



A PARENT AND EDUCATOR'S GUIDE TO

Tomato Plant Girl

by Wesley Middleton

IN THIS GUIDE YOU'LL FIND

Insight into the play and production

Discussion ideas to stimulate interest and reflection

Classroom activities linked to Grade Level Expectations

Ideas to help students practice writing skills

Information and resources on relational bullying and building healthy friendships



PRODUCTION TEAM:

Director and Set Designer: Nicholas Kryah

Costume Designer: Lou Bird

Sound Designer: Rusty Wandall

Props Designer: Stephanie Strohmman

Production Manager: Sarah Rugo

Producer: Carol North

ABOUT THE PLAY...

Tomato Plant Girl is a funny, yet poignant story of the trials of childhood friendship. The play features three unforgettable young characters playing in a garden: Little Girl, Bossy Best Friend, and Tomato Plant Girl. Adults might immediately recognize Bossy Best Friend. Remember that friend who always made you play her way? Remember that friend who posed the constant threat that he would take his stuff and go home if you didn't play by his rules? The fear of being labeled a "foreigner" keeps Little Girl in an unhealthy, one-sided friendship with Bossy Best Friend until a wild, messy Tomato Plant Girl emerges from the garden soil, catalyzing Little Girl's courageous choice for change.

People tend to think that bullies seek out victims outside their social circle. Increasingly we hear from parents and teachers about bullying incidents that occur between children who *are* friends. It can be a challenge to help a child navigate away from a Bossy Best Friend (or even away from their own bossy behavior, in some cases.) But with support, children will find the courage to break the cycle and find that friend who brings out the best in them. Good, healthy friendships are critical for children to grow into kind, caring adults.

Though the play is set in a fantastical world, it presents relationships among children that are achingly honest as it deals with problems that girls and boys in the audience will recognize. The play is full of humor, pathos and magical moments. Most importantly, it leaves young people with a hopeful message about celebrating their own individuality. We hope you enjoy yourtime in *Tomato Plant Girl's* garden and that you'll use the play and this guide as a vehicle for dialogue with the young people you are nurturing.





“IT’S ALL ABOUT MATH...”

An Interview with Director/Designer, Nicholas Kryah

Q: As director/designer of this production, how did you decide what the set should be?

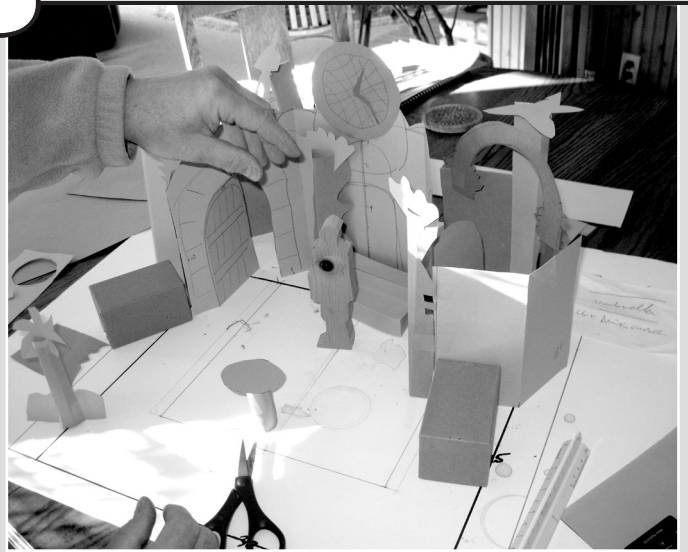
NICK: Reading the script again and again gave me essential information. I wanted to create a growing space for the characters in an isolated, secluded environment distant from adults and other kids. The play takes place in a secret space where time looms large.

Q: Where did you get your inspiration?

NICK: I did research to get ideas. I began by looking at ornate, mantel clocks. I looked at surrealist art. Eventually, my research led me to Edward James, the eccentric English poet who built a fantastical sculpture garden in the jungles of Mexico. Bingo! I’d found my primary inspiration.
(Learn more about Edward James: www.xilitla.org)

Q: How do you design and build sets for touring?

