



# Stuart Little

a Wheelock Family Theatre Study Guide

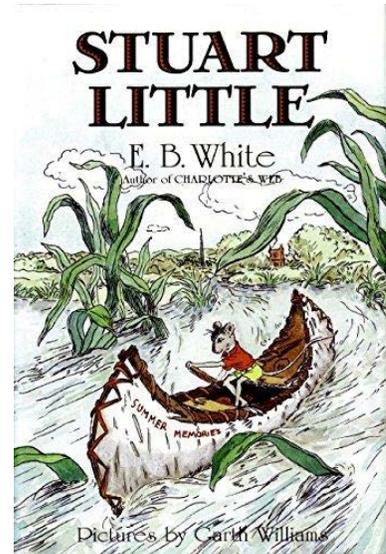
prepared by Jeri Hammond

## BEFORE THE CURTAIN RISES

Read *Stuart Little* by E.B. White. Ask students to make predictions about the play they're going to see based upon their knowledge of the source text as well as any other works by E.B. White. For example, not every character in the book appears in the play.

### Discuss:

- Which characters do you expect to see onstage?
- How do you imagine the locations will be created onstage?
- How do you imagine the scenery, costumes and props?
- Will there be music? If so, how will it sound?
- What challenges do you think the designers had to meet in creating the world of *Stuart Little*?



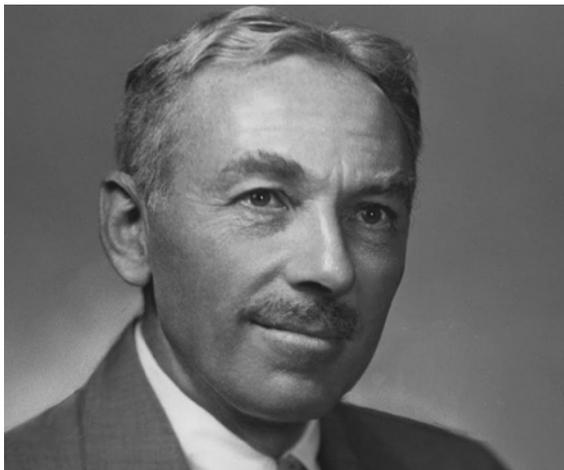
## About the Play

### Summary

Stuart Little, “the second son of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick C. Little of New York City,” is a mouse. His family is full-sized and human, but the differences between them don’t stop them from having a happy life. In fact, many of Stuart’s “differences” turn out to be uniquely helpful to his family and friends. It’s his special capabilities as a mouse that help him in his journey to save his best friend Margalo, a beautiful and wise bird. The adventure wouldn’t be complete without obstacles, all of which challenge Stuart and help him grow. In this production, we don’t know what adventures yet lie ahead for Stuart on his search for Margalo—it’s up to the viewer to imagine the ending for themselves!

### About the Author

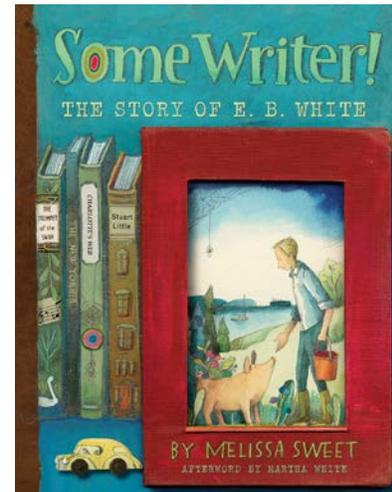
#### E.B. White



“Many years ago,” E.B. White would say, “I went to bed one night in a railway sleeping car, and during the night I dreamed about a tiny boy who acted rather like a mouse. That’s how the story of *Stuart Little* got started.”

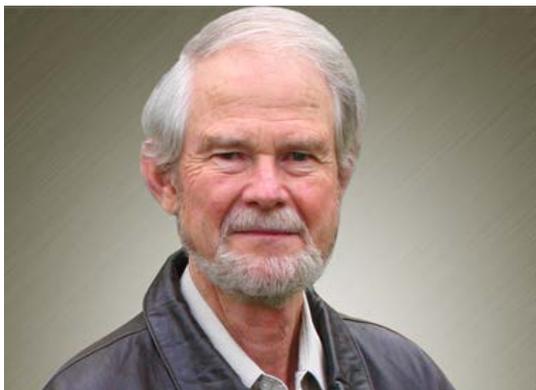
Elwyn Brooks White was born in Mount Vernon, New York in 1899. For many years, he was contributing editor of *The New Yorker* magazine. However, E. B. White is best known for his children's books. The character of Stuart Little first appeared to E. B. White in a dream in the 1920's. White wrote a few episodes about this boy who looked like a mouse and then tucked the stories away in a drawer, thinking he might someday share them with his nieces and nephews. Some twenty years later he expanded and collected the stories as *Stuart Little*, published in 1945. It was White's first children's book. His second was *Charlotte's Web*, in 1952, which is one of the most popular children's books of all time and was named "the best American children's book of the past two hundred years" by The Children's Literature Association. From 1933, E.B. White lived on a farm in Maine with his wife Katharine. He died in 1985.

