

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

"EVERY TIME A BELL RINGS, AN ANGEL GETS THEIR WINGS."



Adapted by JOHN WOLBERS

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(with Common Core, Missouri GLE, and National Core Arts Standards)
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SYNOPSIS

What if you could hear your favorite podcast live? The beloved American holiday classic leaps to captivating life in this 1940s radio broadcast, complete with microphones, a diverse company of characters, and live sound effects. What is a successful life? The story of George Bailey and the town of Bedford Falls illuminates how one life can change the whole fabric of a community.

ABOUT THE ADAPTATION

Our script for *It's a Wonderful Life* was adapted by Metro Theater Company's Producing Associate, John Wolbers. John has worn many hats for Metro Theater Company over the years: actor, puppeteer, teaching artist, producing associate, and playwright. For the last six years, he has interviewed teachers and students across St. Louis to write scenes of realistic middle school bullying for the innovative bullying prevention program, *Say Something, Do Something*. In addition to his adaptation of *It's a Wonderful Life*, Wolbers has adapted thirteen of Shakespeare's plays and a stage parody of *The Lord of the Rings* series. He is the author of two original plays; *The Playing Ground* and *Doctor Faustus, or the Modern Prometheus*, which received a St. Louis Theater Circle Award nomination for Outstanding New Play.

Adapting a piece of text can be tricky, but it allowed John to put his spin on an old classic! Invite your students to try their hand at creating an adaptation. How would they adapt a chapter of their favorite book into a scene for a play?



▲ JOHN WOLBERS

MISSOURI ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS GRADE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS

W2C K-8 Compose well-developed writing texts for audience and purpose.

NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

ANCHOR STANDARD 2 Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

TIMELINE OF RADIO & PODCASTING

1900 The **FIRST TRANSMISSION** of the human voice.

1906 The **FIRST RADIO PROGRAM BROADCAST** was on Christmas Eve, 1906. Reginald Fessenden read a passage from the Bible and played 'O Holy Night' on his violin to ships at sea.



1920 A **JAM-PACKED YEAR OF FIRSTS**: The first radio news program, the first college radio station, the first recurring public entertainment broadcast, the first broadcasted sporting event.

1921 Pittsburgh's KDKA broadcasts one of the **FIRST RADIO DRAMAS**, leading to a surge of dramatic experiments in the era, including broadcasting operas and entire Broadway musicals.



1926 Newspapers go on strike and radios become more popular than ever!



1933 President Franklin Delano Roosevelt broadcasts his Fireside Chats on the radio.

1938 Orson Welles' *The War of the Worlds*, a radio drama about an alien invasion, is broadcast. Many listeners mistakenly believe that an actual invasion from Mars is taking place.



1950 Television begins to replace radio, and radio stations shift toward playing "Top 40" music.



1969 National Public Radio is formed.



2004 Adam Curry and Dave Winer invent podcasting. By October, detailed articles on how to podcast have appeared online.



2005 Podcasts are added to iTunes.

2005 President George W. Bush becomes a podcaster by making his weekly addresses available in podcast form.



2006 "Podcast" makes its first appearance in the dictionary.

2019 Nielsen and Edison Research log 700,000 active podcasts worldwide.



FOLEY ARTISTS

Foley artists are named after Jack Foley, a sound effects artist who worked in the film industry when silent films were transitioning to "talkies." He created many of the foley artist sound effect techniques still used today. In radio, foley artists create sound effects as the radio drama plays out – like doors opening and closing, phones ringing, footsteps, or the jangle of keys. Today's foley artists mostly work in film and television, but during the Golden Age of radio, foley artists were a key element when broadcasting a radio drama.



Foley artist at work at the Vancouver Film School, May 17, 2011

Foley artists have to get creative to create their sound effects. For example, a radio drama may have a horse galloping in the script. It wouldn't be realistic to bring a real horse into the radio broadcasting station! So the foley artist would use coconuts to create the sound of the horse's hooves. Or, a foley artist might crinkle a piece of plastic wrap or wax paper to create the sound of a crackling fire.

CREATE YOUR OWN FOLEY SCENE

Using objects found around the classroom, create your own foley scene! Have students divide into small groups. Within their groups, students will create a silent scene – one with no lines of dialogue, but plenty of action accompanied by foley-style sound effects. Students can use regular objects from around the classroom to create the sound effects for their scene. For example, a student may knock on a desk while the actor in the scene pretends to knock on a door.

MISSOURI FINE ARTS GRADE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS PR5A

Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

ANCHOR STANDARD 2 Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.



