



# OLD JAKE'S SKIRTS

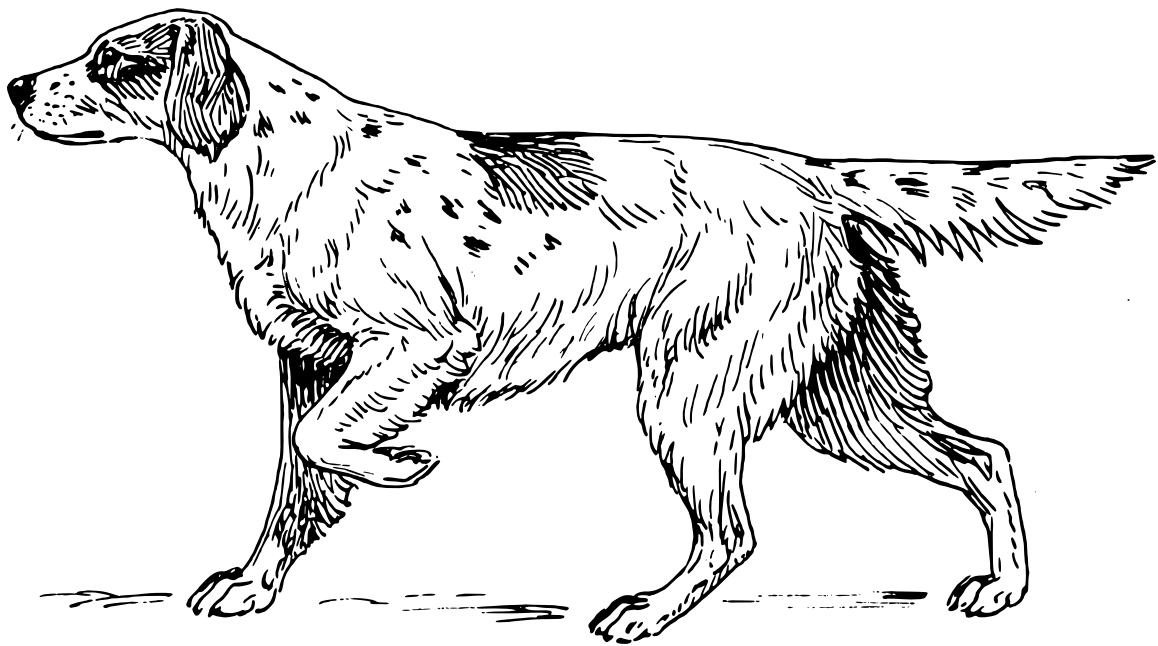
FAMILY RESOURCE GUIDE

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# ABOUT THE PLAY

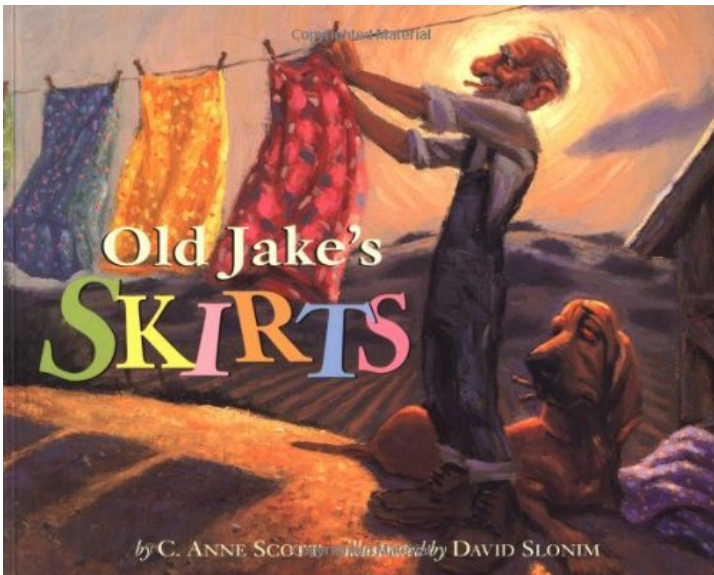
Adapted by José Cruz González

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.

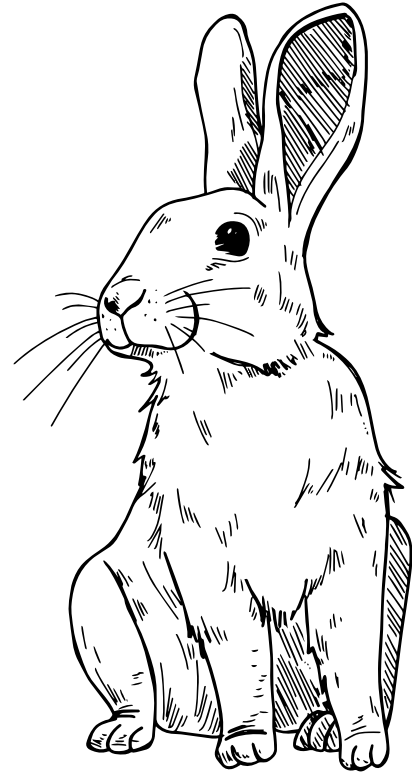
# DISCUSSING THE PLAY

## 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

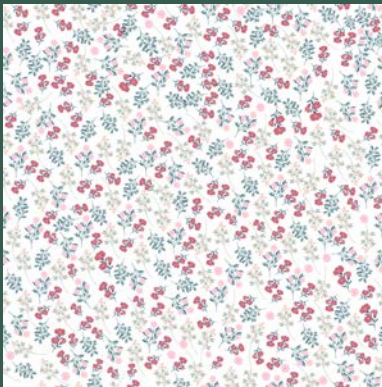
*Old Jake's Skirts* does not specify a specific time period or location. Based on the original book's illustrations, the book and play's language, and the aesthetic choices of the artistic team, this production evokes a small town in Appalachia during the Great Depression. The Appalachian Mountains stretch 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.



