

A Year with Frog and Toad

a Wheelock Family Theatre Study Guide
prepared by Megan Cooper

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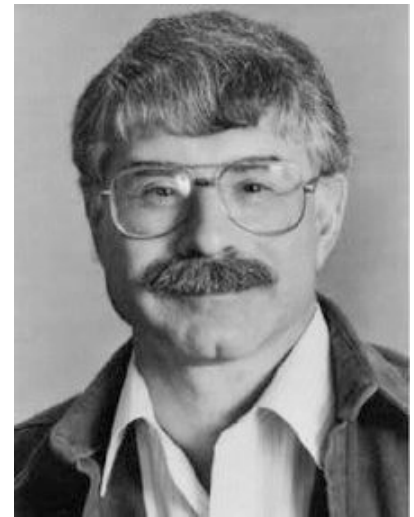
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This study guide has been created for a broad range of young theatregoers. If you have any questions about how to adapt materials specifically for your class, please contact WFT teaching artist and VSA teaching artist fellow Donna Folan at 617.290.1947.

About the Author

Arnold Lobel is the author and illustrator of the beloved *Frog and Toad* children's book series. Lobel was born in 1933 in Los Angeles, California, but was raised in Schenectady, New York. He wrote and illustrated children's books starting in 1962, and his editors convinced him to write an early reader. *Frog and Toad are Friends* was published in 1970 and many others followed. He received the prestigious Newbery Honor Award in 1973 for *Frog and Toad Together*. Known for his lively and rich illustrations, he attended the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York to study art. Of his book *Fables*, the Association of Library Service to Children, ALA said, "The droll illustrations, with tones blended to luminescent shading, are complete and humorous themselves." His work on *Fables*



was awarded the Caldecott Medal in 1981, which distinguishes excellence in children's picture books. Lobel is one of few children's authors to receive both the Caldecott and the Newbery Honor Award. In addition to his own impressive body of work as both author and illustrator (full list provided at the end of this study guide), Lobel provided illustrations for books penned by numerous other children's authors, including Jack Prelutsky.

Lobel was not the only member of his family with great storytelling talent. He married children's author and illustrator, Anita (Kempler) Lobel. Her award-winning memoir *No Pretty Pictures* was a finalist for the National Book Award for Young People's Literature; in it she recalls her early childhood spent in a concentration camp before she and her brother were reunited with their parents by the Swedish Red Cross. Anita and Arnold Lobel worked on two books together, both finalists for the *Boston Globe* Horn Book Award, *On Market Street* and *The Rose in My Garden*. They had two children, Adrienne and Adam. Adrienne Lobel is a theatre producer and Obie Award winning scenic designer. She commissioned the musical version of *A Year with Frog and Toad*, and her then husband Mark Linn-Baker appeared as Toad in the Broadway production. In addition to the musical adaptation of *Frog and Toad*, Adrienne has released archived work of her father's with her own watercolor added to his writings and illustrations in *The Frogs and Toads All Sang* and *Odd Owls and Stout Pigs*. Arnold Lobel died of a heart attack in 1987, yet his collection of stories continues to inspire early readers and young theatre goers with themes of friendship and charming and often funny imagery of animals and the natural world. Of his career, he said, "I cannot think of any work that could be more agreeable and fun than making books for children."

About the Books

The *Frog and Toad* series by Arnold Lobel includes four books: *Frog and Toad are Friends*, *Frog and Toad Together*, *Frog and Toad All Year*, and *Days with Frog and Toad*. The books grew out of stories that Lobel told his daughter, Adrienne Lobel. Each book contains five stories highlighting the friendship between Frog and Toad, their experiences caring for and sharing with one another while living close to nature's wonders and challenges. Every story is simple, often humorous, yet poignantly explores a deeper lesson. For example, *Cookies* tests the will power of Frog and Toad as they take incremental steps to try to stop themselves from eating all of the cookies. In another story, *Alone*, Toad comes to understand that Frog's desire to be alone does not mean that their friendship is over. In each of these stories, Frog and Toad encounter other animals who also help to convey a larger message. In *The Letter*, for example, Snail, exemplifies patience and determination.

Frog and Toad have very different personalities. Frog is optimistic, eager, and independent. Toad is more serious and uptight, and depends greatly on his relationship with Toad and needs more reassurance of its strength. Though they can be an odd couple at times, Frog and Toad ultimately are always willing to go out of their way to show one another they care through giving, sharing, and unending support.



Winding through each story is life on the river and the shifting seasons. Frog is eager for a new Spring season, while Toad is reluctant to wake from his cozy Winter hibernation. The two discover the joys of sledding through Winter's snows, but fear its dangers when Frog trudges to Toad's house in a blizzard. Each season brings its challenges and its pleasures, and Frog and Toad always face them together.

From Page to Stage

Adrianne Lobel knew for some time that she wanted to develop her father's *Frog and Toad* books into a stage musical.

Of all of my father's books, these seemed to lend themselves best to dramatization. Most of his books have one eccentric character, usually an animal of some kind who tends to live alone and has encounters with others but not long relationships. Frog and Toad have the strongest and most developed relationship. There are also four books to pull material from. I envisioned the show as an intimate vaudeville style musical with a jazzy '30s style sound. The songs, like my father's writing, should not condescend to children but should have articulate cleverness and a sophistication that would appeal to children and their parents. I called upon many of my past friends and collaborators to help me realize this vision.

Two of those collaborators were Willie and Robert Reale who wrote the book and lyrics and the music for *A Year with Frog and Toad*. The brothers were skeptical at first because the *Frog and Toad* stories are brief vignettes rather than a connected narrative. However, they recognized the cleverness and sophistication of the characters and their adventures, and agreed to accept the challenge. In adapting the short stories into a full-length musical, Willie Reale said, "Along the way, we found some useful 'runners' like the snail with the mail which helped to glue the show together." Robert Reale was quickly inspired by Adrianne Lobel's "girlhood memory of her father illustrating the beloved amphibians while records from the '30s dropped one by one from the stack on the family phonograph." An eight-piece band was used to achieve a sound similar to the Hal Roach Orchestra, which provided much of the music for the Laurel and Hardy comedies of the 1930s.

A Year with Frog and Toad was workshopped in 2000 at New York Stage and Film at Vassar before it was produced at The Children's Theater of Minneapolis. After sold-out runs, the production moved to Broadway where it ran at The New Victory for 88 performances. It received three Tony nominations: Best Musical, Best Score, and Best Book. Following a national tour, it is now performed regularly by theatres and schools around the country.



The original cast of *A Year with Frog and Toad*; Mark Linn-Baker (Toad), Jay Goede (Frog), and Frank Vlastnik (Snail)

Play Synopsis

Act One

The Birds have come back at the end of winter and are anxiously ready for spring. They look in on Frog and Toad, still in hibernation in their respective beds in their cozy home. In sleep, Frog and Toad dream about their friendship and all they will do in the brand-new year ("A Year With Frog And Toad").

