CURRICULUM GUIDE

Explore the world of
The Little Mermaid Jr.
Engaging classroom activities to enrich your students' experience of the show
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TO THE EDUCATOR

Thank you for bringing your students to see The Little Mermaid Jr!

Use this guide to prepare your students for the performance and to help continue the conversation after the show. In this guide, you will find helpful background information, hands-on classroom activities, and reflection tools that you are welcome to use in your classroom.

The Additional Resources section includes a glossary of terms from the show and a primer on audience etiquette. These can be distributed to students or posted somewhere in your classroom to allow for continued examination. If your students receive merits, bonus points, or other incentives you can offer rewards for students who write sentences or improvise scenes that include words from the glossary or ideas on audience etiquette.
OUT ON THE OPEN SEA, Prince Eric pursues a mysterious voice despite the protests of his valet, Grimsby. Meanwhile, under the sea, the crab Sebastian has prepared a concert that features King Triton’s youngest child, Ariel, but she has snuck up to the surface with her best friend, Flounder. There, they learn about the human treasure she has found from the seagull Scuttle. Beneath the sea, the sea witch Ursula and her eels, Flotsam and Jetsam, plot to regain power from Triton. After realizing she has missed the concert, King Triton scolds Ariel for going to the surface and appoints Sebastian as her chaperone.

Ariel retreats to her grotto and dreams of living on land. Sebastian discovers Ariel’s collection of human objects and tries to convince Ariel of the virtues of the ocean. But Ariel becomes distracted by the shadow of a passing ship and swims to the surface where she encounters the handsome Prince Eric. Suddenly, lightning strikes the ship, sending Prince Eric overboard. Ariel darts to rescue Eric and brings the unconscious prince to shore. Awoken by her song, Prince Eric tries to thank his rescuer, but Ariel has disappeared into the waves.

Back underwater, King Triton learns of Ariel’s contact with a human and furiously destroys her collection of precious human objects. Flotsam and Jetsam find Ariel in despair and lure her to the sea witch’s lair. Ursula offers to change Ariel into a human in exchange for her voice. Ursula’s contract states that Prince Eric must kiss Ariel within three days or she will turn back into a mermaid and become Ursula’s slave forever. Overcome by her dreams of the world above, Ariel agrees to the bargain and trades her voice for human legs.

On the beach, Prince Eric finds Ariel and brings her home to the palace. Ariel’s silence prompts Prince Eric to find other ways to communicate, like dancing, but she is still haunted by the mysterious voice. On the second day, Sebastian calls on lagoon animals to serenade the couple, but Flotsam and Jetsam cause a commotion that blocks their kiss.

Grimsby arranges a singing contest on the third day to locate the owner of the mysterious voice and thus a bride for Prince Eric. When Ariel breaks through the crowd and dances, Prince Eric realizes how much he loves her and begins to propose. However, the sun sets and the spell is broken, turning Ariel back into a mermaid and drawing her into the sea. Sebastian rushes to warn King Triton, who agrees to hand over his trident and take Ariel’s place as Ursula’s slave. When Prince Eric attempts to rescue Ariel, Ursula loses control of her magic shell and Ariel’s voice is restored. Trident in hand, Ursula attempts to harness the power of the seas but creates a whirlpool that destroys her and the eels.

With peace restored, Ariel returns the trident to her father. King Triton realizes how much Ariel cares for Prince Eric and decides to restore her humanity. He gently deposits her on the shore, and Prince Eric rushes up and proposes. As Ariel answers, Prince Eric realizes that it has been her voice all along.

