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***Presenting Live Professional Theatre Field Trips & Workshops for Students***

Theatre IV  
**Classroom Study Guide**



## The Big Adventures of Stuart Little

*by Joseph Robinette*

*based on the book by E.B.White*

### Larger Than Life

**W**hen Mr. and Mrs. Little found out they were going to have another son, they had no idea he would be a mouse. Theatre IV presents *The Big Adventures of Stuart Little*, an adventurous tale of bravery, humor and true friendship. In the story, Stuart meets a beautiful bird, named Margalo and they become the best of friends. Together they show the power of teamwork. Sail with Stuart on the boat, The Wasp, and laugh with him as he outsmarts a few hungry cats. Stuart brings a handful of fun to the Little family and causes everyone he meets to look twice. Not only because he's a small mouse but because his zealous personality is larger than life.



Who was E.B. White?

**E**lwyn Brooks White was born in Mount Vernon, New York, on July 11, 1899, one of six children. White's childhood was a happy one, filled with music and games; however, he developed a fear of public speaking while attending elementary school that stayed with him all of his life, causing him to decline every invitation to speak in public.

In 1929, his first two books, a collection of poems and a book of essays, were published. That same year, he married his wife, Katharine Angell, and the next year their son was born.

In 1938, the family moved to a farm in North Brooklin, Maine, where E.B. maintained close ties with the *New Yorker* and contributed a monthly column to *Harper's* magazine. The next year, he began writing his first children's book, *Stuart Little*. In 1945, *Stuart Little* was published, illustrated by Garth Williams.

In 1952, *Charlotte's Web* was published, and White was asked about the difference between writing for children and writing for adults. He replied, "In my experience, the only difference (save for a very slight modification of vocabulary) is one's state of mind. Children are a wonderful audience — they are so eager, so receptive, so quick. . . . But like any good writer, I write to amuse myself, not some imaginary audience, and I rather suspect that it is a great help if one has managed never really to grow up."

In 1970, his last children's book, *Trumpet of the Swan*, was published. During his career, he won several awards for his children's books, including the Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal and the Lewis Carroll Shelf Award. He was also granted the Presidential medal of Freedom by President John F. Kennedy in 1963.

Elwyn Brooks White died of Alzheimer's disease on October 1, 1985, in North Brooklin, Maine. His books are still read by children today.

*“. . . Stuart Little appeared to me in dream, all complete, with his hat, his cane, and his brisk manner. Since he was the only fictional figure ever to honor and disturb my sleep, I was deeply touched and felt that I was not free to change him into a grasshopper or a wallaby. . . .”*

*-- E.B. White*

## Not All Strings

Theatre IV's production of *The Big Adventures of Stuart Little* is filled with wonderful puppets. More traditional puppets--the kind we might encounter in a contemporary American "puppet show" (like *Sesame Street* or *Bear in the Big Blue House*)-- can be divided into several categories. Here are some examples of different types of puppets that you may see either in our production, on television, in movies, or in other stage shows.



**Hand puppets:** A common type of puppet worn like a glove on the operator's hand. The puppets gestures are limited to the movement of the operator's fingers and wrist. A hand puppet may be made from solid materials (wood, plastic wood, papier mâché) or pliable ones (fabric, foam rubber, latex); it is usually legless or with stuffed legs, which merely hang limply. Pip and Pop from *Bear in the Big Blue House* are hand puppets.

**Rod-hand puppet:** This is a mixed-style puppet that requires the operator's hand inside the body while the limbs are moved with rods. Many of the Muppets--like Kermit and Elmo--are rod-hand puppets.



**Marionette:** This puppet is operated from above the stage by strings and is often the most complex type of puppet. A simple marionette may have nine strings - one to each leg, one to each hand, one to each shoulder, one to each ear (for head movements) and one to the base of the spine (for bowing). But some marionettes may have three times as many strings, so operating them requires great skill. The bodies may be made of wood, fabric, paper, foam rubber, etc. Pinocchio is the best-known example of a marionette.

**Body Puppet:** A puppet that is worn by the manipulator, whose full body, including his or her face, may be covered. A hole, usually covered with a net, allows the manipulator to see. Body puppets are so called when they are used in puppet productions, although they could be considered costumes. Some have elaborate electronic controls to move the eyes or other parts of the body. Bear from *Bear in the Big Blue House* and Big Bird from *Sesame Street* are body puppets.



