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## TWO BEANS PRODUCTIONS, LLC.

Rob Barron, Artistic Director

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# Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day

## Study Guide

### Dear Teacher:

We have created the following study guide to make your students' theater experience with Two Beans Productions' *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good Very Bad Day* as meaningful as possible. For many, it will be their first time viewing a live theatrical production. We have learned that when teachers discuss the play with their students before and after the production, the experience is more significant and long-lasting. Our study guide provides pre and post performance discussion topics, as well as related activity sheets. These are just suggestions; please feel free to create your own activities and areas for discussion. We hope you and your class enjoy the show!

### Introduction

Two Beans' musical is very closely based on the classic book by Judith Viorst. In fact, Ms. Viorst adapted her own story, writing the lyrics (words to the songs) and book (dialogue and story structure) for this musical. She worked very closely with her collaborator, composer Shelly Markham, to create the songs.

### The Story

When six-year-old Alexander wakes up with gum in his hair, then trips on a skateboard, and then accidentally dries his wet face on his sweater rather than his towel, he can tell: it's going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day! In the following scene, the day gets progressively worse as his teacher doesn't like his drawing of an invisible castle, his lunchbox doesn't have any dessert, and his best friend Paul declares that Alexander is only his third best friend. It's enough to make Alexander wish he could move to Australia! After school, the dentist finds a cavity in Alexander's tooth, the shoe store is out of the shoes he wants, and he makes a big mess at his father's office. It really has been a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day, but Alexander learns that some days are like that. Even in Australia.

## Discussion Questions

### Pre-Performance

1. Read *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* with your students, and explain that they will see a musical based on this book. In musicals, songs frequently punctuate the action of the drama. What scenes in the book do your students think will be turned into songs? What other expectations do they have of the live show? For example, will the musical feature a real car and copy machine, and a live cat on stage?
2. In the musical, there are fewer characters than actors. In fact, "Alexander" is the only actor who plays one role. Tell your students to watch closely to see if they can identify which roles each actor plays. For example, Alexander's father also plays the dentist and the shoe salesman.
3. For some of your students, *Alexander* may be their first time attending a live theatrical production. Review proper theatre etiquette with your class. What is the best way to show actors your appreciation? Why shouldn't your students talk loudly to each other during the production? Explain why it's important that your students be courteous audience members.
4. Have any of your students had a really rotten day? What made their day so awful? How did they deal with their emotions? Is there anything they could have done to avoid the bad day? How long did their grumpy mood last? Was the next day better for them?

## Post-Performance

1. As soon as possible after the performance, engage your class in discussion about the show. Who were their favorite characters and why? Which were their favorite moments and songs in the musical? Compare and contrast the book and the live performance. Did the show live up to their expectations after reading the story?
2. Were your students sympathetic to Alexander's plight? Is there anything he could have done to make his day better? Did he deserve to have such an awful day?
3. During his day, Alexander encountered several people with different occupations: teacher, dentist, shoe salesman and businessman. Which of these careers would your students most like to pursue and why? What other jobs would your students like to try? If possible, arrange a "career day" in your class. Invite local professionals to talk with your students (maybe even people with the same occupations as were featured in the show!)
4. Alexander's brothers and classmates tease him a lot in the musical. How did Alexander feel about being teased? How do your students feel when someone teases them? Have they ever made fun of someone? How did they feel afterward? Did they apologize? Why or why not? Is teasing always malicious? Can your students think of any examples when teasing is meant purely in jest?
5. When Alexander's brothers make fun of him, he winds up getting into a fight with them. How could he have better resolved this conflict?
6. Alexander's father warns him not to touch the copier and to be careful around the stack of books. Why did he give Alexander these instructions? What were the consequences of his ignoring his father? Have your students ever failed to follow instructions? What happened as a result? Discuss with your class the concept of action and consequence or "if-then" statements. For example, IF your students complete their chores, THEN they can have dessert at dinner. Can your students think of any other examples?

## Cross-Curriculum Activities

### English/Language Arts

1. In the book and show, Alexander had a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. Have your students write or tell a story about the opposite: Alexander and his incredible, wonderful, marvelous, very good day. Perhaps you can use this concept as a "story starter" – go around the room and have each student name one more great thing that happens to Alexander, or that Alexander does, on this day. Also, each student can draw a picture of a different part of Alexander's incredible day. Bind your students pages together to create your class's very own book.
2. In the title of the book and show, the words and phrases "terrible," "horrible," "no good" and "very bad" are synonyms – words that mean the same thing. On the other hand, "incredible," "wonderful" and "marvelous" are all antonyms of the title words – they mean the opposite. Discuss the concept of synonyms and have your students use the attached worksheet to creatively explore the idea of opposites, and
3. For more advanced students, have them write a letter or postcard to Alexander. Review proper letter formatting, including date, salutation, body and closing. What would your students say to Alexander? Offer him sympathy for his bad day? Tell him about their own terrible day? Give him advice on how to have a better day? Tell him their favorite part of the show? Something else?

