

500 Words

by Jamie Morris



GREEN
THUMB
THEATRE



TOURING PROFESSIONAL THEATRE
FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES
SINCE **1975**

RESOURCE AND ACTIVITY GUIDE

www.greenthumb.bc.ca | touring@greenthumb.bc.ca | (604) 254-4055

Green Thumb Theatre acknowledges the support of



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des arts
du Canada



BRITISH COLUMBIA
ARTS COUNCIL



CITY OF
VANCOUVER

metrovancover

Green Thumb's offices are located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səíl̓wətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. As a touring company, Green Thumb Theatre's work often takes place throughout the traditional homelands of most of the Indigenous Nations and cultures across British Columbia and beyond.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Green Thumb Theatre is committed to telling stories that spark empathy and provoke critical thinking and dialogue. This resource and activity guide is intended to help educators facilitate classroom discussions before and after the performance and to delve deeper into the themes of the show.

ABOUT GREEN THUMB THEATRE

Founded in 1975, Green Thumb Theatre creates, produces, and tours plays that explore social issues relevant to the lives of children, youth, and young adults. Green Thumb provides theatre that celebrates the language and stories of today's generation and culture to stimulate empathy, debate, and critical thinking. Green Thumb has performed for over 4 million people and has toured to every province and two territories in Canada, 36 US States, and 11 countries overseas. Original plays commissioned by Green Thumb have been translated into 9 languages and produced by more than 200 theatre companies worldwide. Green Thumb Theatre is a registered charitable not-for-profit organization. www.greenthumb.bc.ca

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page 2	– ABOUT THIS GUIDE AND GREEN THUMB THEATRE
Page 3	– CAST & CREATIVE TEAM
Page 4	– ABOUT 500 WORDS / PREPARING TO WATCH A SHOW
Page 5	– INTERVIEW WITH THE PLAYWRIGHT
Page 6	– INTERVIEW WITH THE PLAYWRIGHT (continued)
Page 7	– INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR
Page 8	– PRE-PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
Page 9	– PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY
Page 10	– POST-PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
Page 11	– POST-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES
Page 12	– POST-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES (continued)
Page 13	– RESOURCES
Page 14	– FRIENDSHIP BINGO TEMPLATE
Page 15	– STORY TEMPLATE
Page 16	– GET IN TOUCH!

CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

Lance
Sylvia

Ethan De Hoog
Sewit Eden Haile

PRODUCTION TEAM

Playwright
Director
Stage Manager
Costume Design
Props Designer
Set Design
Sound Design
Study Guide Author
Promotional Illustrations
Study Guide Design

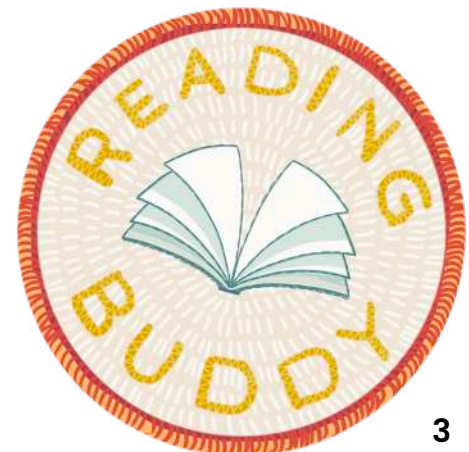
Jamie Norris
Jamie King*
Samantha Pawliuk*
Alaia Hamer
Kimira Reddy
Sophie Tang
Matthew MacDonald-Bain
Nitasha Rajoo
Grae Salisbury
The Art Left Creative Group

GREEN THUMB THEATRE LEADERSHIP & STAFF

Artistic Director
General Manager
Production & Facilities Manager
Company Manager
Accountant
Development & Outreach Officer

Anita Rochon
Shannon Maung
Liam Kearns
Tim Carlson
Susan Cai
Stephanie Durán

*Appears courtesy of the Canadian Actor's Equity Association



ABOUT THE PLAY

500 WORDS BY JAMIE NORRIS

Lance is the smartest kid in grade six who never misses an opportunity to show off his vocabulary. His teacher assigns him a reading buddy, Sylvia, who is a daydreamer but now that she's in grade three is finding it harder to hide that she never really learned how to read. All Lance wants to do when they are together is write for the story contest, not help Sylvia. But Lance can't think of a story until Sylvia imagines a whole world for him of magic, heroes and adventure. Learning together the unlikely pair create a magical story neither could have on their own. In the end, Sylvia loses her fear of reading and Lance learns that the biggest word is not always the smartest word and that you really can't judge a person without knowing them.



