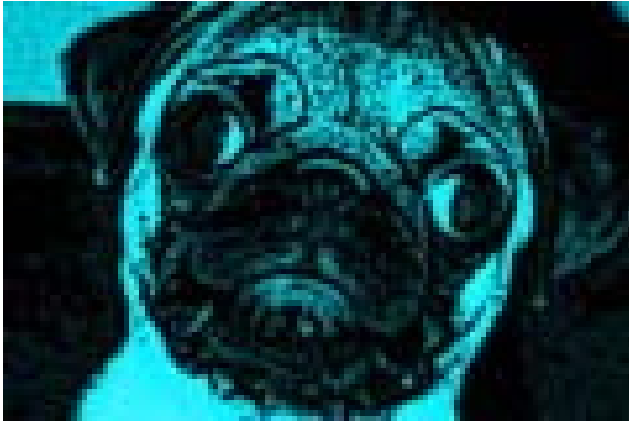


# WONDERDOG

*By Lou Clark*

*presents a Teacher  
& Parent Guide  
to . . .*



## ABOUT OUR PLAY

WONDERDOG is the story of a young girl named Katie. Katie and her mom are new in town. They have recently moved in order for Katie's mom to have a better job. This is very important because of the untimely death of Katie's father. As the story opens, we find Katie and her favorite toy dog, a stuffed animal named Bob, eating breakfast. It is Katie's first day of school in her new school. It is also her mom's first day of her new job. With so many new things around them, it is natural that the two characters are very nervous.

As Katie prepares for school we find that she wants to take Bob with her. Bob is very special to Katie because he was a gift from her dad. Her mom agrees that Bob can go along to the new school. And he is dressed for the occasion. Bob wears a necktie just like the one that Katie wears.



At school Katie meets her new teacher, a very nice man named Mr. Wright. Everything seems to be going well for her until one of her classmates named Penny arrives. Penny is a classic bully. Anyone who is new or doesn't look exactly like her or act exactly like her is a target for her unkind jokes and anger. Unknowingly, Katie makes this worse when she correctly answers a question in class that Penny has gotten wrong. At recess Katie pays the price for being new when Penny picks a fight with her.

At first Katie is good at avoiding the conflict, but when Penny takes Bob away from her, Katie's anger gets away from her. But luckily, Pug is watching.

Pug, a stray dog, has taken a liking to Katie and has followed her to school. When he sees Penny picking on Katie, he stands up for her and scares the bully away. Pug is a real hero in Katie's eyes. But when Katie learns Pug's story, she is moved to help him in return.

Pug is a very special dog. He can talk! He tells Katie that when his last family found out that he could speak, they wanted to turn him into "Wonderdog," a miracle dog that all of the newspapers and television reporters would pay to see. Not wanting a life of notoriety, Pug ran away. Pug tells Katie that, like most dogs, all he wants is a place to belong and someone to rub his tummy.

Determined to not let other humans know he can talk, Pug tries to live with the other homeless dogs in Dog Alley. But when the dogs of Dog Alley learn he can talk, they, too, turn him away out of fear. Maybe humans aren't the only animals who don't like their peers to be different? Katie takes Pug back to Dog Alley where they find acceptance and hatch a plan to get Bob back from Penny the bully.

Together, Katie and Pug learn to stand up for themselves. They also learn to appreciate the things that make them unique. With such great discoveries made, Pug finds a new home and Katie's wish for a REAL dog to live with Bob comes true. Maybe dogs ARE capable of the super power of friendship if you rub their tummies?!?



## OUR PLAYWRIGHT



### Lou Clark

is a playwright, director, educator, producer and native New Englander who now calls New Mexico home. Clark is the author of more than ten plays that have been produced as readings, workshops, and full productions in Colorado, New

Mexico, New York City, Seattle, and Washington, DC.

#### **Her works for young audiences include:**

**WONDERDOG** and *I SEA*, winner of the 2006 National Theater for Youth Playwriting Award from the Kennedy Center. Representative plays for adults include: *The Politics of Hair*, *Godawful Dress*, *Out on the Road*, *Searching for Calliopeia*, *Run Between the Raindrops*, and *Freewriting*.

