Dear Teachers,

We are looking forward to having you and your students here in February for the performances of *Walking the Tightrope*. I was able to see this work last year at the International Performing Arts for Young Audiences Conference. This work, created by 24th Street Theatre from Los Angeles, is simply a beautiful, touching piece of theatre. The story explores the rhythm of life's changes, including loss, and how these changes teach us lessons about ourselves and our families.

24th Street Theatre is known for creating daring works that break the boundaries of age, looking and feeling like adult theatre, while appealing and connecting deeply to kids. Their production of *Walking the Tightrope* won 3 LA Drama Critics Circle Awards for Best Production, Best Lead Performance, and Best Sound Design. It also won 3 LA Weekly Year End Awards for Best Direction-Deb Devine, Best Sound Design and Best Video Design…and the cast is phenomenal. Our mission here at the Lied Center is to bring in various types of performing arts that have a very high level of artistry. We are very aware that your students visit us for one performance a year--we need to make sure the experience is special and that they are seeing topnotch work!" *Walking the Tightrope* will be a very special theatre experience for all of us.

We hope this teacher's guide and the student's 2-sided guide help to enhance and extend the experience of attending *Walking the Tightrope* for you and your students. The guide was primarily created by 24th Street Theatre. We have also added some language arts – poetry activities created by local teaching artist, Priscilla Howe. A special thanks to Teresa McKinley, USD497 learning coach for her help tying activities in this guide to College and Career Ready Standards noted in this guide (full list on page 12).

This online guide can be accessed at www.lied.ku.edu/events/tightrope.shtml or on the USD497 Blackboard site.

See you soon at the Lied Center! -- Anthea Scouffas, Lied Center Engagement-Education Director

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**The Setting (24th STreet Theatre Guide)**

The play has a deeply theatrical but deceptively simple structure with complex content. Because there is a surprise reveal in the play, we believe that the only preparation needed is the rules of theatre etiquette. As with all good stories, we hope our ‘telling’ of it will inspire an interest in the discussion and activities below. *Walking the Tightrope* uses sophisticated video design and creative movement to bring to life the beauty and excitement of both the sea and the circus. With the imaginative use of pantomime and award winning music, we are transported to a quaint English seaside village ‘just before the leaves turn brown and fall from the trees, just before school starts’ in 1959.

**Story Synopsis**

Written by one of England’s leading writers for young audiences, Mike Kenny, *Walking the Tightrope* is a sweet and funny story of a grandfather who, while trying to tell his young granddaughter that Nanna is gone, goes about building a beautiful new relationship with her. With the help of a silent clown, they discover the meaning of family.
Main Theme

Some things change and some things stay the same.
The story explores the rhythm of life's changes including loss. How we handle change can sometimes help us learn about our own family.

English Language Activities (24th StTreet Theatre Guide)

See appendix I, an excerpt from Walking the Tightrope (last pages of this guide).
Mike Kenny writes in a style which is called Prose poetry. It is written with very little verse but with heightened imagery (creating a picture) and is to be spoken as dialogue. Also repetition is used to create an enhanced poetic effect.

Please note how the language is centered on the page. This is text from the script and is repeated several times during the play. The text is placed in the middle of the page which gives it the feel of poetry too.

‘Tide comes in’
‘Tide goes out’

Poetry Activity:
1. Have students write 3 simple lines of dialogue, as if they are speaking to someone, instructing them to do something and put the text in the middle of the page. Example:

   “Wash the car”
   “Put away the dishes”
   “Make the bed”

2. Then write it again repeating the lines and see how it appears to feel and look like prose poetry:

   “Wash the car”
   “Wash the car”
   “Put away the dishes”
   “Put away the dishes”
   “Make the bed”
   “Make the bed”

3. Have several students speak it aloud to the class.
Discuss how it sounds like prose poetry because of the repetition.

4. Have students write a 6 line prose poem. The theme is losing something they really liked and they miss very much. Have them repeat by writing the last line of their story twice. Example:

   “My dog ran away”
   “His name was Baxley”
   “I miss him so”
   “I miss him so”
Poetry Snacks – from Priscilla Howe

Try some of these fun ways to play with poetry. The two rules I give to students are that what they write must be “school appropriate” (and they know what that means) and it must not be unkind about anyone.

