



EDUCATORS GUIDE

It's Okay to Be Different Stories by Todd Parr



This guide is geared toward teachers of grades Pre K - 3.

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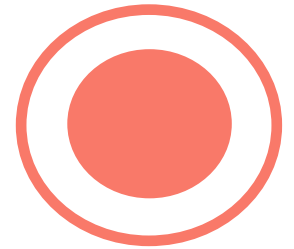
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About This Guide

Use this guide to help your students anticipate, investigate, and reflect upon your live performance experience. This guide is geared toward teachers of grades Pre K - 3.

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The great thing about the arts is that they can often evolve to meet their context. That means that many of the activities shared are flexible to a lot of different contexts depending on how you choose to frame them in your class. We know you all are experts on your classroom and students, so we invite you to use these lessons and activities as guideposts and adapt them to fit your classroom management style, range of student ability, and time constraints.

LEARNING CONNECTIONS

Social-Emotional Learning: Celebrating Differences, Recognizing Strengths
21st Century Skills: Communication, Creativity, Collaboration
Language Arts: Reading, Speaking, Listening

LEARNING STANDARDS ICON KEY



Educators, we invite you to share with us what you did in your classroom around this guide or the production. You can email eschildkret@portlandovations.org or reach us via [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#).

We want to hear and see what great learning is happening in your classrooms.

Introducing the Performance

It is often helpful to share some context with your students before they attend a live performance. Read below for more information on the performance you're coming to see.

About the Performance

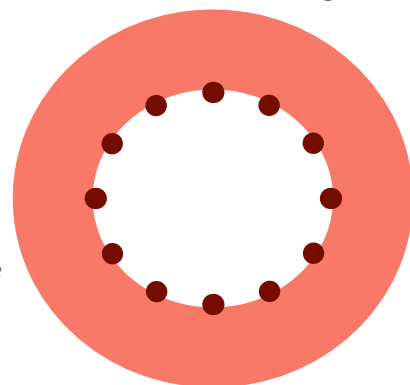
With his signature blend of playfulness and sensitivity, Todd Parr explores important and timely subjects in this heart-felt performance by Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia. With captivating puppetry, a diverse cast, and playful original music, this production brings three favorite books by Todd Parr to life on stage. *It's Okay to Be Different* cleverly delivers the important messages of acceptance, understanding, and self-confidence. Equally whimsical and heartfelt, *The Earth Book*, is a sweet homage to our beautiful planet inspiring readers of all ages to do their part to keep the Earth happy and healthy. *This is My Hair* is a funny exploration of how silly hair can be and that no matter how your hair looks, always feel good about yourself.



About the Company

Mermaid Theatre has been in continuous operation since it was founded in 1972 in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. They moved to the neighboring town of Windsor in 1987, and helped to revitalize the historic town's downtown business core. Mermaid Theatre's extensive headquarters encompass production studios, administrative offices, rehearsal quarters, a versatile studio, animation studios, film & television recording capacity, and an elegant 400-seat performance facility known as The Mermaid Imperial Performing Arts Centre (MIPAC). The enthusiastic response to their innovative family audiences programming has enabled Mermaid Theatre to establish unparalleled touring circuits.

Each year Mermaid Theatre presents more than 400 performances for 200,000 spectators - many of them new to the theatre experience. Mermaid Theatre regularly crosses Canada and the United States, and has represented Canada in more than a dozen countries. Recorded narration featuring outstanding international artists facilitates performances in English, Spanish, Korean, Japanese, French, Cantonese and Mandarin. Closer to home, Mermaid's Institute of Puppetry Arts offers puppetry instruction at both community and professional levels. The Institute's imaginative curriculum-based touring programs entertain and inform students and teachers throughout the region, as well as encourage educators to incorporate the performing arts in the teaching of science. The MIPAC Performing Arts Series attracts audiences of all ages. Many travel from nine counties to join local fans in enjoying the Family Fare program, unique to Nova Scotia.



MERMAID THEATRE OF NOVA SCOTIA

What To Expect

The Performance

- The performance is about 60 minutes long.
- The script for this performance is entirely taken from Todd Parr's original books. No new language has been added.
- All narration has been pre-recorded as a voice over. The narrator is never on stage or visible while speaking.
- The performance will be sign interpreted.

