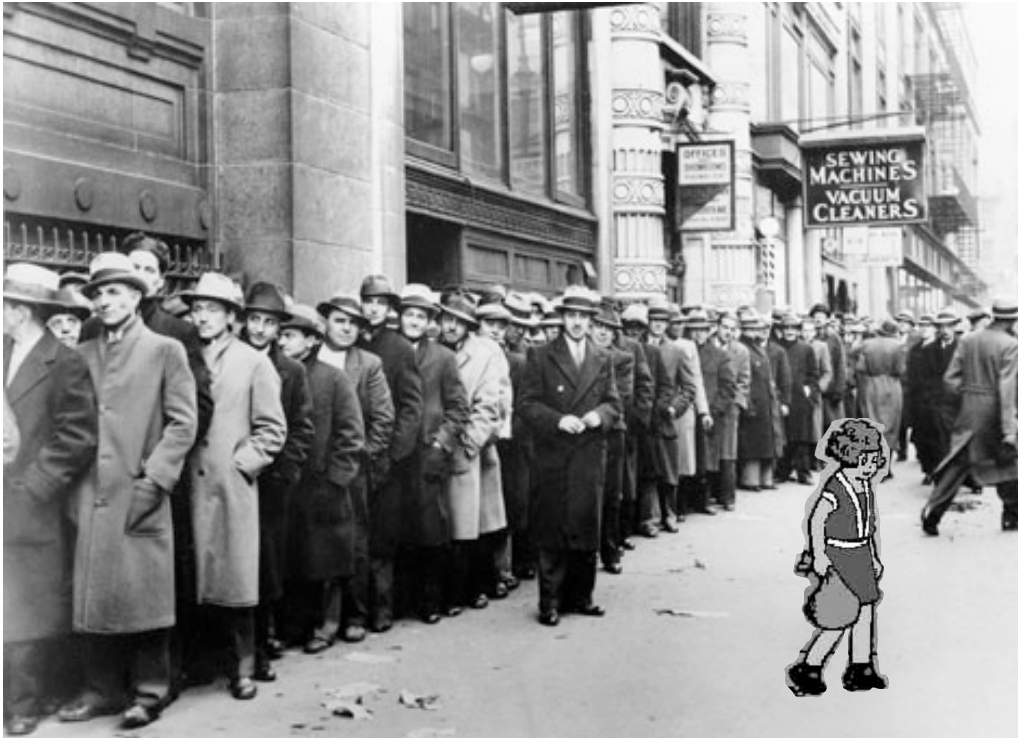


# Annie

Book by Thomas Meehan  
Music by Charles Strouse  
Lyrics by Martin Charnin



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## A Wheelock Family Theatre Study Guide

Prepared By: Nick Vargas

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Wheelock Family Theatre - 200 The Riverway - Boston, MA 02215  
Box Office: 617-879-2300 - [www.wheelockfamilytheatre.org](http://www.wheelockfamilytheatre.org)

## A NOTE ...

Welcome to the study guide for *Annie*! This packet of information and activities is to act as a supplement for pre- and post-show discussion for Wheelock Family Theatre's production of *Annie*. Our hope is that you take advantage of exploring the many themes, ideas, people, and places presented in our production with your students. Although this study guide is comprehensive we have provided a list of resources from which we've pulled our information and encourage you to explore them as well. Finally, we hope you find the study guide to be interesting, enlightening, and FUN!

*Annie* is one of the best known and most often performed musicals today, yet our production, and this study guide, focuses on America in 1933. Real people, orphans, millionaires, and everyone in between were forced to survive in one of the darkest times in our history. Yet, one little girl found the courage to keep her chin up and find the silver lining in every cloud. We hope you and your students will see that the sun always does come out tomorrow.

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## WHERE DID ANNIE BEGIN?

### LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE

A daily comic strip created by **Harold Gray**

First appearance in the *New York News* - Monday, August 5, 1924

March 1976 - Final comics were written, 8 years after Harold Gray's death

The comic strip followed the adventures and misadventures of an 11-year-old orphan girl, Annie, who was soon joined in the strip by her life-time companion Oliver Warbucks, or as he demanded she call him, "Daddy." A munitions manufacturer, Warbucks made his money during World War I and was far from a villain in the eyes of Gray. In January 1925 Annie's loveable mutt Sandy appeared in the strip and never left her side.