UNSCRAMBLE THE PLOT ACTIVITY
Divide your students in 6 groups. Give each group one paragraph from the above Story Synopsis. Instruct the groups to read their piece of the synopsis and improvise a scene to tell their part of the story. Have the groups share their pieces of the story out of order and then work with the class to unscramble the plot!
CHARACTERS

UNDER THE SEA

ARIEL - a little mermaid who longs to be human
FLOUNDER – a rambunctious young fish and Ariel’s best friend
SCUTTLE – a zany seagull and self-proclaimed expert on humans
KING TRITON – the King of the Sea and Ariel’s father
SEBASTIAN – an anxious crab and court composer for King Triton
MERSISTERS (Aquata, Andrina, Arista, Atina, Adella, Allana) – the daughters of King Triton and Ariel’s sisters

ABOVE THE SURFACE

PILOT – driver of Prince Eric’s ship
SAILORS – crew of Prince Eric’s ship
PRINCE ERIC – a prince who would rather explore the ocean than govern a kingdom
GRIMSBY – Prince Eric’s valet
CARLOTTA – headmistress in Prince Eric’s palace
CHEF LOUIS – head chef in Prince Eric’s palace

URSULA’S LAIR

URSULA – a sea witch with a vendetta
TENTACLES – extensions of Ursula, perhaps poor unfortunate souls
FLOTSAM & JETSAM – electric eels and Ursula’s henchmen
Hans Christian Andersen

Born on April 2, 1805, Hans Christian Andersen hailed from humble origins. He grew up in a poor area of Denmark and at the young age of eleven, he lost his father.

By age fourteen, he moved to Copenhagen in search of work and a better life. He experienced difficulty in transitioning from one community to another and was not easily accepted into this new world.

His first three years in Copenhagen were difficult ones financially. Having no luck as a singer or dancer, Andersen turned to writing and was eventually granted the financial means to study in the towns of Slagelse and Helsingor.

Teased mercilessly by his peers for his desire to write, Andersen eventually moved back to Copenhagen to carry out his instruction with a private tutor. He was later granted entry to the University of Copenhagen and would publish his first stories and poems in 1829.

**Adaptation Activity #1:**

What similarities do you notice between Hans Christian Andersen's life and Ariel's story?

If you were going to create a fairy tale about your own life, what event or experience might you re-imagine?

Would the play be a musical?

What kind of audience would be likely to enjoy this show?

With a partner, create a tableau that depicts an important moment from your life.
From Page to Stage

Originally a fairy tale written by Hans Christian Andersen, the first version of The Little Mermaid was a bit darker than its Disney successor. In both versions of the story, Ariel sees Prince Eric from afar on his ship, and falls in love with him. However, when a great storm hits, Ariel rescues Prince Eric and waits for a young girl in a nearby temple to find him and care for him in the original rendition. Prince Eric never actually sees Ariel, only the young temple girl, and assumes this is the person that saved him from the storm.

While in both versions Ariel makes a deal with the Sea Witch to become human, the terms of their agreement differ. In the original fairy tale, Ariel gives her tongue in exchange for legs in the hopes that she will gain the love of the Prince and an immortal soul, something that humans can obtain but mermaids cannot. If Ariel fails in getting Prince Eric to fall in love with her, she will die, not turn back into a mermaid, as we see in the Disney adaptation.

The ending of the original tale though sad, has deep moral undertones: While in human form, Ariel is able to find her way into Prince Eric’s heart; however, when it comes time for Eric to marry, he finds himself promised to the temple girl he thought rescued him after the storm, and decides to marry her, essentially sentencing Ariel to death. Ariel’s five sisters make a deal with the Sea Witch where Ariel will once again return to her mermaid form if she kills the Prince and lets his blood drip on her feet. Despite her sadness, Ariel is unable to kill Prince Eric and throws herself into the sea as she is about to turn to sea foam and die. Because of her pure heart, instead of dying, she turns into a spirit and becomes a daughter of the air. She has the chance to earn an immortal soul by performing good deeds and will eventually be granted entry into the kingdom of God.

Reflecting on Plot Differences:

Why do you suppose that the writers of the Disney movie chose to make changes to the Hans Christian Andersen story?

