



Kids' Entertainment Study Guide for *Mermiad Theatre of Nova Scotia's "Goodnight Opus."*

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Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia

presents

Berkeley Breathed's "Goodnight Opus"

Writer: Berkeley Breathed

Director/Production Designer/Script: Jim Morrow

Composer: Scott Macmillan

Narrator: Bill Carr

Visual Artist: Sheri Bennett

Technical director: Marcel Boulet

Puppet Construction: Jim Morrow, Deborah MacLean, Sarah Jane Hart, Jonathan Ford

Set Construction: Jonathan Ford, Deborah MacLean, Sarah Jane Hart

Production Assistants: Ashley Caldwell, Jasmine Tait, Erin Dooley

Performers: Graham Percy, Sandra Klass, Marty Burt

Understudies: Alexis Milligan, Brian Fidler

Stage Manager: Kimberley D. Hirtle

Tour Manager: Karen Gasser

Study Guide for Goodnight Opus prepared by June MacGregor Jain



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Introduction to Study Guide (notes by Mermaid Theatre staff)

About Goodnight Opus - a brief synopsis

This imaginative story pokes gentle fun at a childhood classic (Margaret Wise Brown's **Goodnight Moon**), and encourages youngsters to "depart the text" occasionally and give rein to fantasy and imagination. Opus the Penguin is snuggled up in bed, wearing his bunny jammies and listening to the 210th reading of his favorite bedtime story when his sweet old Grandma starts to snooze. Opus and his friends decide to say good night to the Milky Way in person, and embark upon a remarkable night time adventure in the heavens which puts them in touch with a host of fantastic characters who would never appear in an ordinary bedtime book : a balloon-headed pillow, an exhausted tooth fairy, a gargantuan purple critter on a flying tricycle, and the Holsteins who inhabit the Milky Way. Grandma wakes up to discover Opus asleep on the kitchen floor with a pint of ice cream clutched in his hand.

The gentle message - that it's safe and even fun to depart from the usual from time to time - will please young audiences, while the parody will certainly amuse parents and teachers who have read Brown's classic more than two hundred times.

About the Writer

Berkeley Breathed is one of America's most popular illustrators. His satirical cartoon strips (**Bloom County** and **Outland**) ran for years in some twelve hundred newspapers around the world and earned him a Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning in 1987. The character of Opus, a whimsical penguin who frequently commented on the absurd state of the world, ranks among the most popular of his many cartoon creations, winning fans among several generations.

Berkeley Breathed's gentle humor and delightful drawings have made him a natural children's writer, and Opus the Penguin moved with him into this field. In addition to **Goodnight Opus** (published in 1993 by Little, Brown), Breathed has authored, among others, **A Wish for Wings That Work: An Opus Christmas Story**, **Happy Trails**, **The Last Basselope**, **Tales Too Ticklish To Tell**, and **Red Ranger Came Calling**. He's currently writing and directing an animated "short" based on his latest book, **Edward Fudwupper Fibbed Big**.

About the Director/Production Designer/Script

Jim Morrow creates puppets for stage, television and film. During his twenty-two years with Mermaid Theatre, he's directed and designed

numerous shows which have toured nationally and internationally. A gifted performer, Jim has toured extensively in Canada, the US, the United Kingdom and Japan. He has served as director of puppetry for Symphony Nova Scotia's production of **The Nutcracker** for the last ten years, and frequently conducts master classes in the US and Canada. Jim Morrow is Mermaid Theatre's Artistic Director.

About the Composer

Scott Macmillan has enjoyed continued success as a conductor, composer, arranger, instrumentalist and producer. He's received accolades for his work in the fields of classical, pop, jazz, blues and Celtic music. Since 1995, he has been Host Conductor of the Mostly Maritime Series with Symphony Nova Scotia, and served as Composer-in-Residence for the 1999 Scotia Festival of Music in Halifax. Scott was awarded a Doctorate of Letters from the university College of Cape Breton in 1997 in recognition of his musical contributions. He composed and arranged the music for Mermaid's Wee Gillis, as well as created both taped and live orchestra scores for The Little Lame Prince.