Find out more about E.B. White by reading a biography such as this one!



## About the Playwright

Joseph Robinette



Joseph Robinette is the author or co-author of 44 published plays and musicals, including *The Paper Chase*, *Anne of Green Gables*, *Stuart Little*, *The Chocolate War*, *A Rose for Emily*, and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. He collaborated with E.B. White on the authorized stage version of *Charlotte's Web*, and with composer Charles Strouse on the musical version. Robinette's plays have been presented by Lincoln Center, the Goodman Theatre, Stage One of Louisville and the Honolulu Theatre for Youth. His works have been produced in all 50 states and in several foreign

countries, including Germany, Spain, England, and South Africa. Robinette is the recipient of numerous awards including the Charlotte B. Chorprenning Award for a distinguished body of work. He is a member of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers and is a founding member of Opera for Youth. In 2002, as professor of theatre at Rowan University, he received the Lindback Distinguished Teaching Award for Demonstrated Excellence in the University Classroom.

## About the Genre

*Stuart Little* fits into the theatrical category of **fantasy**. The world of the play is very different from our own world. While some of the characters are like us—Mr. and Mrs. Little, George, Dr. Carey—many are very different from us. Things happen in the play that don't happen in real life. In the world of *Stuart Little* animals talk, drive cars, teach classes, and wear human clothes. This does not happen in our world, but it is fun to imagine what it might be like if it did.

- Can you think of other stories in which animals act like humans? Or where humans behave like animals?

## About Adaptation: From Page to Stage

How does one become a tiny mouse in a play? When we use our imaginations, it's easy to picture Stuart as small. On stage that can be harder to achieve. One way we do this is through the size of the objects in Stuart's world. As you watch the play, notice that some objects are very large and some are very small. Look for things that help show Stuart's small size.

## About the Themes

A THEME is the main idea of the play, or what the play is about. *Stuart Little* explores many themes—friendship, adventure, loyalty, helping others, overcoming things that are difficult for us.

- What do YOU think *Stuart Little* is about?
- What are some examples from the story that show you what the theme is?

## You're As Big As You Feel

Stuart is different from the rest of his family because he is a mouse. But he never lets that bother him. In fact, Stuart learns that he has a lot to offer because he is different. For instance, he is able to fetch his mother's wedding ring when it falls down the drain and he is able to win the model boat race for Dr. Carey. Throughout Stuart's adventures we see him face challenges that we may not think he can tackle. Each time we learn that he's just as capable as anyone else.



Photo Credit: Gary Thomas Ng

### Discuss:

Stuart is proof that the way you think about a situation has a huge impact on its outcome.

- Have you ever experienced this in your life?
- How is saying I CAN different than saying I CAN'T?

Stuart's individuality is one of his greatest strengths. Because of his unique size, he's able to do a lot of things his full-sized family can't, and as a mouse he grows much faster than human children.

- What are some things that make you different?
- Is there anything you can do that your friends and family can't? Think about the ways your individuality and unique talents are your strengths.

At the beginning of the play, Mrs. Little points out that Stuart will be a great help to his parents. Mr. Little says this is "because he'll be able to do things a mouse can do." In this way, Stuart's size is a unique advantage.

- What unique things is Stuart able to help with because he is small?
- What are some unique ways that you can help others?

## Try It On For Size!

Though Stuart's size might make some human-sized tasks more difficult, with his friends' and family's help he can participate in plenty of regular activities. Using the ice skates made from paperclips as inspiration, think of something you would create for Stuart so he might participate in an activity you like! Make a drawing or model of your idea.

Think about using a real-world object in a totally different way. Assemble a collection of common objects—cardboard tubes, hula hoops—and improvise as many different uses or new identities for them as you can.

Play *This Is Not A...* Pass an object such as a cardboard tube around the circle. Each student transforms the tube into something else. "This is NOT a cardboard tube, it is a telescope... a hot dog... A toothbrush..." How many ideas can you come up with?

What ways did actors in the play use objects in unexpected or creative ways?

If you were Stuart Little's size (2 inches, not counting the tail)...

.... What size bed would you need?

.... How big would your car be?

... What about your toothbrush?

See if you can come up with measurements of everything in Stuart's room that are scaled to Stuart's size.



