

# *The Summer of the Swans*

## **SHOW TIME** *for Teachers*

### **Welcome to *Show Time*,**

a performing arts resource guide published by the CSB/SJU Fine Arts Education series. This edition of *Show Time* is designed to be used before or after a performance of *The Summer of the Swans*.

The suggested activities in this issue include guided lessons for several subject areas that may be adapted to fit your time and needs.

Watch for pages marked *Show Time* for Students; one page, student-ready activities that are designed for independent or small group work.

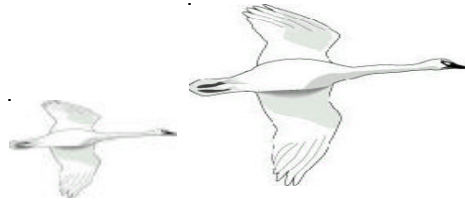
### **How May We Help You?**

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**Presented by**  
**TheatreworksUSA**  
and based on Betsy Byars' novel,  
*The Summer of the Swans*

# The Summer of the Swans



# Story Scan

## About the Play

It's the most confusing summer of Sara Godfrey's life. She has to deal with her bossy Aunt Willie, and having an absentee father; her older sister is beautiful and popular, while Sara has the biggest feet in the whole school! Then there's Charlie, her younger brother with special needs, who wants nothing more than to watch the graceful swans at the lake. Sometimes Sara wishes she could be like those swans, and fly away from everyone and everything.

One morning Sara awakes to discover an empty bed in Charlie's room; he has wandered off during the night. On her quest to find her little brother, she is joined by Joe Melby, who she considers to be a real jerk. Along the way, she discovers the depth of her love and devotion to Charlie. Sara realizes that maybe the most important things in life have nothing to do with being beautiful or popular, or having dainty feet. And maybe Joe Melby isn't such a jerk after all.

*Author Betsy Byars found inspiration for the character of Charlie in her book, **The Summer of the Swans** after volunteering in schools. She tutored children, who, like Charlie, faced the challenges of being differently-abled. In this **TheatreworksUSA** production, Charlie's character is being portrayed as a person who has autism.*

*Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are a group of developmental disabilities that are caused by a brain abnormality. Some of the behaviors that may be exhibited by a person with autism are repeating a movement over and over and a fascination with certain objects. Visit the **Autism Information Center** for additional information at:*

*<http://www.ideallives.com/generic.html?pid=29>*

*Your students may have experience with autism among their family, friends, or classmates. Ask them to look for clues to Charlie's autism during the play. Invite them to share their observations and personal experiences after the show.*

**Everyone is differently abled. Take the relative disability of a young boy named Albert, who didn't talk until age four or read until age nine. He was considered learning disabled and unsociable at school. Albert failed his college entrance exam, but ultimately found his areas of ability as an author, scientist, and mathematician. He developed the Theory of Relativity and turned out to be a real "Einstein"!**

**Rescuer of slaves, civil rights activist, and worker in the women's suffrage movement, *Harriet Tubman* was also a person with epilepsy.**

**Mountain climber *Erik Weihenmayer*, a person who is blind, celebrated his wedding atop Mt. Kilimanjaro.**

***Franklin Delano Roosevelt* was a person with polio, yet served as president of the United States for three terms!**

# Language Arts Connections

*The way  
to love  
anything  
is to  
realize that  
it might  
be lost.*

*~G.K. Chesterton*

*Since her mother's death and Charlie's illness, Sara's dad is only around on occasional weekends. Write a "letter to dad" from the viewpoint of one of the characters in the story.*

*How might this character feel about the dad? What might he or she say to him?*

*Use the "voice" of the character to convey his or her message to the dad.*

## *Lost and Found: Group Discussion*

*During the play, Sara complains to her Aunt Willie that she never gets to be a real person, because she's merely a "professional Charlie watcher." Later on, Sara tells her friend Mary, "There's something about me that makes me understand Charlie. It's like I know how he feels about things...I was thinking about the sky one night and I was looking up at the stars and I was thinking about how the sky goes on and on forever, and I couldn't understand it no matter how long I thought, and finally I got kind of nauseated and right then I started thinking, Well, this is how Charlies feels about some things. You know how it makes him sick sometimes to try to print letters for a long time..."*