About our Study Guide Editor

June MacGregor Jain, B.A. M.Ed., is a much respected teacher at a Kentville, Nova Scotia School, who has chosen to remain in the classroom. She is particularly interested in art and theatre for the young, and is a long-time supporter of Mermaid Theatre.

Mermaid Theatre's objectives

Since 1972 Mermaid Theatre has toured with unique productions designed specifically for family audiences. The company's unusual mix of puppets and performers, its strong emphasis on striking visual effects, and the inclusion of original music provide an impressive introduction to the performing arts. Equally important is the company's objective of promoting literacy and the love of reading, so that productions are generally drawn from contemporary or traditional children's literature. These goals are reflected in our choice of Goodnight Opus, a fanciful story which stretches the imagination, as well as offers considerable scope for stunning theatrical effects.

History and Personnel:

Mermaid Theatre was co-founded by the late Evelyn Garbary (former director of drama at Acadia University), Tom Miller, (a visual artist who formerly served as art consultant to the Nova Scotia's Kings County school board), and Sara Lee Lewis (an Arts Administrator). The company had its headquarters in Wolfville, prior to moving to Windsor, NS in 1987. Jim Morrow became Artistic Director of the Theatre in 1999, following more than twenty

years of active involvement in production, design, directing, performing and teaching. Mermaid Theatre's staff members include Cathy White (Administrator), Karen Gasser (Tour Manager and Office Manager), Christopher Heide (Youtheatre Director), Steven Naylor (Composer-In-Residence), Deborah Maclean (Production Manager), Jonathon Ford (Shop Manager), Alice Lund (Workshop Co-ord), Sarah Hart (Seamstress), and Marcel Boulet (Technical Director).

Mermaid's Approach to Puppetry:

Mermaid's productions draw upon various styles of puppetry, including rod puppets, shadow puppets, hand puppets, and giant body puppets. Unlike traditional puppet theatres in which manipulators are often hidden, Mermaid frequently uses its puppeteers as character actors who play independent roles. This "mix" of puppets and performers is a unique aspect of Mermaid's performance style.

The puppets used in Mermaid's production of **Goodnight Opus** closely resembles Berkeley Breathed's original illustrations. Jim Morrow, who was responsible for translating the drawings from the flat page into two- or three-dimensional puppets, carved and shaped soft foam to create the heads and bodies of the characters. Rods were then incorporated to facilitate movement, prior to covering the puppets with fabric and painting them. The choice of colors and type of paint was particularly important, as both conventional and fluorescent lighting are used in the production to differentiate between Opus's home on earth, and his travel through space.

The puppets vary in size, with some being larger than their manipulator's. In order to manage them effectively, as well as to free the manipulator's hands to handle props and insure subtle movement, director/designer Jim Morrow has invented a harness-like vest which connects the puppets and manipulators at chest level. Considerable dexterity is required by the performers in order to effect the smooth transition between scenes as well as to move the characters from place to place. There are limited opportunities for training in puppet theatre in Canada, so that Mermaid Theatre receives many requests to accommodate apprentices. The Theatre's Institute of Puppetry Arts offers basic manipulation workshops at the community level for youngsters, educators, parents and recreation leaders, and each year several potential puppeteers are selected by Jim Morrow to receive specialized on-the-job instruction. Generally he chooses young people who have a strong background in theatre and/or the performing arts, and who are strong, supple, musical and energetic. When these artists subsequently join Mermaid's touring ensemble, they very much enjoy the chance to bring pleasure to youngsters throughout the continent and beyond,

as well as to practice an age-old art in an innovative and contemporary manner.

For information about Mermaid Theatre tours, please contact
Kids' Entertainment,
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For general information about the Theatre, please contact our office at:
Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia
P.O. Box 2697, Windsor, Nova Scotia B0N 2T0 Canada
Tel: (902) 798-5841
Fax: (902) 798 3311
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website: www.mermaidtheatre.ns.ca

Some Suggestion for Teachers

related to Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia's presentation of
Goodnight Opus

Objectives:

An aesthetic experience for each child is where our focus should be! Can students be helped to perceive that special something which marks the relationship between an audience and the performers of live theatre? Can we, in this often cynical world, create in them a sense of awe?

