

A scarecrow stands in a field of corn. The scarecrow has a straw head wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat, a dark brown jacket, and a blue skirt with a white and black pattern. Its right arm is extended, holding a red book. The background is a warm, golden-yellow field with several large, detailed leaves scattered around. The entire scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent brown rounded rectangle containing the title and subtitle.

# OLD JAKE'S SKIRTS

EDUCATION RESOURCE GUIDE

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# CONTENTS

ABOUT THE PLAY.....	1
TEACHING THE PLAY IN THE CLASSROOM.....	2
HISTORY, PROCESS, AND PRODUCTION.....	3-6
PRE-SHOW LESSON PLAN.....	7
POST-SHOW LESSON PLAN.....	10
ADDITIONAL RESOURCE.....	12



# ABOUT THE PLAY

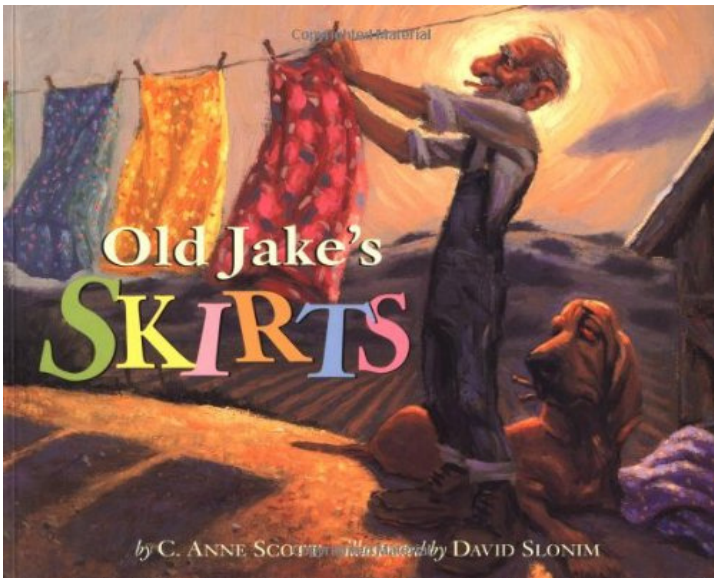
Adapted by José Cruz González

From the Book by C. Anne Scott with Original Illustrations by David Slonim

## Synopsis:

*Old Jake's Skirts* follows the adventures of Old Jake, a pumpkin farmer who is stuck in his ways and convinced that only plagues will befall him and his farm. Old Jake is bothered by others and simply lives in his community, never daring to be involved in it. One day, he and his pal Shoestring encounter a mysterious trunk in the middle of the road that eventually changes his life, and the lives of his community, in more ways than one. In the play, the various members of the ensemble serve as the storytellers, or narrators, showing us that new life is always possible.

## Big Ideas:



*Connection:* People connect in different ways. A sense of belonging looks and feels different for everyone at different stages of their life.

*New Life:* With our imaginations, the possibilities are endless to create new circumstances and points of view for our lives.

*Love and Loss:* Loss and grief are part of life, but they are proof that a lot of love has been around.

# TEACHING THE PLAY IN THE CLASSROOM

## Discussion Questions Before the Play:

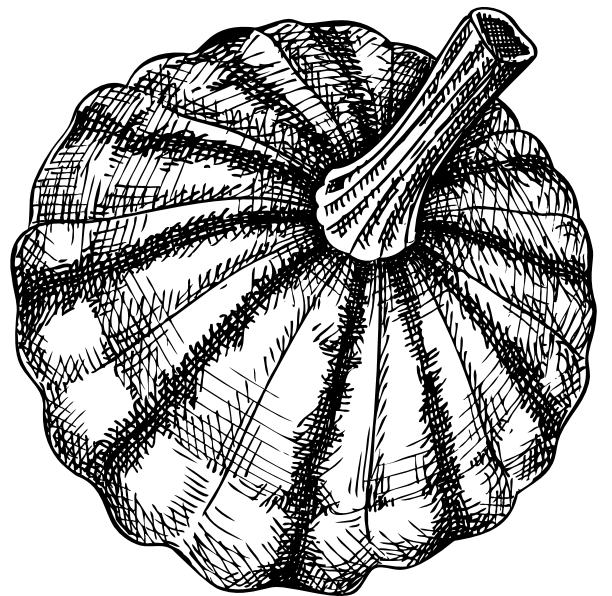
1. Have you ever lost something important to you?
2. If willing to share, what did you lose?
3. How did it feel to lose your special object?
4. How do you feel when you find something valuable?
5. What's a time where you've found something valuable?
6. How did it feel to find it? What did you do with it?

