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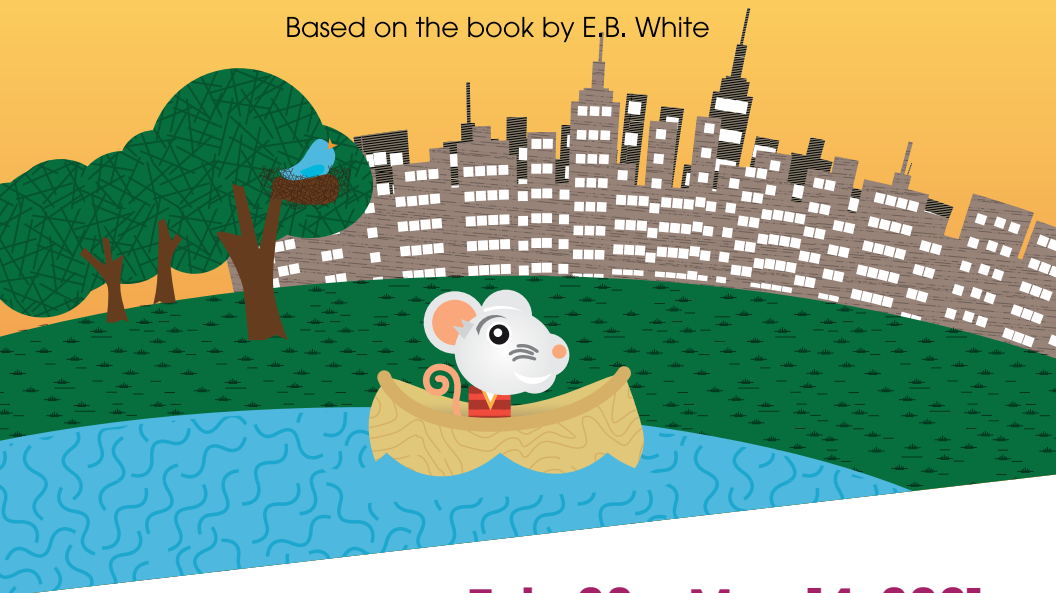


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STUART LITTLE

Based on the book by E.B. White



Feb. 26 – Mar. 14, 2021

Spotlight: Literacy is a Playhouse program supported by

**Cole-Belin Education
Foundation**



JOHN DEERE



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Getting to Know You

The cast of *Stuart Little* was asked “Because the world he lives in is huge, Stuart sees life as one big adventure. Name one very big place you’d like to explore as a very little creature and tell why.”



Brad D. Church (*George/Snowbell/Others*) As a very little creature, I would like to explore the inside wall of Big Ben in London. I have always loved

London and would love to see the inside of this great building as a mouse.



Julie Howland (*Mrs. Little/Pigeon/Others*) I would love to explore Alaska because it is so beautiful and there is so much to see. There are

mountains, glaciers, forests, animals, and the ocean. Imagine experiencing them as the tiniest of creatures!



Michael Howland (*Mr. Little/Dr. Carey/Others*) I'd love to explore more of the ocean and scuba dive with whale sharks and hammerheads. I would even

love to be in a shark cage seeing a great white shark in person. I have had a love of sharks since I was a little boy and have scuba dived with several species including whale sharks and hammerheads. I got so close to a hammerhead once that I could have flossed his teeth!

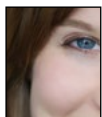


Will C. Johnson (*Stuart Little*) One place I'd like to explore is Europe. It is super-duper big and full of fun places to go, people to see, and food to eat. Europe

would be amazing to adventure as a very small creature.



Lexus Thiessen (*Margalo/Doctor/Others*) I would want to be small enough to fit in a suitcase so I could travel the world for free! Then there would be many big places to explore.



Katy Merriman (*Director*) I love the *Borrowers* books and have always wanted to be as miniature as a Borrower. I could explore my house from

that perspective and try to figure out what objects I could turn into tools for a tiny being to use. I'd live under the floorboards and use a safety pin and floss grappling hook to get around. So exciting!

Easter Egg Alert

About halfway through the play, Snowbell, and his cat friend Tiger, have the following conversation:

Snowbell: “What’s that book you’re reading tonight, Tiger?”

Tiger: “Oh, just some poems by T.S. Eliot.”

What book do you think Tiger was reading?

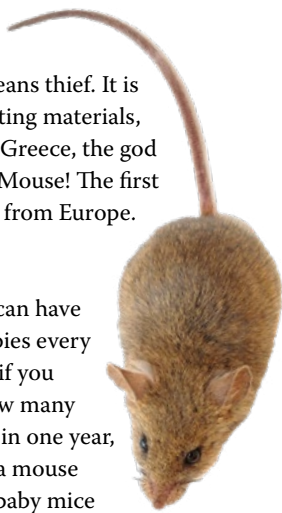
Hint: A long-running Broadway musical is based on it. The musical was also recently made into a movie featuring Jennifer Hudson and Taylor Swift.