**Recent directing credits include:** A staged reading of *Grand Delusions* by Ross Maxwell at the Kennedy Center; the world premiere production of *Body Burden* by Dale Dunn at the Adobe Theater in Albuquerque; *Searching for Calliopeia* in the Words Afire New Play Festival at the University of New Mexico (this production earned Ms. Clark a Regional Directing Award from the Society of Stage Directors & Choreographers and an Honorable Mention for the 2007 National Student Director Award from the Kennedy Center); and the New Mexico premiere of *I Am My Own Wife* at the Vortex Theatre.

She has taught playwriting to adults with developmental disabilities at VSA Arts of New Mexico, to at-risk youth at Acoma Pueblo, and to graduate and undergraduate students at the University of New Mexico, from which she earned her M.F.A. with distinction in Dramatic Writing.

As a graduate student, she studied Playwriting for Young Audiences with Susan Pearson. Clark has also studied playwriting at London's Royal Court Theatre and at the Kennedy Center. Professional training includes the completion of a season-long Artistic Internship at Seattle Repertory Theatre, supervised by Acting Artistic Director Jerry Manning, during which she assisted playwrights, including Pulitzer & Tony Award Winner August Wilson and acclaimed solo performer Sandra Tsing-Loh. She also completed an Artistic Internship with the Bonderman Conference at Indiana Repertory Theater assisting playwright Deni Krueger and Robyn Flatt, who is Artistic Director of the The Dallas Children's Theater.

#### **Lou's productions for 2009 include:**

**WONDERDOG** — her play for children produced by Pollyanna Theatre Company at the Long Performing Arts Center in Austin; a world premiere adaptation of *Lysistrata* at Albuquerque Little Theater; and a staged reading of a collaborative adaptation of the Charlotte Perkins Gilman feminist utopian novella, *Herland*, at Seattle Repertory Theatre, produced by the Northwest Playwright's Alliance.

Clark is the Artistic Director of SOLARITY, a new professional multi-ability theatre company comprised of members with and without disabilities at VSA N4th Art Center in Albuquerque. She is also Co-Artistic Director of Ka-HOOTZ, an Albuquerque-based theater company devoted to the development of new works and serious theater that doesn't take itself too seriously. Clark is a proud member of the Dramatists Guild of America.

## ABOUT SEEING A PLAY

Grade Level: Kindergarten  
 Subject: Theatre/Language Arts  
 Strand: Response and Evaluation  
 Learning Objective: K.5 The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances.  
 Student Expectations: (A) The student is expected to identify appropriate audience behavior.  
 And  
 (D) Observe the performance of artists

We urge you to take this opportunity to tell your students about the very special event that they will attend:

**WONDERDOG** by Lou Clark. Tell the young audience members that this production is a live theatre event and is not like watching television, or a DVD, or going to see a movie. While this difference may seem very obvious to adults, remember that many young people have never seen a play before. This may be some young audience members' first experiences at the theatre. Please do not assume that someone has taught them how to sit and watch a live performing arts event. The youngest of our audience members need to be coached on how to best enjoy their audience experiences and older youth can always benefit from a reminder.

*Begin by asking the students who might know the difference between seeing a live play and watching a DVD or a video.* Some of their answers might be that a video or DVD can be stopped and started when the audience wishes. It can be rewound if they miss part of it, the actors cannot hear the audience in a DVD, but the audience can hear the actors, etc. Stress to the students that a live event is very different from those experiences that they are familiar with at home.

*Explain to the students that when theatre is doing a good job, it makes you think. And as soon as you form a thought, your first instinct is often to turn to your friend next to you and start to talk. But audiences at a play cannot talk while the play is going on because nothing can be rewound! And the company members of Pollyanna Theatre do not want them to miss a single word or movement.*

*Stress to the students that audience etiquette calls for them to remain in their seats during the performance, not to talk while the play is in progress, and to closely watch the actors who are presenting the play. You can also tell them that applause is a very appropriate way for the students to show their appreciation at the end of the play. And because this play is a comedy, the company members at Pollyanna Theatre encourage them to laugh when laughter is appropriate.*

With a little coaching, you can have a big impact on how much young people enjoy and understand this production.

