



EDUCATOR GUIDE



“Leonardo! A Wonderful Show About a Terrible Monster”

This guide is geared toward teachers of grades K - 3

Supported by:



Horizon
Foundation



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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 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

English Language Arts: reading, speaking, and listening

Social and Emotional Learning: celebrating differences and recognizing strengths

Theater: paper puppetry, hand-and-rod puppetry

21st Century Skills: communication, creativity, and collaboration

LEARNING STANDARDS ICON KEY



ART



ENGLISH LANGUAGE
ARTS



THEATER



SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL
LEARNING

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

Leonardo is a terrible monster. He tries so hard to be scary, but he just... isn't. Then Leonardo finds Sam, the most scaredy-cat kid in the world. Will Leonardo finally get to scare the tuna salad out of someone? Or will it be the start of an unlikely friendship? The plot thickens when this pair meet Kerry and Frankenthaler, an even scaredier-cat and her monster friend. Kerry and Sam need to make a big decision: will they just be scaredy cats or can they become friends?

Leonardo! A Wonderful Show About a Terrible Monster uses hundreds of illustrated paper puppets, book pages, two-dimensional props, furry monster puppets, and songs to bring Mo Willems' books to life. Manual Cinema wanted to re-create the experience of holding one of Mo's books, which are big, bold, colorful, and full of visual rhythm, with a playful use of scale. Manual Cinema invite you to watch the show any way you like: watch the big screen like a traditional movie, or watch the artists below as they create the story in real time. There is no wrong way to watch the show!

About Manual Cinema

Manual Cinema is an Emmy Award-winning performance collective, design studio, and film/video production company founded in 2010 by Drew Dir, Sarah Fornace, Ben Kauffman, Julia Miller, and Kyle Vegter. Manual Cinema combines handmade puppetry, cinematic techniques, and innovative sound and music to create immersive stories for stage and screen. Using vintage overhead projectors, multiple screens, puppets, actors, live feed cameras, multi-channel sound design, and live music, Manual Cinema transforms the experience of attending the cinema and imbues it with liveness, ingenuity, and theatricality.

The company was awarded an Emmy in 2017 for ["The Forger,"](#) a video created for The New York Times and named Chicago Artists of the Year in 2018 by the Chicago Tribune. Their shadow puppet animations were featured in the 2021 film remake of [Candyman](#), directed by Nia DaCosta and produced by Jordan Peele's Monkeypaw Productions. Recent productions include [Leonardo! A Wonderful Show About A Terrible Monster](#), based on books by Mo Willems, an adaptation of Charles Dickens' [A Christmas Carol](#), and a revamped production of [The Magic City](#), based on Edith Nesbit's 1910 novel. In 2023, Manual Cinema completed production on their first self-produced short film, [Future Feeling](#), and toured with folk rock band [Iron & Wine](#) the following year.

What To Expect

The Performance

- The performance is 45 minutes long
- The story is told through multiple forms of puppetry, music, and sound effects, creating a live movie for the audience.
- The stage is set up with multiple camera and puppet stations that all project onto a movie screen.
 - One station is used for 2D paper puppets
 - A second station is used for hand and rod puppets, as well as live actors.
 - At the third station, an actor narrates the story, plays instruments, and creates sound effects.
- Some monsters will try to scare the audience using suspenseful music, evil laughter, and close up camera shots.
- At times audience members may be invited to call out responses to specific prompts or questions.