### Discussion/Activities

1. At the end of the play, we are not sure if Stuart Little will ever find his friend Margalo the bird. Finish the story of Stuart Little and his beloved Margalo. Does Stuart find her? If so, where? What adventures does he go through along the way? Do the two ever return home?
2. When Stuart Little is substitute teaching, he asks the class what they think is important, and a student replies, "A shaft of sunlight at the end of a dark afternoon, a note of music, and the way the back of a baby's neck smells if its mother keeps it tidy." Another adds that ice cream is important, too. Why these things are important and what they might add to this list of important things.
3. Stuart Little also reminds the children to remember their "summertimes," using this expression as a metaphor for childhood. Define the term *metaphor*. Why is "summertimes" a good metaphor for childhood? Recount your "summertimes."
4. Margalo and Stuart are best friends. They show this by doing nice things for each other and by looking out for one another. Discuss what you think it takes to be a good friend and write or tell a story about a time when a good friend has come to your rescue or have helped a friend.
5. Stuart Little is only about 3 inches tall. Many people would consider this to be a considerable disadvantage, but from the very start Stuart shows one of his best traits: the ability to make the most of a sometimes difficult situation. Discuss the idea of "pro versus con" and how every situation has a good and bad side. Strive to be like Stuart and find the good side of a seemingly bad situation. Make a list of the pros and cons of being 3 inches tall.
6. Tell your family and friends about the play "Stuart Little." Be sure to tell them what things Stuart thinks are important in life, and ask them what they think is important. Also remember to tell them that Stuart thinks that it is important to "remember the summertimes." Ask your parents or grandparents to tell you about summertimes that they remember from their childhood. What things did they do that you have never done?
7. Imagine a world where you would like to take an adventure. Write a brief story about an adventure in this world and draw a picture of what the world would look like. Put all the pictures and stories up on the walls of the classroom. Now pick someone else's story and picture and share with the class what you like about this other world.

Recommended Reading:

***Animal adventure stories by other authors:***

*The Mouse and the Motorcycle* by Beverly Cleary

*Frog and Toad Together* by Arnold Lobel

*Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh* by Robert C. O'Brien

*The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame

***Other E.B. White books:***

*Stuart Little*

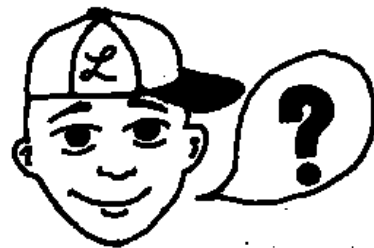
*Charlottes Web*

*The Trumpet and the Swan*

EEK! A Mouse!

Did you know that mice are common on almost every land mass on earth? Here are some other facts about mice:

- Many people keep mice as pets.
- Mice do not usually bite people unless it is trying to protect itself or it's babies - mice are less likely to bite than the average dog.
- Mice live an average of 1 to 2 years.
- Breeders who raise mice call it a "Fancy Mouse" much like a dog breeder calls it a "Pure Bred Dog."
- There are clubs worldwide for people who keep mice as pets!



Leonardo Didja Noe

An Activity for *The Big Adventures of Stuart Little*

In Stuart's family, there is a cat who causes Margalo and Stuart endless troubles, although she never actually hurts them. See if you can identify the following "cats."

- a. What cat is fuzzy and looks like a worm?
- b. What cat is a cat that flies?
- c. What cat can you order clothes from?
- d. What cat is a church cat?
- e. What cat is a classification?
- f. What cat is a bad cat for the eyes?
- g. What cat is a shooting cat?
- h. What cat is a cat that swims?

Theatre IV is the second largest theatre for young audiences in the nation and is the Children's Theatre of Virginia. We encourage your comments about *The Big Adventures of Stuart Little*. Please send your letters to:

**Theatre IV, 114 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23220**

If you need to reach Theatre IV by phone, please call **1-800-235-8687**.

**Answers:**

a. caterpillar b. catbird c. catalog d. cathedral e. category f. cataract g. catapult h. catfish

# Stuart Little & Margalo



  
THEATRE IV