



INDIANA REPERTORY THEATRE

**THE
VELVETEEN
RABBIT**
adapted by James Still
from the story
by Margery Williams

November 18 – December 18, 2014
Performed in the IRT Cabaret

TEACHER GUIDE

edited by Milicent Wright, Randy Pease, & Richard J Roberts
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The Velveteen Rabbit

adapted by James Still
from the story by Margery Williams

The IRT is excited to begin EXPLORING STAGES with theatre for young audiences by bringing to life *The Velveteen Rabbit*. A little boy and his favorite stuffed animal learn about life, love, and growing up in this lively adaptation (by the IRT’s playwright-in-residence James Still) of the classic children’s book. This production of Margery Williams’s most famous fable will be a colorful, imaginative, and interactive experience designed to engage and enthrall both young theatre-goers and their teachers! Don’t miss this joyous, heartwarming, magical story—a timeless tale of the transformative power of love.

Recommended for students in grades Pre-K through 3

Themes, Issues, & Topics

love & loss
real & make-believe
insecurity & acceptance

The performance will last approximately 55 minutes with no intermission.

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Exploring Stages

by Janet Allen,
Executive Artistic Director



With *The Velveteen Rabbit*, we launch a brand new program at the IRT, one we're calling

Exploring Stages. It is our first endeavor specifically designed for our youngest theatre-goers—those who are 3 to 8 years old—who we invite to come explore with us what theatre is, in all its imaginative realms. We have dreamed and brainstormed about how to make theatre for these small people for years, so we are very excited to welcome you all into our creative work and hear your reactions. We've thought about the design of the room in which we want these young people to experience theatre-making; we've thought about the ages and kinds of performers we want creating for them; we've thought hardest about the story-telling components and the content of the story we want them to experience. Some of you are teachers who will be bringing your pre-school or early elementary students to the IRT; some of you are parents or grandparents who will be bringing your small family members to the theatre. You will be entering into a splendid experiential moment. Many of the young people with you will be experiencing an art form for the first time, and that is a particularly privileged moment.

We picked *The Velveteen Rabbit* because it holds the essence of so much that is magical and child-like. It expands upon that crucial experience of childhood in which the inanimate is animated. Anyone who has ever had a beloved stuffed animal or doll or action figure remembers how the concept of "real" glides in and out of childhood consciousness and changes how we feel about the world. And who is to say that the emotional exchange that we have with those inanimate objects is less "real" in our imaginations and memories than those we have with living creatures? We enter into this debate by making art that we hope will resonate with our child audiences and embolden their imaginations.

We have been greatly assisted in creating this program by several key partnerships in the community: First, the Margot L. and Robert S. Eccles Fund, a fund of the Central Indiana Community Foundation, for supporting the start-up costs, and for long-term support for our most innovative education programs. Second, the United Way of Central Indiana for partnering to bring children from more than 50 preschools to the production, and to bring artists into those classrooms for further learning. And third, the ever-creative Child Care Answers, for helping us create tools for preschool teachers, appropriate classroom materials, and valuable post-show activities to enhance the experience of each child attending *The Velveteen Rabbit*. Thanks also to the Indianapolis Public Library for their support of this program, and to our corporate sponsors who share our belief that providing educational and culturally awakening experiences for the very young is one of the best things we can do to improve the future for all of us in central Indiana.

The Story of the Play

This synopsis focuses on James Still's stage adaptation of The Velveteen Rabbit, which is somewhat expanded from Margery Williams's original book.

As the play begins, we meet Older Steve, who tells us about his sixth birthday party and his twelve-year-old brother, Ben. While Younger Steve and Ben set the table for dinner, we meet some toys: a mechanical Train and a Boat that have batteries and can make noise and move, an old Rocking Horse that belonged to Ben when he was younger, and a Velveteen Rabbit that Younger Steve has never played with before.

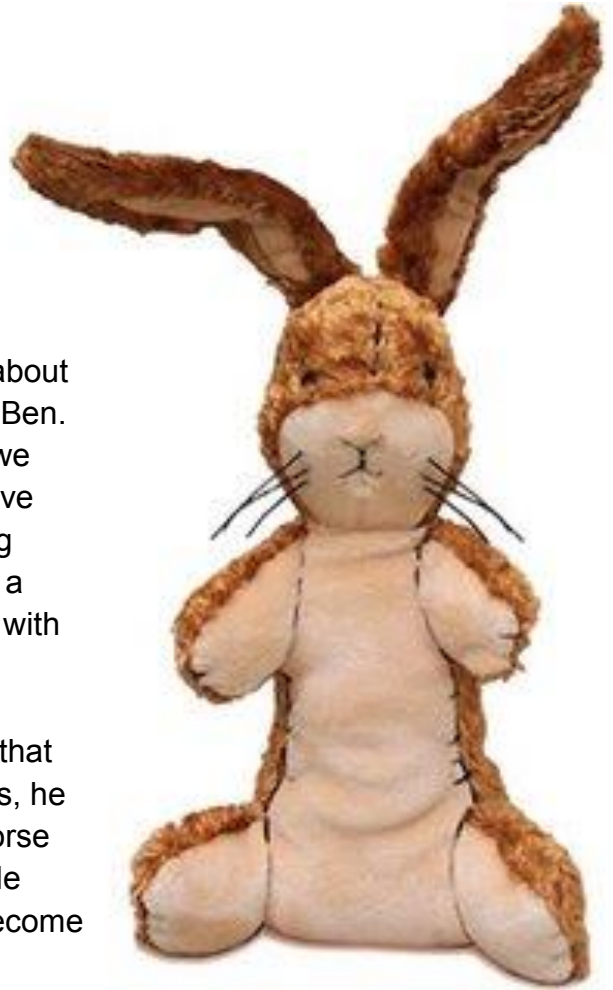
The Train and the Boat make fun of Velveteen, saying that since he will never be able to move or make sounds, he will never be real. When they are alone, the Rocking Horse tells Velveteen that the Train and the Boat are wrong. He explains that toys can become real over time as they become worn and shabby, which means that they are loved.

Big brother Ben and Younger Steve create a story together, about the adventures of two brothers at sea and in a tornado. That night, Young Steve holds the Velveteen Rabbit tight, and the two become very close. They begin to have their own adventures, singing songs, inventing games, and traveling around the world together—all in the family's back yard.

Over time, Velveteen begins to become worn and shabby – just as the Rocking Horse said he would. Velveteen knows that Younger Steve believes that he is real. But one day, when Younger Steve has left Velveteen alone in the garden to play spy, Velveteen meets two Wild Rabbits. They can do things Velveteen cannot do, and they insist that he is not real.

Younger Steve becomes very ill, and the doctor orders that his toys be destroyed to prevent spreading germs. As big brother Ben is about to burn them, he remembers how much he once loved Rocking Horse, so Ben decides instead to leave Rocking Horse in the woods to run free. Ben thinks about his little brother, who is feeling better now, and how much Younger Steve loves Velveteen, so Ben leaves Velveteen in the woods with Rocking Horse. The Toy Fairy appears. She adds her magic to the love that Velveteen has received from Younger Steve, making Velveteen become real at last.

