

### February 24 - March 12, 2023

Spotlight: Literacy is a Playhouse program supported by

Cole-Belin Education Foundation GREATER DES MOINES

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## **Getting to Know You:** The Cast of *The Hundred Dresses*

The cast and production team of *The Hundred Dresses* was asked the following: Describe something about yourself that could get you teased, but you have chosen to see as a positive thing. Here are their responses!



Adam Beilgard (*Mr. Petronski*) When I was younger, I would get teased for practicing my handwriting, something only the girls in my class did. Today, I can

see how this practice has improved my line work when I'm drawing pictures.



**Shea Beilgard** (*Willie*) Some people think the things I like are nerdy, like D&D, animé, and Magic the Gathering. But they make me happy, so I don't listen

to people when they make fun of them.



Jenny Bryant (Stage Manager) As a kid some people made fun of me for having glasses. When I got older I started using my glasses as a way to show

individuality and to be more colorful.



Haddy Dixon (Wanda) I have been made fun of for having stage fright and freezing up. People have laughed at me and someone said, "You should

stop trying. You are not good." That fear has pushed me to work harder and not be afraid to try.



**Bianca Elliott** (*Maddie*) When I am really happy or excited I talk really fast and high pitched and my whole body gets moving. Sometimes being dramatic at

10 gets you into trouble, especially in school, but I have found enthusiasm is infectious and it opens more doors than it closes.



Melissa Kellar (Shelly Reeves) I was always a bit dramatic and loud. Those qualities helped me to get involved in theater and music. I am thankful to have

been able to participate in theater and music since elementary school.



**Callen Kleene** (*Jack*) I tend to always be happy and positive and some people say that is annoying. I choose to ignore them and continue to see the

bright side of things.



Agatha/Auggie Snyder Maul (Jacob) I got bullied for being a trans kid in 5th and 6th grades because it was unusual. But

now it doesn't matter to me anymore because I am who I am, and I am proud of that.



Julia Neighbors (Peggy) I have anxiety and sometimes I get nervous or upset about things that may not bother others. I have learned how to manage

my anxiety and use it to help understand other people better.



Ginnie Padden (Miss Mason) I am a super neat freak because I hate to waste time looking for things. I like to have everything in its place, which used to really

bug my family. But now they all ask me where things are when they can't find them!



Mark Pullen (Mr. Svenson) I was teased and accused of being a spectator of life because I did not want to participate with my friends' activities one night and

I left. I felt vindicated days later when my friends were in trouble for their actions.



David A. VanCleave (Director) People used to tease me for not being into sports like all the other boys at my school. Luckily, I never let it bother me because I spent

my evenings at The Playhouse, traveling to exciting new worlds like Middle Earth and Narnia, and making lifelong friends who love me and accept me for exactly who I am!



Annie White (Cecile) People make fun of some of the foods I bring for lunch, like tuna. I don't let it bother me because I really enjoy it.



### About the Author Eleanor Estes (b. 1906-d.1988)

Eleanor Estes was born in 1906 in New Haven, Connecticut. Her father, Louis, was a bookkeeper for a railway. Her mother, Caroline, was a seamstress and a storyteller. Her father died when she was very young and her mother's dressmaking provided for the family.

When Eleanor contracted tuberculosis, it

was necessary for her to stay in bed for several months. She began writing because it was one way to keep busy, and it also allowed her imagination to run free even though she was confined to bed. She began by recording her childhood memories and these became the foundations of her books.

Eleanor and her husband were both librarians. Her first book, *The Moffats*, was based on her own brothers and sisters and their experiences: being late to the first day of school, ruining Sunday best clothes, dancing lessons, and being quarantined during an outbreak of scarlet fever. Her books feature children who were encouraged to spread their wings and grow independent without fear.

The Hundred Dresses was inspired by an experience from Estes' own childhood, when her classmates bullied a Polish girl who wore the same hand-me-down dress to school every day. Eleanor always felt guilty she hadn't done anything to help the girl. Writing the book was her way of relieving her guilt about not speaking up and defending her classmate.

A note regarding derogatory language: The term *Polack* is used in the play, which is an insulting reference to a person of Polish descent. While The Des Moines Playhouse does not condone the use of this language, it is accurate given the topic, the setting, and the time period of the story and, therefore, is retained for the purpose of being true to the story. It is hoped that this language, as well as the attitudes of some of the characters, will inspire conversations about why people behaved and spoke in the ways they did, how things have changed since 1938, and the ways in which we can continue to grow.

## **The Great Depression**

The Hundred Dresses takes place during The Great Depression, a very important time in America's history. It began with the stock market crash in the summer of 1929 which seriously damaged the nations' economy. Times got worse during the Dust Bowl of the 1930s which was equally damaging to the nations' farmlands. Times were tough for everyone, even the children. Below are some facts about The Great Depression.

- Like Maddie's father, one in four (25%) of America's workers were without jobs.
- Millions of students were forced to leave school and get jobs in factories, mines, and canneries to support their families.
- President Franklin Roosevelt is remembered for the social program known as The New Deal. Designed to help ease the impact of the Depression, the Works Progress Administration, or WPA, built highways, schools, hospitals, airports, public parks, and playgrounds. It also put actors, writers, and other creative arts professionals back to work by sponsoring federally funded plays and art projects, such as murals in public buildings. In all, the WPA put three million jobless people in the United States back to work.