## Discussion Questions After the Play:

1. How can objects connect us to people we miss?
2. What does it mean to have objects from people who are no longer with us?
3. How do you think Sarah felt when the skirts were lost? How about when Jake gave Sarah the carving of a doll wearing a skirt of her mom's?
4. How do you think the events of the story changed Jake? Why do you think this change happened?

## Post Show Activity Prompt: Object Transformation

Put students of teams of 3-4 students and give each team some big pieces of fabric. Have students see how many things they can create just using the fabric and their creativity (a dress, a house, etc.) Every time they come up with a new way to use fabric, have them write it down or draw a picture.





# HISTORY, PROCESS, AND PRODUCTION

## ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

José Cruz González is from Watsonville, California. His parents were migrant workers (definition: usually immigrants from Central and South America who move around a lot working in different places, often on farms). He credits his grandparents, who told him lots of stories growing up, inspired him to share stories with people. González went to college for U.S. History and Chicano Studies, with a minor in theatre. He then went on to pursue two master's degrees (M.A. Theatre, Arizona State; M.F.A. Directing, UC Irvine). He likes to work collaboratively, usually devising plays (definition: where the playwright and actors use improv, writing prompts, and other fun activities to create a story and dialogue together). He especially loves devising with artists of color. Now, González is a member of Cornerstone Theatre Company, a playwright in residence with Childsplay, and taught at CSU Los Angeles. *“There are a lot of stories that are not being told. We need variety, and we need those hidden voices.”*



# HISTORY, PROCESS, AND PRODUCTION

## PRODUCTION HISTORY

The first performances of *Old Jake's Skirts* (called a premiere), were part of an Educational School Tour in 2015 for a theater called Child's Play, in Tempe Arizona. The adaptation of *Old Jake's Skirts* from page to stage was a group effort conducted by five actors, two directors, a playwright and a musician/composer. González's aim was to use as much of the original written story as possible. The only new element added was music, which plays a role in the play of expressing emotional tone, showing the passage of time, etc.



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## ADAPTATION: FROM PAGE TO STAGE

**Definition:** In theatrical adaptation, material from another artistic medium, such as a novel or a film, is re-written according to the needs and requirements of the theatre and turned into a play or musical. The transformation of a dramatic work into a meaningful, living performance.

Adaptations of books or old stories are common in theatre, movies, and video games. When people adapt a story, they get to make little changes that make the story resonate with a new time period/audience.

**Before the play:** Ask your students/young people what adaptations they're familiar with. Make a list and notice the connections between the stories, characters, and media they use.

**After the play:** read C. Anne Scott's book, or find a read aloud online. Compare the book and the play. What things were the same? What things were different? Was there anything that seemed extra special about the story when it was onstage?

# HISTORY, PROCESS, AND PRODUCTION

## EMERSON COLLEGE AND EMSTAGE

This play is produced by EmStage, an organization that produces plays featuring students at Emerson College. There are over 500 students working on nine plays/musicals every school year as actors, designers, technicians, and managers.

Several of the students working on *Old Jake's Skirts* are part of the Theatre Education and Applied Theatre program for undergraduate and graduate students. Every year, one of the nine plays/musicals in the EmStage is geared towards young people (called Theater for Young Audiences, or TYA). *Old Jake's Skirt's* is this year's TYA production and this resource guide was created by Theatre Education graduate students.



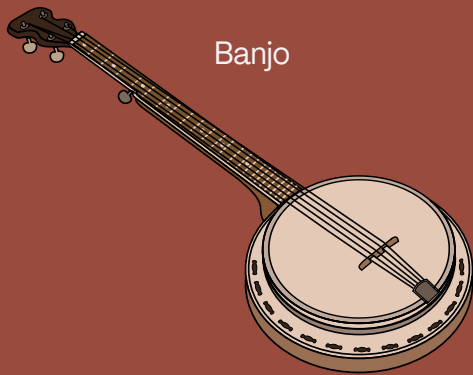
## SETTING: TIME AND PLACE

*Old Jake's Skirts* does not specify a specific time period or location. Based on the original book's illustrations, the book and play's language, and the aesthetic choices of the artistic team, this production evokes a small town in Appalachia during the Great Depression. The Appalachian Mountains stretch across the SouthEastern United States and up into the North East. Generally, when people think of Appalachia, they are thinking of rural areas in Kentucky or other areas of Central Appalachia. The Great Depression was a time in US History from approximately 1929-1939 when many people in the country did not have enough money and jobs were hard to find. Today, small towns in Appalachia are still affected by the Great Depression so money and jobs can be scarce.