WRITING PROMPT

In *It's a Wonderful Life* George Bailey gets the opportunity to reflect back on his life and the way that his actions had a ripple effect across the Bedford Falls community. Sometimes the actions we take seem insignificant to us at the time but they have incredible impact on those around us. Ask your students to write about a person who has made an impact on them and their community. What actions has that person taken to make their community a better place?

MISSOURI ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS GRADE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS

W2C K-8 Compose well-developed writing texts for audience and purpose.

**NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS
ANCHOR STANDARD 2** Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

TRUST WALK

George Bailey has to trust Clara to lead him on a journey of his memories. It wasn't always easy for George to trust Clara, but by trusting her George discovers how wonderful his life truly is. We are going to practice trusting each other to lead us on a journey – a classroom obstacle course.

Ask students to get into pairs. They will take turns leading each other blindfolded through the classroom. You can rearrange the classroom furniture to create the obstacle course. One pair can go at a time, or a few at a time, depending on space constraints. Students within a pair will decide who is the leader and who is the follower. The number one job of the leader is to take care of the follower; their second job is to take care of themselves; their third job is to lead their partner. The number one job of the follower is to take care of themselves; their second job is to follow the leader. The leader will lead their partner through the obstacle course through verbal cues only (for example, "Take two steps forward"). Then have the pairs switch who is the leader and who is the follower.

MISSOURI PERSONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT GRADE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS

PS2C Interacting with others in ways that respect individual and group differences.

PS3B Applying personal safety skills and coping strategies for the safety of self and others.

**NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS
ANCHOR STANDARD 1** Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

TOUR OF A PLACE

George Bailey's home is Bedford Falls, and more specifically, "the old Granville house" – or, "the new Bailey house"! The idea of "home" can mean many different things. Home might be the place you live with your family and/or caregivers, a place you feel safe, or a place you visit in your imagination. Ask students to close their eyes and think of a holiday memory in a place that feels like "home" to them. Prompt them to think about the different details of the space they are imagining: what they see, smell, hear etc. Give the class a short "tour" of your home during a holiday using the entire space of the classroom to imagine you are truly there, with lots of detail and stories/memories. Walk through the space, as if you are moving from "room" to "room", and pantomime different areas, objects, and details while describing your home.

Have students find a partner they do not know well and has not been to their home. One partner in each pair will be the tour guide and one partner will be the tour observer. The partner who is observing may ask questions, but may not comment or judge. Give 3-5 minutes for each tour, then switch so that the guide becomes the observer and the observer becomes the guide.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What was it like giving a tour? What was it like taking a tour?
- Did anyone give a tour of a place where you do not live? Does anybody want to share?
- What does it mean for a place to feel like home?
- What was it like to learn about your partner's holiday traditions?

MISSOURI COMMUNICATION ARTS GRADE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS

LS1B K-8 Demonstrate listening behaviors.

LS2A K-8 Share ideas or experiences verbally or using communication systems.

NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

ANCHOR STANDARD 2 Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

ANCHOR STANDARD 6 Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

RESOURCES for Educators



NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE:

- suicidepreventionlifeline.org

FINANCIAL LITERACY SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS:

- federalreserveeducation.org

HOW TO CREATE A CLASSROOM PODCAST:

- npr.org/2018/11/15/662116901/teaching-podcasting-a-curriculum-guide-for-educators



DISCUSSION Questions



1. What did you think of the sound effects made by the foley artist in the play? What would the play have been like if there weren't sound effects?

2. Why do you think Walter decides to jump in and play George Bailey? What's a time that you saw someone who stepped up, or you stepped up, to help out your community?

3. What's a time that you made someone feel good because you noticed something kind or helpful that they did? And vice versa!

4. In the play, George gets very stressed out and responds negatively to his family. What are some healthy ways you can deal with stress?

5. If you could travel back to any point of your life, when would it be and why?

6. Most of the actors play multiple characters in the radio play. What were some of the ways you noticed the actors portrayed these different characters?

7. The foley artist used different objects to create sound effects. Have you ever used objects around your house to create sounds? If so, what and how?

8. What are the small things that make your life wonderful?

9. In the world of the play, listening to a radio play is a very common family tradition. What fun traditions do you have with your family?

10. George is a part of many different communities: the staff at the Building and Loan, Bedford Falls, his family. What communities are you a part of?

11. At the end of the play, the town of Bedford Falls rallies around George and his family to help him save the Building and Loan. When has your community stepped up to help someone out?



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MISSION

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

