

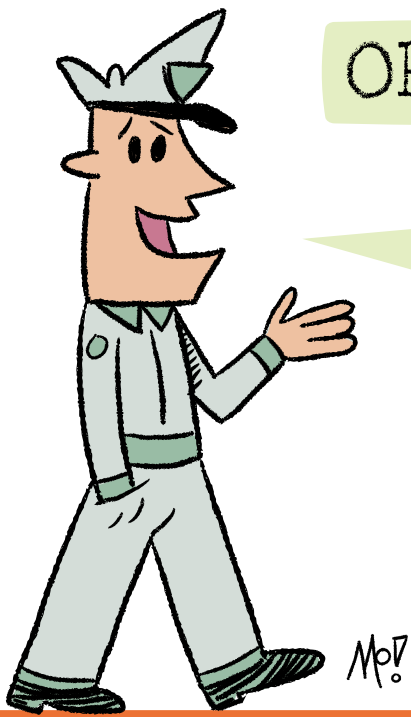
Art © Mo Willems

Mp7

**DON'T
LET THE
PIGEON
DRIVE THE
BUS!**

THE MUSICAL!

GROWNUP GUIDE



OH, HELLO!

Welcome to our grownup guide for *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus! (The Musical!)*, designed to help you make the most of the performance experience with your young theatergoers. In this guide, you'll find lots to explore together before and after the show—discussion questions, background, activities, and more about the creative team. Find additional resources at the end of this guide.

BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

Here are a few quick things to do together:

- Read the printed *Cuesheet Performance Guide* <http://bit.ly/NoPigeons>, try as many of the activities as you wish, and play with the pop-out finger puppets. (15+ minutes)
- Read or re-read some of Mo Willems' Pigeon books (to help see the fun in adapting a book to the stage). (10+ minutes)
- Doodle or draw The Pigeon and brainstorm how The Pigeon's story could be told on stage. Some questions to guide your thinking: What will The Pigeon be like on stage? How could puppets help tell The Pigeon's story? How might a bus be shown on stage? What might be funny or silly in a performance starring The Pigeon? What role would *you* want to play in the performance? (10+ minutes)

LET'S TALK ABOUT THIS

So, you're leaving the theater after the performance. Here are some things to think and talk about while the experience is fresh:

- What happened in the story on stage?
- How was the musical different from the book, and why do you think it was different?
- What was your favorite puppet? Share what you liked about it.
- What was your favorite song? Sing a little, adding some new lines if you'd like.
- What did The Pigeon learn about himself by the end of the story?
- What was each character's "thing"? What is your "thing"? Why?
- Who was a hero in the story? Why?

(National Core Arts Standards Connections, Theatre: TH:Re8.1)

“Puppetry should be part of a show because it can do something that a human in a costume cannot.”

—Puppet Director Scottie Rowell

Brainstorm together: Why use puppets in this performance? How did puppets help tell the story? Why do you think the puppet designer made them look and move the way she did? If you were designing the puppets, how would each one look and move?

Background:

In this performance, the audience sees the puppeteers the whole time, and also sees the puppeteers’ faces expressing the emotions of the puppets. In this type of puppetry—called “overt puppetry”—puppeteers are not hidden from the audience and work together with the puppets to create characters and express the action.

All the puppets in the performance were made of foam and soft fabric, making them very warm and inviting characters (even when having a tantrum). Note the different types of puppets in the show:

The Pigeon: hand and rod puppet (the hand controls the beak; the rods control the wings)

Duckling: hand/glove puppet (with wings and head controlled by fingers)

Smaller Ducklings: finger puppets (operated by a fabric loop in back)

Puppy: giant plush puppet (controlled externally by hand)

Bus: hand puppet (but with rod to control the windshield wiper)

Learn lots more about the puppet types and art of puppetry in our interview with Puppet Designer Carole D’Agostino:

<http://bit.ly/NoPigeons>

Making puppets believable on stage takes some practice and coordination. One of the first things to work on is moving the puppet’s mouth. Work with your young theatergoer to use socks as puppets and read what Puppet Director Scottie Rowell has to say:

“When puppeteering, proper lip-sync will make your puppet all the more alive. ‘Lip-sync’ means moving the mouth in time with words being spoken. For puppeteering, it means moving the puppet’s jaw down when your jaw goes down, and closing the puppet’s mouth when your mouth is closed. Give it a try. Stand with your sock puppet in front of a mirror. Try saying the ‘ABCs.’ Pay attention to when your mouth is open or closed. Can you match the sock puppet’s mouth to yours?”

