



# WALNUT STREET THEATRE

Touring Outreach Company

# BOXHEADS

by Michael Hollinger

## Study Guide

### Play Synopsis

What would happen if you didn't have an imagination? You might become a Boxhead! This highly original piece tells the story of a place where creativity is forbidden and electronic media devices rule. Only the audience and a friendly sock puppet can help our lead character escape from the Boxman, who removes children's imaginations. Together, they help everyone in their world remember how rewarding a diverse and creative life can be. Students will identify strongly with the characters while learning how important it is to be true to your beliefs and resist peer pressure.

### Pre-Show Activities

- Ask your students to think about the "boxes" they use everyday. Start a list on chart paper. Have the students suggest types of "boxes" such as televisions, computers, mp3 players, etc. Leave the list up and encourage students to add to it throughout the day as they think of more items.



- Define the word "imagination" with your students. How do people use "imagination?" What are the characteristics of "imagination?"

Have your students try to picture what a person's imagination might look like. Have them either make a collage, paint a picture, draw a sketch, or make a model of what an "imagination" might look like if you could see it with your eyes.

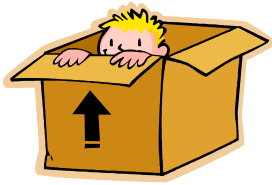
### Questions for Before the Show

- \* *What do you expect from a show called Boxheads?*
- \* *Where does imagination come from and how do we use it?*
- \* *How can using your imagination help you solve problems?*
- \* *Have you ever been told to do something that you felt was wrong?*
- \* *What make-believe games do you play or do you remember playing as a little kid?*



### Questions for After the Show

- \* *There were parts of the show where the characters asked the audience to help by imagining things for them. What sort of things did you think of? How could that scene have ended differently if they had taken a different suggestion?*
- \* *How would you have handled the pressure that Lauren's friends were putting on her to use the "boxes?"*
- \* *The play didn't use a lot of realistic props or sets to tell its story. Instead it relied on the audience to imagine things that might not have really been on the stage. What are a few things that you didn't see with your eyes during the play but that you instead saw with your imagination?*



## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

# THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX...

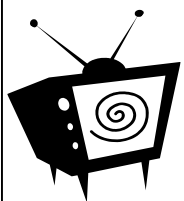
### What Can It Be?

Lauren's grandfather found Herman in a box full of assorted objects. Have your students exercise their imaginations in a similar way through an improvisational activity. Fill a large cardboard box or an opaque plastic bin with all sorts of random objects. Pull an object from the box and hold it up so that the whole class can see it. Ask them what the object really is. For example--if it's a lampshade--the students will shout, "lampshade!" Next, tell the students that they will get a chance to come forward one by one and play with the object. The only rule is that they can't use it the way they would normally use the object. For example, they can't hold up the lampshade and pretend that they are turning on a light. They can instead use it as a megaphone or even a hat. Have the students line up. One by one, have them come forward and take the object, using it in a new way each time. When everyone has had a turn or you feel they have exhausted most of the possibilities, pick a new object and continue playing.

**Extension:** Give the students the following writing prompt: "It had come down to this. It was a matter of life or death. Time was running out, so I had to act quickly. I reached into my bag and pulled out..." Have each student come up and pull a new object from the box. Tell the students to write a short story using the prompt and the object they picked.

### Don't Be a Boxhead

Lauren is easily the most creative person in her circle of friends. That's because she's the only one who doesn't have to rely on a "box" to entertain her. Challenge your students to go an entire weekend without watching TV, using the internet, playing video games, listening to the radio, or using an iPod at home. On Friday, brainstorm alternative activities.



Have students suggest games to play or books to read. Have each student make a list of these activities to take home with them. On Monday, have students share what they did to entertain themselves.