The Puppets

- The puppets in this production are created using black light. They glow when ultraviolet light shines on them. They are bright and colorful.
- The puppeteers are dressed all in black so that the puppets stand out. You may see the puppeteers as they manipulate the puppets.
- The puppets are designed to look like Todd Parr's original illustrations.

The Music

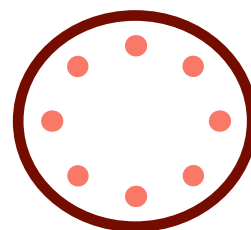
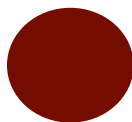
- The music is light and playful. It is sometimes slow and whimsical and sometimes fast and energetic.

The Lights

- This performance uses ultraviolet light on stage to illuminate puppets.
- In order to achieve the illumination, the stage will be painted black, and the house lights will be off. The theater will be very dark during this performance.
- The performance has a few blackouts where the theater will be completely dark.

Resources

- Plan your visit to Merrill Auditorium: <https://portlandovations.org/about/accessibility-merrill-auditorium/>
- Learn more about accessibility at Portland Oventions: <https://portlandovations.org/about/accessibility/>
- Get the latest health and safety information for Portland Oventions productions: <https://portlandovations.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/School-Time-Performance-Health-and-Safety-Protocols-May-2023.pdf>



Being an Audience Member

An audience member is a part of a larger community – an audience – and you all work together to create your theater experience. Audience members play a special and important role in the performance. The performers are very aware of the audience while they perform. Sharing their hard work and joy with you is one of the best parts of being a performer. Each performance calls for different audience responses. Lively bands, musicians and dancers may desire audience members to clap and move to the beat. Other performers require silent focus on the stage and talking from the audience can be distracting. A theater is designed to magnify sound and even the smallest whispers can be heard throughout the auditorium. Mermaid Theatre encourages clapping and laughing at the parts of the performance that you enjoy.

As you enjoy the show, think about being a part of the performance.

- What are the differences between attending a live performance and going to a movie or watching television?
- What are some different types of live performances? How many can you name?
- What kind of responses might an audience give to different types of performances?
- What are the different cues that a performer will give you so that you know how to respond? For example, might they bow or pause for applause?



The interior of Merrill Auditorium

Essential Questions

Who is Todd Parr?

Todd Parr is the author and illustrator of more than 50 books for children including the New York Times bestselling *The I Love You Book*, *The Earth Book*, and *The Thankful Book*. His books have received numerous awards and are available in over eighteen languages throughout the world. He is the co-creator of the popular Daytime Emmy® nominated television show, “ToddWorld”, as well as short films for “Sesame Street”. Todd is also working on a new show based on his books, produced by Spider Eye in the UK. In a review of his 2019 release, *The Kindness Book*, *The School Library Journal* states “Parr encourages consideration of all people and creatures great and small.” Kindness and empathy remain at the forefront of Todd’s books and in his collaborations with SF-MARIN Food Bank, Stouffer’s, *People Magazine* and several companies working towards helping people, animals, and promoting literacy. Todd lives in Berkeley, California with his three adopted Pit



Todd Parr with his dogs

Who created *It's Okay to Be Different: Stories* by Todd Parr?

Everything you see on stage was created by a team of artists. A director imagined how to adapt each book for the stage, including the puppets and how they move, a composer created the music, a sound producer took the composer’s music and created recordings so that it could be played during productions, and a narrator recorded all the stories. Read about the people who created *It's Okay to Be Different* below.

Jim Morrow, Director/Production Designer

Jim creates puppets for stage, television and film. He’s directed numerous shows for the Theatre, including *The Very Hungry Caterpillar & Other Eric Carle Favorites*; *Leo Lionni’s Swimmy*, *Frederick*, *Inch by Inch*; *Goodnight Moon* and *The Runaway Bunny*, *The Rainbow Fish* as well as designed many others. A gifted performer, Jim has toured extensively in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and Japan. He serves as director of puppetry for Symphony Nova Scotia’s production of *The Nutcracker*, and frequently conducts master classes in puppetry in North America and abroad. Jim is Mermaid Theatre’s Managing Artistic Director.