On his seventh birthday, Younger Steve meets a Wild Rabbit in the woods who reminds him of Velveteen. The play ends as Older Steve goes to play a game of catch with his big brother Ben.



Meet the Characters



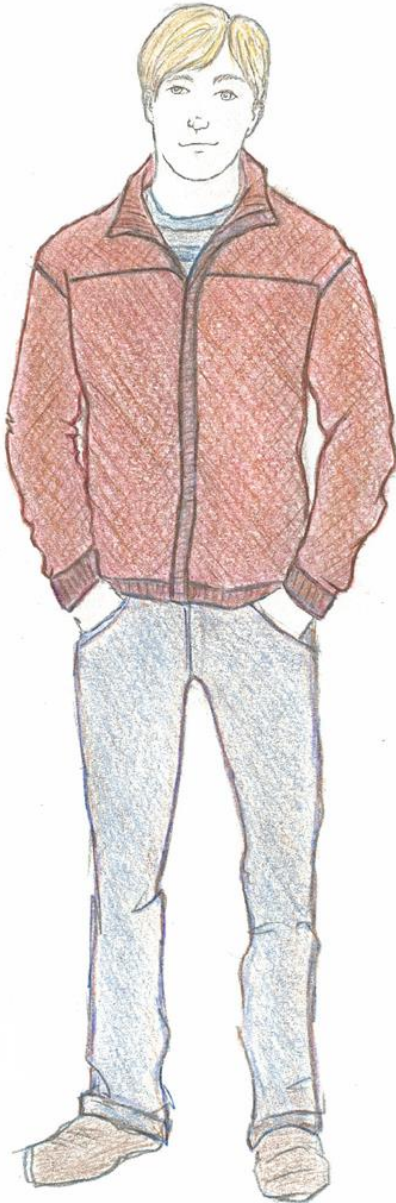
These two actors play the same character at different ages.



Older Steve

played by Andrew Martin

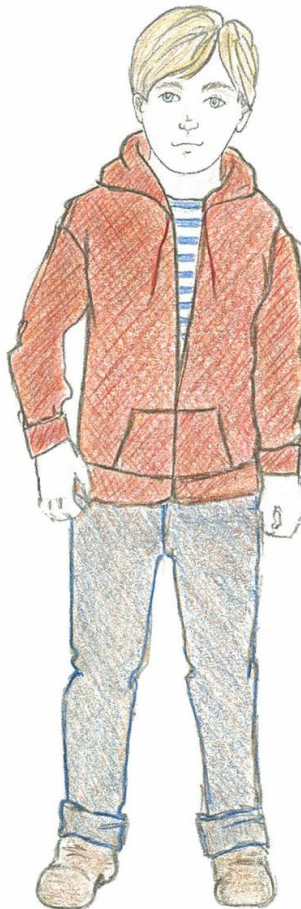
Older Steve is in his mid-twenties. He is our guide through the story, remembering events from his own childhood.



Younger Steve

played by Mitchell Wray

During the play Younger Steve celebrates his sixth birthday, forms a close friendship with the Velveteen Rabbit, becomes very ill, and recovers in time for his seventh birthday.



Ben

played by Isaac Herzog

Ben is Steve's 12-year-old brother, an athlete and a good student. Younger Steve sees Ben as his hero. When Younger Steve becomes ill, Ben realizes how much he cares about his little brother.



Costume drawings by Guy Clark.



Rocking Horse

played by Adam O. Crowe

Rocking Horse was Ben's favorite toy when he was younger. He is old and worn, and is able to give Velveteen the benefit of his wisdom.



Velveteen Rabbit

played by Tyler Ostrander

Velveteen Rabbit is big and floppy and stuffed with sawdust. Over time, as Younger Steve plays with him, his plush fur and shiny eyes and pink nose become worn and shabby. Steve loves Velveteen, which is why Velveteen is eventually able to become real.





**These two actors
each play
two different characters.**



Train

played by Zoe Turner

The mechanical Train has batteries and runs across the floor and blows smoke. She sometimes makes fun of Velveteen because he cannot do the things the Train can do.

Boat

played by Ethan Holder

The mechanical Boat has batteries and races around the room and toots his horn. He sometimes makes fun of Velveteen because he cannot do the things the Boat can do.



Wild Rabbits

played by Zoe Turner & Ethan Holder

The Wild Rabbits live in the woods at the back of Steve and Ben's yard. They hop and play and dance. They don't believe that Velveteen is a rabbit at all.

For All of Us

by Carol North,
Director

Margery Williams's
book *The
Velveteen Rabbit* is
something of a
chestnut.

Published in 1922,

it has been read to generations of children, yet somehow I missed it. I have no recollection of having the book read to me when I was a child, nor did I read it to my own daughters when they were young. We read together all the time, but the rabbits who figured prominently in our collection were Beatrix Potter characters, Peter Rabbit and Benjamin Bunny, those inquisitive rascals who were perpetually in trouble with Mr. McGregor, as well as their own mother. Those were my kind of rabbits.



As a devoted advocate of children's theatre having something to say as well as something to feel, I confess that I wondered if *The Velveteen Rabbit* would have enough substance onstage. Then I read James Still's play. I was hooked. Floodgates of personal connection opened: the agonizing complexity of sibling relationships, the toll of tyrannical bullying, the loneliness of being left out, the excruciating pain of loss. The script conjured up my childhood feelings of unlimited power and possibility when I was playing alone, creating worlds under the dining room table or hidden inside the bushes. Stuffed animals played necessary roles in my dramas and, of course, they followed my every direction.

The play touched my parent's heart, too. An elephant named Pinky was an acknowledged family member at our house for years. He was often at the table for meals and was always tucked in with Emily at bedtime. He even went backpacking with us. Despite his heavy, bean-filled bottom, Emily carried Pinky uphill and down without complaint. Her older sister Megan protested, "Mommy, that's just weird!" But Emily knew that Pinky would feel left out if he stayed at home.

The Velveteen Rabbit is a deceptively simple story about a child and a favorite toy. Artfully woven into this play are emotional threads that connect us to our own journeys and those moments where we confront our biggest challenges and discover what matters most. Those are moments on a continuing journey, not one we leave behind as we grow up.

This play is for all of us. I hope you find strands of your own story in our production, and that it provides rich fodder for conversation on the way home.

Author Margery Williams

Margery Williams was born in London, England, in 1881. Her father was a well-known barrister and classical scholar who encouraged her to read and use her imagination. Margery was enthralled by his vivid descriptions of the characters in the books they read together.

Margery's father died when she was 7. The books she later wrote as an adult reflect this childhood sadness, with themes of death and loss. Although some would question her focus on such topics in books for children, she always maintained that hearts acquire greater humanity through pain and adversity. She said that life is a process of constant change, and that change helps us to grow and persevere.

When Margery was 9, her family emigrated to New York City, and a year later, rural Pennsylvania. When she was 19, she returned to London and began publishing children's stories.

After the World War II, Williams returned to the United States with her husband and children. Her first American book was *The Velveteen Rabbit, or How Toys Become Real*, published in 1922. Although a few critics found the book overly sentimental, it was widely acclaimed as an instant classic for children.

Williams also wrote novels for young adults. The most famous is *Winterbound*, published in 1936. Her final book, *Forward Commandos!*, was one of the first books to acknowledge the contributions of African American soldiers in World War II. Just as the book went on sale in 1944, she died at age 63.