Tough stuff

Writing poetry is a way that we can express the most difficult parts of our lives. Consider using prompts for poems such as lost, scared, uncertain and worried. Think up other topics with the students, and of course give the option for writing about the opposite to these prompts.

Making sense

Make a list of abstract nouns with the students, for example, sadness, happiness, fear, stillness. Use the following pattern with the kids to create sensory poems.

Example: Sadness feels like ______
(Noun) is (color).
(Noun) is shape.
It tastes like __________.
It smells like __________.
It looks like __________.
It feels like __________.
It sounds like __________.
(Noun) is ______________.

I ask the kids not to use the word itself or a form of the word in the blanks, for example, to not say “Happiness is happy.”

What did you notice?
Poetry is often about observation, from the tiniest detail to sweeping patterns. Ask the students to cut out a small strip of paper and to write on it a phrase (not a whole sentence) of something they noticed that day. Gather these strips and create a poem together.

Writing, rewriting

Poems rarely are finished after a first draft. Give the poem the class did together back to the students individually and ask them to rewrite the poems. Suggest that they can add words or take some away, as long as they keep the essence of the phrases. They may play with the order of the phrases, the punctuation and line breaks to create something new.

Buzz, pop!
Poetry is also about sound. Keep a fishbowl of interesting words, including onomatopoetic words such as buzz, fizz and splat to use as poem
Poetry Snacks – from Priscilla Howe (continued)

Pretty as a picture
Figurative language is an important aspect of poetry. Invite the students to write and draw self-portraits using similes and metaphors, for example, “My eyes are like green marbles” or “I hop on grasshopper legs.”

Say it again!
Many poems depend on repetition to convey the main point. Have the students write poems in which each line begins with “I remember.” Then try one alternating lines beginning with “I remember” and “I forget.”

Mood music
Poems capture the mood of a time or place. Brainstorm with the students to create a list of words that express an emotion or atmosphere, such as quiet, angry, shy, serene. Put on different kinds of instrumental music and ask the students to write three lines about one or more of the brainstormed words.

Old favorites
Poetry condenses ideas and themes. Encourage the students to write poems about familiar old stories, such as Little Red Riding Hood. Or combine a few stories into one poem, such as Goldilocks and The Three Pigs.

You’ll find this and other exercises at http://digitalteachers.net/node/3622

Extras
*Watch the video Similes and Metaphors by the Bazillions on Youtube.
*Read “Quiet as a Cricket” by Audrey Wood or “Skin Like Milk, Hair of Silk” by Brian P. Cleary to the students, then play with more similes and metaphors.
*Check out MagneticPoetry.com and create poems word by word online.
*Browse Poets.org, Poemhunter.com, Allpoetry.com and Poetryfoundation.org for many more ideas and of course, for poems.

Narration (24th Street Theatre Guide)
Most plays are written and performed as if the audience is spying in on people’s lives through an invisible fourth wall. Both Gandad Stan and Esme use narration in the play. They speak directly to the audience and ‘break the fourth wall’. Sometimes, as in Walking the Tightrope, the characters know we exist and talk to us directly through it. An example of this is when Grandad Stan says to the audience:
“Train’s comin’. I’ll tell you later.” To narrate something written, is to write it as direct address or first person point of view. It’s as if the writer is speaking directly to the reader.

**Narration Activity:**
1. Have students pair up and exchange each other’s simple stories of loss they created in the prose poetry activity. They should each read the other’s but not aloud. As they read, have them consider that the person who gave them their story is ‘directly addressing them’. Discuss with them direct address.

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**SYMBOLISM (24th STreet Theatre Guide)**

Symbolism is something that represents something else.