I offer the following suggestions, and lesson plans for teachers in preparation or for follow up. These are activities which might be developed to enrich the children's experience in art, language arts, math, social studies and science. They can be easily adapted for the appropriate age of the student. While I have chosen to use Mermaid's Goodnight Opus as my theme, I have, at one time or another, done all the following activities with my students.

June MacGregor Jain
Kentville School, Nova Scotia
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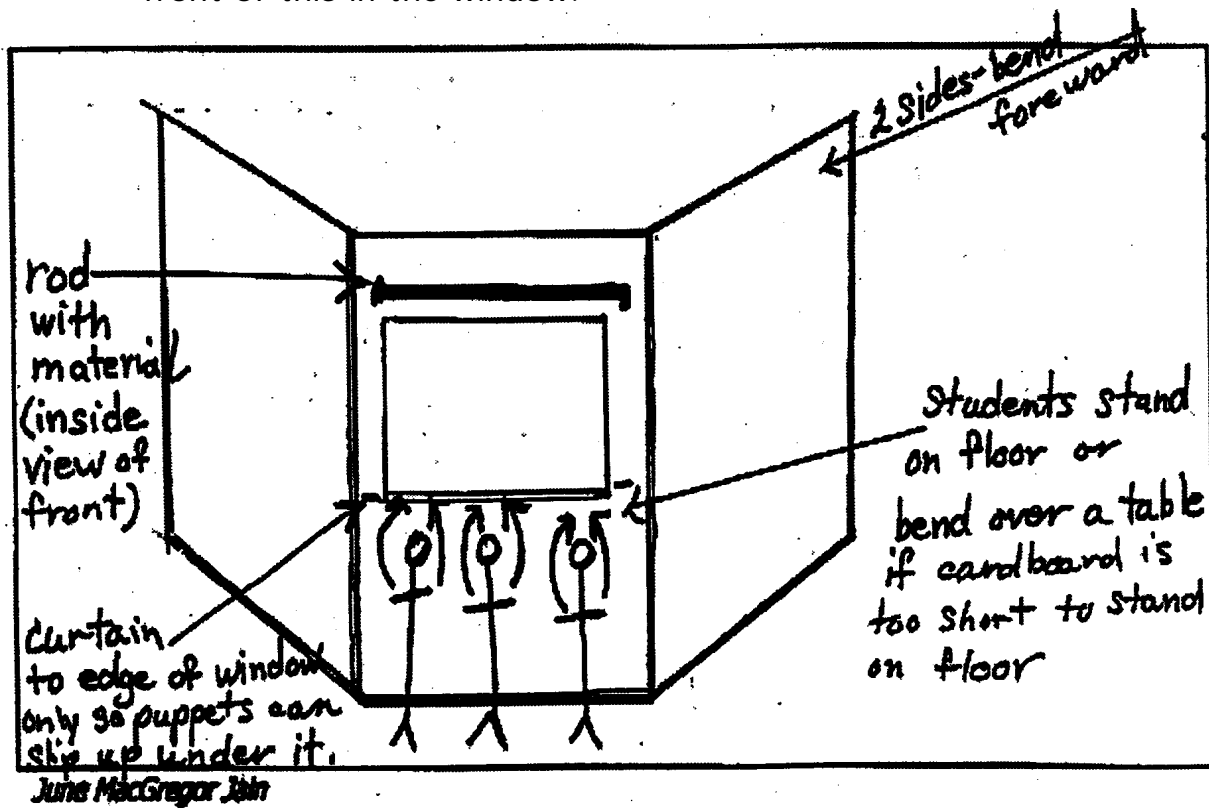
Art Projects:

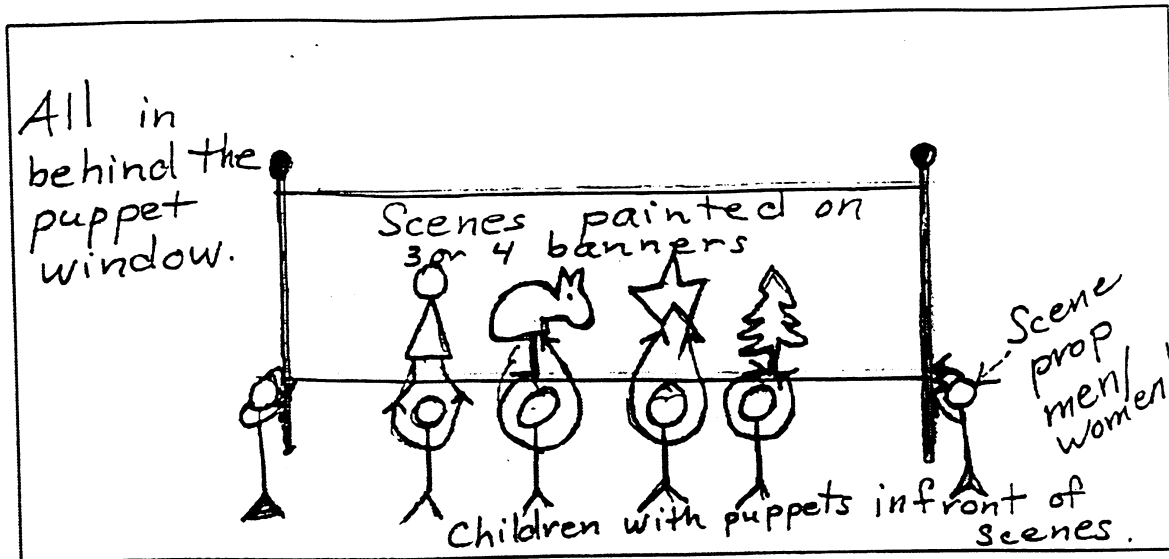
1. Posters in Art class to advertise that Mermaid is coming! What makes a good poster? Have the students bring in their favorite poster. Why is it their favorite? Let each make one for Goodnight Opus and exhibit them all over our school.
2. Bulletin Board notices in the hall by the front entrance if possible to advertise the performance beforehand. These could include on an appropriate background a rather 3D effect. Some examples:
 - a. How do you imagine a Milky Way inhabited by Holstein Cows? Make it - cows on cardboard and stuck on with straight pins so the cows stand out. Don't take it for granted kids today know what Holstein cows are!?)
 - b. Get an old tricycle wheel (an adult could mount it on the bulletin board. Have a small group work on the rest of the of the tricycle in cardboard. The others do the gargantuan purple critter. Put them together for a 3D effect! Kids notice these things. Make a caption to go under your bulletin board.
3. Mini - Murals
 - a. this might be more effective after the performance. Have the students work in small groups to create on mural paper approximately 2 meters long, their favorite scene from the play. These could be painted or coloured with bright plastics and hung in a series outside a classroom in the halls.
 - b. An alternative to this would be still work in small groups - have 2 or 3 children paint the background e.g. the bedroom of Opus or the Milky Way. Have the others do the figures using another medium, e.g. construction paper cutouts or drawing or painting figures on heavier paper. Then paste these on the backgrounds so each mini-mural is a co-operative effort. Other materials, bits of fabric for curtains, wallpaper for the bedroom or large sticky coloured circles for the Milky Way can be added for a hint of collage.
4. Dioramas - 3D stand -ups in a shoe box could be done as a take home individual project. Each student could do his or her favorite scene. Standing the shoe box on its side these make wonderful display in a hallway, library or classroom. Each child could write a caption to be

attached to the diorama (thus including language arts).

5. Puppets - Keep them simple!

- a. The Stage - Probably a post-performance activity. Get a large refrigerator box from any furniture store. Cut the back out completely, leaving the sides. Cut a window near the top on the front and widest side. Students can stand on the floor, hold up their puppets, and speak their parts. Paint the whole outside of this in drama black. Inside the theatre and above the window, a background curtain on a rod, can be placed, although this is not necessary. Puppets are held in front of this curtain. To allow more students to participate, the backgrounds could be done on mural paper with 2 children holding them up (like a banner). Puppeteers perform in front of this in the window.