Photo Credit: Glenn Cook Photography

Make a MOUSE HOUSE.

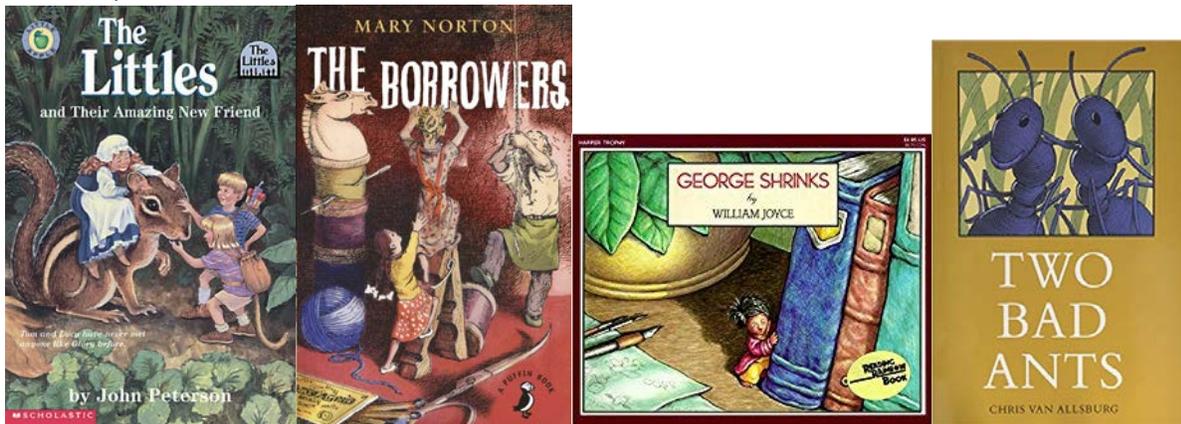
Use a shoebox or other small box to create a miniature room. Perhaps a spool of thread is a table or ... the possibilities are as BIG as your imagination.

## Dramatize Size!

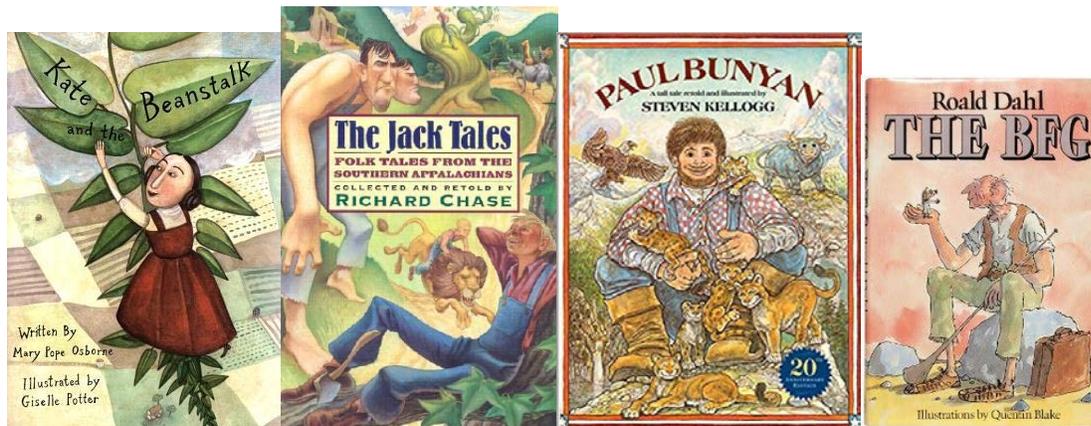
Imagine you're the size of an ant and you're in a bowl filled with sugar cubes. How would that appear to you? Dramatize an ant's climbing adventure in the sugar bowl or swimming experience in a teacup. Now imagine you're a giant. Objects in your world would now seem very small. How would a giant brush his teeth? Have a snack?

Read some other books that feature characters different in size:

Some very small



And some very large



## Friendship and Friends

Throughout his journey, Stuart meets many different people and makes friends very easily. He makes friends old and young, short and tall, bird and human. He also helps his friends out along the way. He gives some of his medicine to Margalo, wins a boat race for Dr. Carey, and teaches a class for the Superintendent of Schools. Stuart sets a great example of friendship and helping others.

### Activity:

Write or improvise a scene between Snowbell and Stuart where Stuart is successful in winning Snowbell as his friend. Be clear about why Snowbell has a change of heart. Perform your scene for the class “in character.”

### Discuss:

Friendship is a very important theme in *Stuart Little*. Discuss the various examples of friendship found throughout the story and how friendship affects each of the characters differently.