Gray had two rules for Annie: *She could never reach a "happy ending," and she could never grow up.*

*"I made her an orphan, so she'd have no family, no tangling alliances, but freedom to go where she pleased."*

*"I could never bring myself to draw Annie as an innocent, sheltered, prissy little angel, or as a smart-aleck little snit that everyone would love to skewer on a hot poker. She must be an orphan of the toughest city streets and alleys; her school, the world as she met it her teachers, the people around her--the good and the bad, the brave and the cowards, and especially the ones like most of us who are pretty much a mixture of all the sins and virtues. A level-eyed, straight-backed, courageous little child usually brings out the best in even the worst of us."*

## HAROLD GRAY

Born January 1, 1894 in Kenchee, Illinois

Graduated Purdue University in 1917

World War I Veteran

Created his own strip, "Little Orphan Otto" in 1924. Otto later changed to Annie.

The name change came out of a poem written by **James Whitcomb Riley**

*Little Orphant Annie's come to our house to stay,  
An' wash the cups an' saucers up, an' bresh the crumbs away,  
An' shoo the chickens off the porch, an' dust the hearth, an' sweep,  
An make the fire, an' bake the bread, an' earn her board-an'-keep:  
An' all us other children, when the supper-things is done,  
We set around the kitchen fire an' 'as the mostest fun  
A'list'nin' to the witch-tales 'at Annie tells about  
An' the Gobble'uns 'at gits you  
Ef you*