Frog finally wakes to realize it is spring, and therefore time to wake up his friend Toad. Toad is hesitant and, after breaking his alarm clock in anger, tells Frog to wake him up in another month. Frog rips the month off of his calendar and tells Toad that the time has passed ("It's Spring"). Toad finally gets out of bed, and decides that this year he wants to plant a garden; Frog gives him seeds and some advice to help them grow. Toad finishes his planting but quickly becomes impatient when they don't immediately grow. Toad tries yelling at the seeds, but Frog tells him that now they will be afraid to grow. Toad feels bad, so he stays up all night trying other methods to convince the seeds to grow ("Seeds").

Toad falls asleep in front of the garden and when Frog comes to wake him up in the morning, they see the seeds have grown a little. Toad is happy for a moment, but instantly becomes sad when he realizes that it is ten o'clock. He explains to Frog that ten o'clock is when the mail comes but he never gets any mail! Hearing this, Frog excuses himself and goes to write a letter for Toad. He gives it to Snail to mail it for him and Snail sets off on his mission ("The Letter #1").

Eventually, Frog and Toad go to the pond for a swim but when it comes time to swim, Toad asks Frog to turn away while he gets into the water. Frog inquires and Toad explains that he looks funny in a bathing suit. Frog promises not to look until Toad is in the water. When it's time to get out, Turtle comes by and Toad tells Frog to ask her to go away. Frog asks her, but instead she finds this amusing and calls over Lizard and Mouse to see Toad in his bathing suit. After getting cold, Toad decides to get out of the water as the onlookers laugh about him and his suit ("Getta Loada Toad").

The next day, Toad goes to Frog's house to surprise him with lunch but finds that Frog isn't home. There is a note on the door that says he went to the island and wishes to be left alone. Toad worries and goes to the island in search of Frog, during which he falls in the water and ruins lunch, but Frog doesn't mind. Frog explains that he isn't sad, he's happy. He just wanted alone time to reflect on how happy it makes him to be a frog on such a beautiful day ("Alone"). Meanwhile, Snail is still on his way to deliver Frog's letter to Toad and is very happy to be doing the job ("The Letter #2").

Frog and Toad are now at Toad's house preparing dinner. They make cookies for dessert. When they go to try them, however, they can't stop eating them because they are so good! In hopes of stopping, the two tie the cookies in a box...to no avail. They end up giving the rest of the cookies to the birds so that they won't eat all of them by themselves ("Cookies").

Act Two

Frog and Toad are trying to fly a kite, but they can't get it to stay in the air. The birds watch nearby and laugh at their attempts. Toad wants to give up, but Frog continues to encourage him and finally they get the kite to fly ("The Kite").

It's now the end of the summer, and as autumn comes leaves begin to cover the ground ("Leaves: A Year With Frog And Toad"). Frog and Toad decide to secretly rake each other's yard as a favor. They find that it's hard work ("He'll Never Know"). When they are going back home after finishing, squirrels come and mess up the piles of leaves, ruining all the work they've done. They both get home and decide to rake their own yard later, never knowing the good deed they've done for each other ("He'll Never Know [Reprise]").

Later, on a dark and stormy night, Toad heads over to Frog's house. Frog thinks that it's a good night to tell a scary story; Toad is already nervous from the weather, but Frog goes on telling him the story of a young frog who gets separated from his parents and then escapes the clutches of the Large Terrible Frog before it eats him ("Shivers"). Meanwhile, Snail is still making his way to Toad's to deliver Frog's letter ("The Letter #3").

It is now winter, and Frog and Toad are getting ready to sled down a hill though Toad is scared. Frog continues to assure him that it will be okay. Partway down the hill, Frog is thrown from the sled - leaving Toad all alone. Toad doesn't know what to do and accidentally takes the dangerous and bumpy path ("Down The Hill"). Toad eventually makes it to the bottom, but is angry at Frog for making him go sledding. He swears he will never talk to Frog again. Just as Toad is about to leave, Snail appears with his letter from Frog. Toad reads the letter wherein Frog talks about their good friendship and that he cannot be happy unless Toad is happy. Toad decides to talk to Frog again and invites him home for soup.

Snail, having delivered his first letter, feels as though he has finally done something to be proud of ("I'm Coming Out Of My Shell").

It's now Christmas Eve, and Toad is in his kitchen waiting for Frog. He begins to get worried because Frog is late, and starts to think something terrible has happened to him. He goes out in search of Frog ("Toad To The Rescue"). Frog arrives just as Toad is leaving and apologizes for being late, explaining that he was wrapping Toad's present. Toad opens the gift and it seems to be a new clock. Toad tells Frog that Snail is delivering his present and it should be there soon; the two reflect on what a lovely Christmas Eve it is and how glad they are to be together ("Merry Almost Christmas").

It is now almost Spring again. Frog and Toad are in hibernation. The birds return and look in on Frog and Toad dreaming. In their dreams, the two talk about what lovely things they have been thinking about and how excited they are for another new year together ("Finale: A Year With Frog And Toad")

Synopsis from Music Theatre International: <http://mtishows.com/full-synopsis/1285#sthash.dpRkcEzl.dpuf>

Cast of Characters

Frog

Optimistic, eager, and independent. Best friend to Toad.

Toad

Serious and uptight. Dependent on his relationship with his best friend, Frog.

Man Bird and Lady Birds

Quirky, bright-eyed birds who travel together, and join in Frog and Toad's adventures—including eating their discarded cookies.

Mouse

Fun, intelligent, and quick-witted. Mouse enjoys laughing with Turtle in "Getta Load of Toad."

Snail

Slow and steady, and determined. Snail spends a year working diligently to deliver a letter.

Turtle

A gossip. The first to spread the news that Toad looks funny in a bathing suit.

Lizard

Gets caught up in the rumor mill about Toad's bathing suit.

Squirrels

Fast-talking and mischievous, the squirrels play in the leaves and make a mess of Frog and Toad's raking.

Young Frog

The clever young version of Frog defeats his fears and foes in a scary story that will give you the shivers.

Father Frog

The adventurous and well-intentioned father of Frog has trouble with directions in a walk through the woods.

Mother Frog

Frog's loving mother, who worries about what Young Frog may discover lurking in the woods.

Large and Terrible Frog

He's mean and awful, his wrinkly skin is pasty green, he eats little bunnies dipped in dirt, and he likes frog children for dessert.

Moles

Enthusiastic and playful. The moles watch Toad as he careens downhill on his sled, and point out the dangers on his path.

Behind the Scenes

Keep an eye out for these production choices in Wheelock Family Theatre's staging of *A Year with Frog and Toad*. You can explore these ideas further, and try theatre activities on your own, in the "Join the Production Team" section of this study guide.

- The show was written for **an ensemble of five adult actors** playing multiple roles. In WFT's production, **twenty-one children are part of the cast**.
- The **seasons and elements of nature** really do come alive onstage... they're actually **played by actors**. When you see this young ensemble enter onstage, **notice what they're wearing and how they move**.

What can you tell about the time of year, the weather, or the setting based on what they do? Why do you think the director chose to do this?