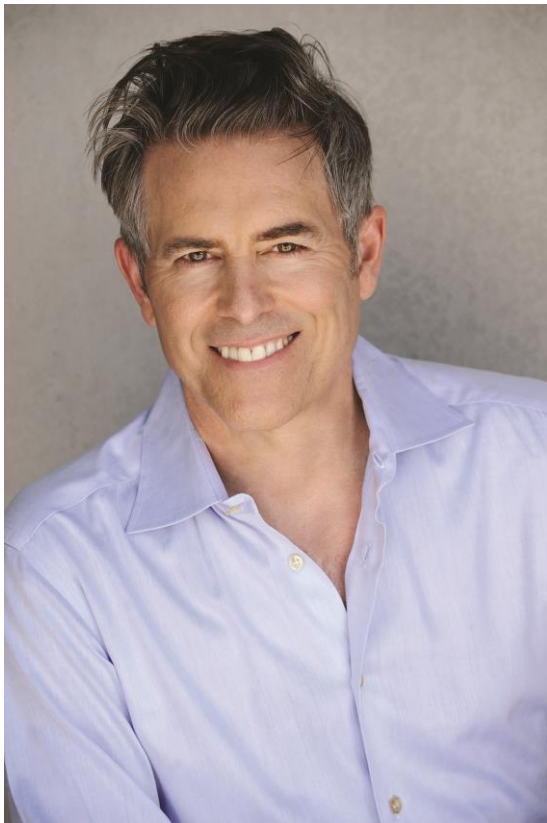
“Nothing is easier to write than a story for children; few things are harder, as any writer knows, than to achieve a story that children will really like.”

—Margery Williams



Writing for Kids

by James Still, IRT Playwright-in-Residence



*During James's 17 years as the company's playwright-in-residence, IRT audiences have seen 16 productions of 13 of his plays, including his plays for young audiences *And Then They Came for Me: Remembering the World of Anne Frank* (which the IRT premiered and has subsequently produced twice) and *The Secret History of the Future*. The IRT also commissioned and produced a full-length version of *Amber Waves*, which premiered at the Kennedy Center as a one-act for family audiences. James's other works for young audiences include the award-winning plays *A Village Fable*, *Hush: An Interview with America*, and *Just before Sleep*. He was a producer and head writer for the TV series *PAZ*, the head writer for Maurice Sendak's *Little Bear*, and writer for the *Bill Cosby* series *Little Bill*. He wrote *The Little Bear Movie* and *The Miffy Movie*. He is also the recipient of the Orlin Corey Medallion from the Children's Theatre Foundation of America which honors significant artists in theatre who have contributed to the cultural enrichment of children and youth*

One of the many joys of being the IRT's playwright-in-residence has been the opportunity to explore and experiment in genre, styles, and stories. There's also the unexpected joy of the IRT producing other plays of mine, both new and less new. *The Velveteen Rabbit* was the first play I wrote that ever got produced. Prior to trying my hand at adapting this classic book written by Margery Williams in 1927, I'd written four plays for "grown-ups." All four plays had gotten a tiny bit of attention ranging from "Thank you for submitting your play, we were really impressed by your fresh voice—but we're unable to do your play," to "Your play was terrible, please don't write any more plays. Please." Those four plays had a handful of readings around the country, and I suppose I was young enough and brave enough and arrogant enough and stubborn enough that still I refused to give up.

So one Saturday night I was at a party in New York (where I lived back then) and I ran into an old friend from college. She had recently settled into a new job at a children's theatre in Omaha, Nebraska. I remember we slipped away to the bedroom and lay atop the piles of winter coats and caught up. I asked her what plays her theatre was doing next year and the list included *The Velveteen Rabbit*. I said something like, "O! I love that book! Who did the adaptation?" And she said, famously, "You are." And so I did.

And that began a surprising and rewarding and life-changing venture into writing for audiences of all ages. Some things I quickly learned about writing for kids: they are the toughest of audiences. The play isn't the thing—the *story* is the thing. Kids taught me about telling story, about momentum and humor and high stakes. I was also hugely relieved to find that kids were actually more likely to embrace anything theatrical, they brought imagination into the theatre with them, they didn't expect me to do all the work as a writer. Any success I've had writing for young people has been earned, because audiences of kids don't know how to lie. That fact is thrilling and absolutely terrifying for a writer.

The Velveteen Rabbit was produced in Omaha first, and then went on to over a hundred productions around the United States and Canada. It was my first published play. It got the attention of people who would later become mentors and champions and friends. It created some much-needed momentum in a young writer's life. And it gave me some confidence to keep writing. For the next 15 years I focused almost equally on writing for adults and young people (and hybrid audiences we sometimes call "theatre for all ages"). I never compartmentalized what I was writing about or who I was writing it for—I was writing plays. When people would ask me about my inspiration in writing for young people, it was easy. My inspiration was my own childhood, my own sense of being a kid. To this day I keep a photo on my desk of myself at age four. I am struck by that little boy's joy and courage and depth. I try never to forget him when I'm writing, that spirit, that sense of infinity in his eyes, that willingness to play. I should add that I don't think of childhood with nostalgia or even romance. One of my mantras when writing plays for kids has always been that the work should be as complex and mysterious and funny and rich as kids are themselves.

Later I would start writing for television—and I focused on children's television. That focus took me away from writing for kids in the theatre, and I found myself writing for adults in the theatre and kids in television. But I never thought of them as that much different. All dramatic structure requires craft and integrity and stamina from the writer. I can't imagine not writing for kids. And I'm old enough now that some of those kids I wrote for not so long ago, are now the adults sitting in the theatre watching my plays. That big circle that connects, that I'm part of, that my work is part of....

It is amazing for me to be at the IRT watching *The Velveteen Rabbit*—at the beginning again. Like that photograph of myself as a four-year-old, this play is fearless in its youth, in its courage and joy.



Playwright James Still at 4,

The Power of Imagination

Gordon Strain Scenic Designer

This play takes us on a journey that goes back and forth between fantasy and real life. Creating the world for that meant finding “anchors” that could easily plant themselves in reality, but were also easy to imagine as something else. For example, a bed is a bed ... until you want it to be a ship sailing on the high seas. It’s a viewpoint that many children seem to understand innately, as their imaginations are so wonderfully vivid. Additionally, we wanted to incorporate enough whimsy that there was a sense of magic surrounding the whole story—just as we all have a little magic surrounding us in life.



Preliminary sketch by scenic designer Gordon Strain.

Maggie Hall Sound Designer

This play takes place in a world where imagination is key. A hug can start a stuffed rabbit on the path to becoming real. Sound can help define and shape ideas within this world of imagination, which is one of the main requirements for sound in this play. A number of musical themes aid in telling the story. Each theme is tied to a location or to a character. One theme is where the wild rabbits live, where the fairies live; there is nature and magic in this theme. Another important theme is tied directly to the Velveteen Rabbit himself, expressed through the voice of a single piano, which has the ability to grow and expand with Rabbit as he becomes real. The Rabbit theme is in direct contrast to the mechanical toys, who are driven by batteries and confined by their mechanics. All of these themes are bound up in the imaginative world of one child and his velveteen rabbit.