### Recycled Music

Lauren's grandfather found a creative use for an object that would normally have had little or no value—an old sock. Have your students extend this basic concept to other objects. Have students bring in various items that they would normally throw away such as two liter soda bottles, cardboard paper towel rolls, coffee cans, or water bottles. Remind students to bring in objects only after they've been thoroughly cleaned. Once a sufficient amount of objects has been collected, use the objects to create a found object orchestra. In groups, have students build instruments out of the objects by filling them with bead or small stones. Encourage them to be as inventive and imaginative as possible. After the students have finished their instruments, have a class concert where students can share their music.



### Peer Pressure Role Play

Lauren's friends pressure her to use the Box instead of her own imagination. Discuss with your students the importance of knowing how to say no to peer pressure. Break your class into groups and have them act out the following scenarios, improvising creative and safe ways to say no.

- *You are at school taking a test. The person sitting next to you is cheating and offers the test answers to you.*
- *Your friends decide they are mad at the teachers and are not going to study for the science test. They are also not going to do homework for the rest of the week.*
- *You are on your way home from school. Your best friend shows you a pack of cigarettes and says, "Let's go over here behind the building and smoke one."*
- *You are walking to school. Your friend, who skips school a lot, tries to get you to cut with him.*
- *It's after dark and you're playing outside. Some of your friends decide it would be fun to throw rocks at some cars.*



## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

# CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

### Electronics Log (Math)

Lauren's friends seem to spend nearly every waking moment either watching "boxes" or listening to their "boxphones." Have your students record the amount of time in minutes that they spend using iPods, TVs, and computers in one day—not including the use of computers in school. Have your students review their logs the next day. Have them add up all of the minutes spent on each of these activities. Have them multiply by seven to find the number of minutes spent per week. Then have them multiply that number by four to find out the number of minutes spent per month. Continue until the students have calculated the estimated number of minutes spent in a year. Have the students make a pie chart that shows which percentage of an entire year is spent using electronic entertainment devices per year. Have the students share their results and debate the pros and cons of spending so much time using these devices.



### Make Your Own Puppet (Art & Lang. Arts)

#### Materials:

socks (clean ones!), safety pins, cardboard for stiffening the mouth (optional), stuffing for the head (optional), eyes, nose, ears, whiskers (buttons, sequins, feathers, yarn, felt, etc).

#### Directions:

1. Put the sock on your hand with the heel at the back of your wrist.
2. Tuck in the "mouth" and safety pin (on the inside) the back of the mouth to the back of the head.
3. Add eyes, nose, stuffing, etc.

After each student has finished constructing his or her sock puppet, have them create names and personalities and introduce themselves to the class. Have older students prepare a list of basic interview questions (Where were you born? What's your favorite food? Etc.), pair up, and conduct an interview with their partner's puppet.

### Herman's Adventure Continues (Lang. Arts)

After the Boxman extracts Lauren's imagination, he takes Herman away to dispose of him. Ask your students what they think the Boxman did with Herman and what might have happened to Herman once everyone got their imaginations back. Ask the class for some suggestions. After you've brainstormed possible a few possibilities, tell the class that they'll be breaking into groups to write a short play that tells their version of Herman's story. Ask each group to write out a conversation between Herman and the Boxman. What might Herman say to the Boxman? What might the Boxman say back to him? Tell each group to write at least ten lines of dialogue in this way: five lines for Herman and five lines for the Boxman.

After your students have had a chance to finish writing their scripts, you can arrange for each play to have a staged reading in front of the class. After you've shared the plays, reflect with your class on the challenges of creating live theatre. How could a director solve the problem of staging a chase scene in a park on a stage no bigger than a quarter of your classroom? How could a 10 year old actor convince the audience that he was actually a confused old grandfather? How could an actress convince the audience that she's playing both an imaginative young girl and a loud, sassy dog in the same scene?

### Boxphones Banned! (Lang. Arts/Social Studies)

"Boxphones" bear an uncanny resemblance to the mp3 players that many of your students probably carry with them every day. Have your students imagine that your school's principal is considering banning all mp3 players—if that hasn't already happened! Tell your students that when laws are first introduced to congress as bills, they are debated very heavily before they are put to a vote. With your students, start to brainstorm lists of the pros and cons of having an mp3 player in school. Have the students then take turns addressing the class one by one in an attempt to win votes either for or against the ban. After every student has had the opportunity to make his or her point, hold a class vote.