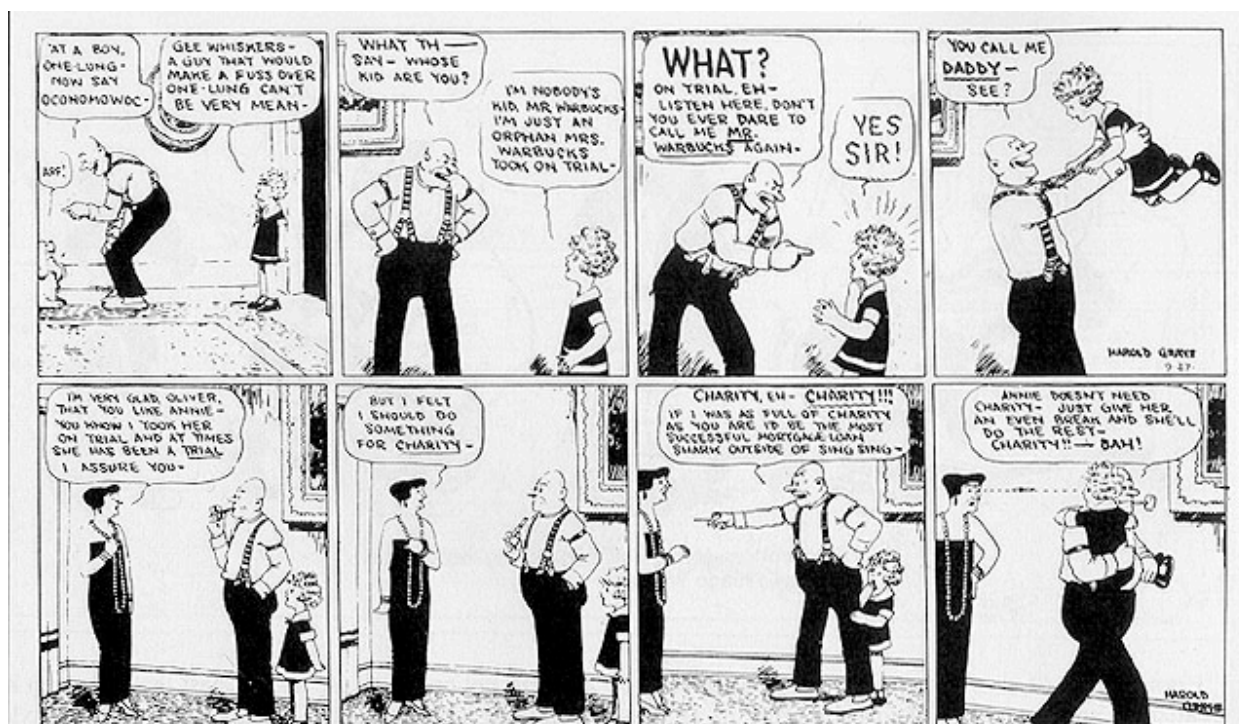
*Don't*

*Watch*

*Out!*

Annie was Gray's reaction to the current life and times he saw in America. When the stock-market crashed in 1929, the richest man in the country, Oliver Warbucks, went broke as well. When Americans were shipped off to Europe to fight in World War II, Warbucks went to war too.

The comic's ebb and flow with American culture acted as a personal diary for Gray. He wasn't shy about including non-fictional caricatures of politicians, neighbors, and celebrities. When Gray was denied extra gas rations during World War II he made a series of strips about the issue. He even used character names based on the real people he knew.



Little Orphan Annie by Harold Gray © 1924 The Chicago Tribune

Gray never wrote the comic for children. In his response letter to an “Anti-Annie” reader, he writes:

*“The successful comics today are stories. No story is worth printing unless it carries some idea. And any idea is the basis for disagreement and hence is controversial... My contention is that since strips tell a story of the current scene, and since many columnists whose stuff is heavily weighted one way or the other enjoy vast circulation, why wouldn’t a strip such as Annie also be very popular if allowed to really tell the American story?”*

## SOME OF ANNIE’S ADVENTURES

### ADVENTURE TIME WITH ORPHAN ANNIE

First broadcast in December 1930 out of Chicago, *Adventure Time with Orphan Annie* was sponsored by Ovaltine. Picked up by NBC’s blue network, the 15-minute radio spot, shortened to *Little Orphan Annie*, aired weekday evenings from 5:45 to 6pm. The theme song was one that no man, woman, or child ever forgot.

Who’s that little chatterbox?  
The one with pretty auburn locks?  
Cute little she,  
It’s little Orphan Annie.

Bright eyes, always on the go,  
There’s a sort of healthiness handy.  
Mite size, cheeks a-rosy glow,

If you want to know,  
“Arf!” says Sandy.

Always wears a sunny smile,  
Now, wouldn’t it be worth your while  
If you could be  
Like Little Orphan Annie?

The show was a huge success and played to millions of listeners over its 10-year run. Unlike Gray’s politically motivated comic, the radio program did hit a few milestones in the radio world. It was one of the first radio programs to have a female principal character. And, like many modern soap operas, it left audiences at the end of every episode with major cliffhangers, something that was uncommon for the time.

In 1940, NBC and Ovaltine dropped the radio show. A short-aired reprise sponsored by Quaker Puffed Wheat Sparkles kept the voice of Bell as Annie the sidekick to the superhero Captain Sparkes. Annie and her less than dynamic new partner went off the air forever in 1943.

### ON THE BIG SCREEN

Four movies were made based on Gray’s famous strip. In 1932 *Little Orphan Annie*, featuring Mitzi Green as Annie, came out on Christmas Eve to less than thrilled reviews. Paramount tried again in 1938 with Ann Gilles in the title role, with no more success. It would take 40 more years before Annie got another chance in Hollywood.

Featuring such names as Albert Finney, Carol Burnett, Ann Reinking, Tim Curry, Bernadette Peters, and newcomer Aileen Quinn as Annie, the movie adaptation of the highly successful Broadway musical opened in theatres in May 1982.

Disney most recently remade the movie musical in 1999 with celebrities

Kathy Bates, Victor Garber, Alan Cumming, Audra McDonald, Kristen Chenoweth, and even the Broadway original Annie herself - Andrea McCardle - as the star to be.

## THE GREAT WHITE WAY

In March of 1977 *Annie* opened on Broadway. After four years of collaborators' Meehan, Strouse, and Charnin recreating Gray's strip, *Annie* got a summer run at Connecticut's Goodspeed Opera House in 1976.

