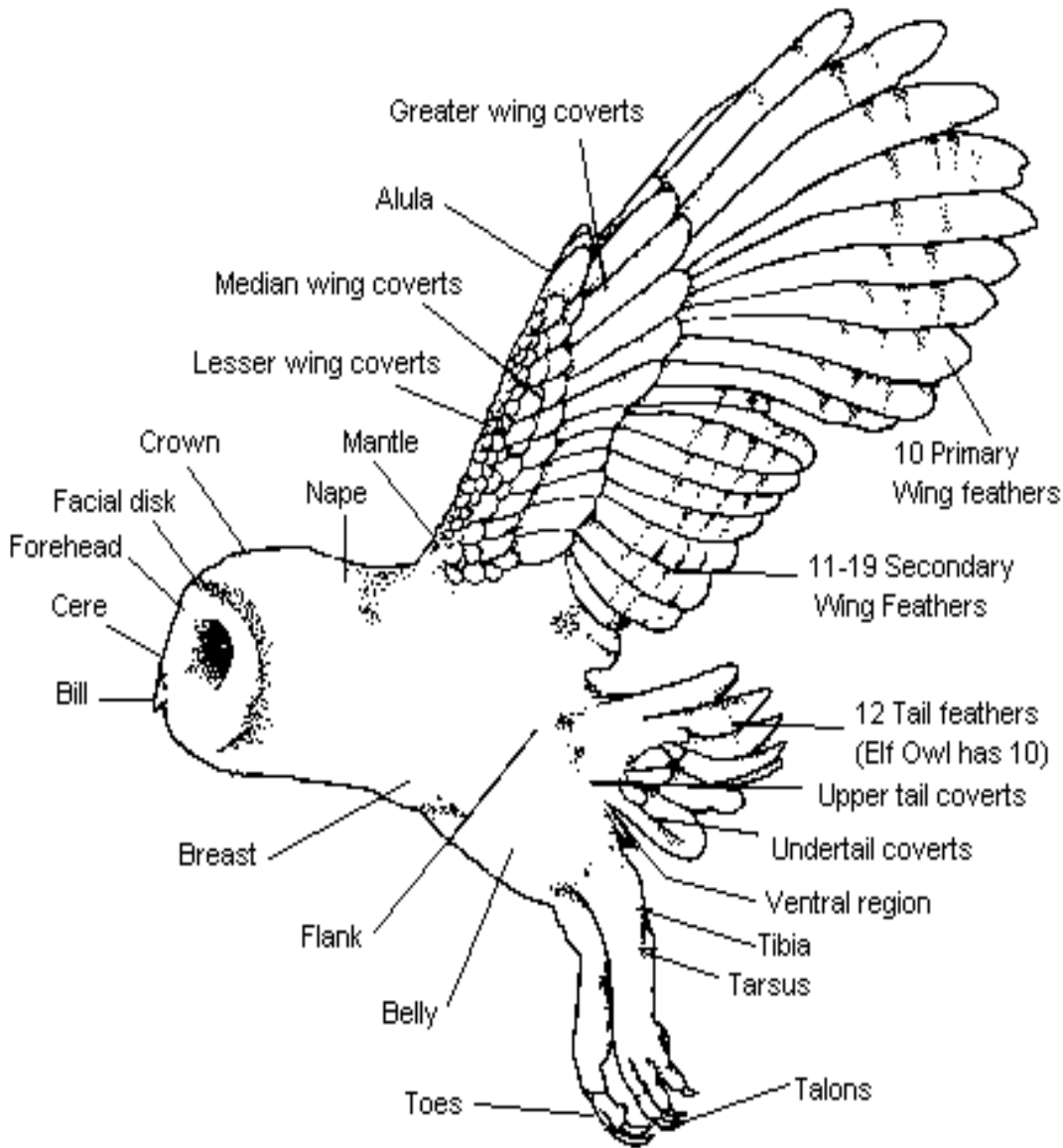
### **Test your Owl Knowledge:**

Use the information on the page above to answer the questions on the next page!

Below are twelve statements about owls. They are based on popular beliefs taken from novels, television shows, cartoons, fictional children's books, and non-fictional books on birds. Which ones are true? Which ones are pure myth? In groups of two or three, decide whether each statement is true or each statement is a myth. Write **T** if you think one is true, and **M** if you think it is a myth on the line provided.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Owls are wise birds.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Owls can turn their heads all the way around.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Advice from owls is followed by other animals in the forest.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Owls are nocturnal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Owls wink at passers-by.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Owls have big skulls.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Some owls have horns.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Owls never blink.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Adult owls eat small prey whole.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Owls spit back the fur and bones of their prey.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Owls build their own nests.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Owls can't move their eyes to the right or left.

Parts of an Owl



<http://www.owlpages.com/physiology/general.html>

Use the above chart to learn more about parts of an owl.