# WEB RESOURCES



[www.turnoffyourtv.com](http://www.turnoffyourtv.com)

*(A collection of articles outlining the negative effects of television.)*

<http://www.pbs.org/parents/childrenandmedia>

*(A website outlining how TV, computers, and video games effect a child's development.)*

[www.creativekidsathome.com](http://www.creativekidsathome.com)

*(Creative, hands on activities for kids of all ages..)*

[http://familycrafts.about.com/od/puppets/Puppet\\_Craft\\_Projects.htm](http://familycrafts.about.com/od/puppets/Puppet_Craft_Projects.htm)

*(Detailed instructions on how to make various types of puppets with your students.)*

## **About the Playwright**

*Michael Hollinger* is an award-winning playwright who teaches playwriting, songwriting, and solo performance. He is the author of six produced full-length plays -- *Opus*, *Tooth and Claw*, *Red Herring*, *Tiny Island*, *Incorruptible* and *An Empty Plate in the Cafe du Grand Boeuf* -- all of which premiered at Philadelphia and have been produced around the country, in New York City, and abroad. Hollinger has won many awards, including the Roger L. Stevens Award from the Kennedy Center's Fund for New American Plays, a Mid-Atlantic Emmy Award, the Frederick Loewe Award for Musical Theatre, and two Barrymore Awards for Outstanding New Play.

***This production was directed by Matthew Decker.***

## **Walnut Street Theatre Education Department Staff**

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Outreach Coordinator.....*Caroline Leipf*  
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.....*Jesimiel R. Jenkins*  
.....*Tim Vetere*  
.....*Sarah Yoo*



## **WALNUT STREET THEATRE**



Walnut Street Theatre has the unique distinction of being the oldest, continuously operating theatre in the English-speaking world, having served Philadelphia audiences for 200 years! It is also the Official State Theatre of Pennsylvania, and a National Historic Landmark.

Today, under the direction of Producing Artistic Director Bernard Havard, Walnut Street Theatre is in its 25th season as a self-producing, non-profit theatre. Walnut Street Theatre continues to entertain and enlighten diverse audiences with high quality theatrical programming. With more than 56,000 season ticket holders, the Walnut is also the most subscribed theatre company in the world!

The Walnut Street Theatre is celebrating 23 years of bringing high-quality professional theatre to schools across the Delaware Valley. Our multi-cultural Touring Outreach Company introduces students to the world of theatre through age-appropriate, curriculum-based pieces, that are socially relevant, entertaining, and exciting. Last season, 109,867 children and adults were impacted by the Walnut's Education Programs.

### **Touring Actors**

Each season, Walnut Street Theatre holds a nation-wide search to recruit accomplished young professionals for Dorothy Haas Acting Apprenticeships. These actors form our Touring Outreach Company. Nearly 350 candidates are considered each year for these four positions.