NICK: It’s all about math. When I first start sketching, I don’t impose practical limitations, but I feel them intuitively. Once the rough idea is on paper, I shift to three-dimensional shaping, because I create environments for actors to move through. I make forms with paper and tape which I can alter quickly with scissors. Working in 1" scale on a ground plan that is 18' x 20' insures that everything will fit in the minimum playing space we require. This part of the process helps me get a feel for the relative size of all the



set pieces and helps me create interesting places for action and surprise. Once it all looks and feels right to me, I go back to very precise, two-dimensional work. I measure my small models, convert to actual dimensions, and make adjustments for cost-effective materials use. For example, if my calculations tell me one of the set pieces will be 8' 2", I trim it to conform to 8' materials.

Q: How do you know the set will fit in the Company van?

NICK: This is hard to explain, but I just have a feel for cubic space. I know the interior volume of the van and how objects fit inside. I know what will and won’t fit through doors. As I’m designing and building, my intuitive sense tells me it will all fit, but I don’t know precisely until I pack it up the first time. It’s like solving a big, thick, jigsaw puzzle!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Help prepare children for the production with these questions:

- Do you garden or take care of plants at home? What do you need to do to help a plant grow?
- What kinds of games do you play with your friends? What are the rules of that game? What happens when people don’t agree on the rules?
- Make a prediction. During the play, the character called Little Girl discovers that the person she thought was her best friend is, in fact, not a good friend at all. What do you think might happen that would make Little Girl change her mind?

Prompt children to use their senses to take in details during the performance:

- Notice the set. What details do you see with your eyes? What kind of environment does it feel like to you? How do the actors use it?
- Notice the costumes. How has the costume designer exaggerated details to create larger than life characters?
- Observe closely the dramatic action of the play. How do characters behave like a good friend, and what behaviors are not those of a good friend?
- Listen to the strange language Tomato Plant Girl uses. How does that make you feel about her?
- Notice the sounds you hear during the play. The playwright calls for an “Earthsoil hum.” What kind of mood does that sound create?

After the play, help children reflect on their experience with these questions:

- What was a moment in the play that really surprised you?
- Imagine what will happen to Little Girl now that she has told Bossy Best Friend that she would rather play alone than with her? What will things be like for her tomorrow? In a month? In a year?
- How would you describe the play to a person who hasn’t seen it?



WHEN FRIENDS BULLY FRIENDS

When we speak to children about bullying, we often address traditional bullying behaviors, such as hitting, punching, physical threats. While nobody would deny the harm done by physical bullying, another much more secretive type of bullying often goes unnoticed. It may even be dismissed by adults as “just kids being kids.” **Relational aggression**, or relational bullying, is behavior that is intended to harm someone by damaging or manipulating his or her relationships with others (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995). Examples include:

- **Ignoring** somebody or giving the “silent treatment.”
- **Excluding** somebody from a group, not allowing participation in the group’s play and activities.
- **Spreading** rumors and gossip about somebody, secretly and within earshot.
- **Taunting** and making fun of somebody directly to their face.
- **Making friendship conditional.** “I’m your friend, but only if you...”
- **Cyber bullying:** Using the internet to spread malicious gossip and rumors about somebody, often anonymously.

Relational bullying often occurs among children who call each other friends and move in the same social circles. The secretive nature of relational aggression makes it a particularly damaging form of bullying. Social networking and text messaging have exacerbated the problem.

According to the National Education Association (NEA) 160,000 children will miss school each day due to fear of being tormented by their classmates.

ACTIVITY IDEA!

WHAT MAKES A REAL FRIEND?

Bossy Best Friend says, “Friendship is about giving.” Ask your class how she twists that notion to get what she wants. How many other examples do students recall where Bossy Best Friend says one thing and means another?