Prior to its opening in NYC the show headed to the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. for a five-week try-out. After the cast met with newly elected President Carter, *Annie* was a hit!

Countless hours reviewing, revising, and finessing later, *Annie* opened on Broadway in March of 1977. Andrea McCardle wore the "red dress of responsibility" in bringing Gray's comic strip to life, just as she had almost since the conception of the musical in Connecticut. McCardle and cast wowed the New York audiences and even the reviewers. Clive Barnes of the *New York Times* wrote:

*"To dislike the new musical Annie, which opened last night at the Alvin Theater, would be tantamount to disliking motherhood, peanut butter, friendly mongrel dogs, and nostalgia. It would also be unnecessary, for Annie is an intensely likable musical. You might even call it lovable; it seduced one, and should settle down to being a sizable hit."*

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## THE WORLD OF OUR PLAY

*Our show is set in the very real, yet fictional New York City. Here is a bit about what was happening at this time in NYC, the USA, and the world.*

- In 1930, 40% of Americans had radios.
  - Many used radio as a form of escape, forging relationships with the characters and the stories being told. It was also the quickest way to receive news and information.
- In April 1932, 750,000 people were being sustained by city relief efforts, while 160,000 waited to get relief. \$8.20 a month was the amount received, 1/5 of what was necessary for someone to live comfortably.
- In 1932, over 46,000 stray pets were found living on the streets of New York. (Sandy?)
- In January 1933, Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany.
- In 1932, NYC elected its 98<sup>th</sup> Mayor - Jack P. O'Brien.
  - He was the last of the so-called "Tammany Hall Puppets."
- In 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected President with 22,800,000 popular votes versus Herbert Hoover's 15,750,000
- Frances Perkins, the first female cabinet member, was appointed Secretary of Labor.

- King Kong premiered in NYC.
- By the end of 1933, the national unemployment rate reached 24.5%. This inspired passage of a law establishing a minimum working wage, 33 cents an hour. This was one of the efforts of Roosevelt's New Deal.
- On December 5, 1933, Prohibition was officially repealed.
- On December 21, 1933 FOX signed Shirley Temple.

### DID YOU KNOW:

*In 1930, the International Apple Shippers Association began selling crates of apples to the unemployed on credit for \$1.75. Many would net as much as \$1.85. By November 1930, there were over 6,000 people selling apples in NYC. By 1931, the majority of apple sellers had vanished.*

## ORPHANAGES

Orphanages were not JUST for children without parents. Many parents believed these institutions, funded by city governments, would provide better education and a better lifestyle than they could. Parents were able to return for their children when they were ready to provide for them, however, many did not. Because of the increase in popularity, orphanages were often over-crowded and were soon restricted to true orphans or to children with only one parent. As time went on many orphanages saw much-needed improvements--increased supplies, playgrounds, libraries. Many major philanthropists supported orphanages, because they had once been orphans themselves.

## THE NEW DEAL

When Roosevelt was elected on March 4, 1933, he inherited the worst economic depression the United States had ever experienced. With many people jobless, completely broke, and filled with uncertainty and despair, Roosevelt took matters into the hands of the federal government. The system was broken and he believed it was the government's responsibility to provide solutions.

Roosevelt created a variety of agencies and offices that focused efforts on the many areas that needed assistance; together they were known as The New Deal. The basic goals were to provide states with federal grants which would be used to help citizens in need and give work to the thousands and thousands of unemployed Americans.

- Works Progress Administration (WPA)** was created to provide work for skilled and unskilled laborers by creating special projects and jobs that needed to be accomplished. This included actors, musicians, and artists.
- Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)** was formed for men to work on conservation programs.
- National Industrial Recovery Act** required cooperation in setting prices, minimum wages, and the ability to join unions within various industries. (It was later declared unconstitutional.)
- Agricultural Adjustment Act** put into place restrictions on farming in order to lower the surplus of goods and, in turn, raise prices. (It, too, was later declared unconstitutional.)
- Securities & Exchange Commission** was established to regulate the Stock Market.
- Social Security (1935)** provided insurance for the unemployed and pensions for the retired.