## ABOUT OUR PRODUCTION

Many pieces of literature are about human nature and use animals to show us something about ourselves. This play is one of those pieces of literature. On one level, it is the story of a young girl and a dog that helps her. On another level is it the story about what it means to be a true friend and stand up for what is right. These are very human issues told through the story of a dog. This offered the designers working on WONDERDOG the chance to explore these human characteristics while at the same time preserving the fun fictional world of talking dogs.

It became our desire to present both levels of the play, both canine and human, as a fairytale with the dangers and growth opportunities found in our daily lives as we grow into mature, caring people. We believe that theatre has a unique power to teach us important things about human behavior and the human spirit. This is an important aspect of Pollyanna's mission.

Therefore, while characters in the play are clearly dogs, they are also costumed with very human attributes. Production Designers Pam Fletcher Friday and Ia Enstera have woven the two worlds together in a playful yet thought-provoking way. A drawing of one of the costume designs is included in this guide. By looking at the drawing you can see the aspects of the character that make him clearly a dog but also much more. We see a human face with very human eyes that express the thoughts and emotions of both aspects of the character, a fictional animal with a human heart.

## PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION

Your students will gain greater enjoyment of their trip to the theatre to see WONDERDOG if you take a few minutes and not only share the plot/story of the play with them, but also discuss a few of the play's themes. This helps them look for meaning in the words and images they will hear and see.

- Tell the students that Katie, the main character in the play, has recently lost her father. He died at a very young age. The play does not tell us how or why. Only that he is gone and Katie and her mom are working hard to move forward without him. How many of you have ever known someone who had a family member die? What sorts of feelings did they have about it? What can you do as a friend to help them?
- How many of you have ever been new to a town, neighborhood or school? What did your first day there feel like? Who helped you get to know your way around? Who made you feel welcome? How did you feel when people were not helpful?
- How many of you have ever had to deal with a bully at school? Why do bullies act the way they do? What is a good way to deal with a bully?
- How many of you have a dog? What is his name? What language does your dog speak? What do you enjoy doing with your dog? If your dog had a super power, what might it be?

Challenge students to look for examples of these themes when they see the play.

## READING LIST

Here is suggested reading for parents and teachers for dealing with children who have lost a loved one:

- Sad Isn't Bad : A Good Grief Guidebook For Kids Dealing with Loss by Michaelene Mundy
- Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children by Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen
- Bridge to Tarabithia by Katherine Patterson
- The Next Place by Warren Hanson
- Help Me Say Goodbye by Janis Silverman



## ABOUT THE FOLLOWING SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Pollyanna's production of WONDERDOG will be enjoyed by audiences of all ages, but is designed for children ages 5 – 9. This is a timeless story of friendship and caring as well as dogs and children. This means that creating grade-level-appropriate classroom activities is a bit of a challenge. But, because the Language Arts curriculum is a spiral curriculum, basic skills learned in lower grades are revisited and enriched each school year. Likewise, an activity written for a higher grade level can easily be adjusted down the basic learning spiral for younger children who are addressing those basic skills for the first time. We encourage teachers and parents of all grade levels to use these basic activities as a starting point for adapting learning opportunities for the children you bring to the theatre. The following activities are based on TEKS for grades K – 2, but can easily be adapted for other grade levels.

Our goal is to provide students with opportunities to practice good grammar and improve student use of the English language in both writing and speaking.

## VOCABULARY BUILDING

Begin by reminding the students that when they are reading something new that there are always ways to detect an unfamiliar word's meaning by looking for clues given by other words in the sentence or surrounding sentences. Give the students the following words and their usage from WONDERDOG and ask them to write down what they think those words might mean. Urge them to base their definitions on what they might know of the word's root as well as the context in which the word is used.

All of the words listed below are words that your students will hear when they come to see WONDERDOG. Spend some time asking the students to look up the various words in their dictionaries. Several of the words below have prefixes or suffixes. Ask students to circle the prefix or suffix to help them identify the word's root.