Asif Illyas, Composer

Asif Illyas is an ECMA award-winning veteran of the Canadian music scene, based on the Atlantic Coast in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada and currently spends most of his time creating music for film and television. His career spans over 25 years where he fronted Canadian progressive-pop outfit and EastWest/Warner Europe recording artists, MIR, touring four continents and producing 4 critically-acclaimed albums. He also was guitarist for Cutting Crew, during a portion of lead singer Nick Van Eede's solo career during the late 1990's. He has appeared on albums with Sting, Leonard Cohen and Joni Mitchell and performed on stage with Australia's Colin Hay of Men At Work, Paula Cole, and many others. He has composed and arranged for many orchestral charts for symphonies such as VSO, WSO and SNS across the country in their Pops series'. He was also assistant to the musical direction for David Foster's touring All-Star show, working for artists BabyFace, Lionel Ritchie, Natalie Cole, and Nathan East.

Currently, his work is in dramatic and documentary score production and has written award-winning scores for feature films such as TIFF and CSA Winner, "Weirdos", 2018 breakthrough Horror epic, "The Child Remains", Cannes-Winner "Blackbird", and National Film Board's award-winning documentary, "The Chocolate Farmer" and other hit-documentaries such as "Sickboy", HBO's "Fanarchy", "Bounty - Into The Hurricane", "Forever Young" among many others

Shehab Illyas, Sound Producer

Shehab Illyas has explored his penchants for the visual arts through photography since the 1990's working on several commercial projects and gallery shows. He made the transition into screen production and editing in 2004. Having a background in music has given him a unique shooting and editing style with over 20 years of involvement in the music industry. Shehab is owner of Skylab Productions based in his hometown of Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Rebecca Thomas, Narrator

Rebecca Thomas is a Mi'kmaw with family roots in Lennox Island First Nation. She is the daughter of a residential school survivor and unrelenting advocate for her community. She is a published poet and was the Halifax Poet Laureate from 2016 to 2018. She has won numerous awards and accolades. She has performed with a Tribe Called Red and has spoken and lectured at conferences and coffee houses from coast to coast. She has written for CBC, the *Washington Post*, and *Bon Appétit Magazine* but has yet to make a chapbook (another name for a short book of poetry). Rebecca writes kids books about growing up the child of a residential school survivor. Her first book *I'm Finding My Talk* was shortlisted for the First Nations Community Reads Award. Her children's book *Swift Fox All Along* was a finalist for a Governor General literary award, and Marilyn Bailie Picture Book Award and was also shortlisted for the First Nations Community Reads Award. Her collection of poetry called *I Place You Into the Fire* was a CBC's Top 20 book of 2020.

What is so unique about Mermaid Theatre's Puppetry?

Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia performs in a style called Black Light Theater, or Black Light Puppetry. Originating from Asia, and popularized in the west by theaters in Prague, Black Light Theater creates illusions using black light in a dark theater or black box. Black Light Theater uses glowing fabrics, props, and puppets manipulated by actors dressed in black against a black background so that they become nearly invisible, a theatrical illusion called a "black cabinet".

Although black light may seem very modern, the principles of Black Light Theater have their roots in ancient China, where acrobats used brightly colored props against a black background in juggling routines. Japanese bunraku puppetry uses the same principle of actors dressed in black against a black background manipulating brightly colored puppets to create the illusion that puppeteers fade into the background. At the turn of the 19th century, French filmmaker George Méliès used the black cabinet illusion in his first films. Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia continues this tradition in its performances, using black light and fluorescent paint against a black background to create the illusion that illustrations from popular books like Todd Parr's *It's Okay to Be Different*



Bunraku in Kyoto



"Rainbow Fish" and "It's Okay to Be Different" by Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia

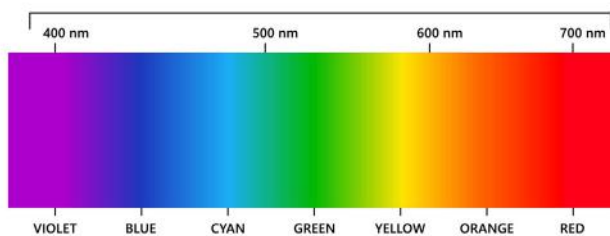
Why does black light make some things glow?