- **Journal Entry.** Write a journal entry from either Little Girl or Bossy Best Friend’s point of view, describing a typical play date in the garden.
- **Thank you letter.** Create a thank you letter to someone who has been a good friend to you. Describe what that person did or said to be such a good friend. Students can choose to mail or hand-deliver the letter to that person, if they like.
- **One year later.** Imagine it is one year later. Write a letter to Tomato Plant Girl. Tell her what has happened in the garden in the past year. Did Little Girl find a new friend? If so, what is that friend like? What games do they play together?

MISSOURI COMMUNICATION ARTS GRADE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS:

- W1A K-8 Apply a writing process in composing text
- W2 K-8 Compose well-developed text
- W3 K-8 Write effectively in various forms and types of writing.

What about Boys?

In studies of social climates within schools, it is clear that both boys and girls are negatively impacted by relational aggression (e.g. name calling, spreading rumors and exclusion). Additionally, awareness of covert aggression in the adult workplace is on the rise. The problem of relational aggression is genderless and ageless, and we encourage everyone to take a stand against this harmful behavior wherever it exists.



ACTIVITY IDEA!

PRACTICE NEW STRATEGIES

After the play, introduce the term ‘relational bullying.’ Share examples of relational aggression listed on this page. Ask students to work with partners to identify moments in the play where Little Girl is a victim of relational bullying by Bossy Best Friend.

- Ask the groups to choose one of the moments, and imagine how Little Girl might have stood up for herself in the situation. For example, when Bossy Best Friend takes Little Girl’s healthy tomato plant and plants it on her side of the garden, what could Little Girl have said or done to stop her?
- Ask the students to practice a short scene between Little Girl and Bossy Best Friend, using their ideas, and then present it to the rest of the class.
- As the scenes are presented, help the students reflect on whether or not Little Girl’s words or action would be successful in getting a friend to stop her bullying behavior in a “real life” situation.

MISSOURI HEALTH EDUCATION GRADE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS:

- HE4 A K-8 Decision-Making and Problem-Solving
- HE4 E K-8 Harassment/Bullying Violence Prevention

At the end of the play, Bossy Best Friend is left without anybody to play with because of her bullying behavior. But what if she changed her ways? Imagine that someone new moves into the neighborhood. Bossy Best Friend wants to try again. What could she do to make a fresh start? Write Bossy Best Friend a letter, giving her some good advice on how to be a better friend. Use details!

Dear Bossy Best Friend,



Sincerely,



EVERYBODY WINS: RETHINKING GAMES

Games children play can be fun, but many games give too much power to one person, or create hard feelings over winning and losing. Here are some games that discourage competition and build community. Try them!

“Your Barbie loves parties and would die for a beau. Your Barbie wants what my Barbie wants but my Barbie can have it and your Barbie can’t. That’s the game!”
Bossy Best Friend, to Little Girl

ACTIVITY IDEA!



PERSON TO PERSON

Players move about the space, filling all of the space. The facilitator calls out “Person to Person!” At that cue, everyone quickly finds a partner. The facilitator then asks partners to connect body parts, for example, “knee to elbow,” “wrist to shoulder,” or “head to hip,” etc. After three connections are made, the facilitator calls out “relax,” “and players break away from their partners, continuing to move about the space until the facilitator again calls out “Person to Person!” Encourage participants to find a new partner for each round.

MISSOURI PHYSICAL EDUCATION GRADE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS:
PA2 A K-8 Responsible Personal and Social Behavior in the Physical Activity Setting

ACTIVITY IDEA!



DO YOU LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR?

The group sits in chairs in a circle, one chair for each person. The leader stands in the middle. The leader approaches one person and says, “[First name], do you love your neighbor?” The person in the chair responds, “Yes, I love my neighbor [name of person sitting on left] and [name of person sitting on right], but I especially love my neighbors who [and then says something true about him or herself.]” Everyone in the circle who shares that with the person who said it stands up and changes chairs. The last person left standing takes the next turn as the leader. A good rule for safety: whoever puts a hand on the chair first gets the chair!

MISSOURI PHYSICAL EDUCATION GRADE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS:
PA2 A K-8 Responsible Personal and Social Behavior in the Physical Activity Setting

ACTIVITY IDEA!