- excuse
- adventures
- Husky
- Collie
- introducing
- surprised
- Lately
- unhappy
- expecting
- working
- wearing
- stuffed
- scared
- talking
- looking

### Vocabulary Building Activity:

Learning Objectives taken from TEKS for Grade 2 2.5 Reading/Word Identification. The student uses a variety of word identification strategies. The student is expected to:

F. Use structural cues such as prefixes and suffixes to recognize words, for example, un- and ly.

G. Use knowledge of word order (syntax) and context to support word identification and confirm word meaning.

And

2.8 Reading/Vocabulary Development. The student develops an extensive vocabulary.

The student is expected to:

A. Discuss meanings of words and develop vocabulary through meaningful/concrete experiences.

## POST-PRODUCTION ACTIVITY

### WHAT MY FAVORITE CHARACTER WAS LIKE

Grade Level: First Grade  
 Subject: Theatre/Language Arts  
 Strand: Perception  
 Learning Objective: (1.1) The student develops concepts about self, human relationships, and the environment, using elements of drama and conventions of theatre.  
 Student Expectations: (C) imitate actions and sounds  
 And  
 (D) imitate and create animate and inanimate objects in dramatic play.

After seeing WONDERDOG, ask the students to think back and remember what their favorite character looked like and sounded like. How did the actor manipulate his or her voice so that this character sounded unique? How did the way they moved tell us what kind of animal they represented? What did they do with their faces? How did they move their hands or feet? After giving the students a moment to think back and remember their favorite character, ask each student to tell you who their favorite character was.

In the box to the right is a line of dialogue from the play spoken by each character. Give each child a line of dialogue from the play that fits his or her favorite character. Challenge them to remember and recreate what their favorite character sounded like and how they moved. Give each child a few moments to remember and recreate the character of his or her choice.

Group the children into favorite character groups. If several children have selected Pug as their favorite character, ask them to work together creating a "Pug Group." If several children all selected Kenny, create a "Kenny Group," etc.

Give the children a few minutes to talk to each other in their group about their character of choice and practice how they want to say their line of dialogue.

After some practice time, have the children stand with their group and deliver their line of dialogue in character through their vocal choices and movement observed at the performance. Depending upon the size of your class and the time available, the students can share their line of dialogue individually if they wish or deliver it as a group.

Remind the students that this is a review done for fun and that there is no right or wrong way to recreate their favorite character.

Model this activity for the students by selecting your own favorite character and showing them that even adults are willing to take a risk and imitate what they just experienced at the theatre. This is an important step in a drama activity!

### Character Lines for use in this activity:

Katie: Hey Bob, wanna see what flying cereal looks like? O.K., here goes!

Susan: Don't play with your food. Eat that cereal, young lady.

Mr. Wright: I like all kinds of dogs. I have a real one at home. She's part husky and part collie.

Penny: Look "Katie" brought a stuffed animal to school. She's a weirdo in a tie and a little baby, too!

Kenny: Penny, I think you better give that back.

Pug: I talked because I saw you listening to Bob. I never met a person who really listened to dogs before.

Jazz: I'll talk as much as you want if I can have more belly rubs!

Prissy: Don't you have any pride! Get up off the ground! Are you going to be taken in by a few belly rubs?