### Social Studies

1. Alexander often says during the course of his day, "I want to go to Australia." Have your students locate Australia on a map or globe. In which hemisphere is it? When it is cold in North America, what is the weather like in Australia? What months in Australia are cold? Depending on your students' skill level, assign them different factoids to discover about Australia. What kinds of animals live there? What are Australia's major cities? What language do they speak? Have them share their discoveries with the class.

### Health/Nutrition

1. Alexander is disappointed when he discovers that he doesn't have a dessert for lunch. What he neglects to realize, though, is that his mother packed him a healthy, well-balanced meal. Talk about the four basic food

groups with your class: vegetable/fruit, bread/grain, meat/protein and dairy. On the blackboard, create a 4-square grid, and brainstorm different specific foods and which food group they each belong to. (Junk food belongs in a special 5<sup>th</sup> box of its own!) From the four boxes, have your students pack a healthy, well-balanced lunch for Alexander, with one item from each of the different groups. If time permits, learn about the USDA's food pyramid, and plan an entire day's meals for Alexander accordingly.

2. When the dentist checks Alexander's teeth, he finds a cavity. Have your students ever had a cavity? What did the dentist do to fix it? What else do dentists do during a check-up? For example, fluoride treatment, scrape build-up from between teeth, take x-rays, etc. What could Alexander have done to avoid getting a cavity? Discuss the things people do to maintain good dental hygiene: brushing and flossing after meals, avoiding sugary snacks, etc. What might happen to your students' teeth if they are neglected?

## Telling Time

1. Alexander does specific things at different times during the day. For example, he wakes up at 7:00 AM, he arrives at school at 8:30 AM, he goes to bed at 9:00 PM, etc. Using the attached worksheet, have your students fill in the clocks' hands (and write the time below, as well) according to what time they get up, eat breakfast, arrive at school, etc.

## Resources

### Books

Judith Viorst wrote several books about Alexander. Your class may also enjoy:

- *Alexander, Who's Not (Do You Hear Me? I Mean It) Going to Move*
- *Alexander, Who Used to Be Rich Last Sunday*

These books, along with *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*, are also published together in one edition, called *Absolutely Positively Alexander*.

Several of the songs in *Alexander* were previously published as poems in these anthologies:

- *If I Were in Charge of the World & Other Worries: Poems for Children and Their Parents*
- *Sad Underwear & Other Complications: More Poems for Children and Their Parents*

Some of Ms. Viorst's other books for children include:

- *Earrings!*
- *I'll Fix Anthony*
- *My Mama Says There Aren't Any Zombies, Ghosts, Vampires, Demons, Monsters, Fiends, Goblins or Things*
- *Rosie and Michael*
- *Sunday Morning*
- *Super-Completely and Totally the Messiest!*
- *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney*

### Websites

- <http://www.dramaticpublishing.com/viorst.html>  
An essay by Judith Viorst about her experiences turning *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* into a musical, as well as a short biography
- <http://www.gigglepotz.com/caustralia.htm>  
A website for and about Australian kids, including what it's like growing up down under, worksheets, local vocabulary and more.
- <http://www.pocanticohills.org/australia/australia.htm>  
Another Australia-centric website, including games and links to more information.
- <http://www.mypyramid.gov/kids/index.html>  
United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) site, explaining the food pyramid and good nutrition for kids. Also includes worksheets, posters and games.

# You and Your Jam-Packed, Overflowing, Exhausting, Very Busy Day!

Alexander has a very busy day in the show, and so do you, every day! On the clocks below, fill in the minute and hour hands for what time you do all of the indicated activities. Don't forget to also write the time in the blanks provided.



1. I get out of bed at \_\_\_\_\_.



2. School begins at \_\_\_\_\_.



3. I eat lunch at \_\_\_\_\_.



4. I have math class at \_\_\_\_\_.



5. I arrive home from school at \_\_\_\_\_.



6. I have a snack at \_\_\_\_\_.



7. I eat dinner at \_\_\_\_\_.



8. I go to bed at \_\_\_\_\_.

# Alexander's Opposites

Below you see a list of words. Can you think of an opposite for each?

1. GOOD Opposite: \_\_\_\_\_

2. SMART Opposite: \_\_\_\_\_

3. STRONG Opposite: \_\_\_\_\_

4. SCARED Opposite: \_\_\_\_\_

5. TIRED Opposite: \_\_\_\_\_

6. CLEAN Opposite: \_\_\_\_\_

7. DELICIOUS Opposite: \_\_\_\_\_

8. NICE Opposite: \_\_\_\_\_

9. SOFT Opposite: \_\_\_\_\_

10. WET Opposite: \_\_\_\_\_

11. EASY Opposite: \_\_\_\_\_

# Alexander's Invisible Castle

Alexander's teacher, Mrs. Dickens, can't see his drawing of an invisible castle, but you can! Just complete this connect-the-dots. When you're finished, you can add details (like a drawbridge, flags, guards, a background) and color it.

● 33

● 11