To understand why a black light makes objects glow, like the puppets in *It's Okay to Be Different*, we first have to understand light frequencies. Light travels in wavelengths, and the speed at which that wave moves through space is its frequency. Our brains interpret light frequencies as colors. The human eye is able to see a range of light roughly from blue to red, but there is some light our eyes cannot see. "Infra-red" light has a frequency lower than red, and "ultra-violet" light has a frequency higher than blue.

"Black light" is a bulb designed to emit ultra-violet light. It's called a black light because if you look at it, it won't seem very bright, and if you put it in a dark room (or a dark theater) it won't seem to brighten the room very much. That's because our eyes cannot detect ultra-violet light. The bulb does emit a lot of light, however, and we're able to see that light in the way it interacts with other things. Some materials have the special property that they absorb ultra-violet light and then re-emit that light at lower frequencies that our eyes can see. This is called "fluorescence." The puppets Mermaid Theatre uses in *It's Okay to Be Different* are painted with special paints that fluoresce when ultra-violet light shines on them. That makes them appear to glow in the dark.



VISIBLE SPECTRUM



Try it for yourself:

Try an experiment in fluorescence using black light! You can purchase black light bulbs and flashlights (they're surprisingly inexpensive), or create your own using a cell phone, tape, and sharpies. To create your own black light, color 2 pieces of scotch tape with a blue sharpie and 2 pieces with a purple sharpie. Layer the tape over your phone's flashlight, alternating blue and purple. Turn your flashlight on and you've created your own mock black light!

Invite students to bring in a variety of objects and materials and test them under the black light to see which ones glow the brightest. Consider lots of different substances, including liquids and foods as well as fabrics and plastics (tip: have some tonic water on hand. Quinine glows blue under black light). How does the appearance of the object change when exposed to black light? What colors and materials glow the best?

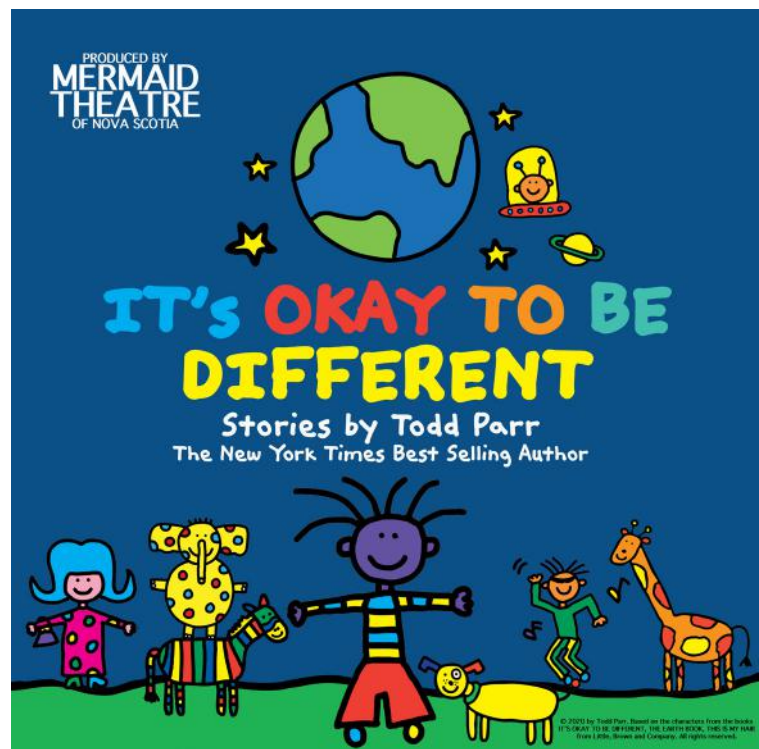
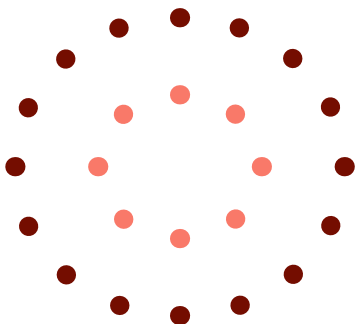
PRE-PERFORMANCE LESSON ACTIVITIES

Here are some ideas for lesson activities that expand on the essential questions, topics, and themes of *It's Okay to Be Different: Stories* by Todd Parr.

