HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

Book-It Repertory Theatre’s Arts and Education Program closely aligns its performances and learning materials with research-based reading instruction. The purpose of this study guide is to engage students in literacy objectives and hands-on activities that support the comprehension of *Thank You, Mr. Falker*.

Some activities are designed for teachers to lead students through an interactive process—directions and support materials are included for successful facilitation. Others are handouts for independent student work or to be used for whole class instruction—these pages do not have directions for the teacher. Feel free to select one or all of the activities and adjust them to fit your classroom needs and the level of your students.

**EALRs for the study guide and performance include**—Reading: 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4 Communication: 1.1, 1.2, 2.2 Theatre: 1.1, 1.4, 3.1, 4.3

LITERACY OBJECTIVES

Activating Prior Knowledge
Making Connections
Building Background Knowledge
Reflecting and Evaluating

THEMES AND CONCEPTS

Overcoming Obstacles
Being Unique
Mentorship
Dyslexia
Bullying
Joy of Reading
INTRODUCTION TO BOOK-IT REPERTORY THEATRE’S ARTS & EDUCATION PROGRAM

Book-It’s Arts and Education Program is dedicated to inspiring people of all ages to read. We tour a diverse range of stories to schools, libraries, and community venues throughout the Pacific Northwest, conduct long-term residencies in schools, offer teacher professional development for school staff, and present low-cost student matinees of our mainstage shows. What you will see and hear at a Book-It performance is literature spoken by the characters as if it were dialogue in a play—actors speak both the narration and the dialogue. Book-It takes the written word back to its roots—storytelling!

OUR MISSION

To provide an interactive relationship between youth and literature through theatrical productions and educational programs that promote the joy of reading, embrace diversity, enhance student and teacher learning, and inspire the imagination.

THE STORY: THANK YOU, MR. FALKER

_Thank You, Mr. Falker_ by Patricia Polacco is an autobiographical story about the excitement and struggles encountered when learning. A little girl named Trisha is entering first grade and is ecstatic about learning how to read. But when she looks at a book, all the letters and numbers jumble up. Her classmates begin to tease her, saying things like, “Hey, dummy!” “You can’t count.” “You’re not one of us.” Trisha begins to believe them until her new fifth grade teacher, Mr. Falker, shows her otherwise. Mr. Falker sees Trisha’s true abilities and helps her understand and overcome her dyslexia. This opens up the magical world of reading—forever changing Trisha’s life.

THE AUTHOR: PATRICIA POLACCO

Patricia Polacco, author, illustrator, and storyteller, was born to parents of Russian and Ukrainian descent on one side and Irish on the other. She grew up spending the school year in Oakland, California with her mother, and summers in Union City, Michigan with her father. Polacco’s rich heritage is reflected in her books which celebrate life in many lands. As a child, she had difficulty reading due to dyslexia and used her drawing skills to earn her peers’ respect. In fact, Polacco didn’t know how to read until she was fourteen. It was her teacher, Mr. George Felker, who helped her overcome her dyslexia and inspired her to use her vivid storytelling skills to continue sharing her family’s love of storytelling. Polacco graduated with a Master’s degree in Fine Arts and a Ph.D. in Art History from Ohio State University. She is the mother of a grown son and a daughter and currently resides in Michigan—on her family’s old farm that was built during the time of Lincoln.

Sources: www.patriciapolacco.com and www.amazon.com/Patricia-Polacco/e/B000APPW12
“Stand up, little one...I did this for your mother, your uncles, your older brother, and now you!” —Grandpa

STAND UP IF...
HOW ARE YOU LIKE THE CHARACTERS IN THE STORY?

Time: 10 minutes

Purpose: To activate prior knowledge for the characters, events, and concepts in the story—specifically, learning to read, struggles with learning, bullying, friendship, and things you love.

Preparation: Read through the directions and dialogue before leading the activity. Pre-select, adjust and/or create statements that are appropriate for the level, age, and background of students.