*Why was Sara so frustrated with having to watch Charlie?*

*How do Sara's feelings toward her brother change as the story progresses?*

*What events influenced how Sara felt about Charlie?*

*In what ways were both Sara and Charlie lost and found?*

*What did Sara learn about herself as a result of Charlie's disappearance?*

*How will knowing herself better help Sara in her relationships with Aunt Willie, Wanda, Charlie, Mary, and Joe?*

The **Summer**  
of the **Swans**

# *Show Time for Students*

## Swan Symbolism

Read the general facts about swans in each of the ovals below. Choose three facts and tell how each relates symbolically to one or more characters in the play. Use the space in the ovals to jot down your answers.

**Swans have wide, webbed feet.**

*Water rolls right off a swan's waterproof feathers.*

**Swans eat and travel in groups.**

*Baby swans are called cygnets (SIHGnehts). Cygnets can't fly, because they don't yet have flight feathers.*

**A swan's bill is large and powerful with sharp scissor-like edges.**

**Not all swans migrate. In North America, "Mute Swans" stay close to their nesting places all year.**

*By late summer, most swans have grown flight feathers. They stretch their wings and soon learn to fly.*

*To take care of its feathers, a swan preens (uses its bill to smooth its feathers).*

**Swans are very sensitive to disturbance.**

The Summer  
of the Swans

# Show Time for Students

Aunt Willie says that Sara has one foot in the past and one foot in the future; a true teenager! What are some of the positive and negative aspects of being stuck on the “elevator” between childhood and adulthood? Jot down your thoughts, then compare ideas with your peers.

Positives of Adulthood \_\_\_\_\_

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Negatives of Adulthood \_\_\_\_\_

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Positives of Childhood \_\_\_\_\_

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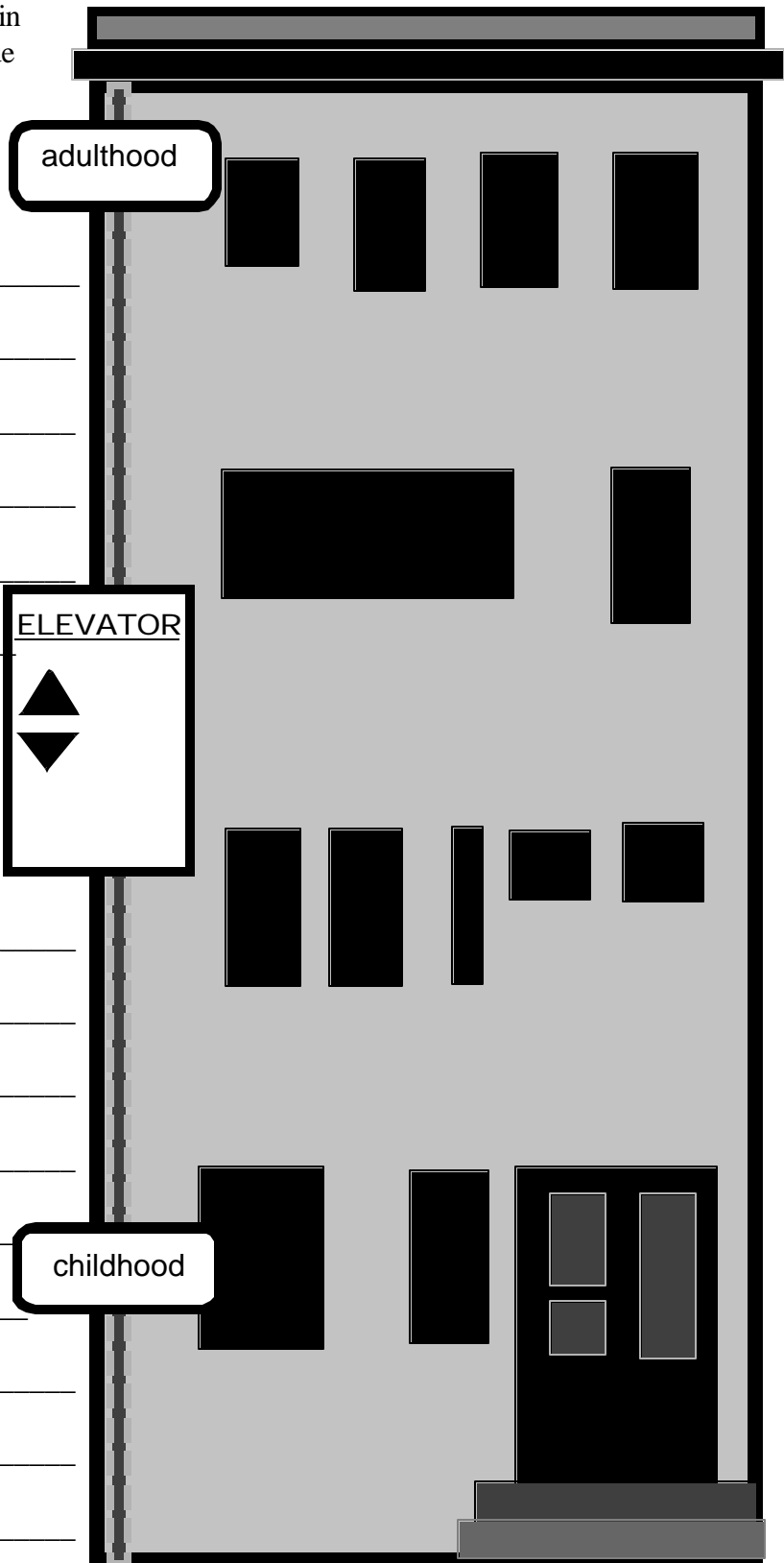
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Negatives of Childhood \_\_\_\_\_