The Sound

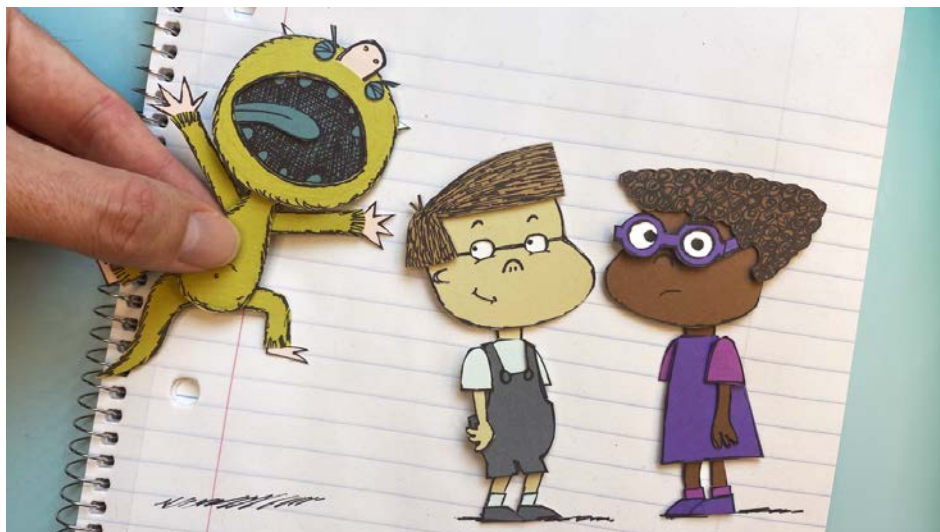
- Songs, instrumental music, and sound effects (like television static, monster growls, and screams) help tell the story.
- Some of the music is produced live.

The Lights

- At moments on stage, there will be bright, colorful lights and shadows.
- At times the theater will go fully dark.

Resources

- Plan your visit to Westbrook Performing Arts Center: <https://portlandovations.org/about/accessibility-westbrook-performing-arts-center/>
- Learn more about accessibility at Portland Ovation: portlandovations.org/about/accessibility/



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. Manual Cinema highly encourages clapping and laughing at the parts of the performance that you enjoy, and may invite you to participate with words and gestures throughout the performance.

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 Mo Willems?

Mo Willems is a children's book author, artist, animator, and playwright. Among the many beloved characters he's created are Knuffle Bunny, Elephant & Piggie, the Pigeon, and of course, Leonardo, Sam, and their friends. Mo Willems was born Maurice Charles Willems on February 11, 1968, in Des Plaines, Illinois, and grew up in New Orleans. Mo drew cartoons all during his childhood and was a big fan of the Peanuts cartoons by Charles Schultz. He also acted and did stand-up comedy in high school. After travelling for a while and living in London as a comedian, Mo returned to the States and went to college, studying film and animation, earning a degree from New York University. He then worked for the Children's Television Workshop as an award-winning writer and animator for Sesame Street from 1994 to 2002. In 2003, Mo wrote his first children's picture book, *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*, which went on to receive his first Caldecott Honor Award.



Mo Willems is currently the author and illustrator of more than 50 books, and his books are now translated into over 25 languages around the world. Some of his books have been adapted into musical productions and are performed in several countries. To date, Mo has been awarded three Caldecott Honor Awards, two Theodor Seuss Geisel Medal Awards, five Geisel Honors, six Emmy Awards, and many #1 New York Times best-selling books.

A few quick facts about Mo:

- **Birthday:** February 11
- **Best Friend:** Mo's Wife, Cheryl
- **Favorite Color:** Rust
- **Favorite Food:** Kimchi
- **Hobby:** Doodling

How does Manual Cinema use Perspective in *Leonardo*?

Manual Cinema uses a common cinematic technique called Forced Perspective to make objects or characters appear larger or smaller than they actually are. Forced Perspective uses optical illusion- a trick of the eye. Moving a character closer to the camera makes it seem larger, and moving it further away from the camera makes it seem smaller. When you combine these two principles, you can make one character or object seem much larger than another, even if they are the same size.

Try this yourself before you see the performance! Grab a camera and experiment with positioning people or objects closer to the lens or further away. You could try making it look like you're cupping a cloud in your hand, or like a toy is the same size as a person. Explore and see what optical illusions you can create.

What Storytelling Techniques does Manual Cinema use in *Leonardo*?

Manual Cinema uses lots of different storytelling techniques to bring the characters in *Leonardo! A Wonderful Story About a Terrible Monster* to life. Here are some specific techniques to look for as you watch the performance:

Narration: The story is based on two books by Mo Willems, *Leonardo*, *The Terrible Monster* and *Sam, The Most Scaredy-Cat Kid in the Whole World*. The narrator often uses lines directly from these books to tell the story.

Dialogue: Characters speak to each other throughout the play to share their thoughts and emotions.