Vocabulary

Share these words with students prior to the performance and create definitions together so that they have a shared vocabulary of how to talk about what they watched.

Earth
Different
Hair
Market
Sparkle
Energy
Small, Medium, Large, and Extra Large
Feelings
Special
Important



ACTIVITY: Come My Neighbor

This active strategy is a great way to explore the qualities your students have in common and celebrate differences in preparation for seeing the show. Encourage students to move quickly (and safely) in creating groups and offering new ideas. The faster students are able to offer new ideas, the more fun the game is. This is also a great activity to use as an icebreaker with a new group of students.



Materials:

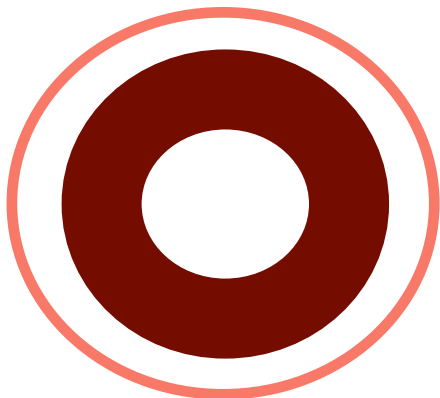
Open space

Procedure:

1. Begin with the class in a circle in an open space with enough room for each individual to move freely.
2. Demonstrate how the game is played with a simple invitation. Say “Come My Neighbor if _____” and fill in the blank with something a number of students will agree with. For example, “Come My Neighbor if you like reading.”
3. Encourage any student who agrees with your statement to form a cluster around you, the speaker.
4. Invite a student who is not part of the group to offer their own “Come My Neighbor” and invite students who agree with the statement to form a new cluster.
5. Continue with the game until students struggle to come up with “Come My Neighbor” suggestions. You may choose to end the game with your own statement of something everyone in the room can agree with.

After playing the game, consider as a class:

- What are some things we have in common?
- What are some of the things that make us different from each other?
- What did it feel like to be part of the group?
- What did it feel like to offer your own suggestion?



ACTIVITY: Narrative Pantomime

Narrative Pantomime is a drama strategy that invites students to imagine and pantomime a character's physical and emotional journey within a story, as narrated by a teacher. This strategy can be used to expand students' background knowledge of the events in a story (both factual and emotional) through a specific character's point of view. In this case, it's a great way to introduce and familiarize students with some of the stories they will see on stage.



Materials:

Open space

1 or more books by Todd Parr such as *It's Okay to Be Different*, *This is My Hair*, and *The Earth Book* (note: There are several books by Todd Parr, including *It's Okay to Be Different* available at Portland Public Library!)

Procedure:

1. Read through the story once as a class in a circle on the floor. Encourage students to listen actively and pay attention to the characters they encounter in the story. (even if the character is "you")
2. Invite students to find their own space in the room where they have enough room to move and won't be distracted.
3. Explain to students that you're going to read the story again, and invite them to imagine and act out what they hear silently, as if it is happening to them. Encourage students to consider all their senses as they act out the story.
4. Read the story slowly, giving students time to complete their actions.

After students have had an opportunity to complete their narrative pantomimes, gather back together as a class and discuss the story and students' interpretations. Some questions you might consider are:

- What do you remember most from the story? What did you see/smell/touch/taste/hear?
- What are some feelings the character had in the story? Why did they feel that way?
- What do you think happens next in the story? OR What could you add to the story?

POST-PERFORMANCE LESSON ACTIVITIES

Post-Performance Discussion Questions

1. Describe a memorable moment from the performance, what parts of the performance are sticking with you?
2. What were the stories about?
3. What was it like to watch a book come to life on stage? What surprised you?
4. *It's Okay to Be Different* celebrates all the things that make us unique. What are some ways we are different that you heard in the show?
5. What are some things that make you unique?
6. How might you help make your community and classroom more welcoming for everyone?