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## **DEFINE**

*Jackie Kennedy-Onassis  
Green Acres (t.v. sitcom)  
migration  
flyways*

## **LOCATE**

*United States  
Alaska  
Ohio  
Maryland  
Michigan  
Minnesota  
North Dakota  
Wisconsin  
Pennsylvania  
Virginia  
West Virginia  
Chesapeake Bay  
Canada  
Beaufort Sea  
Northwest Territories  
Saskatchewan  
Manitoba*

*Trumpeter Swans  
can be identified by  
their deep, French  
horn-like call  
compared to the  
higher “whoop” of  
the Tundra Swan.*



## ***Signs of the ‘70’s***

TheatreworksUSA’s production of *The Summer of the Swans* is set in small town America in the 1970’s. Discuss with your students what references to the 1970’s they noticed in the book and the play (ie. dialogue, sets, and clothing).

To further explore the 1970’s, ask students to choose one aspect (history, politics, science, technology, art, culture, society, and sports) of that decade to research. Students may work independently or in groups to create visual displays to report their findings. Display the visuals on “70’s Day” and invite students to dress for the decade.

Ask students to interview parents and grandparents about what it was like to live in the 1970’s and create a class book to record the different perspectives. Make the book available for browsing on conference night.

## ***Swan Flyways: Read and Map***

Tundra swans in North America are part of either the eastern or western swan populations. Eastern tundra swans breed in Alaska and throughout the Canadian arctic. They migrate on flyways across North America to winter on the Atlantic coast.

Western tundra swans nest along Alaska’s west coast from Kotzebue Sound to the Alaska Peninsula. These swans migrate along the coast and through the western United States to central California where they spend their winters. Invite students to increase their map skills by completing the migration route activity on the next page.

Which population of swans migrated to Sara’s home town in West Virginia?

**Check out the migration of “Waterfowler”, a transmitter-carrying tundra swan at: <http://www.bsc-eoc.org/lpbo/swans/20114.html>**

# The Summer of the Swans

# Show Time for Students

Use the information below to locate and mark the nesting areas, fall migration routes, and winter destinations of eastern tundra swans on the map. Create a key that corresponds to the map.