Paper Puppetry: Manual Cinema uses hundreds of paper puppets based on Mo Willems' illustrations to bring characters to life. Puppeteers place paper puppets on overhead projectors, which project puppets onto a large screen so that they can easily be seen. In creating puppets for *Leonardo*, Manual Cinema was inspired by Mo's illustrations and pop-up books. Many of the puppets have moving parts, or are double-sided to create a movement effect. As you watch the performance, pay attention to the way puppets move and change.

Hand and Rod Puppetry: Along with paper puppets, Manual Cinema also uses traditional hand and rod puppets, like Muppets. They're called hand and rod puppets because puppeteers move them using both a hand inside the puppet and a rod attached to the puppet's arm. The hand inside the puppet supports it and allows the puppeteer to move the puppet's mouth when it speaks. The rod allows the puppeteer to make the puppet gesture and move. Manual Cinema uses a camera to capture the puppets' movements and project them onto a screen.

Music and Sound Effects: Throughout the performance, Manual Cinema uses music to help set the tone and move the story forward. As you watch the performance, pay attention to how the music changes to indicate that something new is happening. Manual Cinema also uses live and recorded sound effects to create a more realistic experience and highlight funny moments.

Cinema: All of these separate storytelling elements come together to create a single story. Just like the movies you see in a theater, Manual Cinema uses cameras, microphones, and computers to capture each individual moment and turn them into a single movie projected onto a large screen. You can watch the story unfold on the screen, as you would in a movie theater, watch the performers create the movie, or both.

PRE-PERFORMANCE LESSON ACTIVITIES

Here are some ideas for lesson activities that expand on the essential questions, topics, and themes of *Leonardo*.

Glossary

Share these words and their definitions with your students before watching the play.

Cinematic: The art of making films or movies.

Conundrum: A problem that is difficult to solve.

Empathy: The ability of share someone else's feelings or experiences by imagine what it would be like to be in that person's situation.

Illusion: Something that is not really what it seems to be.

Manual: Done or operated with the hands.

Optical: Relating to light or the ability to see.

Terrible: Very bad at doing something.

Unsuspecting: Trusting, not realizing there's any danger or harm.

Wonderful: Extremely good.



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. Use this activity to introduce the books Leonardo is based on before you see the performance with your students.



Materials:

Open space

Leonardo, the Terrible Monster (available at [Portland Public Library](#))

Procedure:

1. Read the book aloud to students, focusing on the characters' emotions and actions.
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 a second time, giving students time to complete their actions.

Reflection

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?

ACTIVITY: Learn to Draw Leonardo

Mo Willems' characters are intentionally designed to be easy for students to draw themselves. Teach your students to draw Leonardo, the Terrible Monster using simple letters and shapes. Want to draw along with Mo? [Click here to follow along!](#)



Materials:

A drawing implement like a pencil, crayon or marker

Paper

Procedure:

1. [Click here to follow along with Lunch Doodles!](#)

Tip!

Want to learn to draw more of Mo Willems' characters? Check out the Lunch Doodles Series. Originally created during the Covid-19 pandemic by the Kennedy Center in partnership with Mo, the series features 15 short episodes with accompanying downloadable activity pages. [Find the series here!](#)

POST-PERFORMANCE LESSON ACTIVITIES

Post-Performance Discussion Questions

1. What was the most memorable part of the performance?
2. How did the puppets' movements help to tell the story and show the emotions they feel?
3. How does Leonardo find the most scaredy-cat kid in the whole world? What do you do when you're looking for the answer to a confusing or difficult question or problem, a "conundrum"?
4. When Sam and Kerry first meet each other, they aren't sure if they want to be friends. How do their first impressions change?
5. What do you think makes a good friend?
6. Can you think of a time when a friend helped you feel less scared? How did they help?



ACTIVITY: Compliment Web

Compliment web offers a simple, visual metaphor for the way we connect to each other in a community or classroom. Using a ball of yarn, participants create a literal web of compliments. This strategy works well as an opening or closing ritual. Consider using it to end your discussion about the play as a way of inviting students to consider how their relationships are similar and different to the ones they observed in the play.