**Symbolism Activity:**
1. The title *Walking the Tightrope* is the most significant symbol of the play. The tightrope is symbolic for Esme and Grandad Stan’s relationship and the line they walk between reality and fiction. Discuss with them what the symbolism is.
2. The clown character is also symbolic. Who or What does the clown represent? And why?
3. Below are 5 nouns that were included in the play. Imagining your own story, write down how you might use these nouns as symbols for an idea or emotion.

   Ex. Backyard Swing - Freedom
   Pillow -
   Teapot -
   Clock -
   Window –
   Rain-

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**History/Social Studies Activities (24th STreet Theatre Guide)**

The setting of the story takes place in England in 1959. That is over half a century ago: ‘Every year some things stay the same and some things change’

**History/Social Studies Activity A:**
1. As a class, contrast and compare some more differences between American and English politics, recreation, sports, food, music and culture. For example, in England the Prime Minister is elected every 5 years but can call an election any time during that 5 year term. In the US, the President has no such flexibility. The US Presidential elections are set in stone every 4 years.
2. Think about the play and discuss what would be in Esme and Grandads house if the play was set 50 years later, in present day, i.e. cell phones, computers, dishwasher etc.
3. Have them write 10 of the changes that have happened in their lives in the last 4 years i.e. they’ve grown taller, have a new brother or sister, new teacher, changed the color of their bedroom etc. Then have them write a short autobiography as if they are 10 years older than they are now. Include in the story things that have changed about them in that time. And include 2 things that might have changed about the U.S.
4. Share the story with the class.
Theatre Arts

(24th Street Theatre Guide)

Theatre Arts are fully aligned with English Language Arts as both of them have an emphasis on written word, spoken word, and listening.

Dramatization

To narrate, as discussed in Language Arts, is to tell the story directly using spoken word. To Dramatize is to act it out. *Walking the Tightrope* uses both narration and dramatization.

The three parts of every good story, whether the story is already written (*Walking the Tightrope*) or improvised (made up in the moment) must have the where (setting), the who (characters), and the what (the problem or conflict).

For *Walking the Tightrope* the three parts are:
The Where: English seaside home of granddad Stan 1959
The Who: Grandad Stan, Esme and the clown
The What: Nanna isn’t there when Esme comes to visit.

Theatre Arts Activity A:
The specific use of time and place is essential to all stories. Creating time and place is the first choice to be made in creating an improvisation.

1. Divide into teams of 3. Have each team decide a where, a who and a what. One student is the narrator and the other 2 are the actors. Have them present a 1 minute scene to share with the class, having the narrator tell the action of an encounter (including the where, the who and the what).

Example: Narrator: “A girl was sitting at her school desk working on a math quiz when the boy sitting next to her snatched her pencil out of her hand. She grabbed it back and called out for the teacher ‘Mr. Clemens, Julio took my pencil’

2. Following the narration have the two actors perform this scene as, in this example, Julio and the girl.

A more complex version is to have the actors perform as the narrator describes the scene simultaneously. This involves focused listening and timing.

The most challenging of all versions would be to have all three student artists be both actors and narrators, the way Grandad Stan and Esme did in the play. They break the fourth wall and come out of the scene and talk to us and then return to the ‘real time action’.

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History/Social Studies Activity B: British Vocabulary

1. Both the United States and the United Kingdom are English speaking nations. However, given their different cultures, the language is spoken differently, especially regarding slang and informal vocabulary. With a partner, write 10 sentences using the British slang terms listed below!

**English Slang!**

Theatre Arts Activity B:
To dramatize something means an action takes place, but even more important a reaction follows.
1. Discuss with the class what is Esme’s reaction each time she looks around the house for Nanna? How does it change during each successive search?

2. Have someone come up and create a reaction. It can include brief dialogue, but body and face reaction is very important. Then have several students one
Example: Student One creates a reaction of standing and smiling. Student Two says “Hey, good job at today’s soccer game!”