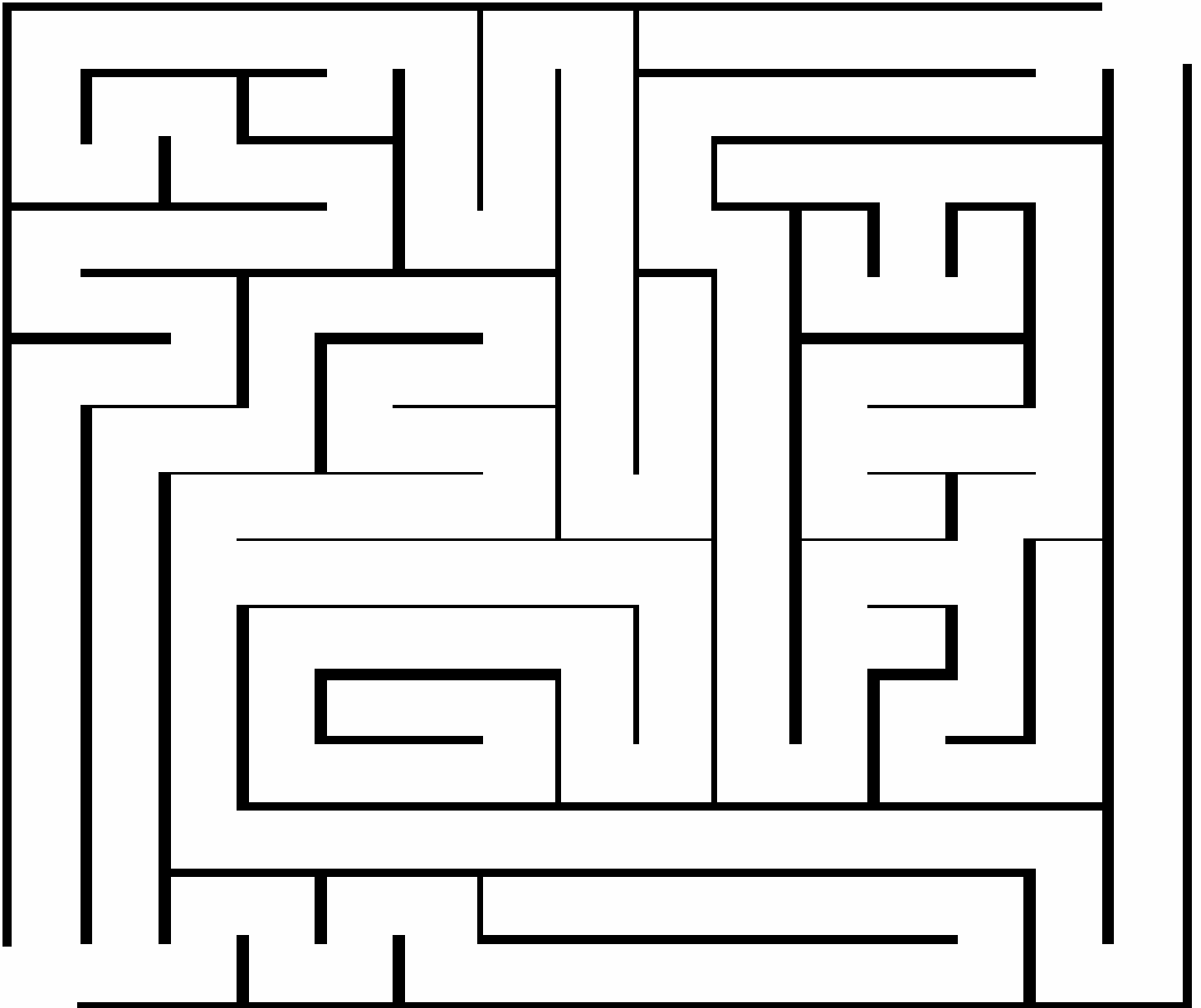
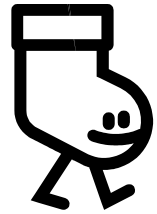
### **The Walnut Street Theatre Educational Programs gratefully acknowledge support from the following:**