- The **actors are playing animals**, but they may not look exactly like animals. In fact, the director and **costume** designer aimed for a look that is about 80% human and 20% animal. This ratio is meant to give each actor a **silhouette or shape of the animal** they are playing.

What animal traits do you see in each costume? Look at the color, shape, and texture of what they wear for clues.

- As with their costumes, the **actors will use their bodies and voices to suggest the animal** they are playing rather than doing a complete imitation of the animal.

What kind of movement or energy do the actors playing birds have that is different than the energy of the actor playing turtle? How do the actors playing Frog and Toad alter their voices and movement to suggest who they are?

- The **music** inspires the look and feel of the production. It has a sound similar to music of the **1930s, particularly the Hal Roach Orchestra** which provided musical scoring to **Laurel and Hardy comedies**. Arnold Lobel would listen to music from this time while making the illustrations for the *Frog and Toad* series. Listen to some of this music, or watch a Laurel and Hardy sketch online.

What do you notice is similar in the portrayals of Frog and Toad: in the music, the friendship, the plots, the costumes? Even the performance style is reminiscent of 1930s vaudeville performers.

- The story of the **Large and Terrible Frog** is also inspired by performance styles of old. **Melodrama** sets the tone for Young Frog and his Mother and Father in the woods. Melodrama was popular in the 18th and 19th century, and features **heightened drama with over the top stories and stylized, emotional acting**.

Why do you think the director chose to use this style for this particular part of the story?

Join the *Frog & Toad* Production Team

Director

A director oversees a theatrical production by unifying all different aspects of the design and performances toward an overall vision. Directors do a lot of research and planning, and hold numerous production meetings before beginning rehearsals with actors. Learn more about the role of the director with Mimi Katano, the director of *A Year with Frog and Toad*.

MEET THE DIRECTOR

MIMI KATANO

Did you have previous experience with the *Frog and Toad* stories?

I saw the production of Frog and Toad at Seattle Children's Theatre and some time later, I produced it at Youth Theatre Northwest. I read the books after seeing the show.

What do you like about the *Frog and Toad* stories?

Their simplicities, and sweetness. They remind you of the most important essence of life.



How do you describe the role of a director?

The director is a person who is like a master chef. They collect the most interesting and best ingredients and carefully put it in their magic pot with their unique recipe and cook up a great story to share with people. A good director is a good collaborator, a good listener and a good observer and sensitive to how people think and feel. They have to pay attention to every detail but step back and look at the big picture at the same time. They also have to be a great leader who can be calm and decisive and also put people at ease so that they can play and make the best art. I hope to be such a director one of these days.

What is most exciting to you about directing this musical?

As far as the show itself, I am very excited because the style of music is very much in my taste. I also love the vaudeville feel of the show--anything that has to do with physical theatre (like portraying animals, dancing, physical comedy) is my background and in my wheel house.

As for this specific production, it has a special meaning to me because I was an actor for more than ten years at this theatre, and I get to work on the show with some of my old friends. To make it even better, my former student from Youth Theatre Northwest is also in the cast and I am bringing my Musical Director from Seattle, who I love. So it is a mix of my two worlds and I couldn't be happier. And working with a cast of adult and child actors is a wonderful learning experience.

What is your favorite scene in *A Year with Frog and Toad*?

I have several:

- The scene where Toad is self conscious about the way he looks in his bathing suit and because he makes a fuss about it, it blows up into a huge thing.
- The scene when they rake each other's yard (I really like that song).
- The sled scene.
- And the cookie song. It makes me think of my husband and my daughter who both LOVE sweets.

What's challenging about directing actors to play animals? How do you overcome that challenge?

For me, it's always about not making the easy, obvious choice both in directing the actors and design. I like to respect the intelligence of the audience (whatever the age) and trust that they can fill the gap in their imagination. So what I like to do is to figure out the biggest characteristics of that particular animal both from the script and in the real life and put it into their attitude, personality, and physicality. And I prefer it if the costume was not so literal but can give a hint of that animal. It's more interesting.

How do you balance between letting an actor express themselves and grow as an actor and maintaining your vision for the production?

I think a lot of directing is in the casting. If you find the right people who fit your vision, you should be able to guide them and let them do their thing.

Describe your process working with the Music Director, designers, and other members of the production team?

I think of my MD as my co-pilot. I like to go through the score with them and understand what is important in the music from their perspective. Their opinion is vital in the casting process, though ultimately, it all has to be under the director's vision. I do my own choreography and in doing that, I have to make sure that the actors are not doing something physically impossible if they have to sustain a note, etc. A good director will help the actors sing better by helping them to find the intent of the song, and a good MD will help fine tune the sound so they can act with confidence. It is the single most important team work in musicals. I am very fortunate to have Heather MacLaughlin Garbes on this show because she is also from Seattle and we have worked on several shows together and really know how we both work. That only serves the show.

What else would you like the audience to know about this production?

This show was written for 5 actors. So aside from Frog and Toad, everyone else was played by 3 actors. WFT wanted to include a couple more adult actors as well as youth actors so I divided up the roles differently and added the Seasons. I thought that having youth actors play different seasons would be really charming and adds to the show nicely.

What feelings or ideas do you want the audience to experience as they watch *A Year with Frog and Toad*?

That there is a lot of good in this world. We have to always remember and hold onto that good stuff. Be kind and caring and thoughtful and loyal to people you love.

What question would you like to ask children in the audience after they've seen *A Year with Frog and Toad*?

Are you more of a Frog or Toad? Do you have a best friend? What do you like to do for them? What do you like that they do for you?

Lighting Designer

Explore light, shadow, and color to create the many seasons and moods in the world of the play.

- Moonlight and sunlight show the passage of hours. How does a lighting designer create this?
- How do elements of nature affect the light from season to season? For example, how would the light differ in the summer when there are leaves overhead to winter when the trees are bare? How could a lighting designer try to show that onstage?
- How does the use of color create mood? What kind of color would you use to light the scene where Frog tells Toad a scary story? What would the light be like on Frog and Toad cozy inside on a dark and windy night compared with the light on the actors acting out Frog's scary story on a different part of the stage?

Props Designer

A Year with Frog and Toad incorporates the use of hand props to help tell the story. Hand props are usually considered to be any inanimate object that an actor carries on or takes off the stage. Some of the props present some unique challenges. For example:

- Cookies: At the end of Act One, Frog and Toad share a lot of cookies. What questions should the props designers consider when making an edible prop? Or should they be edible at all? Will the actors really want to eat that many cookies over and over, and at the same time they have to sing a song?
- Kite: In Act Two, Frog and Toad fly a kite, but it has several unsuccessful flights before it takes off. How does the props designer create a kite that can fly and not fly exactly when it needs to?

Lighting & Props Working Together

Explore shadow by making your own Large and Terrible Frog shadow puppet like the puppet seen onstage in Act Two of *A Year with Frog and Toad* using the activity pages in this study guide. Why do you think the production team chose to use a shadow puppet to portray this character from Frog's story? How would the lighting designer, props designer, and the scenic designer collaborate to create this effect? See page 23 for this activity.

Learn more about shadow puppetry by researching this ancient tradition with a long history in East Asia.