### Nesting grounds:

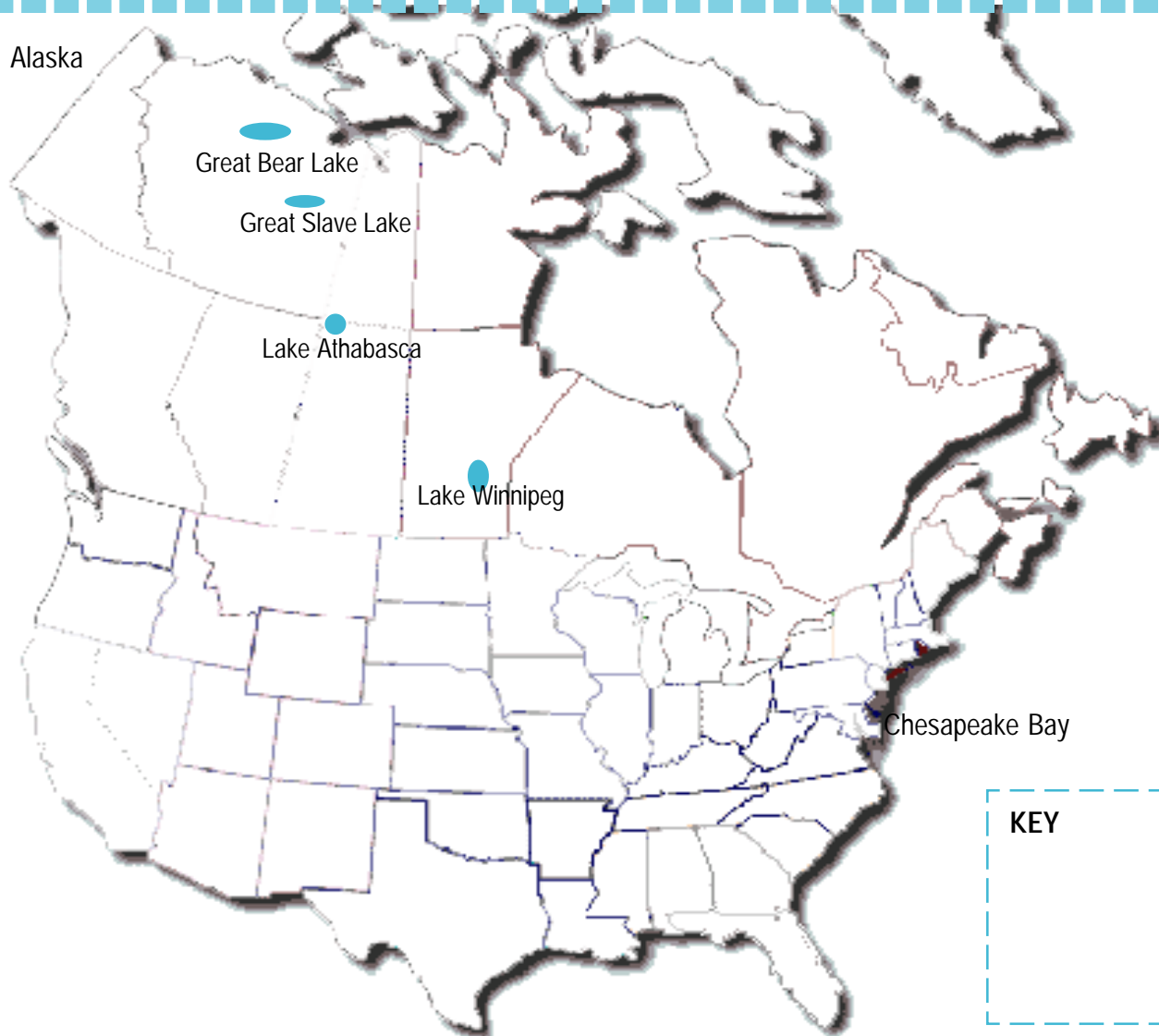
Eastern tundra swans nest from the northernmost tip of Alaska east across the coast of the Beaufort Sea all along the Northwest Territories of Canada including Southampton Island and the Melville Peninsula.