Learn lots more about puppetry for performances in our interview with Puppet Director Scottie Rowell:

<http://bit.ly/NoPigeons>



Art © Mo Willems

Think about... Puppet Designer Carole D’Agostino says that to get good at puppetry, you need to get good at science and math. She notes, “Half of good puppetry is understanding physics and geometry.” Work together to identify ways mathematics helps puppet builders and puppeteers. How do you think science and mathematics can help you make your own puppets work?

(National Core Arts Standards Connections, Theatre: TH:Pr4.1)

TEAM PIGEON

“To make a 40-page book into a sooper giant musical, we added fun, funny characters; rousing music with clever and often touching lyrics; a big bus that may or may not work; and an enormous fluffy puppy (pro tip: always add a puppy!).”

—Co-Playwright Mr. Warburton

How does a live musical (a story told on stage with actors, puppets, songs, and dancing) come to life on stage? With an incredible amount of imagination, creativity, and cooperation, that’s how. Playwright Mo Willems notes, “If it sounds like a lot of work, that’s because it is. But, making this musical was fun because everyone was asking the same question: How do we make the best theater experience?”

Here’s a closer look at the team of people behind this production and what they do:

- The **playwrights** or **book writers** (Mo Willems and Mr. Warburton) craft the whole story so it can be told on stage. They create the dialogue and the words to the songs.
- The **director** (Jerry Whiddon) guides the whole team and helps all the team members tell the same story. He shapes the overall look and feeling of what is on stage.
- The **dramaturg** (Megan Alrutz) is a theater expert who asks hard questions and helps the writers and director perfect the musical.
- The **composer** (Deborah Wicks La Puma) writes all the music and helps communicate how the characters feel.
- The **lyricist** (also Mo Willems) writes all the words to the songs.
- The **puppet designer/builder** (Carole D’Agostino) plans and creates all the puppets by hand.
- The **puppet director** (Scottie Rowell) plans and guides the on-stage puppet work.
- The **choreographer** (Jessica Hartman) plans all the dance movements for the songs as well as how the characters and puppets move throughout the performance.
- The **actors/puppeteers** play all the roles on stage (human and puppet) and make sure you are enjoying the show.



Art © Mo Willems

Other important people on the team include the **set designer** (who decides how the stage will look), the **lighting designer** (who plans and manages all the different lighting effects), the **costume designer** (who plans what all the performers wear), the **props manager** (who makes or finds all the objects used on stage), and the **stage manager** (the person backstage who makes sure each performance runs without a hitch).

Ask your young theatergoers: Which role would you like to take on in creating a theater production? Why?

“The Pigeon’s feelings are BIG! So the music acts as a way to amplify those feelings, along with the feelings of all the people in the story, to the next level. When set to music, the lows are lower and the highs are higher—and also more fun and toe-tapping.”

—Composer Deborah Wicks La Puma

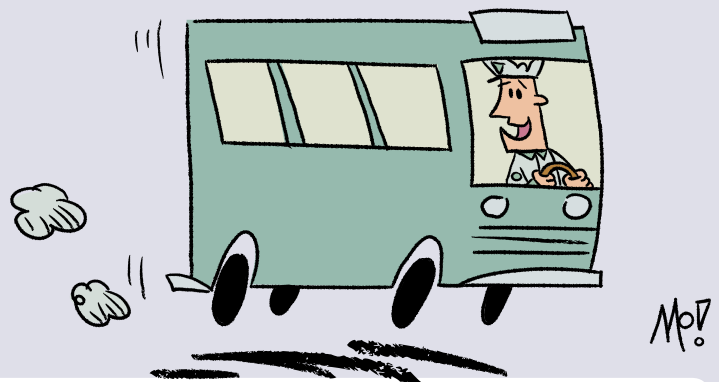
SOLVE IT

Here’s a challenge for your young theatergoers: Describe and analyze the tools (such as props, lighting, puppetry, costumes, projections, actions, and sets) the creative team used to solve each of these theatrical storytelling challenges and work with friends to plan another way to show:

- The Pigeon flying
- a giant puppy jumping or bounding
- a bus moving on and off stage
- The Pigeon’s dream about the bus

Share and demonstrate your ideas.