- Stuart seems to easily make friends wherever he goes (with the exception of most cats). Why do you think Stuart can make friends so easily?
- What clear friendships do we see throughout the play? How do you think these friendships developed? What do these characters have in common that helps their relationship?
- Stuart’s best friend is Margalo and he’s also friends with different humans. Why do you think it doesn’t matter that they’re different types of animals?
- Think about your friendships. Have you always been friends with these people? Have you had to overcome differences to be or stay friends?
- What does it mean to be a true friend?

## Character Traits

To better understand the characters in a play, book, or movie, it's helpful to examine their key character traits—what qualities make these characters the way they are? Match the characters from the play with character traits that best describe them and support their actions. A selection of qualities is provided below and you can always add your own! Students can analyze one character or all of them, and should support their ideas with evidence from the play or observations they made about the character.

### **Characters:**

Stuart Little  
Margalo  
Snowbell  
Mr. Little Mrs.  
Little George  
Little Angi the Angora

### **Traits:**

thoughtful                  loyal                  sneaky                  determined                  cunning  
   creative                  generous                  adventurous                  caring                  brave  
selfish                  confident                  dishonest                  wise

Create a Venn Diagram to compare characters.

## Family

The Little Family is a very interesting kind of family.

- What does it mean to be a family?
- List words that describe your family.

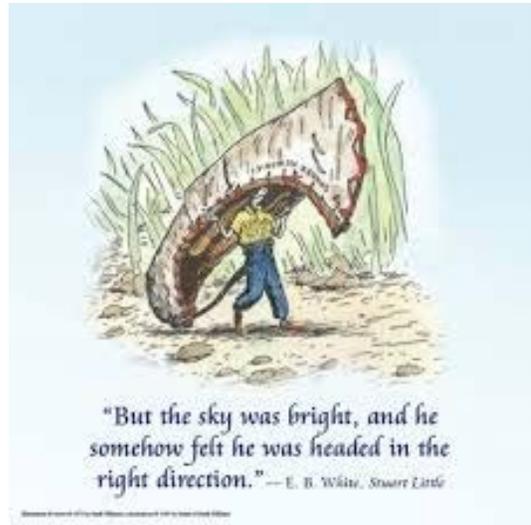


Photo Credit: Glenn Cook Photography

## AFTER THE CURTAIN CLOSES

**“...this is where the story ends, but it’s also where our imaginations begin.”**

Encourage students to fill in the next chapter of Stuart Little’s adventure! In a collaborative effort or individual assignments, have your students supply the ending to Stuart’s adventure—or even just the next step in his journey!



When the play ends, Stuart is still searching for Margalo. Do you think he ever finds her?

Pretend you are Margalo. Write a postcard to Stuart telling him about your travels. Draw a picture on the front of the card and write a letter on the back.

Create a daily journal for Margalo describing the places she is visiting. Decide whether she went north or south. Describe her adventures.

Together, as a class, brainstorm possible endings to the play. Then have each student choose an option and write out a 1 - 2 page scene with dialogue. Be sure to include stage directions for the actors.

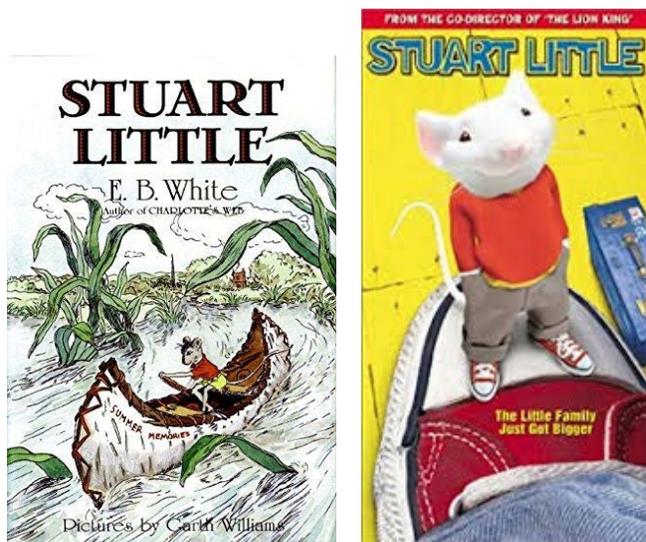
Make a Stuart-sized book about his adventures.

### Discuss:

- How was the play different from the book?
- How was it similar?
- How did the actors look? Was it what you expected?
- Did the actors portray the characters as you thought they would?
- How did the stage look? Was it what you expected?
- How, when, where, and in what creative ways did the artists convey differences in size and scale?
- How did the director’s choice to have the actors play instruments on the stage help to tell the story?

Compare and contrast media:

- How are the book, play, and movie the same? How are they different?



**Read all three of these wonderful books by E.B. White!**