Characterization  (24th STreet Theatre Guide)
Characterization is how the actor portrays a character’s personality through thought, action, dialogue, makeup and costuming.

Characterization Activity A:
1. There were three characters in the play, however only two spoke. Discuss with the class why the clown character didn’t speak.
2. Granddad Stan’s character had a secret, what was it? How did the actor help us know he was struggling with his secret?
3. Throughout the play Esme was looking for Nanna but she found something else instead. What was it? How did the actor help us know she had found it.

Characterization Activity B:
1. Divide the class into pairs. Have each pair create 2 characters that would interact with one another in Granddad Stan’s seaside village by imagining what they might be doing in the town i.e. a fisherman and a grocer buying fish, a trolley conductor and a passenger, etc.
2. Imagine who the character really is. What makes them unique? Would they have gnarly hands if a fisherman? Would the trolley conductor have a loud voice from the constancy of shouting out the stops?
3. Using dialogue and their bodies, face and voices, have them act out a scene where they meet.

Pantomime  (24th St Theatre)
Pantomime is using the body and face to convey a story and create an imaginary world. One of the main theatrical techniques used in the production is pantomime—there were no teacups, spoons, blankets, etc. These were all pantomimed.

Pantomime Activity:
1. Using pantomime, have students show where they might be in Grandad Stan’s house: living room, kitchen, backyard, etc. Have them create rooms that weren’t in the play and be specific.

Music
The award winning original music supported the story in a very important way. The score helped us feel the confusion, loneliness and joy of the story.

Musical Activity:
Listen to this 3 minute excerpt from when Esme and Ganddad Stan were watching the circus and using pantomime imagine what you might be seeing and react to it. Example: They see clowns juggling so they laugh, tigers jumping through fiery hoops so they look surprised, etc.
**Props (24th St Theatre)**

Because pantomime was used so extensively, props (short for property: something moveable an actor holds in their hands) become very important and stand out in the play: suitcase, doll, shell, umbrella, towels, ice cream, flask, book and glasses are the props in Walking the Tightrope.

**Prop Activity A:**
1. Discuss how each prop played a part in helping Esme learn more about Nanna’s disappearance. How did Grandad Stan and Esme ‘receive’ the props in the play?

**Prop Activity B:**
1. Have students choose a ‘prop’ in the classroom i.e. pencil, ruler, globe, notebook, and as a class give it value by creating a fictional past for it. Where did it come from, who used it for something important, what problem did it encounter that it ended up in this classroom. Don’t have them anthropomorphize it. Keep it as a real object that has a special history.
2. In small teams have them create a simple scene using the where, the who and the what based on the value and importance of the prop.

Example 1: Prop- Pencil  
The Where- restaurant  
The Who- waiter and customers  
The What - the waiter can’t take their order until she finds her ‘lucky pencil’

Example 2: Prop- Ruler  
The Where- shoe store  
The Who- shoe salesman and customer  
The What - the ruler is ticklish to the customer and so the salesman can’t get the right sizing for a new pair of shoes
Vocabulary

Vocabulary:
Dialogue – a conversation between two or more characters onstage.
Prose – a non-rhyming language used in writing, usually in literature.
Poetry – A type of literature written in short rhyming or non-rhyming groups of sentences. Narration – Spoken description of the events onstage.
Dramatization – A theatrical adaptation of an event, moment, or story.
Autobiography – An individual’s own written or spoken retelling of their own life story. Production – A theatrical presentation by a theatre company or group of artists.
Play – A written theatrical work that can be produced by any theatre company or group of artists.
Fiction – Stories that have not happened in real life.
Imagery – Language that describes the setting and characters of a story.
Prop – An object used onstage in a production.
Score – A musical composition used to enhance story-telling.
Act – To represent behavior, action or emotion.
React – To respond to a behavior, action or emotion.
Improvisation – To create a character, setting and action without any previously written material.
Fourth wall – The imaginary wall between the actors and the audience.
Actor – A person portraying a character onstage.
Character – A participant in the events of the story.
Timing – The ability to select the precise moment of doing something for optimum effect Setting – The location where the play takes place.
Place – A specific location.
Unique – something or someone that is unlike anything else.