Guy Clark Costume Designer

In *The Velveteen Rabbit*, a young child's imagination is so powerful that it transforms a few pieces of fabric and a bit of sawdust into a beloved companion. After we have grown out of our childhood toys, that same magic can still enchant us by transforming a bare stage into a palace, a pirate ship, or even a young child's bedroom.



Costume drawings for Younger Steve and Velveteen Rabbit by designer Guy Clark.

What is Theatre?

The most basic needs for a theatrical experience are a story to tell, actors to tell it, and an audience to hear it. As soon as prehistoric people could communicate with each other, they began to tell stories around the campfire. As civilization developed, communities gathered for ritual festivals where stories were told through song, dance, and spoken word. **Playwrights** from Sophocles to Shakespeare to James Still have written plays that tell stories through dialogue and action. Taking the playwright's words from the printed page, **actors** use their voices, bodies, and creativity to develop characters that live on stage. **Designers** create scenery, costumes, lighting, and music that form a unique physical environment for each individual play. The **director** is the person who leads this ensemble of artists, making sure that all the various elements and viewpoints come together for a unified statement that creates a satisfying experience for the **audience**. When theatre artists bring their best work to the stage, and when audiences receive that work with open minds and active imaginations, the results can be enlightening, enriching, and entertaining.



Theatre Etiquette

When your students come to the play, IRT staff will take a moment before the show to remind students of what is expected of them:

First, we will remind them to *remain seated on their bottoms in the carpeted area*. This is so both students and actors are kept safe, and nobody will trip over anybody!

Then we will remind students to *listen with their eyes, ears, heart, and body*. We want students to enjoy themselves. Remind them that they are welcome to smile and laugh when things are funny! But we must also remember that we are together to watch and learn! Just like in school or during learning time, we should stay focused on the action in front of us.

Activities

for before, after, and beyond seeing the play

Discussion

- Talk with the children about stories in books and movies where **toys come alive**.
 - *Toy Story* and *Toy Story 3* have great scenes of a child playing with toys.
 - The Island of Misfit Toys in *Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer* and the Disney series *Doc McStuffins* both teach about tolerance and respecting differences.
 - Read part of *Winnie the Pooh* by A. A. Milne.
- Talk with the children about books and movies with **fairies and other magical beings** that do good things, such as:
 - flying reindeer
 - Papa Smurf
 - Disney fairies
 - the Rainbow Magic Fairy book series
 - the fairy godmother in *Cinderella*

In the original book *The Velveteen Rabbit*, the fairy says, “I am the nursery magic fairy. I take care of all the play things that the children have loved. When they are old and worn out and the children don’t need them any more, then I come and take them away with me and turn them into Real.” Ask the children: If you were a fairy ...

- What type of fairy would you be?
 - What special thing would you do for the world?
- Ask the children to **tell about their favorite toy**:
 - What makes this toy your favorite?
 - Have you ever changed favorite toys?
 - Why is your new favorite toy better than your old one?

After the book or play, ask:

- Why do you think the Velveteen Rabbit was the boy’s favorite toy?
- What makes a toy special?

These questions help student explain their feelings and empathize with the feelings of others.

Writing and/or Drawing

After seeing the play, have your students **write or draw a message to the cast**. It could be a thank you, or a note to tell the actors about their favorite part of the play.

Younger students might make a drawing and dictate to the teacher what they’d like to say.

Older students might write a sentence or two about what they remember most from the play, or how they felt during or after the play, and why.

Activities:

Reading and Re-Reading the Story

Read *The Velveteen Rabbit* as retold by Carol Ottolenghi to your students several times. A free copy of this book was provided for the Paths to Quality child care centers by the Indianapolis Public Library. We also encourage reading the original story by Margery Williams and perhaps other adaptations. These and other options are available at the public library.

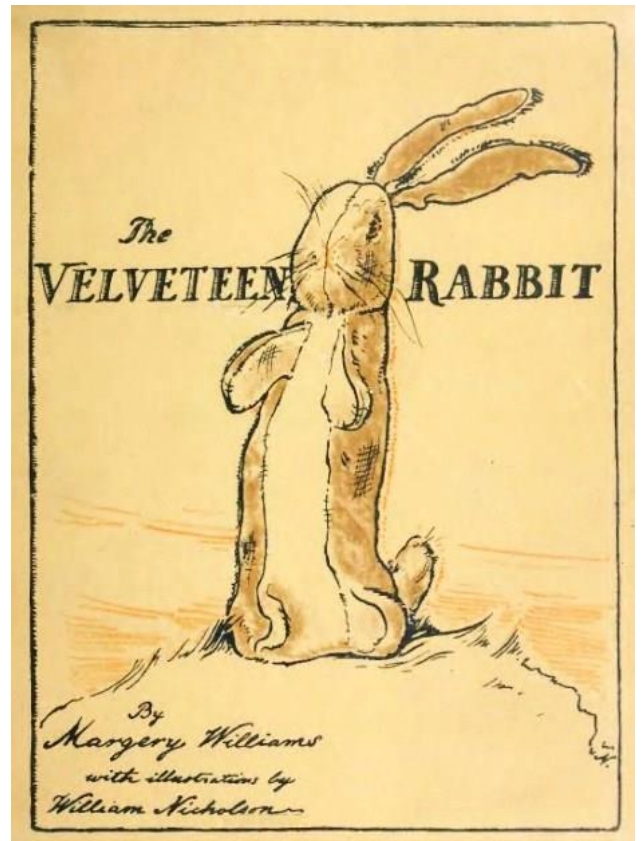
- The first time you might read the story through without interaction from the children, but using your best expressive reading skills. The more dramatic you are, the more you are preparing the children for the theatrical experience. They are learning what theatre people call **active listening**: listening with our eyes, ears, hearts, and minds. Use your voice like actors do by changing your vocal tones. For example:
 - Use the upper range of your voice for the Wild Rabbits.
 - Use low-pitched sounds for the Rocking Horse, the oldest toy in the nursery.

Another tool to making stories come alive vocally is to use **onomatopoeia**—words that imitate the natural sounds of things. Onomatopoeia creates a sound effect that mimics the thing described, making the description more expressive and interesting.

For example: take the first two sentences of Carol Ottolenghi’s edition of *The Velveteen Rabbit*: “Long ago, on a cold winter night, the Velveteen Rabbit peeked out of a Christmas Stocking. He was very excited.”

Using onomatopoeia:

- “Long ago” becomes “*Looooonng agoooo*” to accent that this event happened way in the past.
- “on a cold winter night” becomes “*on a coooold winter night*” in a whispered shaky voice to give the impression of cold weather and a quiet night.
- “peeked” becomes a quick tempo word in your higher voice, tilting upwards, sounding like the action of peeking.
- “Christmas” sounds like your impressions and feelings of the day—a day full of wonder and delight.