ACTIVITY: I Am Me Self Portrait

Reflect on the show by creating individual self portraits that celebrate all the things that make you unique.

Materials:

I Am Me Worksheet (next page)

Art supplies such as crayons, markers, construction paper cut into shapes, glue, glitter, etc.

Procedure:

1. Begin by inviting the class to brainstorm a list of traits they remember from *It's Okay to Be Different*. What moments from the show are sticking with students? What types of differences did the show celebrate?
2. Encourage each student in the class to think about what makes them special or unique. What would they like others to see, hear, or know about them?
3. Hand each student an I Am Me worksheet, and invite students to choose 3 things that make them special or unique to highlight. Write those qualities on the page.
4. Design a self portrait on the worksheet that shows those qualities.
5. Once portraits are complete, consider staging a gallery opening by hanging portraits in your classroom and inviting students to tour the gallery examining each portrait.

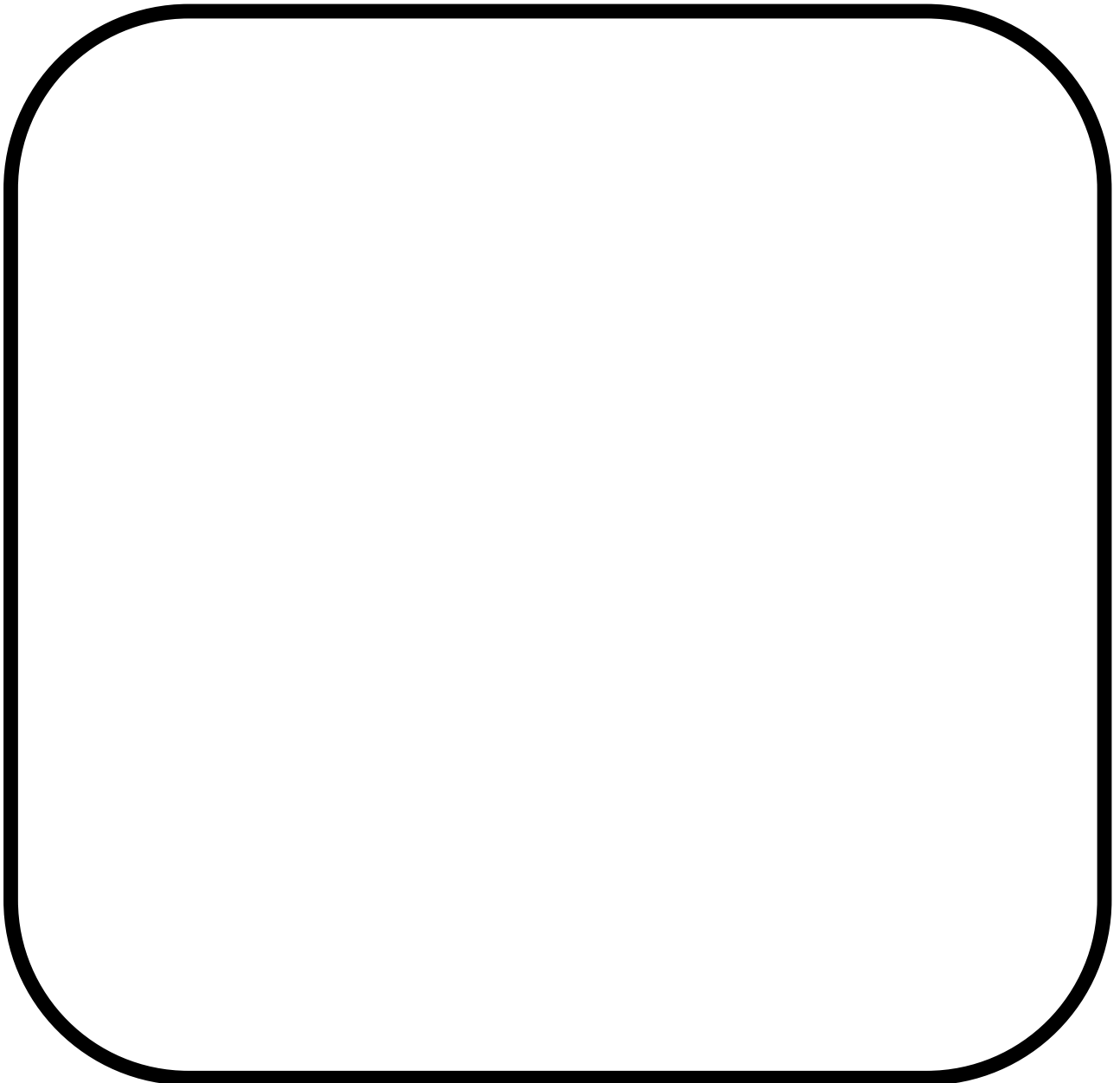


I Am Me Worksheet

My Name is: _____

3 qualities that make me unique are _____ , _____ ,
and _____ .

My Self Portrait:



ACTIVITY: Our Planet Promise

Commit to small actions that can help protect the planet as a class, using Todd Parr's *Earth Book* as a starting point.

Materials:

- A large roll of paper
- Crayons or Markers
- 10 ways I can help the earth (below)

Procedure:

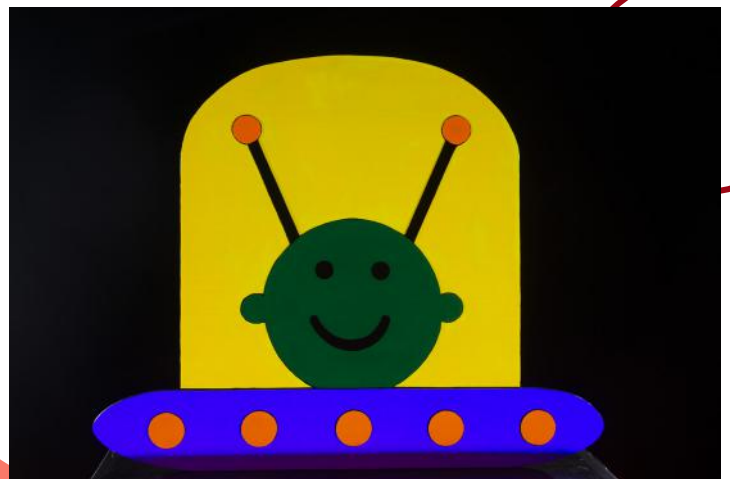
1. Share the list of "10 Ways I can help the earth" from the Earth Book by Todd Parr. Consider, what are things on this list are you already doing as a class? What could you start doing or do more of?
2. What's missing from this list that could help the class protect the earth?
3. Examine your brainstormed list and select a few actions to implement now. They might be things the class is particularly excited by, things that can be done easily and immediately, or things that require a little extra focus to achieve. This will become your Planet Promise.