Scenic Designer

Designers research the setting of a play to inspire their set design. Here are a few suggestions:

- Learn about wetland areas surrounding rivers and ponds. The Biodiversity in the Wetlands lesson plans in this study guide are a great place to start. See page 15.
- Look at illustrations and photographs in books and stories depicting the wetlands. What colors, shapes, and textures do you see?
- Visit a wetland area to make your own observations about the plants and animals that live there. How do the animals interact with the land and vegetation? Where do they nest, burrow, eat, play, and rest?
- Read or listen to the descriptions of the places in the *Frog and Toad* series or other stories or poems taking place in the wetlands.
- What images come to mind? Draw or paint what you imagine.
- Create a three-dimensional set design for one of the places in the story.
- Compare and contrast how the settings in *Frog and Toad* would change through each season in the year. How, as a scenic designer, could you show this transformation?

This is a story about friendship. Frog and Toad's friendship is bound to the natural landscape around them. Together, they enjoy its pleasures and overcome its obstacles. Try thinking of the landscape as a character that effects their friendship. How could you, as a set designer, create a feeling of a living, changing world while only having one stage?

MEET THE SCENIC DESIGNER

MATTHEW T. LAZURE

Did you have previous experience with the *Frog and Toad* stories?

No, I hadn't. I purchased an anthology of the stories to catch myself up. In addition, I watched some wonderful stop animation versions that were released in the mid 80's.

What do you like about the *Frog and Toad* stories?

I enjoy the simplicity of the stories, as well as the friendship and concern the two main characters display for each other.

How do you describe the role of a scenic designer?

My job is to work with the director and the design team (costumes, lights, props, sound) to attempt to tell the story in the most honest and engaging way. My focus is on scenery and making sure that the environment is one that is easy to navigate and suits the needs of the



director and actors who will interact with it, as well as being interesting, aesthetic, or evocative to look at and interact with.

What is most exciting to you about designing the scenery for this musical?

For this production, I was most excited about researching and honoring the original artwork from the Frog and Toad book series. Arnold Lobel both wrote the books and illustrated them and they have a real pure simplicity that was fun to interpret and find inspiration from.

What is your favorite scene in *A Year with Frog and Toad*?

I love the scenes with Snail; his optimism and fortitude is infectious as are his songs.

What was the greatest challenge in the production process?

The greatest challenge for me is always getting pen to paper. Often, I will mull over ideas in my head for weeks before making sketches; working out paths, look, feel, and texture of the world I'm creating. Once I've started sketching and making decisions on paper, the world I'd only been thinking about takes physical form and the process becomes much easier to realize.

***Frog and Toad* has a lot of settings, seasons, and moods. How do you portray the inside of Toad's house, the swimming pond in Summer, a scary forest with an even scarier frog, or flying a kite in the Fall in a single space? What kind of considerations do you have to make to achieve many different scenic looks on one stage?**

I prefer to keep your specific questions unanswered because I believe part of the journey of live theatre is finding out those answers live onstage and I would hate to give away all the tricks. Speaking generally, moving scenery, creative dramatics, expressive lighting, props, costumes, and other elements together help to establish setting, season, and mood once combined with the audience's imagination.

Describe your process working with the director, other designers, and members of the production team?

I met first with the director, Mimi Katano, and lighting designer, Craig Zemsky to discuss the overall "feel" of the show. We had each read the script and brought ideas to the table to discuss. The production and design teams came together later in production meetings in collaboration to expand on these ideas and hone the look and feel of the show. Designers presented their completed designs for approval to the group and fabrication began.

What else would you like the audience to know about this production?

I've designed shows for both of the leads in this production, Larry Coen and Neil Casey and I think the casting is just perfect; I'm really looking forward to seeing them together on stage. I'm equally excited to see Gary Ng as the Snail; he's been a longtime actor at WFT and he will "knock it out of the ballpark."

What feelings or ideas do you want the audience to experience as they watch *A Year with Frog and Toad*?

For the adults in the audience, who grew up with the books, I hope to evoke a sense of nostalgia and warmth. For children who will visit Frog and Toad's world for the first time or who are reading the books in preparation for seeing the production, I hope to provide a sense of wonder and engagement in the narrative.

What question would you like to ask children in the audience after they've seen *A Year with Frog and Toad*?

I would be curious about the similarities/differences they notice from the original books. I would also be interested in what, if anything surprised them about the set. I would also want to know which characters they related to the most, and why.

Actor

Actors have a lot to consider as they create a character: their personality traits, emotional state of being, relationships, and motivations, as well as how they move onstage. The actors in *A Year with Frog and Toad* have to decide all of these things with the added challenge of playing an animal.

- Observe the real animal. Visit the zoo, a park, a hiking trail or place where you can find the animal you wish to play. You can also find a video or photos of the animal online or in the library. Watch how this animal moves, rests, plays, eats, and sleeps. Listen to the sounds they make. Which of these movements, facial expressions, or sounds can you mimic or embody yourself? Does the animal have a sort of “attitude” or “energy” that you can express using your body or voice?
- Sometimes an actor will play an animal in a human-like way. This is called *anthropomorphism*. For example, if an actor is playing a snake, they may find a way to move in a slinky, slithery way without actually laying on their stomach and pretending to have the body of snake. Dancer and choreographer Bob Fosse gives a great example in the film *The Little Prince* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyALCd9SrgY>).
- How might you suggest an animal in the way you move and vocalize onstage? Create a still physical image and a movement for an animal that is a complete imitation, then try pulling back and creating a mere suggestion of the animal. Add sound: start by mimicking their actual sound, then try speaking a line of text while making suggestions of that animal sound. In what other ways can you imbue a character with an animal’s personality or energy?
- Make sure these are actions and vocalizations that are repeatable. If you’re onstage a long time, you don’t want to trap yourself into an uncomfortable or tiring set of movements and vocalizations that are hard to sustain or could even cause injury.
- Demonstrate your *anthropomorphized* animal to your classmates. Demonstrate a few simple actions: try to get someone’s attention, look for something you misplaced, move across the room, etc. Ask students to provide *objective* observations about what they saw (e.g. Alice used short, jerky movements whenever she turned her head; Alice kept her arms stretched out really wide whenever she lifted them). Then ask students to provide *subjective* observations (Alice’s head movements made her seem small and skittish; Alice’s arms reminded me of flapping wings). Then ask students to guess what animal is being portrayed. A bird!
- When you read a book, there are many ways the author lets you know what the characters are thinking and feeling. While reading the *Frog and Toad* books, note what you believe each character is feeling and thinking.

- When watching the play, take note of the way the actors say their lines (expression), their facial reactions, and their body movements to let the audience know how their character is feeling.
- It is the actor's job to think about how the character changes from the beginning of the play until the end. Think about what events cause the character to change his or her beliefs or perspective. Or does the character not change at all?

Music Director

A music director is responsible for the vocal and music elements of a musical or play. He or she may lead music rehearsals, hire musicians, and even conduct a band or orchestra. It's important for the music director to be familiar with the style of music being performed.