THEMES

Friendship, Literacy, Creativity, Collaboration and Learning Differences

CHARACTERS

LANCE: 11 years old, in grade 6

SYLVIA: 9 years old and in grade 3

PREPARING TO WATCH A SHOW

Sometimes, when young people attend a live theatrical performance for the first time, they may not realize how different it is from watching a movie or a television show. You can help them prepare for a live theatre experience by:

- Giving them a chance to use the bathroom or get a drink of water before the show begins.
- Reminding them that photos and recordings of any kind are not allowed.
- Reminding them that the actor(s) can see when they're moving around or hear if they're speaking during the performance.
- Letting them know there will be time to ask questions of the performers at the end of the show.
- Encouraging them to be active listeners by asking them to focus not only on the story, but the set, costumes, and sound design.
- Including the questions and activities from this study guide in your discussions before and after the show.

INTERVIEW WITH THE PLAYWRIGHT - JAMIE NORRIS



What inspired you to write this play?

I like the idea of a “spark”. I usually find my inspiration for the plays I write inside a moment (or “spark”) between characters that holds some kind of question, conflict, or challenge. The play will then expand outwards from these pivotal moments.

The two corresponding moments that sparked 500 Words are:

1. *When Lance wonders if he was born with no imagination... and*
2. *When Sylvia finally faces and shares her deep fear about not being able to read... Both of these moments allow each character to share their own personal expertise by helping the other learn something new.*

Lance struggles to tap into his imagination—have you ever faced similar challenges? If so, how did you overcome creative blocks in your own life?

Every time I sit down to write there are moments when I must move forward from the known - whatever frameworks or outlines I, as playwright, have put in place - and enter into the unknown. It is at this point that I must trust the characters to find their own voices and begin figuring things out for themselves. This can be a scary moment. Terrifying even. It might feel like nothing is happening. I might doubt myself and everything I’ve written before. I think this is how Lance is probably feeling as he keeps re-writing the opening sentence of his story. I’ve come to accept these creative blocks as part of the creative process. The way that I am continually learning to overcome them is... practice. Keep writing. Like Sylvia says: “Stop trying to figure everything out before it’s even happened yet.” And, “Don’t think just go.”



How would you describe Lance and Sylvia using just three adjectives each?

Both Lance and Sylvia are LONELY, although neither would admit it. They both share a secret sense that they are different from other people; that somehow, they don't belong. They have both experienced various forms of bullying and social exclusion. As a result of this, they have both developed their own private ways of dealing with these challenges. Neither of them has very many friends.

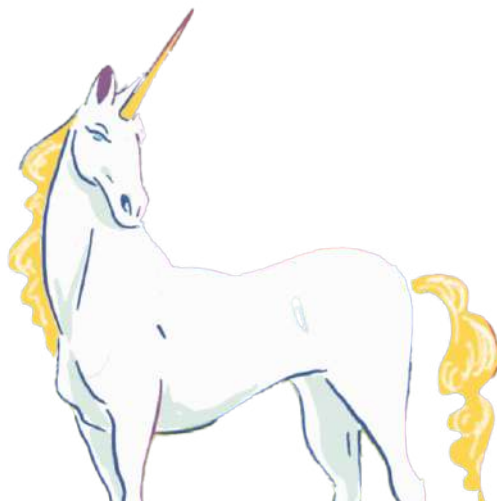
Lance and Sylvia are in different grades. Why was it important for them to be at different stages in school? What do you think this dynamic adds to the story or their relationship?

Inside the school environment*, I believe, there can be a huge difference between the world of a grade three student and the world of a grade six student. Because of this, Lance and Sylvia can initially come together as perfect strangers. This age/grade difference also sets up a relationship where, at the beginning of the play, Lance may be seen as the "expert". He is older. He is put in the position to teach Sylvia something (how to read). Through the events in the play it soon becomes clear that Sylvia also has something to teach Lance. It may be an extra-huge challenge for Lance to allow himself to learn from someone younger than him. It is my hope that this dynamic might help share the universal message that it is possible to open ourselves up to learn from anyone.

** This difference may not be so pronounced in smaller schools.*

Do you have a favorite moment in the play? What scene stands out to you most and why?

I think my favourite moment of the play is when Lance finds a way to follow Sylvia's guidance; when he stops thinking and planning and finally allows himself to be swept up into the unfolding world of his story. I personally love these moments. To me they embody that part of the creative process when we, as creators, abandon ourselves to the unknown and just... play.



INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR- JAMIE KING



How do you use your own imagination to shape your vision for the show?

My imagination carries me through every step of creating the show, in how I hear the rhythm of the language, in how myself and the designers envision the physical world of the play, in thinking of colours for each character and the sounds of the world. When working with the actors, I use my imagination to think of new ideas, to punch up jokes, to find the heart of the piece.

What process do you follow to bring the playwright's words to life on stage?

I work through the script loads of times before we get to rehearsal, sometimes focusing on asking questions throughout and writing them down. I also read through thinking of the journey for each character, how do they think at the beginning of the show, does that change, why and when? Each time I go through the script I find moments that tell the core story – what are the moments that need lots of clarity? Then make sure that I give them a physical language so they can be highlighted. Every action I make with the script is about finding the truth of the playwright's words and bringing it to life!

Is there one key thing you want students to know before they see the show?

All you need to know is the company feeds off of your reactions! When you laugh and gasp and share your joy and excitement, we hear you! It gives us energy, it makes the show feel brighter and more exciting to do. So, share your love of the show with us!

What's the most important idea or feeling you'd like them to take away?

To remember that your creativity is a treasure. As you grow and get older, use your creativity to share your vision of the world. My creativity helps me solve problems, helps me figure out how to work with people with different styles, and allows me to create beauty with the tools I have at hand.

What is the central theme of the play?

The central theme is collaboration, when we don't know things, or can't do something alone – we can rely on the people around us. I think there's a question around how to overcome our fears, both Lance and Sylvia feel lonely and isolated; they feel like they can't accomplish something that they need to do. The play looks at how, even when we feel alone and our problems are unique, we can still find help and support.

What questions, thoughts or curiosities do you hope the audience will have as they leave the after the performance?

I hope that the audience feels inspired to go and create! To learn the joy of collaboration, and to create something that excites them.

PRE-PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS

These discussion questions aim to stimulate creative and critical thinking while providing an opportunity to hypothesize about the production:

- 1. The play is titled “500 Words.”
What do you think of when you hear that title?**
- 2. What does it mean to “play”? Is there a particular way you
express your creativity or have fun?**
- 3. Can you be friends with people in different grade levels?
Why or why not?**
- 4. When you think about going to the playground at recess,
do you feel excited or nervous?
Why? What makes the playground a fun or challenging place?**
- 5. How do you get to know someone who’s new to you?
What steps do you take to make a new friend or understand
someone better?**

PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY

ACTIVITY: HELLO, NEW FRIEND!

If you were meeting someone new, what questions would you ask them to get to know them better?

Working independently, get students to write down 5 questions they would ask a new classmate/ friend.

Question Starters	Example of Questions
1. What is your favourite.... 2. When did you... 3. Who is your... 4. How did you make... 5. Where is your...	1. Do you have any pets? 2. What is your favourite book? 3. When you get home from school, what is the first thing you do? 4. Do you like the mountains or the beach? 5. What is your favourite lunch food or snack?

For Grades 4 – 7

Consider asking them to develop deep questioning. Examples may include:

1. What is a recipe or dish that has been a part of your family's identity? Why is it so valuable?
2. What is a dream you have for yourself?
3. If you could meet anyone from history, who would it be and why?
4. If you could have any super power, what would it be?
5. Who inspires you the most and how do they influence your life?

When completed, move into pairs (teacher to assign) and interview classmate(s).

All Grades – Debrief: What did you learn about your classmate that you did not know before? What things do you have in common? What can you learn from them?

All Grades – Opportunities for Modifications or Adaptation

1. This could be turned into a game of Friendship Bingo; "Find someone who..." (see the *Friendship Bingo template on page 14*)
2. Just like in the play, Sylvia is in grade 3 and Lance is in grade 6 and found common interests. This could work well between grade and/or class levels promoting cross grade learning and a

POST PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These discussion questions are designed to encourage reflection and deeper analysis of the performance. Students should be encouraged to think critically about the characters, themes and key moments of the production

**1. What do you think is the key message or theme of the play?
What do you think the story is trying to show us or make us think about?**

**2. Lance enters a story contest, but we never find out if he wins.
What do you think happened?
Do you think winning or losing is the most important part of the contest? Why?**

3. How did Sylvia help Lance discover something new about who he is or what he's capable of?

4. What did Lance teach Sylvia about herself?

5. Now that we have seen the production, what are some of the things you might learn from someone who is in a different grade than you?

POST-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY #1: CREATE THE STORY

The definition of imagination is to have the ability to be creative and resourceful and playful. Sylvia shows Lance that everyone has an imagination.