And we have listed ALL imbedded links at the end of this guide.
Appendix A: Walking the Tightrope – Script Excerpt

STAN  Finish your egg?
ESME  Yes.
STAN  Fancy a mint?
ESME  No thank you.
STAN  You sure?
ESME  Yes.
STAN  You always liked them.
ESME  Did I?
STAN  Always.
    I got them specially.
ESME  I don’t like them now.
STAN  You’ve changed.
ESME  Yes I have.
STAN  Well, let’s do the washing up.
    And we’ll have a walk by the sea before bedtime.

    Tide comes in.
    Tide goes out.

    At the end of the day
    It all washes away.
    And back comes
    Something else.

    At the end of the day
    It all washes away
    And it just leaves
    Wood and stones and shells.

    And you and me.
    And a shell to hear the sea.

ESME  In bed that night
   Esme was still quiet.
   Grandad Stan.
STAN  What is it, Esme?
ESME  Can’t sleep.
STAN  Can’t sleep?
ESME  No.
   Nanna always tells me a story.
STAN  Always?
ESME  Always.
STAN  Grandad Stan went very quiet.
    I don’t usually do stories.
ESME  Well, you’ll have to if Nanna Queenie’s not here.
STAN  What do you want a story about?
ESME  Me.
STAN  Right.
    Every year
Right at the end of summer
Just before the leaves turn brown and fall from the trees.
Esme comes to stay
With her Nanna and Grandad
Every year

Every year
Some things stay the same
And some things change.
The first year she came
She was in her mum’s tummy.

ESME I remember that.

STAN The next year she was a baby
And she cried

ESME A lot

STAN The next year she walked
And the year after that she talked.

ESME A lot

STAN Last year she came on her own
For the first time
And this year
This year…

(Esme seems to be asleep)
Grandad tucked her up
And tiptoed away.

ESME (Just awake)
Grandad Stan
Why can’t we see Nanna?

STAN Erm
Because
She’s gone to join the circus.

ESME And we can’t go?

STAN No.

ESME Never?

STAN We’ll see.
Maybe.
Goodnight.

ESME (is asleep)

Tide comes in
Tide goes out
Tide comes in
Tide goes out.
At the end of the day
It all washes away.
And back comes
Something else.
At the end of the day
It all washes away
And just leaves
Wood and stones and shells
KANSAS COLLEGE AND CAREER READY STANDARDS

WRITING STANDARD 10
Range of Writing
Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

WRITING STANDARD 12
Production and Distribution of Writing
Strengthen writing craft—both independently and collaboratively—through a recursive writing and revision process and the use of the common vocabulary of the 6-Trait model.

LANGUAGE STANDARD 3
Knowledge and Language
Choose words and phrases for effect.*

LANGUAGE STANDARD 4
Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

LANGUAGE STANDARD 5
Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meaning.

READING STANDARD 6
Craft and Structure
Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of the text.

READING STANDARD 7
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
R.4.7
Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text, identifying where each version reflects specific descriptions and directions in the text.

R.5.7 Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., graphic novel, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, poem).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.5
CRAFT AND STRUCTURE
Refer to parts of stories, dramas, and poems when writing or speaking about a text, using terms such as chapter, scene, and stanza; describe how each successive part builds on earlier sections.

SPEAKING AND LISTENING STANDARD 2
Comprehension and Collaboration
Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

WEBSITE LINKS FROM THIS GUIDE:
www.MagneticPoetry.com
http://digitalteachers.net/node/3622
24th STreet Theatre’s Teacher Toolbox: www.24thstreet.org/arts-education/teacher-toolbox/
www.lied.ku.edu/events/tightrope.shtml
www.farmers.com/teachers.html
www.bbc.co.uk/history/british
www.24thstreet.org/walking-the-tightrope/

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