- Listen to the soundtrack of *A Year with Frog and Toad*. What kind of mood does the music lend the story? Does any of the music reflect qualities of the characters? What does the music tell you about when and where the story is taking place?
- Listen to music that inspired the composer of *A Year with Frog and Toad*. This includes music by the Hal Roach Orchestra and other music from the 1930s (suggested recordings listed in the Resources section of this study guide). What similarities do you hear between this music and the score for the musical? What instruments are being used? How is the rhythm and mood similar?
- Try creating your own composition using Arnold Lobel's poem *The Frogs and Toads All Sang*. Use classroom instruments or even your own body to create a rhythm. Make up a simple melody for the poetic lines and put them all together.

The Frogs and Toads All Sang by Arnold Lobel

*"We're going to have a party,"
The frogs and toads all sang.
"We've got lemonade with ice cubes
And paper lamps to hang."
The ladies wore long dresses,
And the gentlemen wore pants.
The orchestra was ready,
So they all began to dance.
They danced in the meadow.
They danced in the street.
They danced in the lemonade
Just to cool their feet.*

Costume Designer

A costume designer has to dress characters in ways that show who they are, where they're located, and when in history they are living, and to use colors and textures of fabric that work well under bright theatre lights. He or she may have to build a costume from scratch or piece things together from existing items in the wardrobe.

- Draw a sketch of one or more of the characters from *A Year with Frog and Toad*. Consider the physical and personal traits of that particular character.
- Look at Arnold Lobel's original illustrations for the *Frog and Toad* books. How might they inspire a costume design?
- How would you choose to design a costume for an animal character? Would you create a realistic animal costume or design something that suggests each animal's qualities? How could you use color, patterns, and texture of fabric to help portray each animal's traits?
- Design a costume for the character. Explain your design ideas—what does the color stand for? How does each costume choice reveal something about the character: rich or poor, young or old, kind or cruel?

Playwright

A playwright will often write an original story, but *A Year with Frog and Toad* is an adaptation of the four *Frog and Toad* books. Try these writing activities to create your own adaptation.

- Choose one of the *Frog and Toad* stories to adapt for live performance. Include a dialogue (a conversation between two or more characters) and a monologue (a speech delivered by one character that expresses their inner thoughts and feelings).
- How is writing a script different from writing a story?
- Perform the play for your classmates or family members.

Theatre Reviewer

Theatre reviewers write summaries and opinions of plays, musicals, and other live performances. Their thoughts help people decide if a performance sounds interesting to go see, and they also contribute to larger conversations about how a piece of theatre may speak to issues in a community or how it fits into our culture as a whole.

Reflect on what you experienced in the theatre when you saw *A Year with Frog and Toad*.

- What surprised you the most about this play?
- What was your favorite part of the play? How did you feel when you experienced it?
- Was there a moment in the play that made you think differently about something? Describe your experience.
- Who was your favorite character? Why?
- Using your responses to the questions above, write a review of *A Year with Frog and Toad*.



Explore *A Year with Frog and Toad*

Pre- and Post-performance lesson plans for the classroom or the home

Biodiversity in the Wetlands

Duration: Two class sessions of 30 - 40 minutes • Grades 3 - 5

STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO

1. Identify and name the natural features of a wetland environment
2. Define and describe the function of wetlands as a natural water purification system and habitat with great biodiversity
3. Demonstrate deeper understanding of the connections and dependencies between different components of a wetland ecosystem

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. Why are wetland ecosystems important?
2. How do wetlands support the health of our water systems, and our planet?
3. How do humans rely on the wetlands, and what is our role in supporting healthy wetland ecosystems?

Activity Preparation:

Supplies:

Day 1

1. Reading materials and images of wetland ecosystems (resource recommendations provided on next page)
2. Wetland ecosystem worksheets (provided)
3. Definitions of different wetland ecosystems for teacher to read/share with students during a game
4. Large pads of paper, or whiteboard space enough for 3 - 5 teams of students to draw on simultaneously
5. Markers

Day 2

1. Reading materials and images of wetland ecosystem components (plants, animals, etc.; use recommended resources)
2. Name tags or picture cards identifying ecosystem components (soil, sun, water, worm, fish, hawk, fox, heron, rabbit, algae, cattails, duckweed, etc.)
3. Ball of yarn or string

Resources for Lesson Activities, Images, Videos, and Background Information

- <http://www.fs.fed.us/outdoors/naturewatch/implementation/Curricula/DU-Wetland-Teacher-Guide.PDF>
- http://wetlandslive.pwnet.org/resource/wetland_ecology.php
- <http://www.ngwa.org/Fundamentals/teachers/Pages/Lesson-Plans.aspx>
- <http://education.nationalgeographic.org/archive/xpeditions/lessons/16/g35/freshwater35.html>
- <http://www.nwrc.usgs.gov/topics/wetlands/wetlandsInfo.htm>

Activity:

Day 1

Discover Wetlands Ecosystems • Wetland Pictionary

1. Review the definition of a wetland, and the different varieties of wetlands. Provide examples of each type. Excellent definitions, images, and videos are available in the links provided above.
2. Select a number of wetland types to be used in the game and provide students with a definitions page that briefly describes each one. Ask students to review them independently before breaking into teams.
3. Divide the students into two or three teams and explain that they will be playing a game with definitions. One student from each team will come forward to be the first player. The instructor will give each player a definition to read through (the same definition for each player). The student will then draw an image that represents the wetland type, in order for the remaining team members to make a guess as to what wetland type it is. Encourage students to use their drawings to focus on features such as: Freshwater vs. saltwater; The types of plants in and around the wetland; Whether water flows in/out of the wetland
4. The instructor can award points to the teams in one of two ways. The teams can call out their answers during play and the first team that is correct earns a point. Alternatively, each round of play can be limited to a time period (1-2 minutes) and then give the teams time to consult with one another to come to a consensus.
5. As the lesson concludes, review the types of wetland habitats with the students and emphasize that they are similar yet different in their physical features.

Extensions

1. Ask students to research a wetland type using the library, internet or other resources and create a diagram, drawing, or three dimensional diorama identifying its unique characteristics. Present work to another class and have students lead their peers in the Wetland Pictionary game.
2. Visit a wetland near your school and create a photo-journal or film about its features and share it on social media. Find wetlands in your area:
<http://maps.massgis.state.ma.us/images/dep/omv/wetviewer.htm>
3. Connect to *Frog and Toad* by sketching or painting a set design for *A Year with Frog and Toad* based on knowledge and understanding of wetland environments.