Directions: Students sit at their desks. Tell students they will activate prior knowledge on themes in the story to prepare for the performance they will see. Tell students they will hear a series of statements and if the statement applies to them, they should stand, scan the room, then sit for the next statement. Begin with simple statements to get everyone moving and then transition to statements related to the content that gradually get more sensitive as the activity progresses. After the activity, engage in reflection on selected statements—relate students’ experiences to the questions and the story.

Dialogue:
Just like good readers think about what they already know before reading, we're going to think about our own experiences before seeing Thank You, Mr. Falker in an activity called Stand Up If...

I will say a series of statements starting with “Stand up if this statement is true for you...” and if the statement is true you will stand, look around the room to see who else is standing, then sit down and listen for the next statement. You can choose not to stand, even if the statement is true for you—that's okay. No one comments or is allowed to say whether something is or isn't true for another person—this is a silent activity. Let's begin.

Stand up if this statement is true for you...

- I like chocolate.
- I love sports.
- I have seen a play before.
- I have read (say the name of a book your students have read in class).

(Transition into content statements)

- I am really good at something.
- I am smart.
- I am embarrassed at school sometimes because of a subject that is hard for me.
- I have moved from one home to another.
- I didn't want to move.
- I was excited to move.
- I have a special space where I feel safe and hidden.
- Someone close to me has died.
- I have ways of remembering them like looking at pictures, visiting a special place, reading letters, or talking to them.
- I have felt good about myself because of what someone else said or did.
- I have felt bad about myself because of what someone else said or did.
- I have teased someone so much it made them feel bad about themselves.
- I have seen someone be bullied before.
- When I saw this, I did something about it—told a teacher, adult, or friend.
- When I saw this, I didn't do anything—I let that person be bullied.
- I have purposefully left someone out knowing it would make them feel bad.
- I know someone who is unique.
- I am unique.
“Reading was just plain torture. And numbers were the hardest of all to read... she knew she was just plain dumb.” —Trisha

STRUGGLES TO OVERCOME
WHAT DO YOU STRUGGLE WITH IN LIFE?

In the story you’re about to see called *Thank You, Mr. Falker*, the main character named Trisha, struggles with reading. Everyone else in her class is moving on to the next reader, while she stays at the same level. She begins to feel insecure and not as smart as the other kids. Think about things you struggle with—these might be sports, math, reading, making friends, riding a bike, etc.

In the spaces below, write or draw your answers to the following questions...

WHAT IS SOMETHING YOU STRUGGLE WITH?
WHAT THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS DO YOU HAVE ABOUT IT?

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO OVERCOME THIS STRUGGLE? HAVE YOUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS CHANGED?
THE FIREFLY IN YOU
WHAT MAKES YOU UNIQUE?

Every one is different. To be different makes us unique. Unique means to stand out in a good way. In the story you’re about to see, Trisha asks her grandma if she’s different and her grandmother replies, “To be different is the miracle of life. You see all those little fireflies? Every one is different.”

In each circle, write or draw about the ways you are unique.

“To be different is the miracle of life. You see all those little fireflies? Every one is different.” —Grandma
“That took cunning, and smartness, and such, such bravery... 
You’re going to learn to read—I promise you that.” —Mr. Falker

**MY VERY OWN MR. FALKER**

**What is a Mentor?**

In the story you’re about to see, Trisha is helped by a teacher, Mr. Falker. He highlights her strengths, sticks up for her to mean classmates, and helps her learn how to read. Mr. Falker becomes Trisha’s *mentor*—a wise and trusted counselor.

**Imagine Your Own Mentor**

Imagine a time you felt frustrated, sad, or discouraged. Who would be the perfect person to help you? It could be a friend, family member, teacher, or even a pet. It could be someone you know, or someone you create with your imagination. Who is this person? What do they look like? What qualities do they have? Draw this real or imagined mentor below, and circle the words that best describe them.

**Words to Describe Your Mentor**

- Smart
- Funny
- Kind
- Courageous
- Encouraging
- Creative
- Positive
- Clever
- Brave
- Strong
- Compassionate
- Determined
- Patient

*Add your own words:*  

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**My Mentor’s Name is:**
Imagine a friend, a family member, teacher, or even a pet who has helped you. This is a mentor—a wise and trusted counselor. Think about what this mentor did when you were feeling frustrated, sad or discouraged. How did they turn a bad feeling into a good one?