Materials:

Space for a circle
A ball of yarn

Procedure:

1. Invite students to create a circle. It should be large enough that everyone has space to move around, but still be near enough to each other to comfortably pass, toss, or roll a ball of yarn. This game can be played standing or sitting on the floor.
2. Begin with the ball of yarn in your hand. Hold the tail end of the ball and make eye contact with a student across the circle. Offer that student a compliment. You can either broadly invite students to compliment each other or assign a specific prompt. Consider asking students to offer compliments that describe what makes their chosen person a good friend.
3. Once you've offered your compliment, pass, toss, or roll the ball to the student who received the compliment. Now it's that student's turn to choose someone in the circle, offer a compliment, and pass the yarn. Remind students to hold onto their section of the yarn as they pass it on.
4. Continue passing the yarn around the circle until everyone has given and received a compliment. You may need to remind students to hold onto their section of yarn several times. Students may pass in any direction, but the more the yarn crosses the circle, the more the yarn will resemble a web when you are finished.
5. Admire the web of compliments you've created! To conclude, you can either lay the web on the floor or pass it backwards to roll it back up. If you choose to pass it backwards, consider asking students to respond to a new prompt (for example: a time when their chosen person was brave.)

Reflection

- What did you notice about yourself or the group in this activity?
- What kinds of things did our group appreciate the most?
- If you had to title our compliment web based on our responses, what would you call it?

ACTIVITY: Paper Puppet Portraits

Manual Cinema handmade all of the puppets that appear in Leonardo. In this activity, students create self-portrait paper puppets like the ones Manual Cinema used in the performance.



Materials:

Paper
Scissors
Glue stick
Markers, crayons and/or colored pencils
Cardboard or a cereal box
Tape
A small dowel or chopstick

Procedure:

1. Begin by asking students what they remember about the puppets used in Leonardo. How did they move? What made them interesting to look at? Record responses somewhere everyone can see them.
2. Invite students to draw a full-body self-portrait on a blank piece of paper, incorporating a few of the things they remember from the puppets in Leonardo.
3. Cut out the self-portraits and trace the shape onto a piece of cardboard. This will serve as backing to help keep the puppet standing upright. Glue all the pieces together.
4. Tape a small dowel or chopstick to the back of the puppet. The puppet is complete!
5. Now that puppets have been created, consider asking students to use them to create short scenes. Students can work in small groups or individually. Some scene prompts to consider: show your puppet being brave or trying something new. Show your puppet being a good friend. Show your puppet supporting someone.

Resources

- Learn more about Mo Willems: <https://www.pigeonpresents.com/>
- Learn more about Manual Cinema: <https://manualcinema.com/>
- Read more about Forced Perspective: <https://www.nfi.edu/forced-perspective/>
- Watch a Read-Aloud (with kids!) of Sam, the Most Scaredy-Cat Kid in the Whole Word: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MaOP-3-6wFM>
- Listen to some of the music from the performance: <https://manualcinema.bandcamp.com/album/leonardo-a-wonderful-show-about-a-terrible-monster-ost>

ABOUT PORTLAND OVATIONS

Portland Oventions, 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. Oventions 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 Oventions 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 Oventions’ 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.

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Designed by Katie Day

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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: *Leonardo! A Wonderful Show About a Terrible Monster*

SCHOOL NAME: _____ **TEACHER NAME:** _____ **GRADE:** _____

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

What did you like about *Leonardo*? Why did you like that part?

What was something that you learned during the performance?

What would you like to tell other kids about *Leonardo*?

What types of performance would you like Portland Ovation 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 *Leonardo! A Wonderful Show About a Terrible Monster* that you liked. Thank you!



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

Please scan and email to offstage@portlandovations.org or mail to Portland Ovations 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: *Leonardo! A Wonderful Show About a Terrible Monster*—October 27, 2025

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

SCHOOL NAME: _____ **CITY/TOWN:** _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

1. From your perspective as a teacher, how would you rate *Leonardo*?

☐ Excellent ☐ Very Good ☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor

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

4. What was your primary reason for choosing to bring your students to *Leonardo*?

- ☐ 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):

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

6. Did you use the Educators Guide provided by Portland Ovation before or after attending the performance?

☐ Yes ☐ No

7. Why or why not?

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

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

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

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
Reserving & paying for tickets	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Communication about the day of the performance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Arrival at the venue	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Departure from the venue	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

10. 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.)?

11. 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?