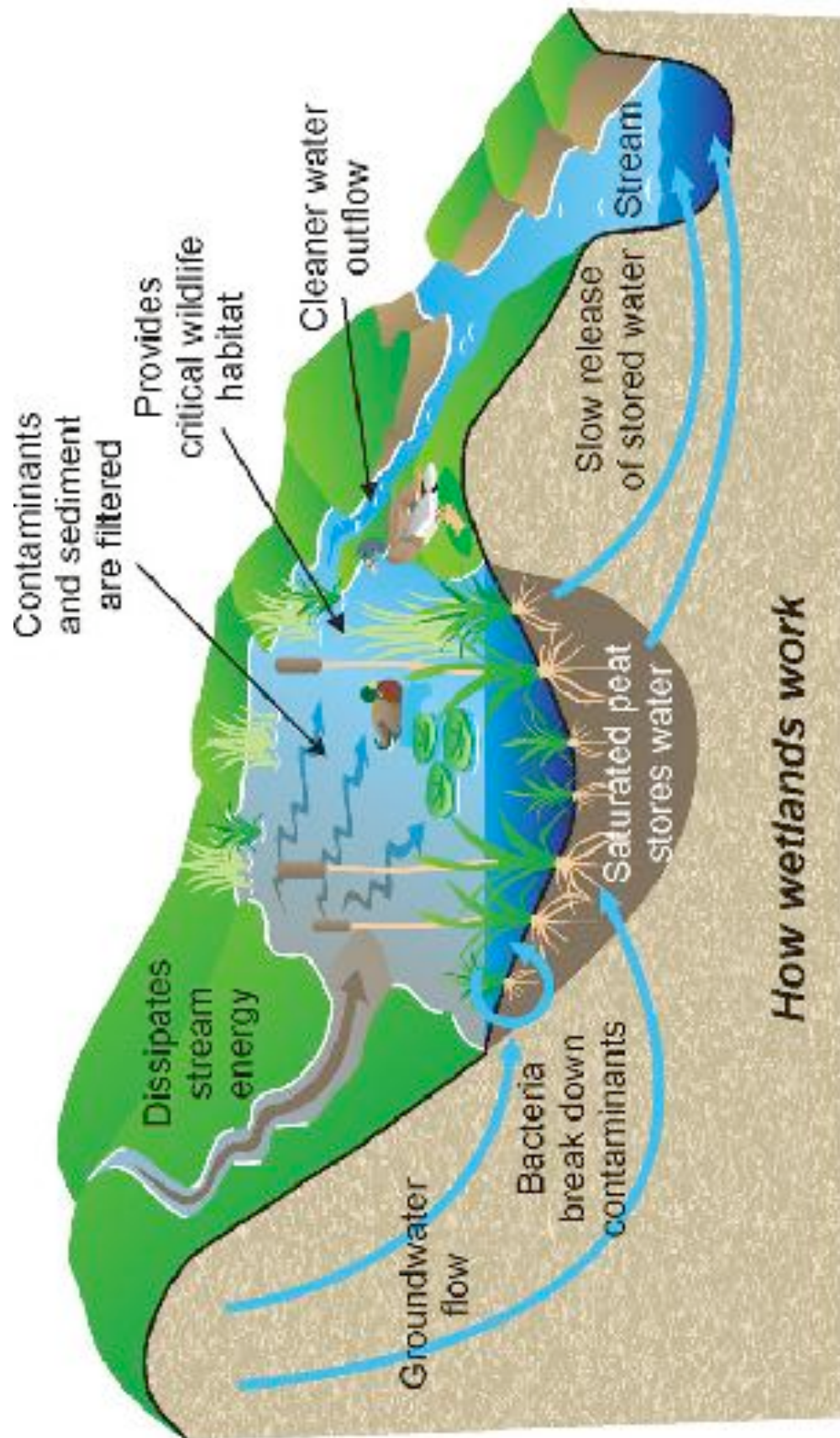
Day 2

Biodiversity & Ecosystem Components • Web of Life

1. Review the components of a wetland ecosystem. Provide examples of plants, animals, and other components. Discuss how these components work together in food cycles and food chains. Excellent definitions, images, and videos are available in the links provided below.
2. Provide each student with a name tag or picture card identifying one of the ecosystem components (soil, sun, water, worm, fish, hawk, fox, heron, rabbit, algae, cattails, duckweed, etc.)
3. Arrange students into a circle to represent the ecosystem. Start by making a few simple food chains with the yarn. For example: Start the end of the yarn with the student playing “algae.” Who eats algae? A snail, connect the ball of yarn to snail, and so on. Try a few different food chains.
4. Now form a web. Starting with any one component, use the ball of string to connect the component to another related component. The relationship may be that the second component eats the first (e.g., plant connected to rabbit.) Or, the relationship may be that the first component needs the second to survive (e.g., plant connected to soil).
5. Connect the second component to a third (e.g., rabbit eaten by fox, or rabbit needs water). Continue in this way until everyone is connected to several people in several ways. As you go along, discuss what each connection or relationship is. Also, discuss interdependence.
6. Once everyone is connected, remove one component of the web (e.g., there is no water because it was drained). The water person shakes his or her strings. All members who feel the shake then shake their strings as well. This continues until it's demonstrated that every component is affected. Discuss how the various components are affected when one component of the web is removed.
7. What would happen if a chemical spill destroyed all the plants (plants tug their strings)? The plant eaters would starve, which would cause the meat eaters to starve. The web would be destroyed — at least temporarily.

Extensions

1. Ask students to research a specific wetland ecosystem component using the library, internet or other resources and create a poster or PowerPoint presentation about that component (animal, plant, etc.) and its role in the ecosystem. Present work to classmates.
2. Create a web between the characters from *A Year with Frog and Toad* based on knowledge and understanding of wetland ecosystems. Ask students to imagine themselves as one of the characters from the musical and write or improvise a monologue in which they tell another character about their role/job in the wetlands.
3. Start a class conservation project. Wetland Protection Information for Massachusetts: <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/massdep/water/watersheds/wetlands-protection.html>



Snail Mail: Writing Letters

Duration: Two class sessions of 30 - 40 minutes

STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO

1. Identify the components of the Friendly Letter format
2. Compose a friendly letter
3. Track locations on a map
4. Calculate letter response time

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. We now often communicate instantly with others using brief phrases and emoticons on social media and in text messages. What are the benefits of being able to communicate so quickly? Are there any drawbacks?
2. Why might it be important to know how to communicate using a long-form friendly letter to be sent via email or through the postal service?
3. To whom might you send a friendly letter?
4. What kind of news or information would you want to communicate in a friendly letter?

Activity Preparation:

Supplies:

1. Paper, Pens, Pencils
2. Word processor and printer, if letters are to be typed
3. Envelopes
4. Stamps
5. Map of the United States
6. Pushpins or small stickers
7. Ball of yarn or string

Activity:

Day 1

Understanding Friendly Letters

1. Provide students with some examples of friendly letters. The link below shows friendly letters written by children to presidents. Many other examples of historical letters are available online.

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/presidency/5a2d.html#>

Brief Discussion: How do you keep in touch with people that you don't see regularly? Does anyone in class receive or write friendly letters (or emails)? Who do you correspond with— family that lives far away, a friend that's moved, a famous person you admire? On what occasions do you write/receive letters (birthdays, holidays, etc)? If you don't write or receive letters, what do you do instead? What would be different about using a letter to communicate with someone? Would it be surprising or special to write/receive a piece of "snail mail" today? Why? For what reasons are friendly/personal letters still written?