## Pre & Post Show Activities

### Article Images

#### Grades 4 & Up

**Time Needed:** 10 to 15 minutes

#### Objectives:

- Dissect source documents.
- Physicalize historical events.
- Draw informed conclusions.
- Work with a group.

**Materials Needed:** Newspaper articles about specific “historical” events (both recent and from the 1930’s).

#### Instructions:

1. Break the students up into small groups (no smaller than three per group) based on the number of newspaper articles obtained. Distribute a different article to each group.
2. Once the students have read the article, have groups compile a list of reactions, thoughts, feelings, and emotions. These answers should be short and impulsive and related to the content of the article. (Articles with more dramatic subject matter - the Stock Market crash, homelessness, unemployment, poverty - are more likely to foster stronger reactions.)
3. From this list, have each group create a silent frozen image—a tableau--to represent the article. Again, this should be impulsive and based on gut reaction. Groups then select a title for the image they have created.
4. Once each group has created a tableau, have groups share their images and discuss. What do you see? How does this make you feel? What time period do you think this is from, today or the 1930’s? Also consider isolating individuals in each picture and asking the class to describe what they think this person, within the image, is expressing. Give each group the opportunity to share their image, repeating the same process.
5. Finish up by asking each group to briefly explain what their article was about. Ask students to remember and describe what they saw from the picture that might connect to this article. If students then want to describe exactly what their image was, they can do so after everyone shares what they saw.

#### Variations:

Groups can all be given the same article and asked to create various tableaus around it. Two or more articles would be needed, one from today and one from the 1930’s, with each group creating at least two images.

#### Connection to *Annie*:

*Annie* the musical is set in 1933 New York City. With the recent crash of the stock market, the recent election of President Roosevelt, who appears in *Annie*, and millions of Americans jobless, homeless, and simply looking to get by, the era of our show has a rich history. First-hand documents from the 1930’s provide students with insight into just some of what life was really like. However, it is also helpful for students to see similarities between the 1930’s and today’s society.

**Status Cards****Grades 4 & Up****Time Needed:** 15 to 20 minutes**Objectives:**

- Listen and relate to other students.
- Develop and commit to all elements of a character.
- Form leading questions and decode other students' questions as well.

**Materials Needed:** Playing cards (or index cards/name tags)**Instructions:**

1. Give students playing cards or numbers, which are taped to their backs or foreheads; students are unable to see their individual cards, but the group can: the higher the numerical value of the card, the higher the status of the person wearing it.
2. Choose a location in which all students will interact and create characters based upon how others treat them and how they treat others. A party is always a neutral location where many different people of various status might exist. If a group works better in pairs, then partners can be chosen and interactions occur in twos or small groups.
3. It is important that students ask questions of each other that help them to figure out their own status as well as suggest the status of another. The more specific and creative the question, the more likely it is that students will be able to figure out what status they were given.
4. Once most students have discovered their own status, they can continue the "scene" by creating characters, with the given status, they believe would exist in this world.
5. After the scene has ended ask the students a few questions about this activity. What status were you? How did you figure out your status? How did people act towards you because of your status? What did people say to you because of your status? When you knew your own status how did you act towards others? Are there situations in real life where status exists? What is an example of status in your own life? Do you think a person's status can ever change?

**Variations:**

This can also be used as a post-show activity, in which each student is given a character name and students base their interactions on how the characters acted. You can also note changes in characters' status from the beginning through the end of the play.

If time and space are limited a discussion on status would help students to understand and relate to those characters representing the "Hooverites," and how they had money and homes at one point but were now homeless.

**Connection to *Annie*:**

Many Americans lost everything during the stock market crash of 1929, while there were some people who weren't as affected. Status is something everyone has—from the characters in our production to "real life" people. A basic understanding of how the characters in *Annie* use their given status to move up (or sometimes down) on the "status ladder" relates directly to the day-to-day struggles of the great depression.

**GROUP STORY****Grades 2 & Up****Time Needed:** 10 minutes**Objectives:**

- Listen and respond to the story as it's being told.



- Practice thinking and speaking improvisationally.
- Build a creative and interesting story with a beginning, middle, and end.