Why do you think that the script of the stage musical The Little Mermaid JR. is different from the movie version?

Adaptation Activity #2:

As a group, select a fairy tale (The Three Little Pigs, The Ant and The Grasshopper, The Tooth Fairy, Little Red Riding Hood, Jack and The Beanstalk or another story that you know). Discuss how you might expand or alter the story if you wrote a play based on the story (select at least one major change you would make).

What kind of experience would you want your audience to have?
Would you want them to learn something?
**VOICELESSNESS**

Begin by asking your students: What happens to Ariel’s voice in *The Little Mermaid*? If prompting is necessary, remind your students that Ariel trades her voice for legs so that she can find Prince Eric on land.

Then, invite your students to experience Ariel’s challenge of voicelessness through the following activity:

- Divide your students into pairs. Prompt students to decide who will be Partner A and who will be Partner B.
- Inform students that Partner A can speak, Partner B cannot.
- Ask Partner B to think of something about herself or her past that she would be willing to share. Partner B will have one minute to communicate this information to Partner A without words.
- Ask Partner A to guess what Partner B was trying to share.
- Invite the partners to switch roles. Partner A will have to communicate something about herself or her past and Partner B will guess.
- **Modification:** If you are short on time or class size is too large for everyone to participate, ask for two volunteers and have these two model the exercise for the class.
- Reflect on the activity with your class using the following prompts:
  - What did it feel like to communicate without using your voice?
  - What communication strategies were most successful?

**THE MAGIC OF COSTUME DESIGN**

Begin by explaining that there are many jobs in the theatre apart from the actors that we see on stage. Ask your students to share the jobs in the theatre that they know. If Costume Designer is not offered, offer it yourself and explain that it is the Costume Designer’s job to help tell the story through the clothing or costumes that the characters in a play or musical wear.

Invite your students to be Costume Designers for the day! Today, they will explore the magic of Costume Design by creating two designs for Ariel: one for while she is still a mermaid living under the sea and one for when she has transformed into a human.

- Ask your students to generate a list of character traits for Ariel. Write their responses on the board.
- Ask your students what colors or textures come to mind when they think of Ariel? Write their responses on the board. These ideas will serve as a jumping off point for their designs.
- Distribute the Costume Design Templates on page 8 & 9 and challenge your students to create two designs that clearly communicate Ariel’s character and allow the audience to understand that she is the same character even though she has transformed.
- Invite the class to share their designs when they’ve finished and explain their choices.

**ENRICHMENT:** If time allows, have students create a prototype of a few of the designs in groups with newspaper and tape!
PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

ARIEL’S ‘UNDER THE SEA’ COSTUME DESIGN
PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

ARIEL’S ‘ON LAND’ COSTUME DESIGN
ARIEL’S SACRIFICE
Begin by asking your students: Why do you think Ariel chose to trade her voice to be human? Then, introduce the concept of sacrifice and ask if the class has heard the word before and if anyone can explain it. If the class is unable to come up with a working definition, provide this one: “A sacrifice is an act of giving up something valuable for the sake of something else that is more important.”

Then, invite your students to explore the theme of sacrifice in The Little Mermaid, JR. using the following activity:
- Divide the class into small groups
- Instruct the small groups to work together to determine something they want; an important goal. It could be something related to school or to their lives outside of school.
- Once each group has chosen a goal, they will come to you, now in role as Ursula, to learn the price of their goal. They will pick a “tentacle” which has a sacrifice written on it (see below).
- Each group will discuss the sacrifice provided and whether or not the goal they have chosen warrants this sacrifice.
- Have each group create a short scene that shows the moment of decision. One student will act as “the sea witch” and present the other students with the sacrifice on their chosen tentacle. The sea witch will attempt to get the other students in the scene to make the sacrifice. The other students will decide in the moment if they are willing to accept the sea witch’s terms.
- Before the scenes are shared with the class, briefly discuss proper audience etiquette, including sitting quietly, applauding at proper moments, and not booing or being disrespectful of performers.
- Each group will share their scene.
- Reflect on the activity with your students using the following prompts:
  - Would anyone have made a different choice from what you saw in one of these scenes?
  - Why would you be willing to make the sacrifice or not make the sacrifice? What influenced your decision?
  - Have you ever chosen to make a sacrifice? Would you make the same decision again?