2. Discuss and demonstrate the components of a friendly letter.

<http://www.letterwritingguide.com/friendlyletterformat.htm>

3. Explain that you are going to begin a mail race, where each student will write to a student in a different part of the country, and see which letters return the fastest. Using a large map of the United States that can be posted on a wall, ask students to select a city and state where they would like to send their personal letter. Have each student select a different location so that you have letters going to a wide variety of places. Mark your school's location with a pushpin.
4. Create a brainstorm list of the kinds of things you would like to share in your letter and what questions you would like to ask the recipient.

Extensions

1. Ask students to find a letter by an historic person using the library, internet, or other resource. Imagine that you were the recipient of the letter and write a reply. Keep in mind to whom you are writing and his or her relationship with the recipient you are pretending to be and match the tone in your writing— you would write differently to your mother than you would to the president or a friend.
2. Connect to *A Year with Frog and Toad* by writing a letter to one of the characters. Or as Frog did for Toad, write a letter to your best friend, and tell them what their friendship means to you.

Day 2**Writing a Friendly Letter for a Snail Mail Race**

1. Ask students to look up online (or the teacher could supply these) the name and address of a principal at a school in the city and state they selected. Students should write a personal letter to the principal, explain that they are participating in a mail race and ask if he or she would pass the letter on to a responsible student who would write back quickly. Continue the letter by sharing personal details and asking questions for the student to answer in his or her reply.
2. Ask students to address and stamp the envelopes for the letters to be mailed.
3. As reply letters arrive, place a new pushpin in the city/state from which they originated and use a piece of yarn or string to connect it with your location. *Students may wish to send two letters to increase their chances of getting a reply.

Extensions

1. Ask students to reply to the letters they receive, and see if they can establish a pen pal relationship. Ask students to “introduce” their pen pal to the class, by sharing what they’ve learned about their pen pal and what they’ve learned about the place their pen pal lives.
2. If any students speak multiple languages, extend the letter writing race to other countries where their other known language is spoken. Take the Snail Mail race international! From how far away can your class get a response?

Make a Newspaper Seedling Pot

In the story *The Garden*, Frog gives Toad some seeds to plant a garden. Toad is so eager to see the seeds grow that he becomes very worried and goes to great lengths caring for them when they don't sprout right away. It certainly is an exercise in patience to grow a plant from seed, but the reward of smelling a fragrant flower or tasting a flavorful vegetable that you've grown yourself is second to none.

You don't need a big outdoor space to start a garden of your own. Follow the instructions below to make your own seedling pot small enough to fit on a window sill.

You'll need a tin can, newspaper, seeds, potting soil, water

- Step 1** Fold a sheet of newspaper into thirds so that is approximately 1 - 2 inches longer than the length of the tin can.
- Step 2** Set the can on top of the end of newspaper so that the edge of the can is lined up with the edge of the newspaper.
- Step 3** Roll the newspaper around the can, and fold the long edges over the bottom.
- Step 4** Press the can down on top of the folded side to deepen the creases, and use a small piece of tape to close the bottom of the pot.
- Step 5** Remove the can from the newspaper pot. Fill with soil, plant and water according to seed instructions.

For more details: <http://dabblesandbabbles.com/how-to-make-newspaper-seedling-pots/>



Tips from Toad

Place your seedling pot on a small plate to catch excess water that may leak through the newspaper.

If you plant a good kitchen herb, like basil or parsley, you can leave the plant in the kitchen, trimming only the largest, outer leaves as you need them, leaving the rest to grow.

When it's time to move your plant to a larger space, you can leave the seedling in the newspaper pot and plant it straight in the ground. The newspaper will decompose.

Make Cookies—and a Plan for Sharing

In the story *Cookies*, Toad brings Frog a batch of cookies to share. They realize before too long that they are both having trouble restraining themselves from eating too many cookies all at once. Frog and Toad struggle with temptation and willpower even as they try to make the cookies more difficult to get by putting obstacles in their way. In the end, Frog throws the cookies outside for the birds. By sharing them, they don't eat too many cookies.

Read *Cookies* in *Frog and Toad Together*, or review the cookies scene and song from *A Year with Frog and Toad*. Take note of the ways Frog and Toad tried to stop themselves from eating cookies. What worked, and what didn't work? What would you do differently?

Bake a batch of your favorite cookies.

Create a plan for sharing the cookies or using good will power. Use the questions below to help create your plan.

How many cookies will you make?

Check the yield of your cookie recipe; how many does the recipe make? Compare the yield to the number of people who will be eating the cookies—do you need to make a full recipe? Could you halve the recipe, or do you need to double it?



What's the occasion, why are you making the cookies and when are you eating them?

If you make cookies, or another sweet treat, for a special occasion or celebration it can be easier to have good will power because there's often other party food to eat and more people to share with. When you're making cookies "just because" or to have something to do on a rainy day, it can be harder to set limits for yourself. When you're home with a full cookie jar, try to think about small special occasions you can create to enjoy just one or two cookies at a time: coming home from school, having a friend over, finishing a project or chore, after going for a walk, enjoying for dessert, or sharing with a family member. Instead of thinking about how many cookies you're eating, think about when and why you're eating them. How many mini occasions can you create and celebrate with only one batch of cookies? This might help you from wanting to eat them all at once.

What other times do you need to use will power?

While you enjoy one of those cookies, think about other times you need to use will power. Are there other things that you have to try to control the urge to do too much of? What about things that you don't really want to do, but need to work hard to get through?

Create a Large and Terrible Frog Shadow Puppet

On a cold, dark night Frog tells Toad a scary story while the wind is howling through the trees. Frog thinks it's fun to get the shivers. Toad can't tell whether or not the story is true. What do you think? Do you like hearing spooky stories? What is fun about being scared sometimes? Is it scarier to know that a spooky story really did or did not happen, or is it scarier if it's uncertain?

In this production of *A Year with Frog and Toad*, the Large and Terrible Frog is represented by a shadow puppet. Follow the instructions below to create your own shadow puppet.

You'll need shadow puppet template (provided), scissors, a hole punch, 5 craft brads, 4 1/8th inch diameter wooden dowels or craft sticks, masking tape

- Step 1** Print the template onto card-stock or other sturdy paper and cut out all six pieces of the frog's body.
- Step 2** Cut out the black interior areas on each piece (eyes, mouth, and leg spots). Ask an adult for help.
- Step 3** Use a hole punch to punch out each white dot and attach the four legs and head to the circular body with the craft brads. When your frog is assembled the frog's arms, legs, and head should rotate when you move them.
- Step 4** For a simple shadow puppet, attach a single craft stick to the body of the frog using masking tape. To move the frog's legs independently, attach a long 1/8th inch dowel to each leg so that you can move them without your hands being visible in the shadow.