### Fall migration route:

Tundra swans in the western section of the nesting grounds fly southeast across the Northwest Territories over Great Bear and Great Slave Lakes, then into Saskatchewan over Lake Athabasca. Here, they are joined by tundra swans who have flown southwest from Melville Peninsula and Southampton Island. Together the swans continue southeast down through Manitoba over Lake Winnipeg into eastern North Dakota. Next, the swans fly across Minnesota, Wisconsin, Lake Michigan and into the lower half of Michigan. Finally, they make their way through Ohio, southern Pennsylvania and the tip of West Virginia.

### Winter destination:

Eastern tundra swans winter in eastern West Virginia, Virginia, Maryland, and the Chesapeake Bay.





## Are We There Yet?

Using an atlas with a scale, invite students to calculate the approximate distance eastern tundra swans fly from the Alaskan nesting grounds to their winter destination on Chesapeake Bay.

Have students use the same distance calculation to estimate how many hours it would take to make the same trip by car if the average driving speed is 50 mph?

Post the flight information below on an overhead transparency. Ask students to find which flight has the shortest travel time. (don't forget about time zones!) Which flight has the longest layover? Which flight most closely follows the migration route of the swans?

### Flight # 1 Sunday

Depart:	3:15 p.m.	Fairbanks, Alaska
Arrive:	4:30 p.m.	Anchorage, Alaska

Depart:	8:15 p.m.	Anchorage, Alaska
Arrive:	5:01 a.m.	Chicago, Illinois

### Monday

Depart:	6:32 a.m.	Chicago, Illinois
Arrive:	9:20 a.m.	Baltimore, Maryland

Total travel time \_\_\_\_\_

### Flight # 2 Sunday

Depart:	6:45 p.m.	Fairbanks, Alaska
Arrive:	7:55 p.m.	Anchorage, Alaska

Depart:	11:45 p.m.	Anchorage, Alaska
Arrive:	6:48 a.m.	Denver, Colorado

### Monday

Depart:	4:35 p.m.	Denver, Colorado
Arrive:	9:55 p.m.	Baltimore, Maryland

Total travel time \_\_\_\_\_





## *The Truth About Swans*

Direct students to the following website:

<http://www.state.ak.us/adfg/notebook/birds/swans.htm>

Divide students into groups and assign each group one of the statements below. Ask each group to determine if their statement is true or false and report their findings (and corrections) to the large group.

1. Swans were once hunted for their meat and feathers. (T)
2. Swans change breeding mates each year. (F, swans mate for life.)
3. Male and female swans share the duties of incubating the eggs. (T)
4. Incubation of swan eggs takes about three months. (F, it takes about thirty days.)
5. Swans live primarily on fish and small rodents. (F, they eat aquatic vegetation and small grains.)
6. Tundra swan populations are declining and endangered. (F, they are growing rapidly.)

## *Make Your Nest and Eat it Too!*

Swans typically build their nests along the edge of a lake or pond. The nest is a large platform about 12 to 18 inches above water level and built out of mosses, grasses, and sedges. By plucking the vegetation from around the nest site, swans create a moat around the nest up to 15 feet in diameter. Tundra swans generally lay four or five eggs each year.

Give students a small scoop (1/2 cup) of prepared rice krispie bar mixture and a few tablespoons of dyed green coconut. Have them mix the two ingredients and form into a mound style "nest" on a blue paper plate (the moat). Pass out Skittles for eggs.

Ask older students to build their nests to scale!