Take any of the following sentence starters and write a story (independently, in pairs or small groups): (see the *Story Template* on page 15)

1. Once upon a time there was a brave noble....
2. They pressed the button and it transported them to...
3. It was a cold night with the wind blowing leaves everywhere when, suddenly...
4. After fishing for hours, they felt a tug on their lines, and when they reeled in their lines, they discovered they had caught...
5. They were face to face with a huge butterfly that said...
6. They danced and danced and laughed and laughed when all of a sudden...
7. One morning, I woke up to find something unexpected on my doorstep...
8. They dusted off the box that said "do not open", looked at each other and then...
9. Running to the finish line, they knew they had won, when out of nowhere...
10. I thought I made a delicious cake, but...

TIP: Remember to include:

- What happens next?
- Who are the characters?
- How does it conclude?

Opportunities for Modifications or Adaptation

This can be done through oral storytelling. Pick one of the sentence starters above. Have the students sit in a circle, and each person adds one sentence to the story, building on what was shared before. Once everyone has added their sentence and the circle is complete have the students return to their desks to write or draw what happens next. Then, allow them to share their creations with the class.

Lance: *What if I don't have one?*

Sylvia: *One what?*

Lance: *An imagination.*

Sylvia: *Ha!*

Lance: *It's not funny Sylvia, what if I was born without an imagination?*

Sylvia: *But Lance, everyone has an imagination.*

ACTIVITY #2: FINDING MAGIC

Sylvia and Lance use their imagination to create an epic story full of adventure; they name the story, "Finding Magic". Create the title page (poster) just like Sylvia did in the performance.

Here are some key lines from their story to help you create the title page:

- Once upon a time there existed a young brave noble knight.
- Mr. K-nig-ht's on the run - being chased by this huge enormous dragony lizard creature-thing
- Mr. K-nig-hts can be safe if he can make it to the ocean - and the only way to the ocean's if he goes through the "DREADED CANYON OF FLAMES"
- He saw the three firey red eyes of the dreaded... gigantic... electric... WORM!
- Magic's suit split wide open and they both ejected up up up through the black eater, the blue sky and back out to the very edge of the known universe where they could be together and safe forever!
- There were two reasons that Mr. K-nig-ht was alive. One - was cause of his special clothes which were made outta this super invincible metal stuff and second was cause of his horse (named Magic)- who also had the same super invincible metal clothes and extra thick fire proof feet

Opportunities for Modifications or Adaptation

Use the work of Pablo Picasso to inspire students to create a title page using his style. In the play Lance complements Sylvia's style to that of Picasso:

SYLVIA: *"Pablo Picasso was born in Spain in 1881. He attended his local school and is described as having great difficulties with reading and writing..."*

LANCE: (reading) *"Despite these early difficulties it soon became clear that young Pablo had an incredible talent."*



RESOURCES

BC Curriculum Connections

English Language Arts K-7: Big Ideas https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/sites/curriculum.gov.bc.ca/files/curriculum/continuous-views/en_ela_k-9_big_ideas.pdf

Arts Education K-7: Big Ideas https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/sites/curriculum.gov.bc.ca/files/curriculum/continuous-views/en_arts_education_k-9_big_ideas.pdf

Literacy Curricular Connections

Learning Pathways: Curricular Connections <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/learning-pathways/curricular-connections>

Reading Rockets: Launching Young Readers <https://www.readingrockets.org/>

Canadian Children's book Centre: Resource Library <https://bookcentre.ca/resource-library>

Arts Education – Picasso

Tate Modern: <https://www.tate.org.uk/kids/explore/who-is/who-pablo-picasso>

National Geographic: <https://www.natgeokids.com/uk/primary-resource/pablo-picasso-art-primary-resource/>

How to Draw Like Picasso (Video): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3tVQoYPV94>

How to Draw Like Picasso (Website): <https://artprojectsforkids.org/picasso-art-project/>

Friendship

Teacher Planet: Friendship <https://www.teacherplanet.com/content/friendship>

Scholastic Parents: Friendship Lessons for All Ages & Stages <https://www.scholastic.com/parents/family-life/social-emotional-learning/development-milestones/lets-be-friends.html>

Virtual Lab School: Promoting Social-Emotional Development; Building Positive Relationships <https://www.virtuallabschool.org/management/social-and-emotional-development/lesson-5>

Learning Differences

Understood.com: Everyone Deserves to be Understood <https://www.understood.org/>

Learning Disabilities Society: <https://ldsociety.ca/>

PBS Resource Site: Misunderstood Minds <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/misunderstoodminds/intro.html>