*(National Core Arts Standards Connections,
Theatre: TH:Cr1.1)*

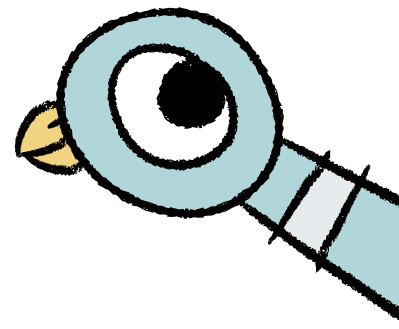


“It’s been said that when a piece of theater is created, it takes shape in four versions. The one in the writer’s head, the one put on paper, the one that the actors and director rehearse, and finally the one the audience experiences. My job as director is to translate what’s on paper into the language of theater, with actors, sets, lights, and costumes. And I love that creative process of trying different ways of making the story come alive and seeing how it all works.”

—Director Jerry Whiddon

“The fun thing about writing a play that is different from writing a book is, it is a lot more collaborative.”

—Co-Playwright and Lyricist Mo Willems



Background:

The Pigeon’s story started in the imagination of author and illustrator Mo Willems. Mo says, “The Pigeon is the only character of mine that arrived fully formed in my head...[so] I don’t really know what makes him tick. Putting him through the paces of becoming the star of a play seemed like a fun way to get to know him (and myself) a little better.”

Then Mo really got down to work on adapting the book into a story that could be told on stage. The process started by making a mess. Mo explains: “My cowriter Mr. Warburton, composer Deborah Wicks La Puma, dramaturg Megan Alritz, and I locked ourselves in a room and threw every possible idea we could think of on the wall until the wall became very, very messy. Slowly, bits of ideas fell off. Then more disappeared, until what was left started to make sense as a story.”

Help young theatergoers analyze the story of *Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus! (The Musical!)* and identify the three main parts—the beginning (setting, characters, and the problem or challenge), middle (events in the story), and end (the resolution). Put these in boxes on a chart if you like. Discuss: What do you think was the most important event in the story, and why? Also examine how The Pigeon changed during the story (a character arc). Does The Pigeon change in the books? Does he change in the musical? How and why?

Here is some more fun for your young theatergoers: Now imagine a new story for The Pigeon, in which he wants something new and faces a challenge in getting it. Work with some friends to brainstorm, or as Mo says, “throw” as many ideas as you can “at the wall.” See what patterns and ideas start to make sense as a new story. Use dialogue balloons and doodles and take turns writing new pages of the story. Be supportive of other people’s ideas, but also willing to lose a joke or idea to make the story work better.

Then take your story to the next level! Adapt it to be performed on stage as a play or musical, with puppets if you like. Perform a small part for others or make a short video to share. Discuss your creative choices, including your story’s big ideas, and why these were important.

Quick Tips:

Need help drawing The Pigeon? Mo shows you how on pages 5–7:

pigeonpresents.com/content/uploads/2017/08/pigeon_activity_10-year_v10.pdf

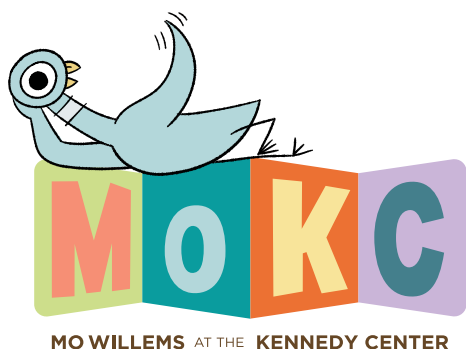
Need more puppet characters? You can make new ones with socks, but also remember that *anything* can be a puppet (called found object puppetry)—spoons, pillows, pans with lids, and cups are just a few examples. And don’t forget shadow puppets—here’s a quick how-to: planet-science.com/categories/under-11s/our-world/2012/04/make-your-own-shadow-puppets.aspx

(National Core Arts Standards Connections, Theatre: TH:Cn11.2, TH:Cr1.1)

MORE MO!