- The second time you are reading through the story, encourage the children to be **physically, vocally, and mentally interactive** and engaged with the story.
 - Have the children repeat how you say words and phrases expressively:
 - “long ago” and “on a cold winter night” as described above.
 - “a tingling, tickling feeling”: help them to notice the alliteration and the repeated “ing” words.
 - Have them mimic your sad tones after the other toys are mean to the Velveteen Rabbit.
 - Lead them to interact physically:
 - Have them scrunch down in their imaginary Christmas stocking and then peek out stretching their necks and looking all around the room.
 - Ask the children what sounds we might make when we are excited about getting a present or something special happening. Have them make those sounds after you read the sentence, “He was very excited.”
 - You can have them pretend to tear open imaginary wrapped presents and hug stuffed toys.
 - Get them to think how the story relates to their own lives:
 - Ask them, “What games do you play with your toys? Show me how you play with one of your toys.”
 - If they don’t have an idea, then you can name toys. How do we play with our dolls, our racing cars, our Lego blocks?

- The third time through the story is about making sure they are **following the plot**. Knowing the plot will greatly help the children enjoy the play at the IRT. Feel free to paraphrase the story while stopping to ask questions about what has happened and what is going to happen next.
 - “How do you think the Velveteen Rabbit feels when he and the boy are playing outside?”
 - “How do you think he feels when he is left outside alone when the boy goes inside to eat his dinner?”

Each time through the story you can **add elements** such as using rabbit puppets or repeating a certain physical action each time they hear the word *rabbit* throughout the story. Such activities, as you know, build reading comprehension, increase vocabulary, ignite creativity, and get the body in motion.

Reading the story multiple times will not only help the students with comprehension and other learning skills, it will also give the children an experience akin to that of the actors they will see in the play. During rehearsal, the actors will read and work on the script for six hours a day for more than two weeks.

Activities:

Have a Rabbit-Themed Day

- Read **other stories about rabbits**. The Indianapolis Public Library librarians have compiled a list of books where rabbits are the main characters. Rosemary Wells has a large selection of books with a rabbit as the main character, one being *Read to Your Bunny*.
- Look at **DVDs and YouTube videos about real rabbits** and talk about the lives and food of real rabbits in the wild and as pets. Here are a few websites to assist you on making your rabbit-themed day fun!

8 common myths about rabbits

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CXo7BkufNZA>

20 Fun Facts about rabbits

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_Dn_NrdVP0

Cute bunny jumping competition

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qM9YWm6T_hc

What do rabbits eat?

<http://www.saveafluff.co.uk/rabbit-info/what-do-rabbits-eat>

- Have **snacks that rabbits would eat** (carrots, lettuce, etc.) or that are made to look like their food (i.e. cookies that are decorated like carrots).
- Make **rabbit crafts**, finger puppets, masks, pictures, costume piece ears or whiskers etc. Each teacher visited by an AIC teaching artist will receive four samples of rabbit crafts that can be used in creative play. To make these crafts, and to explore more on your own, here is a Pinterest page for making bunnies, masks, games, snacks, etc.:

[http://www.pinterest.com/search/pins/?q=preschool%20easter%20bunny&term_meta\[\]=preschool|typed&term_meta\[\]=easter|typed&term_meta\[\]=bunny|typed](http://www.pinterest.com/search/pins/?q=preschool%20easter%20bunny&term_meta[]=preschool|typed&term_meta[]=easter|typed&term_meta[]=bunny|typed)

- Have a **visit from a real rabbit**. Perhaps you know a family who owns a rabbit. You might contact Silly Safari, <http://www.sillysafaris.com/index.php?q=node>, or visit the zoo.



- Sing **songs about rabbits**:

- **“Funny Bunny”**

This is a link to “The Ooey Gooey Lady” singing the song, with finger play:

<http://www.pinterest.com/pin/202028733256649195/>

Lyrics:

Here’s a bunny with ears so funny

And here’s a hole in the ground.

When a noise he hears, he perks up his ears

And he jumps in the whole in the ground!

- **“Mr. Rabbit”**

There are numerous versions of this song on iTunes where you can hear the tune. We have found the renditions to be the most clear in learning lyrics and the tune on the albums:

- *Animal Folk Songs for Children* by Mike, Peggy, Barbara & Penny Seeger
- *Sally Go Round the Sun: Songs and Rhymes from the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program* by Kathy Reid-Naiman

Then you can sing it along with an instrumental recording like:

- *Folk Songs for Kids: Relaxing Piano Music* by Maya Rosenfeld

Here are some variations to get you started:

- Mr. Rabbit Mr. Rabbit your ears are mighty long
Yes my Lord (my Friend) they’re put on wrong

Chorus:

Every little soul must shine shine shine

Every little soul must shine shine shine

- Mr. Rabbit Mr. Rabbit your coat’s mighty gray
Yes my Lord (my Friend) it was made that way

Chorus:

Every little soul’s gonna (must) shine shine shine

Every little soul’s gonna (must) shine shine shine

- Mr. Rabbit Mr. Rabbit your tail’s mighty white
Yes my Lord (my Friend) I’m getting’ out of sight

Chorus:

Every little soul’s gonna shine shine shine

Every little soul’s gonna shine shine shine

Activities:

Bring Your Favorite Stuffed Toy to School

Show and Tell

Have the children stand up and talk about why they toy they brought is their favorite.

- Try to have the other children look at the child who is sharing while they are listening to that child. This teaches the children a skill they will need when they come to the theatre. In the theatre we call this **giving focus**. Remind students about eye contact, movement, and noise, and what that means when you're engaging in **active listening**.
- Ask each child questions about his or her toy:
 - Why is it your favorite toy?
 - How long have you had it?
 - Do you remember who gave it to you?
 - Was it a birthday, holiday, or other gift?
 - Is it new or old?
 - What games do you play with it?
 - With whom would you share this toy?

Dramatic Play

Plan activities the children can do with their stuffed toy friend.

- Have them play games with their toy, like the boy in the story of *The Velveteen Rabbit*.
- For imaginative play, ask them to have their toys talk about what they do during the day.
- Two children might come to the center of the circle or the front of the group and act out a scene with their toys being the talking puppets. Give them a subject to talk about before the scene begins: for example, your toys are at the state fair and they are deciding what activities they want to do and what foods they want to eat; or like in *The Velveteen Rabbit*, they are in the garden during the summer playing amongst the flowers. You may need to coach from the side, giving them ideas and prompting questions.



Drama and Language Arts Activities

for before, after, and beyond seeing the play

Several of these activities will be led by the IRT teaching artist(s) when working with your students. Feel free to ask the teaching artists any questions you have about content, execution, supplies, or logistics. We hope you will use these activities with your students beyond this collaboration.

Front-Loading Vocabulary

Reading the story before coming to the play can be a helpful way to front-load vocabulary and practice sight words. The questions below can be used in various ways to reinforce vocabulary.

- For younger students, you might use the activity orally in group or carpet time. Create a drawing or cut out a picture to represent each word. Keep the pictures visible as you ask the questions, and remove them from sight after they've been used. You may also choose different words than the ones in this sample.
- For older students, you might give them a worksheet with the questions. You could also challenge them to use these words in their own sentences, or as bonus words to practice their spelling.
- For all students, this activity could be modified to check for understanding after reading the book or seeing the play.