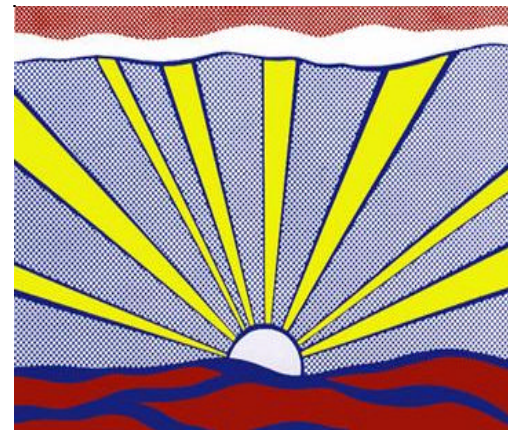
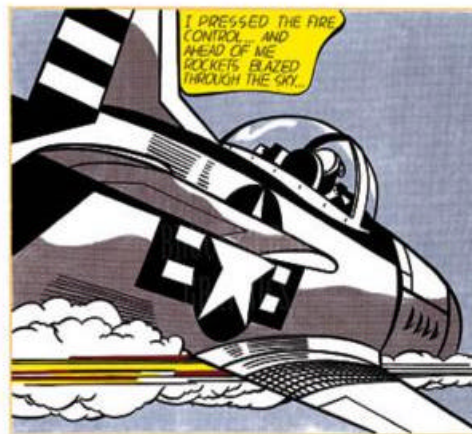
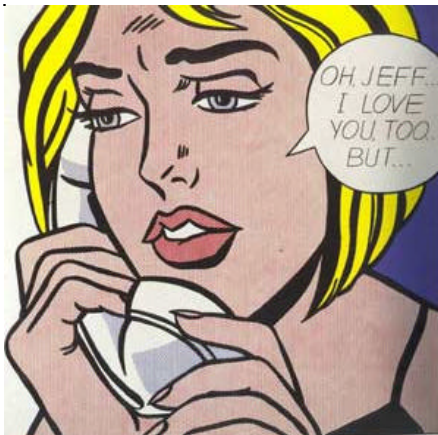
Although swans do not nest here, you are most likely to see swans flying over **Minnesota** sometime between November 5th and 15th!



# The Summer of the Swans

## Show Time for Students

In *The Summer of the Swans*, Sara complains that this summer is “the very worst summer of her whole entire life.” Think back to a summer (or a day or a situation) that you thought was the worst ever, but turned out to be okay. Use the frames below to create a comic strip of the events of that time. Be sure to put the events in sequenced order working from left to right.

Look at the work of artist Roy Lichtenstein. He uses the flat, primary colors, text balloons, and dots found in comic strip art. Lichtenstein began making large paintings in this style during the Pop Art movement of the mid-1960's in America. Pop artists chose to use images from popular culture such as comics, everyday objects, and brand-name products to make people look at art in a new way.

**Select a favorite frame from your comic strip to create a Lichtenstein - style painting. Enlarge the drawing to at least 10 x 12 inches on good paper. Use acrylic paint to paint in flat sections of primary color, white, and shades of gray. Add dots to some areas using the tip of your paintbrush handle. Outline the painted areas with black marker.**

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# Theater Etiquette

Each year, thousands of school staff, students, bus drivers, and parents take part in CSB/SJU's Fine Arts Education Series. Please review the **LOOKING & LISTENING** information below with your students to help make your theater experience the best it can be.

## **LOOKING & LISTENING**

Attending TheatreworksUSA's live performance of *The Summer of the Swans* will be interesting and enjoyable for everyone if you remember to:

- ~ listen in order to understand the words the actors are saying.
- ~ look for facial expressions and body language that will help you understand what the actors are thinking and feeling.
- ~ watch for clues in the set design and clothing that will help you understand the time period in which the play takes place.
- ~ look for possible changes in the attitudes of the characters as the play progresses. The actors in the play will be in the same room as the audience, and they will be affected by the audience's behavior. Unexpected noise and activity in the audience make it difficult for actors to concentrate on what they say and do on stage. Please help the performers to have a successful performance by listening quietly and applauding when it is appropriate.

Please review the **PROCEDURES** section below to help your theater visit go smoothly.

## **PROCEDURES**

- \* Please bring a minimum of one adult chaperone for every fifteen students.
- \* Prepare your students to enter the theater in single file in order of seating.
- \* Position your chaperones to maximize adult supervision of your group.
- \* Trips to the rest room must wait until your group has been seated in the theater. Then, students may go in small groups with the teacher's permission. Younger students will need to be chaperoned.
- \* The theater is a food, gum, drink, radio, camera, tape, and video recorder free zone!

**LISTEN CAREFULLY  
AND  
WATCH CLOSELY!**

**ENJOY THE  
PERFORMANCE!**

Show Time was written and designed by Janine Bunkowski. Parts of this study guide were adapted from materials provided by TheatreworksUSA.