Social-Emotional Well-Being

Heart-Mind Online: Resources to support social-emotional learning <https://heartmindonline.org/resources/for-educators>

The CALM Curriculum©: Innovative Canadian play-based curriculum to strengthen social and emotional well-being <https://www.fvcdc.org/programs/additional-services/the-calm-curriculum/>

The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation: Age and stage appropriate resources that teach important Social Emotional (SEL) skills <https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/>

RESOURCES

FRIENDSHIP BINGO TEMPLATE

<p>Find someone who likes to play in the snow.</p> <p><i>Name:</i></p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Find someone who has cooked a meal for their family.</p> <p><i>Name:</i></p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Find someone who has a pet.</p> <p><i>Name:</i></p> <p>_____</p>
<p>Find someone who can play a musical instrument.</p> <p><i>Name:</i></p> <p>_____</p>	<p>FREE PLAY</p>	<p>Find someone who has a sibling.</p> <p><i>Name:</i></p> <p>_____</p>
<p>Find someone who has travelled on a plane.</p> <p><i>Name:</i></p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Find someone who can speak more than one language.</p> <p><i>Name:</i></p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Find someone whose favourite colour is</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>Name:</i></p> <p>_____</p>

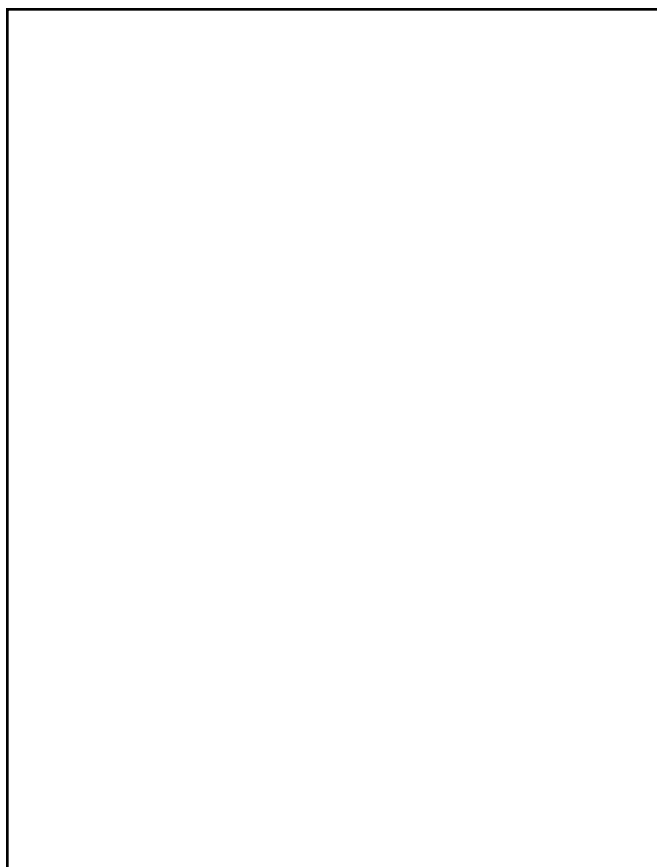
RESOURCES

STORY TEMPLATE

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

TITLE: _____

Directions:



SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS & OPINIONS!

We love getting mail and your students' feedback!

GREEN THUMB THEATRE

Mailing address:

5522 McKinnon Street, Vancouver, BC, V5R 0B6

Email: info@greenthumb.bc.ca

Phone: (604) 254 -4055

Fax: (604) 251 -7002

WRITE A LETTER!

Ask your students to write us a letter/email to share their thoughts and opinions on the performance of **500 WORDS** by Jamie Norris. Send it to us at Green Thumb!

WRITE A REVIEW!

Have your students write a theatre review about this performance of **500 WORDS**.

Send it in to us at Green Thumb! A theatre review usually includes the following:

- A brief summary of the story
- A comment on the quality of the play itself
- A description of the costumes and set and a comment on whether these were interesting and appropriate
- A comment on the actors' portrayal of the characters and on the director's skill at pulling the whole show together

There are many examples of reviews in newspapers and online that you could use to introduce the concept and format of a theatre review. For help getting started, take a look at "How to Write a Play Review" on Wiki How: <https://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Play-Review>

CHECK US OUT ONLINE!

 /greenthumbtheatre

 @greenthumbtheatre

 @greenthumbtheatre

 @greenthumbtheatre

WWW.GREENTHUMB.BC.CA