Use the space below to write your mentor a thank you letter! This letter can include one to three examples of how they have helped you and one memory that you share with them. You can choose to give this letter to them or keep it for yourself.

DEAR __________________________,

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________
DYSLEXIA: What are you seeing that I’m not seeing?

**Dyslexia** is a term used for when a person has a hard time learning to read or interpret words, letters, and other symbols. The eyes and ears take in the information correctly, but the brain mixes up the information.

In *Thank You, Mr. Falker*, Trisha has a difficult time with learning to read and do math—she lived with dyslexia. Her eyes and ears could see and hear letters, words, and sounds, but when they got to her brain, it would jumble everything up. This made reading and writing difficult for Trisha, but it did not mean she was “dumb” like other children teased.

Imagine if your brain mixed up words and letters. Here is what it might look like:

- Thew ord sare n ots p aced cor rect ly.
- We spell wrds xatle az tha snd to us.
- Sometimes all the letters are pushed together.

**How do people with dyslexia feel?**

Just like Trisha, people who have dyslexia might get frustrated, angry, sad or feel bad about themselves because reading is so hard. But with help and practice, they can learn to read.

**Sources:**
www.medicinenet.com/dyslexia/article.htm#what_is_dyslexia
http://kidshealth.org/kid/health_problems/learning_problem/dyslexia.html#

BULLYING: It’s not as easy as “Sticks and Stones”

**Bullying** is constant verbal, physical or emotional abuse by one or more people.

**Three types of bullying…**

1. **Verbal**—saying or writing mean things. Including teasing, name-calling, taunting, threatening to cause harm.
2. **Social**—hurting someone’s reputation or relationships. Including leaving someone out on purpose, telling other children not to be friends with someone, spreading rumors about someone, embarrassing someone in public.
3. **Physical**—hurting a person’s body or possessions. Including hitting, kicking, tripping, pushing, spitting, pinching, taking or breaking someone’s things, making mean or rude hand gestures.

**What would you do?**

There is this girl that you often see in the playground by herself. Sometimes people spread rumors about her, and you have heard people call her names. One day, you see her walk over to play on the tire swing. “Go away!” a kid shouts at her. She sees another group of girls and asks, “Can I play?” But one of the girls snaps “Don’t talk to her. If you talk to her, you’re not my friend.” The girl looks very upset and walks away as the other girls call her names.

**What would YOU do?**

**Sources:**
www.kzoo.edu/psych/stop_bullying/for_kids/what_would_you_do.html
http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/friends/bullies/
www.heartwoodethics.org/resources/culturekey.php?num=39&pg=4
“Stop! Are all of you so perfect that you can look at another person and find fault with her?” —Mr. Falker

### MYSELF & OTHERS
#### WHAT CAN I DO TO MAKE A CHANGE?

In the story you’re about to see, Trisha is teased and made fun of by other kids in school because she has a hard time reading. Kids laugh at her and say things like, “How come you are so dumb?” or “Stupid!” or “Ugly!” She starts to believe them and she doesn’t want to go to school.

**What about you?** Think of a time you have felt this way and think of some ways you could help someone else. Write or draw about a time when…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MY FEELINGS WERE HURT.</th>
<th>I HURT SOMEONE ELSE’S FEELINGS.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOMEONE GAVE ME A COMPLIMENT.</th>
<th>I GAVE SOMEONE ELSE A COMPLIMENT.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
“The honey is sweet, and so is knowledge, but knowledge is like the bee and the bee who made the honey, it has to be chased through the pages of a book!” —Grandpa

THE PLAY & BOOKS!

At the end of Thank You, Mr. Falker, Trisha learns to read and loves it!

Pair Share:
1. Your favorite part of the play.
2. The saddest part of the play.
3. Something you didn’t understand or you had a question about.
4. Something you learned.

Write about, draw, or discuss your favorite stories:

IF YOU COULD GIVE A BOOK TO ANYONE, WHICH BOOK WOULD YOU GIVE AND WHY?

WHO WOULD YOU GIVE IT TO?