No technology

No sugar

Saturday School

Have to wear school uniform on the weekend

No TV
POST-SHOW REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Following the performance, engage your students in a conversation about the *The Little Mermaid JR.*, using these discussion questions.

How is Ariel’s experience shaped by the actions of her friends?

What do you think this show says about friendship?

What motivates Ursula’s actions (why does she do what she does)?

Why do you think Flotsam and Jetsam help Ursula?

JOURNAL WRITING

What character in the story do you most relate to? Write a journal entry as that character describing your feelings about Ariel leaving the world “under the sea” for a chance to marry Prince Eric in the world of the humans. What would it take for you to make such a great sacrifice? Would you/your character make the same sacrifice if you were in her position?
Begin by explaining that a “prop” derives from the word property, and is any stage property that is handled during a show. In other words, any object, accessory, or handled tool used by an actor in a show is considered a “prop”.

Facilitate a discussion about the props used in The Little Mermaid JR. using the following prompts:

- What are some of the props used in The Little Mermaid?
- Why does Ariel love going to the shipwreck to find things left in the ship by humans?
- What objects does Ariel find there?
- How does she use them?

Then, invite students to explore the props for themselves using the following activity:

- Divide your students into pairs.
- Ask the pairs to imagine they are traveling to the land “Under the Sea”.
  - What objects do you imagine you can find there?
  - What unique uses could you find for them back on land?
  - Act out the object and how you would use it back on land to your partner, then switch turns.
- Invite a few of the pairs to share their scenes with the class.
Creating Our Own Production Concept

Part 1: Thinking Like a Director
- Invite one student to represent the Director of the production you have just seen while the rest of the class (as critics and academics) asks her questions about her choices in this production.
- Students may ask about the technical elements (costumes, set, lights), the staging of specific scenes, the challenges and opportunities presented by the theater space used, or any other topic relevant to this production’s execution.
- The director may use up to 3 life lines if she is stumped by any questions, or may “pass” the title to another student at any time.

Part 2: Production Meeting Preparation and Presentations
A) Creative Team Concept Meeting:
- Divide students into small groups.
- Invite them to generate a concept for an upcoming production of The Little Mermaid JR. using these prompts:
  - In your group, decide if you would like to designate a director, Costume Designer, Set Designer, and Prop Designer, or whether you would prefer to share these roles.
  - Talk with your team about the following questions:
    - What do we enjoy most about The Little Mermaid JR.?
    - What effect do we want our production to have on an audience?
    - How can we achieve that effect?
    - How should our production be different from the production we saw?
    - What moments do we want to emphasize? Where on the stage should they happen?
    - What colors should our set, prop, and costume designers use?
  - As a collaborative team, discuss how you will stage the play’s moment of transformation (when Ariel changes from a mermaid with a tail to a human with feet). In the Broadway production Ariel wore wheelie sneakers when she swam and removed the sneakers and tail altogether when she got legs. See how creatively your team can come up with an idea for this transformation. Go big: Broad strokes! Glitter! Excitement!

B) Production Pitch – Invite each group to present their production concept to the class.