4. Write your Planet Promise on a large sheet of paper. Invite students to add their own illustrations to the paper and sign it to demonstrate their commitment to your Planet Promise.
5. Hang your Planet Promise prominently in your classroom for everyone to see and remember. Consider sharing your Planet Promise with your school community.



10 ways I can help the earth

- Turn off the lights
- RECYCLE !
- Save my leftovers
- Be nice to the worms
- Share a book
- Plant a tree
- Use both sides of the paper
- Save water
- Clean up trash
- Put my underwear in the freezer when it's hot

From The Earth Book by Todd Parr



RESOURCES

- Visit Mermaid Theatre's Website: <https://mermaidtheatre.ca/>
- Download coloring pages and other activities created by Todd Parr: <https://www.toddparr.com/landing-page/todd-parr-fun/>
- Read Todd Parr's answers to frequently asked questions, and submit your own questions to Todd: <https://www.toddparr.com/landing-page/todd-parr-todd/#questions-for-todd>
- Download a teaching guide based on several of Todd Parr's books from Scholastic: <https://clubs.scholastic.com/on/demandware.static/-/Sites-master-catalog-rco-us/default/dw3c8fd1c3/pdfs/ToddParr-TeachingGuide.pdf>



Portland Ovation, founded in 1931, produces dynamic performing arts events including classical music, jazz, opera, dance, theater, and Broadway. We believe that cultural enrichment should be high quality and accessible to all. Ovation collaborates with other nonprofit organizations, education systems, and the business sector to promote lifelong learning while celebrating the power and virtuosity of the performing arts. We bring the exhilaration of the performing arts into our communities with free events as part of Ovation Offstage, connecting artists and audiences. Join us at unexpected “art happenings,” classroom workshops, masterclasses, community discussions, and pre-performance lectures to explore together the relevance and connection of the performing arts to our lives.