The creative force behind this show and the Pigeon book series is author/illustrator Mo Willems. After starting out writing and animating on *Sesame Street*, he wrote his first book for children—*Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!* Since then, he has written more than 50 books and won numerous awards. Mo draws all the time with his own family at home and encourages everyone—and that means grownups and children—to imagine and doodle.

This year, Mo Willems serves as the Kennedy Center's first-ever Education Artist-in-Residence. There's even a new logo:



Find out what it's all about:

cms.kennedy-center.org/education/mo-willems-at-the-kennedy-center

Final food for thought... Mo Willems says, "Creating a play is playfully creating." Discuss what you think he means and give examples of your own playful creations.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Puppets and Puppetry

14 Fun Puppet Activities for Kids, with a range of puppet-making fun geared toward younger children:
kidspot.com.au/things-to-do/art-and-craft/14-fun-puppet-activities-for-kids/image-gallery/138250ddf6d59441cc1a061cdc900b5a?image=11

"History of Puppetry and Puppet Theater," a brief overview of puppetry as well as some additional puppetry resources:
theaterseatstore.com/blog/history-of-puppetry

"Puppets: Art and Amusement," an article introducing the world of puppetry:
puppetsbostonguild.org/puppetry.html

Puppet Planet: The Most Amazing Puppet-Making Book in the Universe by John Kennedy (recommended by Carole D'Agostino), a book for more advanced puppet enthusiasts:
amazon.com/gp/product/1581807945?pf_rd_p=183f5289-9dc0-416f-942e-e8f213ef368b&pf_rd_r=SQ7PNEXFJK6YZTC9841D

The Pigeon Resources & More About Mo Willems

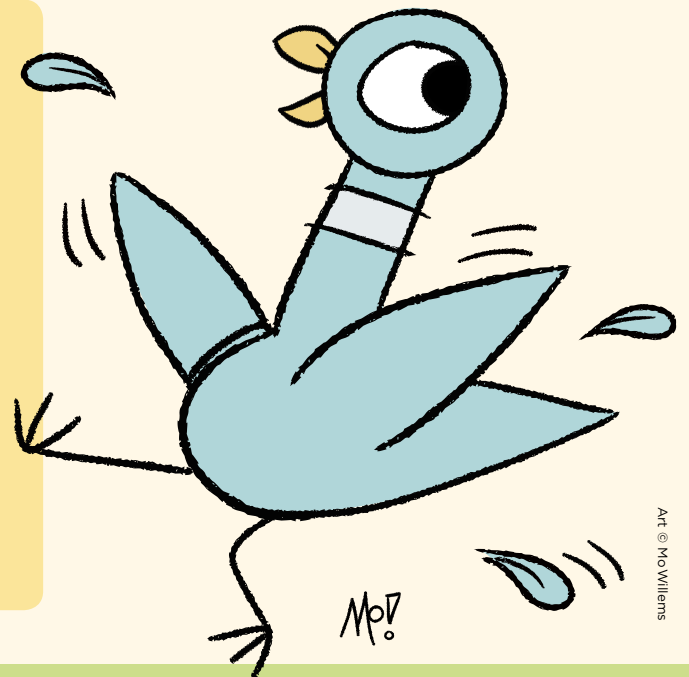
“Kids’ Author Mo Willems Has a New Creative Challenge (And So Should You),” an NPR interview with Willems about his books and being the first-ever Kennedy Center Education Artist-in-Residence: [npr.org/2019/07/02/735494332/kids-author-mo-willems-has-a-new-creative-challenge-and-so-should-you](https://www.npr.org/2019/07/02/735494332/kids-author-mo-willems-has-a-new-creative-challenge-and-so-should-you)

“Knuffle Bunny Artist Mo Willems Helps Kids Doodle,” an interview on *Today* with Willems on the importance of doodling: [today.com/video/knuffle-bunny-author-mo-willems-helps-kids-doodle-32687683619](https://www.today.com/video/knuffle-bunny-author-mo-willems-helps-kids-doodle-32687683619)

Pigeon Presents: The Latest from Mo Willems, a website full of activity sheets, games, resources, and more: pigeonpresents.com

“One thing that has struck me about this smart and sassy piece is that **The Pigeon** literally gains perspective that he didn’t have—and as you see at the end, gaining perspective is an ongoing process. The story communicates a joy of knowing one is on a trajectory in one’s life and offers a great way to engage that journey for our audience.”

—Director Jerry Whiddon



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