Study Guide

Miss Nelson is Missing
Presented by Theatreworks USA

November 9, 2015 at 10:30 AM

Performance is approximately 60 minutes and is geared for Grades K-5

Eissey Campus Theatre
Palm Beach State College
11051 Campus Drive, Palm Beach Gardens
561-207-5910

THE SHOW:

The students in Room 207 were the worst-behaved class in the whole school: spitballs stuck to the ceiling; paper airplanes whizzing through the air – even though they had the sweetest teacher of all, Miss Nelson. But when Miss Nelson unexpectedly does not come to school one day, the class gets the strictest substitute they have ever met: Miss Viola Swamp! The search is on for Miss Nelson, who seems to have vanished. Hopefully the students of Room 207 will find her before it's too late – for them! This lighthearted musical from Two Beans Productions reminds us all to show appreciation to those that we value!
ARTISTS:

The mission of Theatreworks USA is to create, produce, and provide access to professional theatre for young and family audiences nationwide, including disadvantaged youth and under-served communities. Since our founding in 1961, we have presented more than 90 million children and their families with opportunities to enjoy our theatrical productions in 49 states and Canada.

Each season, three million children, many of whom have no other access to the performing arts, attend our original productions in venues as varied as local elementary school gymnasiums, regional fine arts centers, and major Broadway-sized theatres. Theatreworks USA tours approximately 16 shows each season from our repertoire of 133 plays and musicals. In addition, Theatreworks USA has an extensive multi-cultural roster of guest artists, including storytellers, puppeteers, poets, and magicians.

Book Writer/Lyricist/Composer: Joan Cushing

Ms. Cushing is a humorist, playwright, composer, lyricist and political satirist. She performs in Mrs. Foggybottom & Friends, which is a newsical review featuring her wit and humor. She’s a former elementary school teacher and cabaret performer. She’s written several other children’s musicals including MISS NELSON HAS A FIELD DAY and HEIDI.

PRE-PERFORMANCE DISCUSSIONS:

1. Discuss how students should behave at the theatre.
   a. No food or drinks inside the theatre
   b. No gum chewing
   c. No cell phones
   d. No taking pictures or recordings during the performance
   e. Respect for the performers on stage (being quiet while the actors are on stage)
   f. Clapping where appropriate

2. Read Miss Nelson is Missing in class and review the plots and characters with your students.

3. Discuss and make a list of all the ways seeing a play version of the story might be different than reading the book in class.

4. Introduce the topic of respect. How do we show respect to others? Why don't the students in Miss Nelson’s class show her respect and what does she do about it? What do the students learn about the consequences of not showing respect to their teacher? Ask questions about how they would like to be treated.
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:

1. **Alma Who? Write Your Own School Song**
   An ALMA MATER is a person’s school song and school pride is important. In fact, the first song in the beginning of MISS NELSON IS MISSING, the musical, is their school song (The words are listed below). Read them and try to write your own school song. See if you can include two or more rhymes and specific details about your school. For example if your school colors are blue and white, perhaps you could try adding that to your song (hint –both of those colors are also easy words to rhyme, for example, blue and true / white and right.)

   HAIL TO THEE, OH ALMA MATER.
   WE ARE LOYAL, THROUGH AND THROUGH.
   PROUD TO BE YOUR SONS AND DAUGHTERS,
   TO YOUR COLORS WE ARE TRUE.
   GREEN IS FOR THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE.
   GOLD IS FOR THE GOLDEN RULE.
   HAIL TO THEE, OH HORACE B. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

2. **The Worst Students in 207!**
   Miss Nelson has some behavioral issues with the students in room 207. In fact Pop, the principal calls them “the worst students ever!” They even say “respect for others” is the catch phrase of the week, and “Character Counts!” While these words are used in the plot of the show, they’re important for students to think about.

   a. Role-play certain scenarios that demonstrate a situation where someone is behaving poorly and brainstorm the best solutions to the problem.

   b. Have students make a list of positive buzzwords that demonstrate good character and respect for others. Hang it in the classroom for students to refer to. When one of the words is used put a mark (or a sticker) by that word to keep track of what is used the most. Have the class write a mission of “Good Character” using their most commonly used buzzwords. (These can also be incorporated into the school song/above activity.)

   c. Losing something is difficult, but the students realize how much they loved Miss Nelson when she was missing. Have students write an essay about an influential person in their life and how they’ve made a difference to them. If the person is still in their life, give them the option to share the essay with the person they write about.
3. **A Little Bit of Detective Work**
   When the students can't find Miss Nelson, a detective is brought in who refers to Sherlock Holmes. Spend a day in class solving a mystery.

   Have students read some of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s short stories about Sherlock Holmes. There are some for younger readers (Grade range, 3rd-7th)

   - The Extraordinary Cases of Sherlock Holmes (Puffin Classics)
   - The Great Adventures of Sherlock Holmes (Puffin Classics)
   - Classic Starts: The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes (Classic Starts Series)

   Assign roles to students and reenact the story in class with students using the clues to solve the case. Before students see MISS NELSON IS MISSING have them try to predict what happened to Miss Nelson. Then, after they see the show, discuss what happened and see if anyone guessed correctly.

4. **Teacher for a Day**
   It’s hard to understand how hard something is until you do it yourself. The students in classroom 207 behaved poorly for Miss Nelson and were afraid of Viola Swamp, but none of them understood how hard it is to be a teacher.

   Have students think about their favorite subjects and what they would teach if they could.

   Have them make a lesson plan for the length of one class. In the lesson plan have them include:

   - An in class project
   - At least 3 facts or statistics
   - Questions to ask the students about the topic

   Have them turn in the lesson plan. For students who are comfortable, have them try and “teach” their lesson plan for a portion of one class period.

   After they present have the students share what they thought of their “teaching” experience.

5. **Everything Is Not What It Seems**
   Viola Swamp scared the kids into better behavior. She even looks a little like a witch. But Viola Swamp isn’t exactly what she seems.

   Many famous characters have donned alter egos to help solve problems, for example: Superman, who remained the mild-mannered Clark Kent when not fighting crime. Bat Man, whose alter ego was Bruce Wayne.
Have students think about whom they would disguise themselves as to make the world a better place.

- Would they have special powers?
- What would they be?
- What would their disguise look like?
- What problems/causes would they want to focus on to solve?

Have them draw a comic strip of them as their alter ego in action and share them with the class.

**POST PERFORMANCE DISCUSSIONS:**

1. Ask your students how the musical was different from the book *Miss Nelson is Missing*. How was it the same?
   a. Discuss the costumes. How did the adult actors portray kids?
   b. Discuss the set. How did the set and props set the scene?

2. Miss Nelson was very upset about the way the students treated her. Why do you think the kids didn’t respect her? Did she do the right thing by tricking them? What else could she have done?

3. Discuss other plays/musicals the students have seen. What did they think of this production in comparison? What did they like best? What did they like least?

**FLORIDA STANDARDS:**