Word Bank (Vocabulary from *The Velveteen Rabbit*):

fever	fairy	fast	toy	play
horse	soft	love	real	hop

1. The Velveteen Rabbit's fur was very _____.
2. The Horse said that toys become _____ when they are loved.
3. The real rabbits asked the Velveteen Rabbit to dance and _____.
4. The boy and the Velveteen Rabbit _____ hide-and-seek.
5. The Blue _____ came to make the Velveteen Rabbit real.
6. A _____ made the boy very sick.
7. The _____ explained to the Velveteen Rabbit how toys become real.
8. The Velveteen Rabbit was the boy's favorite _____.
9. The Velveteen Rabbit could run very _____.
10. "I _____ my boy," said the Velveteen Rabbit.

Drama and Language Arts Activities:

Let's, Yes!

This game has many variations, but for younger children we suggest that you start out as the leader and then guide them in giving actions and ideas. As “The Ooey Gooley Lady” has said in her presentations, this activity can go on for quite a while if you stretch your creativity.



Have the children stand around the room with enough physical space that they can move their arms and legs and not bump anybody. Teach them two phrases:

- Whoever starts the action says, “Let’s ...” then says and does an action at the same time.
- The group responds, “Yes, let’s!” and then does the action.

For example:

- You might start by saying, “Let’s all stand up” and the group would then say, “Yes, let’s!” as they stand up.
- Then you might say, “Let’s look at the stars in the sky” and then the group would say, “Yes, let’s” as they look up as if looking at the stars and pointing to them and making oh and ah sounds.
- You might elaborate the action by saying, “Look there is the north star shining bright” and pointing at it and having the children point at it as well.
- Then go on to the next prompt, which could be something like, “Let’s march up the mountain to get a better look.” And the group then says enthusiastically, “Yes, let’s.”

Some helpful tips:

- This is an activity where the actions can be random (Let's swing our arms, act like a bunny rabbit, brush our teeth) or you can suggest actions in sequence to guide the children on a journey.
- Eventually you want to get the game going so well that the children are giving actions. Encouraging them to say, "Let's catch fireflies" or any action they can think of.
- To take it further in learning language, have the children repeat the whole sentence. "Let's jump up and down." "Yes! Let's jump up and down!"
- *You might want to create a signal of some sort that will stop the action so you can move onto the next one.*
- If the activity is getting stuck, side coach the children by asking what types of activities they do every day. What types of activities do they see adults doing? What activities do you do in the kitchen? These prompts will help the children and you to come up with more ideas to keep the game going.
- Offer imaginative prompts as well as reality-based actions. For example: Let's fly to the moon, let's be fairies and spread morning dewdrops, let's be vegetable seeds and grow into tall corn stalks, let's be monsters and eat everything in the house....

For older children, this game can be turned into a guessing game:

- Someone an action silently; when another person has figured out what they are doing, they say, "Yes, let's comb our hair."
- The person who guessed what the other person was doing is the next person to start pantomiming another action for someone in the group to guess.

This activity is great for reinforcing positive attitudes, supporting the ideas of others, learning verbs, creativity, repetition, and getting physical.



Drama & Language Arts Activities:

Dramatic Play

The core of these activities is to help the children be physical while they tell stories and to use and extend their vocabulary, grammar, and creativity.

Making Up a Story in Sequence

Tell a simple story while acting it out, and having the children copy your movements with each sentence as you go along.



- Teaching artists usually start with getting up in the morning and getting ready to come to school because this has a number of commonalities. It can be a good way of teaching beginning, middle, and end.
 - You begin by waking up and stretching and yawning.
 - The middle is washing up, putting on your clothes, and eating breakfast.
 - The end is traveling to school and walking into the classroom to say hello to your teacher.

- You the teacher can lead these simple stories with the children's help by asking them what might come next or what do you do next. With the simple stories you might even have a few children who can tell a whole story as you help the class act it out.

- This type of story can be as elaborate as you want it be or as basic as five sentences. What is essential is the inclusion of as many **verbs** as possible so your story stays physically active, making it more fun and moving it towards a conclusion. Example:
 - "I *walked* three blocks to the grocery store. Along the way I *waved* to Mr. Smith and *said* good morning to Mrs. Johnson."
 - As the children are walking in place or around the room, you can *count out loud* the neighborhood blocks you are walking.
 - See a penny and you *stoop* to pick it up.
 - *Look* both ways across the street.
 - Forget your grocery bags and have to *run* back home.

Taking this exercise further, you can then move into fun fictional stories utilizing the beginning, middle, and end concept further by telling stories where you introduce a character (a beginning), have a conflict/problem (the middle), and resolve that problem (the end). An example might be:

- “Daisy Mae the cat got up from her long nap in the sun” And you do some good stretching of arms and legs and back and shake your bottom as your tail. Perhaps you might even do the yoga pose called Cat.
- “Daisy Mae realized she couldn’t find her favorite mouse toy. Oh no!” (You have introduced a problem that must be resolved.) Then you can throw your hands up, or put your hands on your cheeks and twist from side to side. Add sounds that we make when we’re anxious and worried. Or meow like a cat who is upset and worried.
- “Daisy Mae looked everywhere for her toy! Under the bed, in the sofa between the cushions. She ran from room to room.” (You have the middle or trying to resolve the problem. Lots of action from looking for the toy.)
- “Finally, Daisy Mae found her favorite mouse toy in the corner of the closet behind all the winter coats. She was very happy and played with the toy for the rest of the afternoon.” You can act the emotion of happiness with the children, and then act out games you would play with your mouse toy. You might even introduce a ball that the children roll to each other or bat between their hands as cats do with their paws.

After seeing the play, use this same activity to reenact parts of *The Velveteen Rabbit* to reinforce the plot. Some moments that lend themselves to this activity might include:

- Younger Steve and Ben “swimming” in the ocean
- the Boat and the Train racing around the playroom making noises
- the Velveteen Rabbit trying unsuccessfully to hop at the beginning of the play,
- the Velveteen Rabbit dancing and jumping with the Wild Rabbits at the end of the play



Drama & Language Arts Activities: Dramatic Play:

Here to There

Have the children line up on one side of the room. Tell them they are going to cross the room in many different ways. Start with easy suggestions to get the activity started. “Go from here to there just walking.” When they get to the other side of the room they turn around to go back across. “Now go from here to there like you are marching in a parade.” As you go along you can vary the prompts that use more of the children’s imagination and pretend skills:

- riding a bicycle
- going up stairs
- moving through peanut butter or mud
- in a snowstorm
- like dinosaurs
- as if you were giants in a forest
- like mice sneaking around the house looking for cheese.

You can add emotions:

- on your way to a party
- after an argument with your best friend
- when you have a toothache

Use this activity to reinforce elements of a story you have been reading or a topic you’ve been studying, for example, the seasons:

- picking the spring flowers
- swimming in the pool at summer time
- raking the fall leaves
- shoveling the winter snow

This activity also can incorporate skipping, dance moves, and other types of locomotor movement.

Telling the Story with Props

• IRT Artist in the Classroom (AIC) Visit

The visiting teaching artists will be telling the story of the play, which is James Still’s adaptation of *The Velveteen Rabbit*. They will be showing costume drawings so the children can learn the characters in the play and see what the actors will look like in costume. They will also have some fabric swatches so the children can feel the softness of the velveteen rabbit and also the slick, stiffer fabric of the boat and train.