**Materials Needed:** None

**Instructions:**

1. Have students stand in a line or a circle and tell a story one person at a time. (A limit can be set of one or two sentences per person.) Either select students at random or go down the line for students to pick up the next part of the story. By providing the group with a subject or theme for the story, or having the group select one as a whole, the story will tend to be more specific.

**Things to keep in mind:**

- Is a sentence keeping the story moving?
- When something new is introduced into the story, how can the students continue to incorporate it throughout the story? (If Annie was introduced at the beginning of the play and then, in the second scene, our main character was a little boy named Otto, that wouldn't be a very strong choice by the playwrights.)
- Is there a beginning, a middle, and an end?

**Variations:**

Tell the story so that each speaker alternates their starting sentence with "Fortunately..." or "Unfortunately..." Have students tell stories in small groups. Prior to the beginning of the story brainstorm a list of characters, a setting, and a few things that will happen. When a student incorporates one or more of these things it can be crossed off the list. If students create a story they are passionate about they can then go back around and try to make it more specific, or they could work in small groups to explore what might happen next, what this world is really like, who this character is outside of this story, and so forth.

**Connection to *Annie*:**

In its basic form, *Annie* is a story. Like a bed-time story, a fairy tale, and a comic strip, the play and musical is just another way to share and explore strange places, meet new people, and maybe even learn something new. This activity gives students the opportunity to work together in creating a story from their imaginations and, as is true for many musicals, collaborate on how the story is told.

## **I'M NOT WHO YOU THINK I AM**

### **Grades 2 & Up**

**Time Needed:** 10 minutes

**Objectives:**

- Develop listening, focus, and concentration skills.
- Make strong vocal choices.
- Participate vocally.

**Materials Needed:** None

**Instructions:**

1. Have students sit in a circle. Discuss ways in which they could change their voice so that no one would know it was them. Some examples include: *deep voice*, *high voice*, *raspy voice*.
2. Practice saying the line "I'm not who you think I am" using different voices.
3. Once students are comfortable with using their voices in a variety of ways, choose one student to be the guesser. The guesser will close his or her eyes. Choose one student to disguise their voice and say the sentence: "I'm not who you think I am."
5. Have all the students act as if they have no idea who said the line--it could've been anyone of them. Then have all the students say to the guesser: "Open your eyes!" The

guesser uses his or her power of observation and power of listening to determine who said the line. They get three tries.

**Variations:**

If the exercise is too easy for students, have all the students switch places in the circle after the line “I’m not who you think I am” has been said. Then have the guesser open his or her eyes.

**Connections to *Annie*:**

All of the characters seen in *Annie* are played by actors of all ages. Outside of learning lines, remembering when to enter and exit, and performing all the songs and dances, an actor can also be required to use an accent for his or her character. The actor playing President Roosevelt was portraying a real person and in order to characterize the President he practiced playing with his voice and creating a new voice that sounds much like F.D.R. Also, many radio actors in the 1930’s excelled at changing their voices. This exercise gives students an opportunity to see how many different voices they can come up with.

**MY DREAM: THE COMIC**

**All Ages**

**Time Needed:** 15 to 20 minutes

**Objectives:**

- Work within the guidelines of “comic strip” story-telling.
- Allow images to translate an idea onto paper.
- Use limited words to support these images.
- Think outside of the box—but contain it to limited comic frames!