How did The Great Depression effect Maddie's family? How was it different from Wanda's or Peggy's family?

**Design It** The students in Miss Mason's class are asked to design and draw either a motorboat or a dress for their art contest. Design your own dress or boat below. What materials is it made out of? What colors?

## 1930s Pop Culture

Growing up in the 1930s was different than today in many ways, but there are still some similarities. Children still read comic books, go to the movies, and follow current celebrities. One big difference? While televisions had been invented, they were not widely available to the public in the 1930s. Instead, families gathered around the radio for news and entertainment, including President Roosevelt's Fireside Chats, radio dramas, and comedy hours.





Buck Rogers, Flash Gordon, and Dick Tracy were popular comic strips characters in the 1930s. Buck Rogers was in movies, on the radio, and in comic strips. Both he and Flash Gordon were science fiction characters who had traveled to space. Dick Tracy was also in the comic strips. He was a hard-hitting police detective.



Charlie McCarthy was a very famous ventriloquist's dummy who made his radio

debut in 1936 with his creator, Edgar Bergen. Charlie was a very mischievous little boy who liked to joke and flirt. You can see the original Charlie at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.



Greta Garbo was a beautiful Swedish film actress. She was greatly admired in silent and

classic films. Young girls thought of her as the most glamorous movie star of all.



The whole nation fell in love with Little Orphan Annie, another popular comic strip character.

Annie was a child adopted by the rich millionaire, Oliver "Daddy" Warbucks. When its creator, Harold Gray, decided to write out the character of Annie's dog, Sandy, President Franklin Roosevelt himself wrote to persuade him otherwise.



The character of Superman was first introduced in 1938 in Action Comics #1, one

of the first comic books written. His popularity launched a "Golden Age" of comic books during which other superheroes, like Captain America, Wonder Woman, and Batman were created.



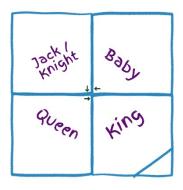
Peggy tells the other girls that she is getting a dress made out of "Stuart plaid". The Royal Stuart plaid

was adopted as the Windsor family's personal tartan. In 1938, it would have been worn by then 12-year old Princess Elizabeth, the future Queen Elizabeth II of England.

## **Four Square**

#### OVERVIEW

- The object of the game is for each player to advance to the highest square by eliminating players in high squares. King is the highest square, then Queen, then Jack (or Knight), and Baby.
- The server must complete a serve with at least one foot behind the service line. The serve is the first play of the game. Traditionally, King serves diagonally to Jack.
- All balls must be hit underhanded. A player touches the ball with one or two hands.
- The ball must bounce one time, and only one time, in your square before a player hits it underhanded. A receiving play can hit the ball back to the server or any other square. If the ball back to the server or any other square.



the ball bounces a second time in a player's square, they are out.

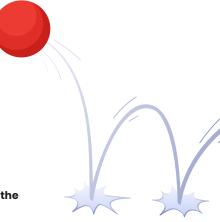
- When a player gets out, they move to the last square (or the end of the line if more than 4 people are playing) and remaining players rotate up (Jack to Queen, Queen to King, etc.)
- If a ball hits an interior line, it's considered "out," and the player is eliminated.
- If it hits an exterior line, it's considered "in" or good.

#### SPECIAL RULES

A longstanding Four Square tradition is creating your own special rules, or variations to gameplay. Here are the rules seen in *The Hundred Dresses*.

- Around the World: If the King calls "Around the World," players must quickly tap the ball to the square of the person immediately to their left. Play must continue this way until someone is out or the King calls out "Return to normal."
- Around the World Peacefully: Players toss the ball gently to the left (without bouncing).
- Bus Stop: All players must rush to the center of the grid and put a foot on the corner where all four squares touch. The last player to put their foot on the corner is out.
- Corner: If the King calls "Corner," all players must put their feet on the outside corner of their squares. The last player to reach their corner is out.
- Line: If the King calls "Line," all players must touch a different inside line.
- Out of the Woods: If the King calls "Out of the Woods," all players must jump out of their squares and stand out of bounds. The last player to leap out of bounds is out.

### Do you play four-square at your school? How are the rules the same? How are they different?



### WRITE IT

The ending of the play leaves some details to our imaginations. What do you think happens next? Will Wanda write back to Maddie? Write the opening paragraph to the next chapter.

Why do you think Wanda was singled out for ridicule? Were there reasons other than the way she dressed? Some people define bullying as an imbalance of power. How do you define it?

Friends sometimes tease one another in a friendly way. **What is the difference between teasing and bullying?** Maddie feels extreme guilt over not having intervened on Wanda's behalf earlier. When was the first opportunity Maddie had to step in and help Wanda? What kept her from doing so?

If Wanda and her father had not left, do you think that the classmates would have continued to bully her? Why or why not?

### **TALK ABOUT IT**

We would probably say that Peggy is the "leader" of the students in their classroom. Why do you think that is? Why do you think she behaves the way she does?

The Gettysburg Address was a speech by U.S. President Abraham Lincoln. It is one of the most well-known speeches in United States history. It was delivered during the American Civil War, on November 19, 1863. It came to be regarded as one of the greatest speeches in American history. Research The Gettysburg Address. Do you think it would be difficult to memorize, as they are asked to do in the play?



# **AUTOGRAPHS**