Make a Shadow Puppet Theatre

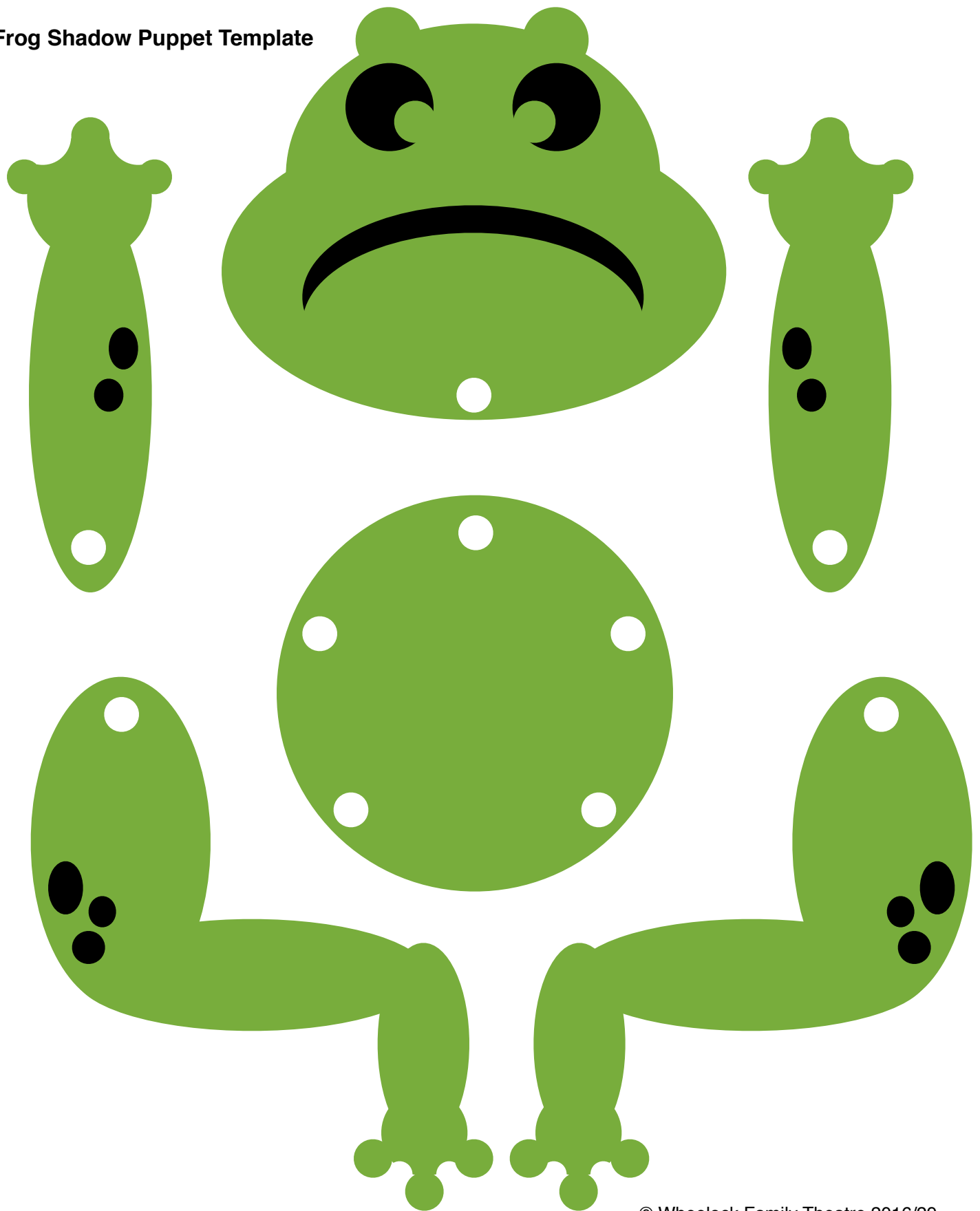
There are a number of ways to create a shadow puppet theatre, and you can find many resources online, but in the simplest version you will only need a small desk lamp

You'll need a desk lamp, an empty wall space

Aim lamp toward wall, and position the puppet between lamp and wall. What happens to the shadow when the puppet is moved closer and then further away from the light source? Recreate Frog's scary story with your own depiction of the Large and Terrible Frog. Create a character profile using the worksheet provided and improvise new lines. Or invent a scary (or not so scary) story of your own!



Frog Shadow Puppet Template



Large and Terrible Frog Character Profile

Name (of frog):

Age:

Family:

Where Do You live?:

Favorite Color:

Least Favorite Color:

Best Lunch You've Had:

Worst Lunch You've Had:

Favorite Thing to Do:

Least Favorite Thing to Do:

Greatest Want:

Greatest Fear:

Where Do You Feel The Most Safe:

Biggest Secret:

Best Friend:

Worst Enemy:



Reading & Resources

BOOKS BY ARNOLD LOBEL

Prince Bertram the Bad (1963)
Giant John (1964)
Lucille (1964)
The Bears of the Air (1966)
Martha the Movie Mouse (1966)
*The Comic Adventures of
Old Mother Hubbard and Her Dog* (1968)
*The Great Blueness and
Other Predicaments* (1968)
Small Pig (1969)
*Ice-Cream Cone Coot, and
Other Rare Birds* (1971)
*On the Day Peter Stuyvesant
Sailed Into Town* (1971)
Owl at Home (1975)
Grasshopper on the Road (1978)
A Treeful of Pigs (1979)
Fables (1980)
Uncle Elephant (1981)
Ming Lo Moves the Mountain (1982)
The Book of Pigericks: Pig Limericks (1983)
The Rose in My Garden (1984)
Whiskers & Rhymes (1985)
Odd Owls & Stout Pigs: A Book of Nonsense (2009)

Frog and Toad series

Frog and Toad Are Friends (1970)
Frog and Toad Together (1972)
Frog and Toad All Year (1976)
Days with Frog and Toad (1979)

Mister Muster series

A Zoo for Mister Muster (1962)
A Holiday for Mister Muster (1963)

Mouse series

Mouse Tales (1972)
Mouse Soup (1977)

Color by Adrienne Lobel

The Frogs and Toads All Sang
(2009)

MUSIC & LISTENING

A Year with Frog and Toad (Original Cast Recording), 2004
The Best of Laurel & Hardy's Music Box, Ronnie Hazlehurst & His Orchestra, 2009
On to the Show (The Original Music from the Hal Roach Comedies), The Beau Hunks
Orchestra, 1995

FURTHER READING & RESOURCES

Lobel and His Family

http://www.parents-choice.org/article.cfm?art_id=35

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arnold_Lobel

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anita_Lobel

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adrienne_Lobel

***A Year with Frog and Toad* Articles and Reviews**

<http://www.playbill.com/features/article/tony-nominated-reale-brothers-talk-about-frog-and-toad-113454>

<http://americantheatre.org/recipients/robert-and-willie-reale/>

<http://www.playbill.com/news/article/a-year-with-frog-and-toad-a-musical-for-families-leaps-to-bways-cort-april--112399>

http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/2003/05/12_newsroom_ctctony/?refid=0

http://www.theatermania.com/new-york-city-theater/news/07-2012/photo-flash-the-broadway-work-of-tony-award-winner_59460.html

http://www.theatermania.com/new-york-city-theater/reviews/04-2003/a-year-with-frog-and-toad_3379.html

http://www.theatermania.com/new-york-city-theater/news/04-2003/frankly-frank_3397.html