Answers: The book is *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* by T.S. Eliot, and the Broadway musical based on this book is *Cats* by Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Real Mice

The word mouse comes from an ancient language, Sanskrit, and means thief. It is a good name since mice are always on the lookout for food and nesting materials, and they can easily slip into small spaces to take things. In Ancient Greece, the god Apollo was also called Apollo Smintheus, which means Apollo the Mouse! The first mice to arrive in America were stowaways on ships that sailed here from Europe. Here are some other interesting facts about mice.

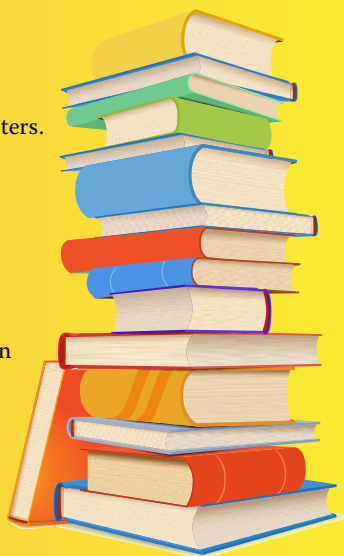
- Mice eat between 15-20 times per day.
- There are over 30 different species of mice in the world
- Mice are nocturnal. That means they are usually active at night.
- A baby mouse is called a pinky. A grown female is called a doe and a male is called a buck.
- Mouse teeth never stop growing. They gnaw and chew on various objects to grind their teeth down.
- Mice have very poor eyesight but excellent hearing.
- Mice are very athletic! They can jump a foot in the air and can squeeze through an opening as small as a dime.
- A female mouse can have up to a dozen babies every three weeks. See if you can figure out how many baby mice that is in one year, assuming a mama mouse gives birth to 12 baby mice every three weeks.
- When grown, house mice weight between $\frac{1}{2}$ and 1 ounce.
- Mouse tails are about the same length as their bodies.
- Perhaps the most famous of all mice is Mickey Mouse, who was created by Walt Disney in 1928.



Great Mice in Literature

Check out these books that all feature mice as main characters.

- *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* by Beverly Cleary
- *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes
- *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* by Kevin Henkes
- *Redwall* by Brian Jacques
- *Poppy* by Avi
- *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* by Robert C. O'Brien
- *The Tale of Despereaux* by Kate DiCamillo
- *Geronimo Stilton Series* by Elisabetta Dami
- *The Rescuers* by Margery Sharp
- *Angelina Ballerina* by Katharine Holabird
- *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* by Laura Numeroff



Can you think of any others? See how many of these you can read.

Meet the author:

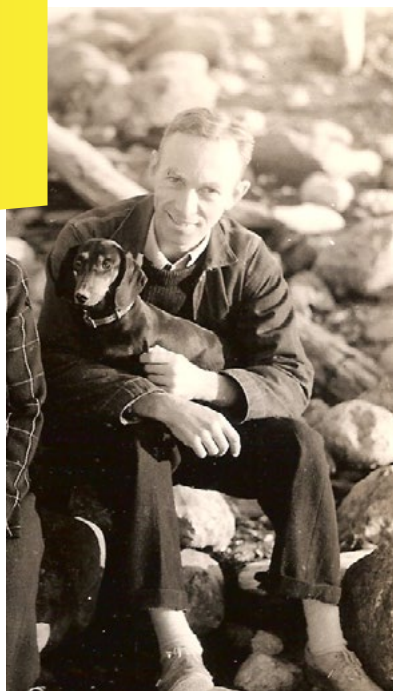
E.B. White (b. 1899–d.1985)

Before you read any further, try to guess what the initials E. and B. stand for. Is it Edward Brian? Elton Bob? Emerson Banderfield?

Elwyn Brooks White was the youngest child in a very large family who lived on a farm in New York. As a youngster, he was very shy. So shy, in fact, that he worried all year long about a speech that he was required to give in class. Later in life, when he was a famous writer, he was so embarrassed to speak in public that he would write the speech and have someone else read it aloud.

After graduating from college, he wrote for several magazines including *Harper's Bazaar* and *The New Yorker*. Even though he was well-known for his magazine articles, he wanted to try something new. His nieces and nephews were always begging for stories, so he thought he would write children's books.