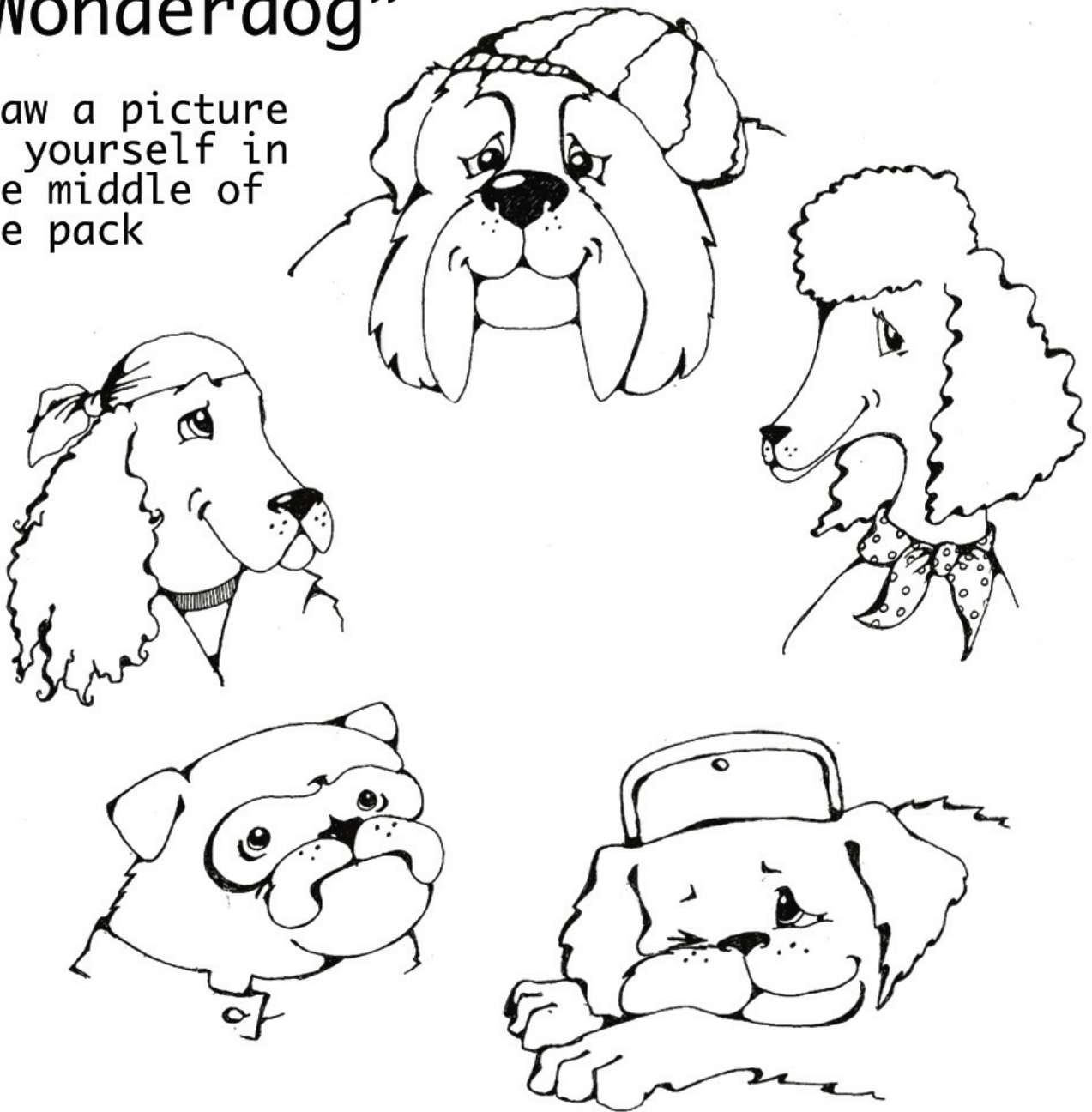
Big: What about Katie? Can she take the Dog Oath too?

Napper: You can bark, Katie. It might help to pretend you are asking for food.



# “Wonderdog”

Draw a picture of yourself in the middle of the pack



NAME _____
AGE _____
SCHOOL _____

*This is a drawing of Costume Designer la Enstera for the play. If you were the Costume Designer, what color would it be? Color the drawing before you come to see the production. While you are watching the play, look to see if your design looks like the Designer's choices. Remember, there is no right or wrong way to design a costume.*



## WE'D LIKE TO THANK OUR SPONSORS

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*Please write...*

*We would love to hear from you! You can email us at [judy@pollytheatre.org](mailto:judy@pollytheatre.org).*

**OR**

*Write using the “pollyanna fan mail” link on our website,  
<http://www.pollytheatre.org/downloadables/DearPolly.pdf>.*