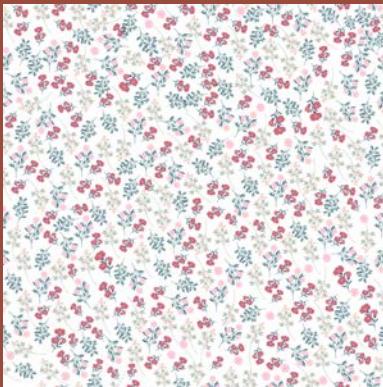


# HISTORY, PROCESS, AND PRODUCTION

## DEFINITIONS



Banjo



Calico Fabric



Wood Carving

*Bluegrass:* A style of music often associated with the southern United States and Appalachia. Bluegrass features banjos, mandolins, fiddles, and harmonies. Lyrics are often a little sad and a little hopeful. Religious themes are also common.

*Calico Fabric:* Plain-woven textile, made from half-processed and unbleached cotton fibers. Generally very cheap due to its unfinished nature, and the fact that it remains un-dyed and raw. Versatile, sturdy and durable. Often featured a floral pattern.

*Plague:* While a plague is usually a wide spread deadly disease, in this play, it means a terrible event that is repeated over and over again, like a curse.

*Whetstone:* a fine-grained stone used for sharpening cutting tools

*Wood Carving/Whittling:* Whittling is the process of carving little slivers out of a larger pieces of wood to create something new.



# PRE-SHOW LESSON PLAN

## Acting like Actors | Elementary Grades 3-4

### Massachusetts State Standards - Essential Standard

*Refine and complete artistic work.*

*Propose new details to existing character, plot, and story in a guided drama experience. (1-2.T.Cr.03.a)*

*Develop voices and body movements consistent with the character. (1-2.T.Cr.03.b)*

### Massachusetts State Standards - Clarifying Objective

*Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. Explain how a theatrical work can help identify multiple perspectives and diverse community ideas, and can help connect to a community or culture. (3-4.T.R.08)*

### Essential Questions

How are my habits, likes, and dislikes the same or different from my peers?

How does learning about myself help me make predictions about a character in a story?

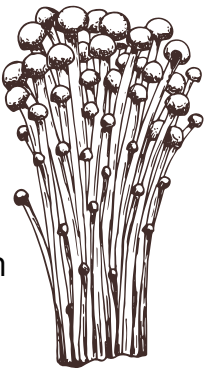
How do actors use their voice and body to tell stories onstage?

### Engage: Exploding Atom

Gather students in a large circle. Explain that the class is going to learn about each other's likes, dislikes, and habits by showing if they agree or disagree with a statement. Tell students you will be reading some statements and if they agree with a statement, they'll stand near the outside of the circle. If they disagree, they'll stand near the center of the circle. And if they're in between, they can stand between the center and the outside. Remind students to stay in their own personal space, and that they're moving on a track, like spokes on a bike wheel. Tell students you'll say the statement twice and then let them move. Start with a practice statement:

*I think pineapple is the best pizza topping*

Read twice then allow students to move. Once students are done moving, ask them to make observations about where everyone is standing. Is there a majority opinion? Are there a mix of opinions? How do we know how people feel?



# PRE-SHOW LESSON PLAN

After the practice round, reset the circle and repeat the process with the following statements:

*I like being surrounded by people more than being by myself.*

*I like spending time with animals.*

*I like to grow things, like plants.*

*I like sharing things about myself.*

Make sure to have students notice and name the distribution after each statement - where are people standing and what does that tell us about the group? Additionally, students should discuss why they voted the way they did after each statement. You can use: Think-Pair-Share, Popcorn, Small Group, or call on one student from agree, disagree, and the middle.

*\*Adaptation: You can also have students arrange themselves in a line and show their answers on a spectrum. If space is limited, they can vote from their seats by raising their hands high if they agree, pointing them low to the ground if they disagree, and stretching them forward towards the middle if they don't feel strongly. This activity works best if students can see how their peers are voting.*

## **Explore: Reflection/Statues**

After the activity, have students sit in a circle or at their desks for a discussion. Ask them if they learned anything new about their classmates in the activity. Ask them if they learned anything new about themselves in the activity. Explain that a character in the play they're going to see can be a little grumpy and refers to being alone. Ask them to pose (or freeze, or make a statue) like someone who is grumpy. Ask them to pose like someone who likes to be alone. Tell them to look out for the character who likes to be alone and how that character uses their body and voice to show the audience that.

## **Reflect: Machine**

Next, tell the class that actors often show how their character is feeling using their voice, body, and imagination (three tools of the actor). Actors can also tell us a story about objects using their voice, body, and imagination.

The activities and DAR question format are inspired by  
Drama Based Pedagogy by Katie Dawson and Bridget Kiger Lee.