CAT AND MOUSE

This is a cooperative game of tag that encourages people to work together to escape the “Cat.” This game requires a lot of room to run. Everyone gets a partner. Holding hands with partners, everyone spreads out across the room. The leader chooses a person to be the Cat, and a person to be the Mouse. When the leader says “Go!” the Cat chases the Mouse. As the Mouse runs, players holding hands should hold out their free hand for the Mouse to grab. When the Mouse grabs a free hand, the person on the outside of that pair has to let go and becomes the new Mouse. If the Cat tags the Mouse, the Mouse has to become the Cat. This is great fun, regardless of the role you are playing, because everyone stays in the game!

MISSOURI PHYSICAL EDUCATION GRADE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS:
PA2 A K-8 Responsible Personal and Social Behavior in the Physical Activity Setting

ACTIVITY IDEA!



MAKE UP YOUR OWN GAME!

Invite students to work in pairs and invent a game with no winner or loser. Both members of the pair must agree on the rules. Have pairs teach their game to the rest of the class. The class could even publish a book of the directions to all of their new, non-competitive games, and share it with other classrooms in the school.

MISSOURI PHYSICAL EDUCATION GRADE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS:
PA2 A K-8 Responsible Personal and Social Behavior in the Physical Activity Setting





ACTIVITY IDEA!



Fun Science Learning: HOW DO PLANTS GROW?

The following activities are very simple ways to observe plant growth and the processes of respiration, transpiration, and the need for sunshine as part of the complex process of photosynthesis.

- **GROW A BEAN PLANT.** Place a bean (a lima bean works well) on a wet paper towel and put it in a ziplock bag. Place it in a sunny spot, and chart each day how the bean changes.
- **DESIGN AN EXPERIMENT** to help students understand what plants need to grow. Put one plant in the dark. Don't water one plant. Seal a third plant up in a ziplock bag. Note how each bean plant responds to different circumstances.
- **EXPERIMENT WITH TRANSPIRATION.** Fill a glass with water, and add a few drops of food coloring. Insert a celery stalk (preferably with the leaves on top), or a white carnation in the water. Leave it overnight. When students return in the morning, take note of what has happened to the water in the glass, and how it has affected the celery or flower.
- **COMPARE AND CONTRAST.** Create a Venn diagram. In one circle, make a list of what people need in order to grow. In the other, note what plants need in order to grow. Where the two circles overlap, note what both plants and people need to grow. In how many ways are we similar to plants?

MISSOURI SCIENCE GRADE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS:

- L01 There is a fundamental unity underlying the diversity of all living organisms
- L02 Living organisms carry out life processes in order to survive
- IN 1 Science understanding is developed through the use of science process skills, scientific knowledge, scientific investigation, reasoning and critical thinking

TO PARENTS AND EDUCATORS:

Please let us know how this Guide enriched your experience with Tomato Plant Girl. Share letters, drawings and projects developed in your classroom. Let us know what sorts of discussions occur at school, in the hallway, lunchroom, staff lounge or over dinner at home. Your feedback helps us enormously. Thank you for the opportunity to share Wesley Middleton's important play with you.

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SUGGESTED RESOURCES

http://www.ehow.com/how-does_4565009_tomato-plant-grow.html
A website about how a tomato plant grows.

<http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/adults/tip-sheets/default.aspx>
This site provides tip sheets for adults, parents and teachers, dealing with bullying issues.

http://www.opheliaproject.org/main/ra_about3.html
This site has excellent support for relational aggression and bullying.

<http://www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/books/detailListBooks.asp?idBookLists=309>
A bibliography of children's books about relational bullying and aggression.

Two of our favorite titles are:

Say Something by Peggy Moss, illustrated by Lea Lyon.
ISBN 978-0-88448-310-6

Wings by Christopher Myers.
ISBN 0-590-03377-8

METRO THEATER COMPANY'S MISSION

Inspired by the intelligence and emotional wisdom of young people, we create professional theater for young people, foster inclusive community, and nurture meaningful learning through the arts.

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