- b. Puppets - A simple art lesson - use paper plates!!!! Draw on them or paint them. Attach to popsicle sticks and add eyes from the craft store or your own creation! Use flat popsicle sticks or others if you need longer handles. Flat sticks are easier to manipulate and store. Again you can use 2 paper plates, the small ones back to back, 2 per puppet for strength and a 3D effect.
- c. Performance - for homeroom and other classes throughout the school. This instills in the student a respect for his or her own art work as well as that of others. They can interact with sensitivity and use a variety of materials!

The above exercise provides an excellent chance for students to observe that can you have children experience that there is a "background, middle ground, foreground," in Mermaid Theatre's productions. They can describe what puppets fit in each section for each scene.

Language Arts:

1. Performance Response - Similar to a book report, (novel response) give each child a sheet (see below). This part could be done as an assignment or as a rough draft! Then polish it using greater vocabulary taken from the WORD WALL and/or VOCABULARY LIST. See example below. Hand in the final draft. Limiting the length of these assignments really encourages students to focus on the task and to self - correct.

Performance Response

Name of Play

Writer

Director/Production Designer/Script

Characters

Actors (how many do you remember?)

Tell briefly your favorite part of the performance

2. Word Walls - These are bristle board charts. These lists should be printed on pale -coloured bristle board and displayed in a prominent place.

Vocabulary

- a. imaginative
- b. opus
- c. fantasy
- d. embark
- e. etc.

Theatre Language

- a. foreground
- b. background
- c. middle ground
- d. technical effects
- e. stage right
- f. stage left
- g. house lights
- h. etc.

3. Spelling - This could be drawn from the word walls (e.g. theatre, theater: why the difference?). Students love acquiring the skills which enable them to spell the words which they use daily. With Goodnight Opus as a theme, have them focus on the use of these words in their puppet play, art captions, word balloons etc.
4. Paragraph writing - In an ample paragraph, describe the setting for Goodnight Opus. Suggest the following:
- a. 1st draft - Let your thoughts just flow onto the looseleaf.
 - b. 2 nd draft - Self-correct, improve your vocabulary and embellish

your work - conference with a classmate or teacher.

c. 3rd draft - Prepare a final draft as a computer printout, in your best handwriting or by printing.

5. Character Sketches - Focus on one character or all of them (one by one). Qualities of greed? Love? Concern for others? Evil? Controlling? How is this shown in each character ? Why is the character this way? Why is this quality necessary to the plot, in a positive/negative way?
6. Literary Terms - The performance could be a basis for teaching literary terms in the upper grades especially. Have them make up examples. For example:
 - a. Alliteration - Opus often opened his eyes wide.
 - b. Simile - Opus was as normal as a peanut butter sandwich.
 - c. Metaphor - Opus was a lamb.
 - d. Exaggeration/Hyperbole - Opus said goodbye to the Milky Way in person!
7. The "Press" - Hats are in! All kids recognize Sherlock Holmes by his hat. All kids can recognize a reporter the same way. Get a felt hat (or a few from a goodwill shop) Make a rectangle card PRESS for the hat band. With hat , trench coat, and clipboard ,children can represent the traditional press reporter. In groups or individually, they can make a list of interview questions to ask Opus/ Grandma/the Author/or one of the Mermaid performers (if time permitted).
8. A Story - Can the students recognize the development of a story ie Introduction, building, anti-climax, climax, conclusion.
 - a. What can we learn or the moral of the story? In Opus we learn that its okay," to depart from the usual from time to time".
 - b. How does the "plot" unfold?

Science/Math Projects:

1. Sound / Technical Effects -
 - a. What makes the wind? (crinkled cellophane?) What makes the sea? horse hooves?
 - b. use of live music
 - c. use of taped music
 - d. lights - house lights, spotlights, gels
 - e. booms / other special equipment - how does it work?
2. Measurement - e.g. a pint of ice cream - how much when we use metric measure? Explain other scientific terms if used.
3. Penguins - Learn all we can about these.
4. Milky Way - Learn all you can about it! How far away is it? What is it really made of? Do the astronauts go through it? Are the stars above or below it? How would it feel if we could touch it? Why is it in the sky?
5. Imagination / Creativity - What part of the human brain allows these qualities to develop?