*Aramark Charitable Fund \* Arronson Foundation \* The Barra Foundation  
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The Harvey and Virginia Kimmel Arts Education Fund of Philadelphia  
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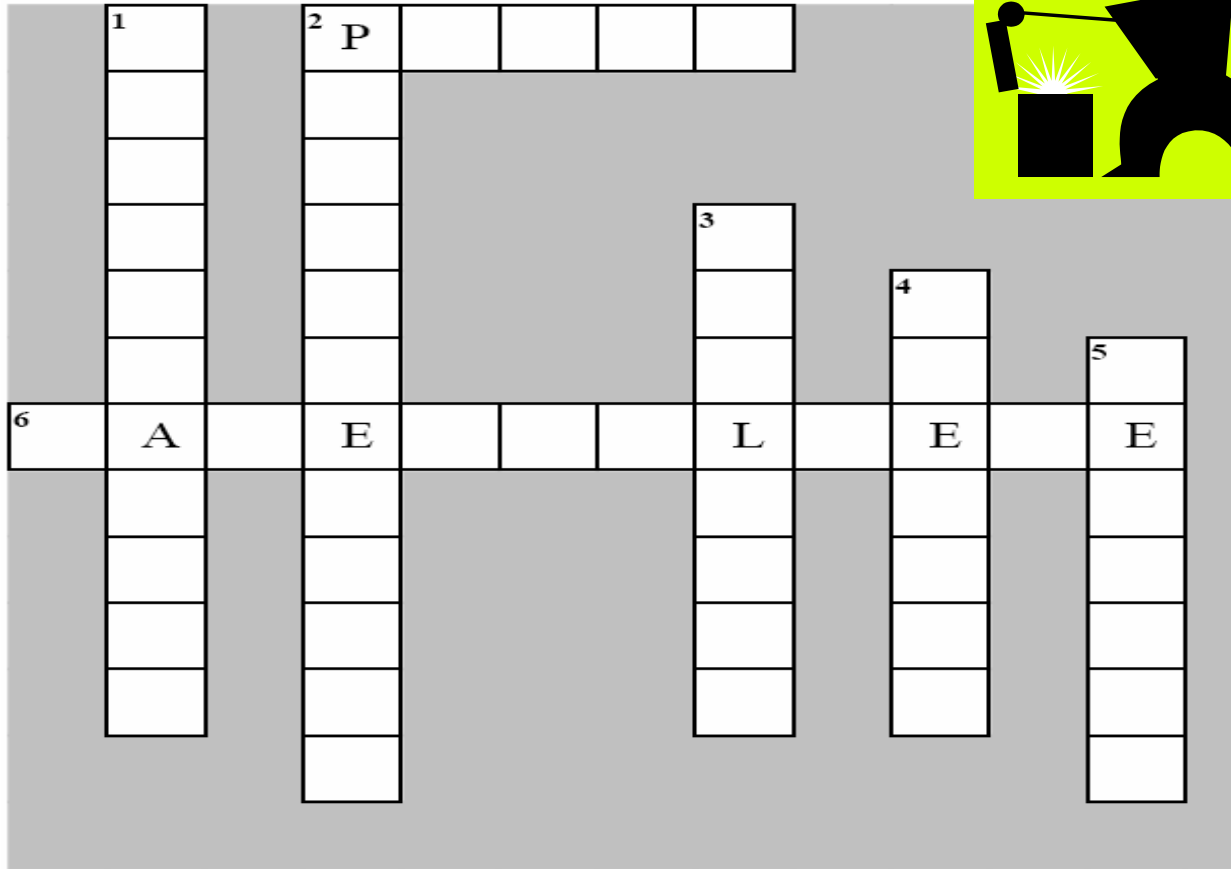
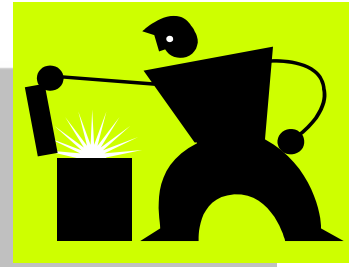
Help Herman escape  
the Boxman and find  
his way to the park!



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**PART ONE:** Complete the crossword puzzle below.



**Down**

- 1 The ability to see things in new ways, form new ideas, or create new things by thinking.
- 2 being influenced by friends, or others your age, to do something (2 words)
- 3 The lines spoken by characters in drama or fiction.

- 4 to act as if something is true, when it is not.
- 5 The location in time and space where a story takes place.

**Across**

- 2 items used in a theatrical play
- 6 something that is made up.

**PART TWO:** Sometimes knowing dates, numbers, and facts isn't all it takes to solve a problem. Sometimes it takes an active imagination to find a solution to a problem. Use your imagination to find creative solutions to the brain teaser puzzle below!

Starting from any point, draw four continuous lines (without lifting the pen) so that each of the nine dots has at least one line running through it.