# PRE-SHOW LESSON PLAN

Arrange students in a circle so that there's a large open space in the middle. Tell students they're going to work together as a class to make a machine with their bodies. One at a time, a student will enter the circle and make an action and noise that could be part of a machine. When a student enters, they should be trying to add onto something someone is doing in the machine.

Once everyone has joined the machine (it will be a little loud and silly), have everyone reset in the circle. Ask students to describe familiar sounds or motions in the machine. Ask the students to tell you what the familiar actions or sounds remind them of.

Next, split students into groups of 4-6 and have them spread out to their own spaces in the room. Tell them they're going to make a machine again, but this time, the machine should resemble a car or truck. (You may want to generate a list of parts of a car or truck on the whiteboard before starting this part). Tell students they have 3 minutes to work together to use their bodies and voices to make a truck. Once students have created their car/truck machines, have them show their machines to the class.

Reset the group to a seated circle or their desks and ask:

Describe: What car parts did you see the group acting out?

Analyze: How was our second machine (the car) different from the first one (general)?

Reflect: Imagine we're actors telling a story with a car in it, based on what we saw today, how could we use our bodies to tell that story?

Tell students that during the play, the actors will use their bodies, voices, and objects to create lots of different characters, settings, and maybe even a machine. Tell them to keep an eye out for how the actors used their bodies, voices, and imagination (three tools of the actor) to tell the audience a story.



# POST-SHOW LESSON PLAN

## Objects Hold Memory | Elementary Grades 3-4

### **Massachusetts State Standards - Essential Standard**

*Arts Framework: Theatre 3-4.8 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.*

### **Massachusetts State Standards - Clarifying Objective**

*Explain how a theatrical work can help identify multiple perspectives and diverse community ideas, and can help connect to a community or culture. (3-4.T.R.08)*

### **Essential Question**

How do objects connect us to the people we love?

Why do objects mean so much to us?

### **Engage: Artifact**

(The day before this lesson, assign students to bring something important with them to school. Bring something yourself and model talking about something important to you so students have an idea of your expectation.)

The day of, explain that students will sit in a circle and take turns showing everyone their object of significance that they brought to school. Students can choose whether or not they would like to pass them around the circle.

Identify the expectation that objects will be handled with care and respect, and that each person's turn will be listened to and respected.

Have each student take a turn answering the following questions and showing their object.

Ask students the following questions:

Describe: What is your object?

Analyze: Where did you get it? What is the story behind it?

Reflect: Why did you choose to bring this? Or why is it important to you?

Thank each student for sharing before moving onto the next turn.

At the end, ask the students to share what they learned about their peers.



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Drama Based Pedagogy by Katie Dawson and Bridget Kiger Lee.



# POST-SHOW LESSON PLAN

## Explore: Letter Writing

Give each student a piece of paper and a writing utensil. Tell them to consider if they lost this object or gave it away, and instruct them to write a letter to the person who finds it. What would they want the next person to know, and what would they want the next person to do with their special object?

Ask students the following question:

Describe: Who did you choose to write your letter to? What does that person need to know about your object?

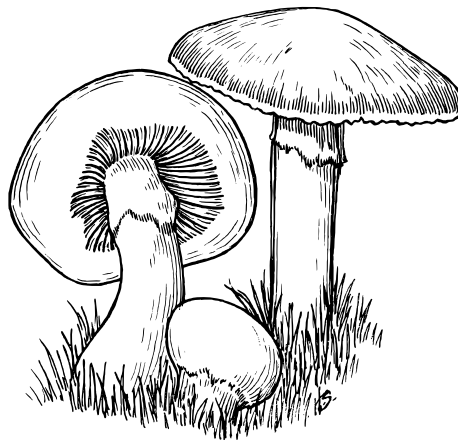
Analyze: Why did you choose this person? What are the most important things for them to know about your object?

Reflect: How did it feel to write the letter? How would you feel handing someone the letter?

## Reflect

Ask students to ask someone else in their life about an important object to them, and if they can, ask to see the object. Think about the object. What does it look like, feel like, what do you do with it?

This can be a caretaker, friend, or another teacher. Tell students to listen with care and thank that person for sharing with them.



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# ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

Want more?

Check out the Family Engagement Guide for Emerson College's production of *Old Jake's Skirts*!

**[Click Here for the Family Resource Guide](#)**

or go to

**[www.emersonstage.org/old-jakes-skirts](http://www.emersonstage.org/old-jakes-skirts)**

You'll find a family upcycling activity and instructions for planting your own pumpkin seeds.

To continue the learning, please share the family guide with your students' caretakers, and feel free to try the activities yourself!