Drama & Language Arts Activities: Dramatic Play: Telling the story with props:


• The “Emotion” Story

You can use pictures and teach gestures of emotions that run through the story you are telling. Make large pictures of emotions. These pictures might be laminated, or mounted on foam core, or attached to paint sticks; whatever makes them durable and easier for the storyteller to access while talking.

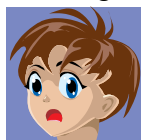
Here’s a link to some free downloadable charts that illustrate various feelings; you might use them as is or cut them into individual flash cards:

<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/modules/2006/feelingchart.pdf>

Begin by showing the children each picture needed for your story, and create with the children a simple action. **For example:**

- **HAPPY:** 

The action could be big smiles with our arms and fingers spread wide and looking up full of joy. You might add a simple word or sound like Yay! or Whee!



- **SCARED:**

The action could be arms crossed in front of our bodies like hugging ourselves, a little shiver, and faces with big eye and mouths like we going to say Oh No!

Review these actions several times with the pictures and tell the children each time you hold up the picture they are to do the action and say the emotion with you. Then start telling the story you have chosen. You might have a story that has the emotions in the text. Otherwise, just work it into your narrative: How does the boy feel when he discovers that the Velveteen Rabbit is missing? You hold up the picture of the emotion and the group says the word and does the physical gesture.

For older students:

You might introduce the four categories of **glad**, **sad**, **mad**, and **bad** (bad is the more difficult one to explain and can be left out; it is the category for emotions like disappointed, regretful, bored, afraid).

You might basic emotions at different levels of intensity. So maybe you have three pictures for mad that show the emotion from the lowest to the highest level of feeling. For example: disgusted (low), angry (medium), outrage (high). Here is a web page that offers several methods for categorizing emotions:

<http://changingminds.org/explanations/emotions/basic%20emotions.htm>

Drama & Language Arts Activities: Dramatic Play: Telling the story with props:

• Props in a Bag

In this activity, students work together to create a story about seemingly unrelated objects. This encourages lateral thinking and allows students to create and explore relationships between two things.

To begin, collect an assortment of objects and place them in a designated bag (or box). Only use as many objects as you feel your students can confidently remember. Then, drawing one item out at a time, create a story piece by piece until all objects have been used. For example, if your box contained a toy rocket, a bottle, a book, and an apron, your story may go like this:

- *You draw out the apron.* Once upon a time there was a little girl who loved to cook. She wore an apron in the kitchen, just like her grandmother.
- *You draw out the rocket.* She decided to bake a cake in the shape of a rocket for her little brother's birthday!
- *You draw out the bottle.* She pulled out a bottle of her most delicious milk to use in her recipe.
- *You draw out the book.* But, she didn't know how much milk to use, so she opened her favorite recipe book to find out. The cake turned out to be delicious, and her brother had a very happy birthday!

For very young students, you may need to model first by simply telling a story. Then, have the students repeat the same story along with you. Use the same objects a third time through, but ask for students to suggest what happens next. You will likely have to help them connect the objects. After repetition, students will begin to easily offer their own suggestions for the story. To challenge yourself, allow them to choose the objects for the bag and wow them with your versatile storytelling

For older students, you may choose to have them work in groups, with each group having a box containing different objects. Groups can work together to write, illustrate, or perform a story using their objects. Alternately, you may have them work independently to write a story as you reveal the objects one by one to the whole class. This will keep them on their toes! Encourage students to share their stories with each other when the activity is complete.



Drama & Language Arts Activities:

Sight Words – Opposites

When the children get older, they will learn about metaphor, simile, and oxymoron, comparing opposite images and ideas. Even at this age, however, we can still find ways to introduce this literary concept and the basic knowledge of opposites. The teaching artist may use opposite words that have been pulled from the book, the play, from lists we have found online, and from movement and emotion concepts we use to teach our students about acting and character development.

Choose about five pairs of opposites (ten words total) that vary the action and allow for speaking and solo and group actions. Example:

- shout / whisper
- push / pull
- together / apart
- happy / sad
- toward / away

Make a flash card for each word, with a picture illustrating the word.

- For children who do not read yet, use a different color for each pair of opposites so the children can match the colors if not the words.
- You might laminate your pictures and use Velcro to hold the opposite terms together.

Begin by holding up a card and acting out the word. Have the children act it out with you at first, then using call and response: you say the word while doing the action, and then they say the word and do the action. For example:

- Hold up “RUN” and run in place.
- Then flip over to the opposite word “WALK” and walk in place.

For older students, once you have gone through all the words, put the children in groups or pairs and hand each group or pair one of the words. You want to spread the “opposites” around the room so they really have to go looking for the matches. Tell the children to try to find their match.

For younger children, have all the children sit down. Have one group stand and act out and say their word and hold up their card. The group who believes they are the opposite can stand and act out their word and hold up their card. Then the teacher or the class can say, “It’s a match!” or “Try again!” And this goes on until all the opposite words are paired up.

Here are a couple website links to aid you:

<http://quizlet.com/13427366/first-grade-sight-words-of-opposites-flash-cards/>

<http://www.kinderiq.com/sight-words.php>

Cool Down

As teaching artists and as actors and directors, we have learned the importance of calming a group down at the end of a lot of excited physical activity. It helps for group cohesiveness and transitioning to the next activity. Here are a few suggestions from the IRT Artist-in-the-Classroom (AIC) staff. One of these activities may be done during your visit.

Relaxation Narrative

This can be a guided image journey that you lead students to imagine while they are sitting or lying down. Or it can be a narrative like the one provided that you lead the children through in a calm voice with maybe soft instrumental music accompanying you.

Here is an on-line example: <http://www.childdrama.com/appletree.html>

An image journey has the students seeing the pictures in their minds. What is important is that the students relax their muscles and bones, and breathe, and do their best not to talk.

- We start by guiding the students to lie down on their backs and close their eyes. We tell them that we are here to keep them safe, so our eyes are open.



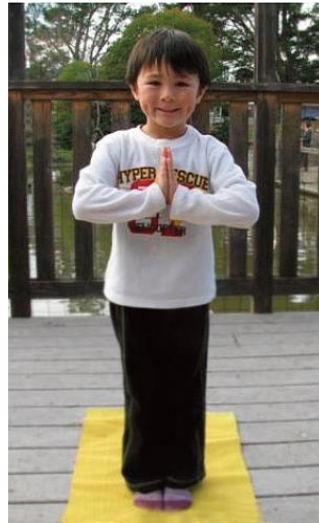
- We say something like, “Relax your arms, your shoulders, your legs, your feet.... You are so relaxed your body becomes very light, so light you are floating up into the sky and you can float through the sky with the clouds and see all the buildings in your neighborhood....”
- From there the narrative can go anywhere you take it. You bring them back to where they started and then have them sit up and tell you about their journey. Ask them leading questions, such as what buildings did you see? Did you smell any food when you floated by that restaurant? What colors did you see on your journey?
- End by complimenting their imaginations and thank them for sharing, and then move to your next activity.

Cool Down: Yoga

Yoga is becoming an integral part of the lives of theatre practitioners because of the health benefits. It increases flexibility and improves breathing and more. See this web link:

<http://www.yogaforbeginners.com/benefits01.htm>

Leading the children in some simple yoga poses can help the group decompress and have some fun. There are poses with names that are applicable to many subjects, even *The Velveteen Rabbit* (for example: Mountain, Tree, Rabbit, Horse, Boat, Child's, and more...).