C) Discussion Questions – Facilitate a discussion with the class using the following prompts:
- What worked well for you about your group’s process?
- What could have worked better?
- What parts of another group’s presentation did you connect or agree with?
- The production we saw was directed by a large group of people. Would you want to direct in a group, or alone?
Theatre Etiquette

Newcomers to the theater aren’t always sure what the proper behavior and theater etiquette is when attending a play or musical. Common questions that first-time theatergoers ask are: When do I applaud during the performance? Can I laugh out loud during the performance or will it distract the performers? Will there be refreshments like at the movies? These are all good questions to ask, and there are also other questions people might not even think to ask related to how to behave (and how NOT to behave) during the show so as to better enjoy the performance and to allow the rest of the people in the audience to enjoy it as well. Sitting in the audience of a “Live Show”, be it Broadway, Off-Broadway, or in your own school building, is not like being in a movie theater audience. It’s usually much more quiet at times, and the actors onstage need to be able to concentrate on their jobs – the show! We as audience members have to be careful not to make too much noise. The performers and fellow students in the play and backstage have a big job to do and are working hard to entertain you LIVE and IN PERSON. They are not filmed and on a screen, so it’s important to be respectful to them at all times.

Of course, they DO want you to react to the show when it IS appropriate. LAUGH! When it’s funny! GASP! When it’s scary! And LISTEN when it’s quiet. That would be perfectly appropriate in a LIVE PERFORMANCE.

DOs and DON’Ts

DON’T use a cellphone or any other electronic device for any reason. It is distracting to fellow audience members and to the performers onstage.
DO turn off all electronic devices if you happened to bring them into the performance with you. Take a break and enjoy the show!
DO unwrap candies and throat lozenges BEFORE the show begins. Unnecessary noise and crinkling of paper distracts others from enjoying the show.
DON’T bring any snacks into the theater. Snacking will distract others and yourself from enjoying the show. Enjoy snacks in the lobby before and after the show.
DO cover your mouth with your hands if you have to cough. You are in very close proximity to others.
DO show respect to your fellow students and actors by listening, clapping and paying attention to what they have to present. Sit back and enjoy the show!
DON’T talk about the show until after it’s over, and then only in the positive. Your fellow students worked very hard to entertain you and want to know if you enjoyed it!
DO applaud at the end of the show. This is the traditional way to show the actors and stage crew that you care about the work they put in and a way to say “Thank You!”
DO respect the space and comfort of those around you. Take up only the space in your seat and no one else’s.
DO bring your program out of the theatre with you. Don’t leave it behind for someone else to clean up!

THANK YOU! For doing your best to observe these Rules of Theater Etiquette that will make going to see a live performance of any kind a more positive experience for you and all those around you.
GLOSSARY

ENCOURAGE YOUR STUDENTS TO LISTEN FOR THESE VOCABULARY WORDS DURING THE MUSICAL!

ah mais oui: (ah may wee) French phrase meaning “oh, but yes”.

attention: (ah-TEN-see-yon) French word meaning “attention.”

bonjour: (bon-joor) French word meaning “hello” or “good day.”

câ c’est toujours: (sa say too-JOR) French phrase meaning “it is always.”

fathom: A unit of measurement used specifically to measure depth of water. One fathom is the same distance as two yards or six feet.

fish fillet: (fil-LAY) A thinly cut slice of boneless fish.

fish flambé: (flahm-BAY) A French dish prepared by spreading brandy over the meal and igniting it to create a dramatic presentation.

fish paté: (pah-TAY) A fancy dish of ground fish made into a spread and served with bread.

fricasee: A popular Cajun stewed dish made with seafood, gravy and vegetables.

lobster bisque: (beesk) A creamy soup made with lobster and vegetables.

le menu: (luh MEh-niew) French phrase meaning “the menu.”

maintenant: (meh-tuh-NAH) French word meaning “now.”

les poissons: (lay PWA-sohn) French phrase meaning “the fish.”

pour ce soir: (poor seh swar) French phrase meaning “for this evening.”

sashimi: A Japanese dish with very fresh fish, sliced into thin pieces and served with rice.

tuna tartare: (tar-TAR) A dish made from finely chopped fish that is seasoned and served on toast.

zut alors: (zoot a-LOHR) A French expression meaning “Oh my goodness!”