# FAMILY UPCYCLING PLAN

Old Jake learns that turning something old into something new can be a great way to bring joy into your life. He also learns that giving away something he isn't using can make someone else really happy. In this family activity, you'll start a conversation about donating and recycling items in your home and make a plan for items you no longer need.

## **Start by learning a little more about how the clothing industry contributes to pollution:**

Did you know, the global fashion industry contributes 8-10% of global carbon emissions?<sup>1</sup> Carbon emissions (aka Carbon Dioxide) are gasses that help keep our planet warm. But, when we put too much of that gas into the atmosphere, it makes Earth too warm and causes problems for people, animals, and the environment.<sup>2</sup> Scientists call this problem "Climate Change." Making clothing also takes a lot of clean water, makes it dirty, and then clothing companies have to find a way to get rid of that dirty water (which usually contains pollutants) or clean that water (which takes a lot of energy). Finally, lots of people these days buy clothes, wear things just a few times, and then throw the clothes away and buy new stuff!<sup>3</sup> One way people can reduce the clothing industry's impact on the environment is to find new ways of using old clothes, instead of buying new clothes. When you take an old item and find a new way to use it, that's called "Upcycling".

[Learn more about climate change here](#)

[Learn more about Climate Change and Carbon Footprints here](#)

[Learn more about upcycling here](#)

# FAMILY UPCYCLING PLAN

Start a conversation as a family about climate change and clothing using the following questions.

1. How often do we buy new clothes?
2. What clothes do you buy? Do you ever buy used clothes (called “thrifting”)? Do you buy clothing from stores that try to reduce their carbon emissions or use recycled fabrics?
3. Do individual families have a responsibility to help with climate change? Or, are there things you can do to convince big clothing companies to make kinder decisions for the environment?

Next, go around your home and gather up any unused clothing, toys, or other items that are no longer needed. You can make this activity a game or a scavenger hunt with prompts like:

- a. Try to find one thing in every color of the rainbow.
- b. Find two things in each room.
- c. Sort all the items by size, texture, color, etc.

Make a plan:

- a. Which items should be donated?
- b. Which items can be upcycled?
- c. Which items need to be thrown away, and what’s the more eco-friendly way to dispose of them?

Make a list or draw a picture of the items you plan to donate:



# FAMILY UPCYCLING PLAN

Before donating, have a conversation about donation options. Sometimes, when we donate clothing and it's not in good shape or a thrift store doesn't have room for it, it ends up in a landfill anyway. Also, some people think that if you give your clothing to a thrift store for free, it's not fair to make people pay for those clothes, they should just be able to get them for free if they need them. Do some research about clothing donation centers in your community. If you need help, reach out to your school, place of worship, local government, or community centers to see if they have resources. You can also look at the resources below for inspiration.

- a. [Learn more about our community partner: Cradles to Crayons here.](#)
- b. [Learn more about Ethical Donation here.](#)
- c. [Learn more about re-sale and ethical donation options here.](#)
- d. [Learn more about donating children's clothing for at-risk youth here.](#)

Make one last plan:

How can your family rethink the ways you buy and use items to help the planet and people in your community? Write or draw about your family's plan below.

Sources:

1. <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200310-sustainable-fashion-how-to-buy-clothes-good-for-the-climate>
2. <https://climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/carbon-dioxide/>
3. <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2022-fashion-industry-environmental-impact/?leadSource=verify%20wall>



# PUMPKIN PLANTING!

Try growing your own pumpkins!

## Things you'll need:

- Pumpkin seeds (2-5, depending on pots and garden space)
- 3 small pots (yogurt containers will do!)
- Soil or compost

## Directions:

### Step 1

- Soak your seeds in water overnight - they'll grow quicker if they're hydrated.
- Fill your pots with compost.
- Plant a seed in each pot, on its edge (not flat), 1cm deep.

### Step 2

- Put your pots in a warm, light filled windowsill and water at regular intervals.
- When they're big enough to handle, plant your seedlings in a garden (late May is an ideal planting time.)
- Pumpkins grow quickly, let the plant trail over the ground or train it over a strong arch.

\*Pumpkin seedlings planted in late May will be ready to harvest by Halloween!

## Discuss:

As the plants grow, talk about how they change over time.

- What changes can you observe in your plant?
- How did Old Jake change during the play?
- How do people change as they grow up?

## PUMPKIN FUN FACTS

- Pumpkins are hungry plants! Add compost or well-rotted manure into the soil to your pot or transfer them to the garden (a great way to use leftover food scraps and practice sustainability!)
- Protect your plants from hungry slugs or snails by isolating the pumpkin with sand (slugs/snails won't travel across sand.)
- Each pumpkin contains about 500 seeds!
- Once they sprout, pumpkins take 90-120 days to mature.