In 1945, he began work on *Stuart Little* which was followed by *Charlotte's Web* and *The Trumpet of the Swan*. All three stories are fantasies because they are about animals who can speak. Stuart was originally supposed to be a boy who looked like a mouse, but he found it more fun to write a fantasy about a family with a son who was a mouse.



“Real life is only one kind of life — there is also the life of the imagination.”

—E.B. White

Little known fact: Although his real name was Elwyn and he is known as E.B. White to his readers, his nickname was “Andy.”

Meet the Playwright:

Joseph Robinette (b. 1939)



Joseph Allen Robinette was born in Rockwood, Tennessee. He began performing in local theatres as a child and majored in speech

and drama in college. He is the author or co-author of over 55 published plays and musicals, including several produced here at The Des Moines Playhouse!

His plays include *Charlotte's Web*; *Anne of Green Gables*; *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*; and *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. He is also a Tony Award nominee and Drama Desk Award nominee for the libretto

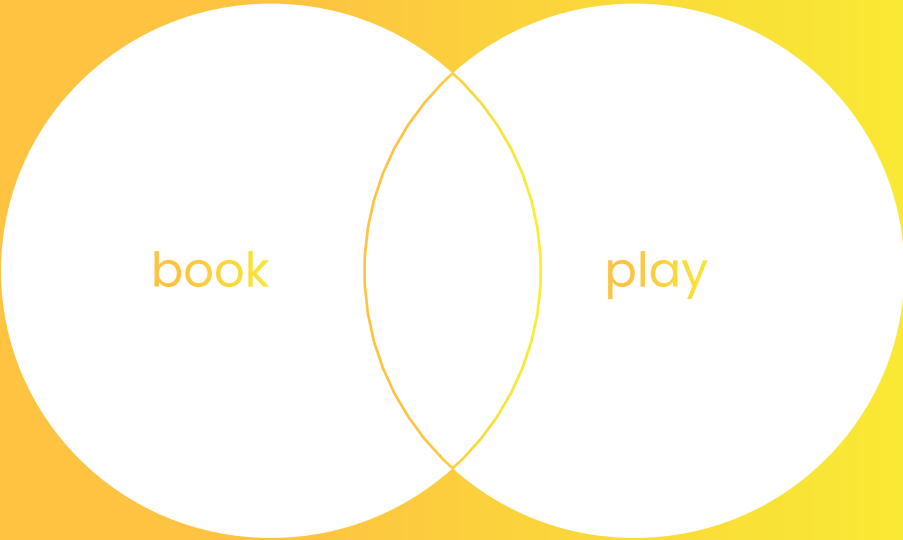
(script) of *A Christmas Story, The Musical*, which was The Playhouse's 2019 Family Holiday Classic. Many of his plays have been translated to different languages and produced all over the world.

Joseph, a retired college professor, is married and the father of five children. He also shares a name with Joseph Robinette Biden, our 46th President!

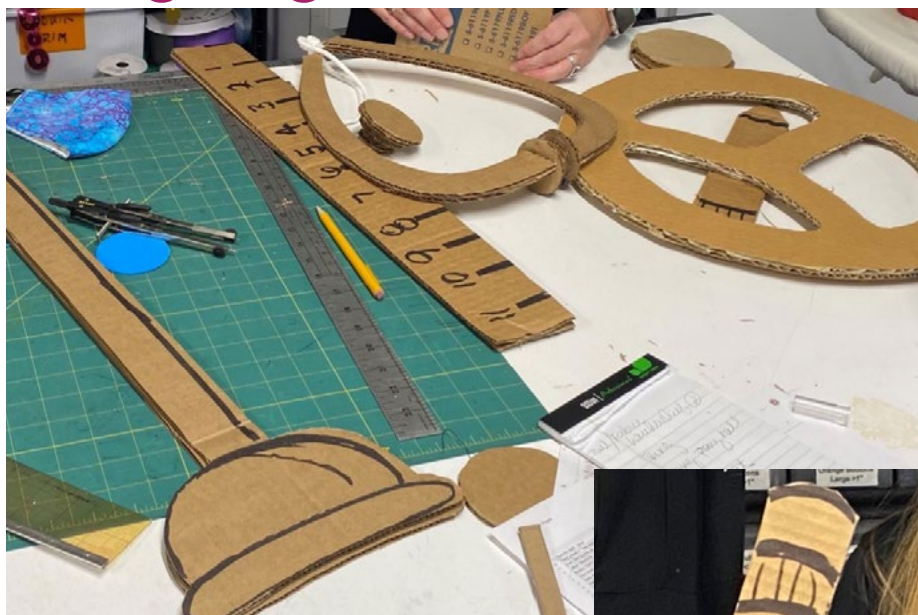
>> [Click here](#) to listen to a radio interview with Mr. Robinette about his writing and career.