**Materials Needed:** Blank paper with a comic strip format pre-drawn, pencils, and any other art supplies necessary.

**Instructions:**

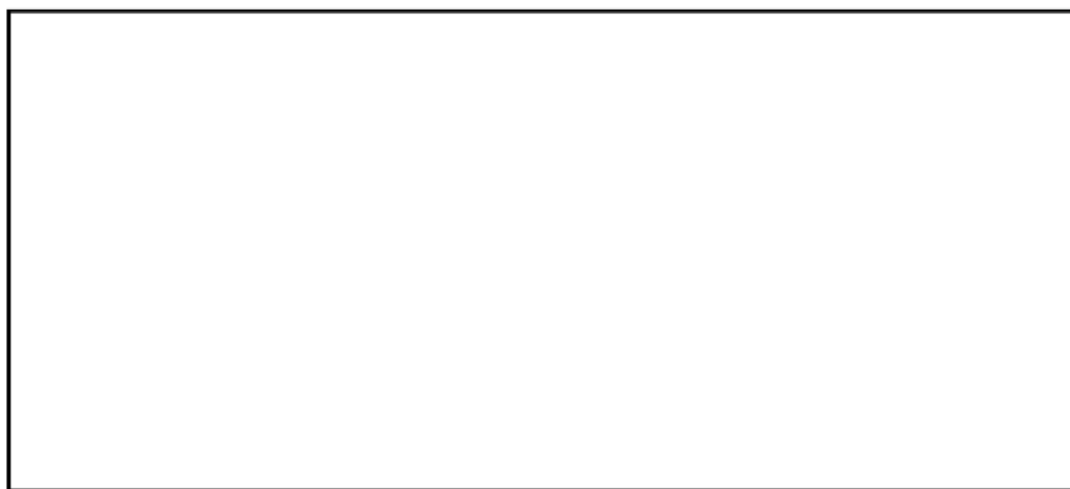
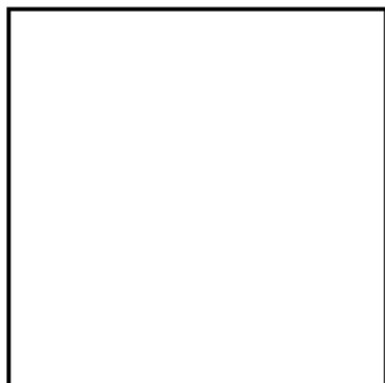
1. Your students have been commissioned to write and create a new comic strip for the *Boston Herald*. The *Herald* has seen a decline in young readers and the paper wants to appeal to this important group by presenting a new section dedicated to comics and telling stories of young readers. The first issue of this new section is going to be dedicated to “Dreaming of the Future.” Each student should plan, sketch, and complete a five panel comic strip about one of his or her dreams.
2. If there is time some students can present their comic strips.

**Things to keep in mind:**

- Plot out the action of each panel before drawing.
- Keep it simple.
- Tell the story with pictures and a few words.
- Drawing talent isn’t key –creating a clear story is.

**Variations:**

This can become a group project in which students work together to create an entire newspaper filled with reviews of and/or opinion articles about WFT’s production of *Annie*, as well as news stories based around the theme. Creating an entire paper will allow students to play towards individual strengths and provide the opportunity for collaboration. If equipment and time is available this activity can be modified into a radio program. Younger students can draw a scene from *Annie* or from their day—that works as well!



## Resources to consult:

### Books:

*The History of Little Orphan Annie* by Bruce Smith

*Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* by Studs Terkel

\*There are hundreds of books in print on the subject of the Great Depression. Have your students explore history text books, first-hand letters, memoirs, and everything in between. They are all talking about the same time in American history, but each one has a slightly different story to tell.

### Online Resources

#### The New York Times Historical Archives

\*Search for articles written in the 1930's

#### About Harold Gray

[http://lambiek.net/artists/g/gray\\_h.htm](http://lambiek.net/artists/g/gray_h.htm)

#### Fads of the 1930's

<http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1864526/posts>

#### About the Radio Program

<http://www.otrcat.com/little-orphan-annie-p-1517.html>

#### About Harold Gray

<http://www.stuartliss.com/loahp/haroldgray.html>

#### About the 1930's

<http://www.kyrene.org/schools/brisas/sunda/decade/1930.htm>

#### Little Orphan Annie Radio Episode

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYYAwSYyRy4>

#### About James Whitcomb Riley

<http://www.jameswhitcombriley.com/>

#### About the 1930's

<http://www.thepeoplehistory.com/1930s.html>

#### Bestselling Books of the 1930's

<http://www.caderbooks.com/best30.html>

#### American History of the 1930's

<http://www.usa-people-search.com/content-american-history-of-the-1930s.aspx>

\*This is only a few of the many places where you will find information about the 1930's, Harold Gray, and *Annie*. Search out your own resources and you'll be surprised how much you and your students will learn!