Land Acknowledgment

Portland Ovation’s programs are presented on Wabanaki land, home of the Maliseet, Mi’kmaq, Passamaquoddy, Abenaki and Penobscot Nations, their elders past and present, and future generations.

We encourage you to learn more and take action in support of Maine’s Indigenous communities through the following organizations

[Abbe Museum](#)

Maine’s premier museum dedicated to indigenous history and culture. Their mission is to inspire new learning about the Wabanaki Nations with every visit.

[Maine-Wabanaki Reach](#)

A Native-led non-profit that supports the self-determination of Wabanaki people through education, truth-telling, restorative justice, and restorative practices in Wabanaki and Maine communities.

Created and written by Dr. Liz Schildkret

Additional information and images provided by Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia

Designed by Katie Day

© Portland Ovation 2023

We want to know what *you* thought about the performance. You can write your answers below or draw a picture on the back of this page. Thank you!

PERFORMANCE: *It's Okay to Be Different: Stories* by Todd Parr

SCHOOL NAME: _____ TEACHER NAME: _____ GRADE: _____

YOUR NAME: _____ May we use your name when we share your comments?
Yes__ No__

What did you like about *It's Okay to Be Different*? Why did you like that part?

What was something that you learned during the performance?

What would you like to tell other kids about *It's Okay to Be Different*?

What types of performance would you like Portland Oventions to offer in the future? (Feel free to share what type of art you are interested in (theater, dance, music), what cultures you might like to see, what topics the art might connect with, or specific artists.)

We want to know what *you* thought about the performance.

Draw a picture of a part of *It's Okay to Be Different: Stories by Todd Parr* that you liked. Thank you!



YOUR NAME: _____ SCHOOL: _____ TEACHER: _____ GRADE: _____

Please scan and email to offstage@portlandovations.org or mail to Portland Oventions 120 Exchange St Portland, ME 04101

Please take a few moments to fill out this survey after you attend the performance. You can also fill it out [online here](#). Your response provides valuable insight on the impact, accessibility, and relevancy of the School-Time Performance Series and will allow us to improve and strengthen the program. Thank you.

PERFORMANCE: *It's Okay to Be Different: Stories* by Todd Parr – October 30, 2023

TEACHER NAME: _____ GRADE(S) OF STUDENTS: _____

SCHOOL NAME: _____ CITY/TOWN: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

1. From your perspective as a teacher, how would you rate *It's Okay to Be Different*?

- Excellent Very Good Good Fair Poor

2. What made this a valuable experience for your students? (If it wasn't, what can we do better?)

3. What was your primary reason for choosing to bring your students to *It's Okay to Be Different*?

- I wanted my students to experience the performing arts.
 The performance topic fit with my curriculum goals.
 The date and time of the performance fit our schedule.
 The ticket price is affordable.
 Other (please specify):

4. How did this live performance connect to or enhance your curriculum?

5. Did you use the Educators Guide provided by Portland Ovation before or after attending the performance? Yes No

6. Why or why not?

7. What improvements could we make to the Educators Guide to serve you and your classroom better?

8. How would you rate the following components of attending the School-Time Performance?

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
Reserving & paying for tickets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication about the day of the performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arrival at the venue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Departure from the venue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. What types of performances would you like to bring your students to in the future? (Feel free to share art forms, topics/themes, specific artists, etc.)?

10. A number of generous individuals and organizations make it possible for Portland Ovation to offer these School-Time Performance tickets at extremely discounted rates. Is there anything you'd like them to know in terms of your experiences or its impact on your students?

MAIL RESPONSES TO: Portland Ovation 120 Exchange Street Portland, ME 04101
EMAIL SCANNED RESPONSES TO: offstage@portlandovations.org