Compare & Contrast

When a playwright adapts a book into a play, they must decide which parts or characters in the book should be kept in the play. Otherwise, a play could be an all-day event! Once you've read the book and seen the play, use this Venn Diagram to write down what is the same in both, and what is different.



Designing Stuart Little



Stuart Little is an example of story theatre, with a group of actors both narrating and acting out the story. Story theatre typically uses simple scenery, props, and costumes to help illustrate setting and characters. Director Katy Merriman and costume and properties designer Angela Lampe decided to use cardboard and fabric as their main materials to create all of the props in the show.

>> [Click here](#) to listen to interviews with Katy and Angie for a peek into that process.

Not only is cardboard a sustainable material, it is also fairly easy to find. You can make your own props with a little imagination and work. Two empty toilet paper tubes, some glue, and a piece of yarn can become binoculars, an empty paper towel tube can be a telescope and a big box can be a fort or a spaceship. The sky's the limit when you use your imagination!

>> Go to [Angie's Pinterest page here](#) to find more inspiring ideas for your own cardboard props!

THINK ABOUT IT!

Before and after the show, here are some questions that encourage you to think more about it.

Would you like to be two inches tall? What about the world would be fascinating? What about the world would be very scary?

E.B. White gave animal characters the gift of speech. If your pet or stuffed animal had the gift of speech, what do you think he or she would say to you? What other books have you read that have animal characters that talk and act like people?

Our costume designer, Angela Lampe, does not make outfits to wear with masks so that the characters look like real animals. Instead she designs costumes that “suggest” the look of an animal. What has she done with Margalo to give her the appearance of a bird? How about Snowbell or Stuart?

The children call Stuart “Mr. Little,” but he believes that he has to accomplish a lot more to be considered a grown up. What things would Stuart have to do in order to rightfully be called Mr. Little?

At the end of the play and the end of the book, Stuart sets off in search for his friend, Margalo. As audience members and readers, we do not know for sure if he found her. Create an ending in which he does finally unite with her. How long would it take to find her? Where might she be? What would they say to one another at long last? Would they remain friends?

Several actors play many roles in the show. What do they do to change from one character to the next? Choose different characters from the play and walk like them. Now talk like them. What did you do differently?

Stuart Little is very small, so most things seem very large to him. Where could you go that you would feel small? Where would you feel large?



Chairman of the World

When Stuart imagines himself Chairman of the World, he has important rules like “Absolutely no being mean.” **Imagine that you are Chairman of the World. What would be your five most important rules?**

A Boat Race in Central Park

Stuart takes a bus to Central Park in New York City where he goes to the pond for a boat race. There are several ponds in Central Park in which children and adults sail their toy boats, but there is so much more!

Central Park covers 843 acres in New York City. Can you imagine how big that is? By comparison, a regulation American football field is just 1.32 acres. Approximately how many football fields would fit into Central Park?

The land dedicated as Central Park is in Manhattan. The land was not always as beautiful as it is today. When it was first purchased in 1853, it was little more than hayfields, abandoned quarries, and swampy scrub land. A large portion was devoted to sheep grazing. Sheep actually resided in the park until 1934, and that area is still referred to as the Sheep Meadow.

Fredrick Law Olmsted designed Central Park but there was a lot more to it than just planting trees and setting out benches. Over 20 thousand barrels of dynamite were needed to level the land

and a half million tons of topsoil had to be brought in. In 1859, the Central Park project employed a workforce of 3600 men. Today, there are 21 playgrounds; 48 fountains, monuments and sculptures; 24,000 trees; 7,000 benches; and 275 species of birds. Central Park is not the largest park in the United States, but it draws the most visitors; over 38 million a year.

Central Park has its own zoo and within it... another zoo, Tisch Children's Zoo! The zoo maintains several different habitats so visitors can see polar bears and penguins, pandas and sea turtles, or lemurs and anteaters.

The carousel has been in operation since 1871. The original was powered by a mule. Later on, it was powered by steam and then electricity. The current carousel is the fourth and was moved to Central Park from Coney Island. This carousel features some of the largest hand-carved figures ever constructed.

>> [Go here for a complete view of Central Park.](#)

Make Your Own Boat

E.B. White was an accomplished sailor, which may be why a sailing contest ended up in *Stuart Little*. In fact, his son, Joel was a well-known sailboat and yacht designer. **Did you know that you can make your own boat out of paper or aluminum foil, crayons, and packing tape?**

>> [Go here to find out how!](#)

Make two and race them to see which is the fastest. Experiment with different materials to see which stay afloat longer or can carry more weight. Can you form a scientific hypothesis about your boats' buoyancy? Record your results and share them with a family member.