Keep in mind that there are variations on each pose for beginners and the less flexible. What is important is the breathing. Here are a couple of web links for more information.

<http://www.dummies.com/how-to/content/how-to-combine-breath-and-movement-in-yoga.seriesId-333200.html>

http://www.sparkpeople.com/blog/blog.asp?post=you_asked_am_i_breathing_right_during_yoga

There are a large number of yoga teachers in and around Indianapolis who you can reach out to for a reasonable cost, who would really enjoy coming to work with your students.



Book Recommendations

from Children's Librarians at
the Indianapolis Public Library

Toys

Corduroy by Don Freeman

Found by Salina Yoon

Knuffelbunny by Mo Willems

Monkey and Me by Emily Gravett

Wash-a-Bye Bear by Thomas Docherty

Where's My Teddy by Jez Alborough

Friendship/Love

A Splendid Friend Indeed by Suzanne Bloom

Guess How Much I Love You by Sam McBratney

My Friend Rabbit by Eric Rohmann

Will You Be My Friend? by Nancy Tafuri

Rabbits

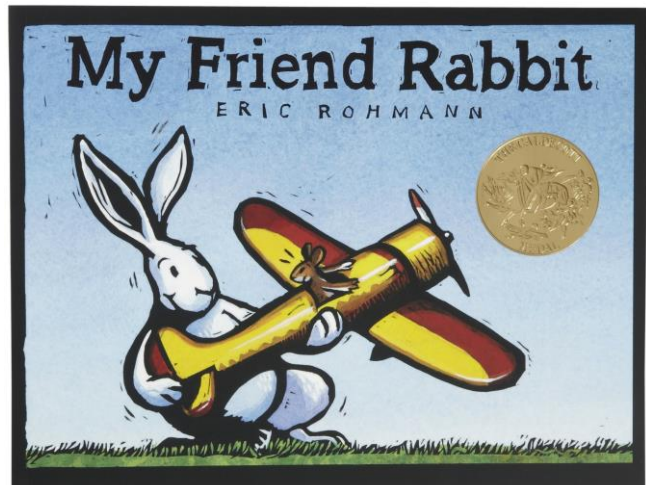
It's Not Easy Being a Bunny by Marilyn Sadler

Small Bunny's Blue Blanket by Tatyana Feeney

The Runaway Bunny by Margaret Wise Brown

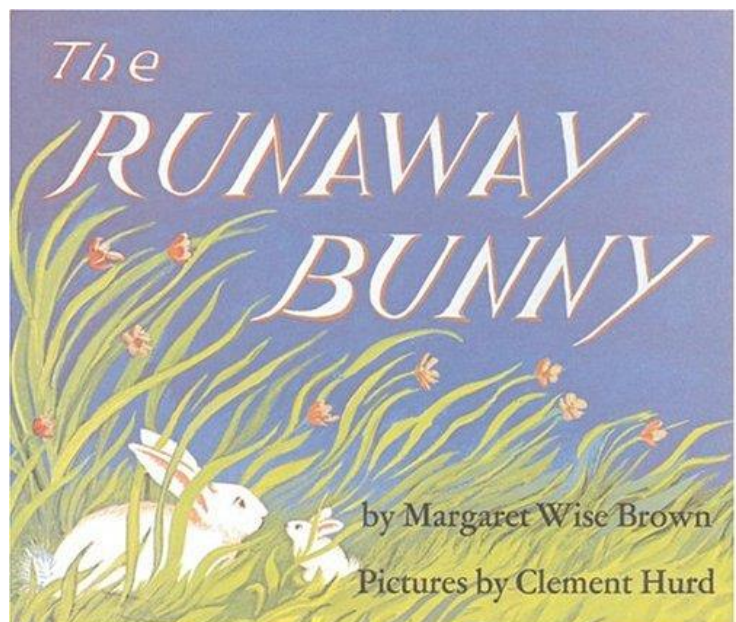
Thunder Bunny by Barbara Berger

We're Rabbits by Lisa Westberg Peters



Child Care Answers

Child Care Answers is part of the Indiana Child Care Resource and Referral network that provides services to parents, child care providers, and the community. It is their mission to assure the highest level of early childhood education for children in central Indiana. This area includes Bartholomew, Brown, Hamilton, Hendricks, Johnson, and Marion Counties in Central Indiana. Early childhood educators and parents can contact them for referrals, education and training at 317-636-5727 or Toll Free: (800) 272-2937.



Recommendations

from the IRT Education Staff

Books

101 Drama Games for Children: Fun and Learning with Acting and Make-believe

by Paul Rooyackers

112 Acting Games: A comprehensive workbook of theatre games for developing acting skills

by Gavin Levy

50 Early Childhood Literacy Strategies by Janice J. Beaty

Beginning Drama 4-11, Early Years and Primary 2nd Edition by Joe Winston and Miles Tandy

Movement Stories for Children Ages 3—6, including instructional material for teachers

by Helen Landalf and Pamela Gerke

The Preschooler's Busy Book:

365 Creative Learning Games and Activities to Keep Your 3-to-6-Year-Old Busy

by Trish Kuffner

Theater Games for the Classroom: A Teacher's Handbook by Viola Spolin

Up, Down, Move Around — Nutrition and Motor Skills: Active Learning for Preschoolers

by Deborah Kayton Michals

Websites

Using Drama and Theatre To Promote Literacy Development

<http://www.ericdigests.org/2004-1/drama.htm>

Why Children's Theater Matters

http://www.education.com/magazine/article/Why_Childrens_Theater_Matters/

“The Ooey Gooley Lady” has a wonderful and extensive list of resources on her website:

<http://www.ooeygooley.com/resources/>

Study Finds Major Benefits for Students Who Attend Live Theatre

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/10/141016165953.htm>

DVDs

The Velveteen Rabbit (1984, narrated by Meryl Streep)

The Velveteen Rabbit (1985, narrated by Christopher Plummer)

The Velveteen Rabbit (1984, featuring Marie Osmond)

The Velveteen Rabbit (2009, featuring Jane Seymour, Tom Skerritt, & Ellen Burstyn)

Special Thanks to IRT Artists in the Classroom

***Callie Burk, Katie Rae, Beverly Roche, Katie Sellars, & Bill Simmons
for their assistance in developing Activities for this Teacher Guide.***

Works of Art – Kyle Ragsdale & the IRT

This summer the IRT initiated a unique collaboration with one of Indianapolis's most prolific artists, Kyle Ragsdale. IRT executive artistic director Janet Allen worked with Kyle as he created an original piece of art to represent each of the IRT's nine plays that make up the 2014-15 season. The IRT will use these images throughout the season and display them in the theatre. The IRT hosted a First Friday event in October to unveil these original pieces as well as some of Kyle Ragsdale's other pieces.

The Velveteen Rabbit

"*Velveteen Rabbit* was the most fun to paint." Ragsdale says that when he read the script he thought of boats he painted last year. "It seemed like it would work together, and when I sent the picture over, they loved it right away."

—*Kyle Ragsdale*

The Velveteen Rabbit by Kyle Ragsdale

