Michelle L. Vacca’s

The Princess and the Pea

Ideas Packet

Prepared for the Blackfriars of Agnes Scott College
Production of
The Princess and the Pea
An Adaptation by Michelle L. Vacca

Directed by
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Scenic and Lighting Designs by
Dudley Sanders

Costumes Coordinated by
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Prepared by
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A Letter to the Teachers

Thank you for your interest in the Blackfriars of Agnes Scott College and our production of *The Princess and the Pea*. Blackfriars is the oldest continuously performing theatrical troupe in metro Atlanta. In conjunction with Agnes Scott’s Department of Theatre and Dance we produce theatrical events throughout the academic year. Please check our web site [www.agnesscott.edu](http://www.agnesscott.edu) for dates and details. We would like to thank you for supporting Blackfriars and our production program. In return, we hope you will enjoy the Ideas Packet. We view this as a means of creating an educational partnership that serves to involve your students in a meaningful discussion of our production as well as an exploration of the art of theatre.

The activities and information outlined in this packet reflect themes relevant to our production of *The Princess and the Pea* and some general concepts related to the theatre. The packet is divided into two sections, Before the Show and After the Show. Feel free to pick and choose different activities from each section and to change them as necessary for your situation. Our suggestions are just that, suggestions. You are in the best position to determine what will provide the greatest benefit or enjoyment for your students. The information and activities are presented to provide independent lessons just waiting for your guidance.

It is our intent that this package will engage classroom discussion, provoke creative writing assignments, provoke art projects, and perhaps even allow for a mini staging of your own production of *The Princess and the Pea*. Please do not feel limited by the nature of this packet. We hope that this will only stimulate your ideas and the ideas of your young students. Allow this packet not to limit but rather broaden your curriculum.

It is important to note that in our production of *The Princess and the Pea* all characters, including male characters, will be played by females. This may bring about some questions for younger students and activities have been suggested in the packet to parallel this concept. Agnes Scott is a women’s college and we have decided to showcase the talent of our women by taking on this challenge.

We thank you for your interest in our program and we hope that you enjoy our show and find our school tool useful in preparing your students for our production. Feel free to put forth comments that you
find useful and believe will contribute to the development of our school tool packet in years to come.
BEFORE THE SHOW

What is *The Princess and the Pea* about?

*The Princess in the Pea* is a common tale across cultures. It is quite possible that the students in your classroom have heard at least one version of this classic story. Start by asking your students what they think the play will be about. Allow them to share and if necessary follow up with a synopsis of Michelle Vacca’s adaptation.

Synopsis:

**ACT I**

King Maximillian summons a gathering in the Great Hall of his castle in commemoration of his son, Prince Valiant, turning 19 and a half years old. In King Max’s kingdom it is on this occasion that one must consult the Ancient Book of Wit and Wisdom. Through this consultation, King Max and his family learn that Valiant must begin a journey through the neighboring kingdoms to find a suitable princess to whom he will wed. Old Queen Maude, Valiant’s Granny, orders Valiant and his Squire, Donald, to begin the journey at once. Queen Maude also explains to Valiant that whoever he chooses must pass the “secret test”.

On Valiant’s journey he encounters four rather different princesses. The first princess he meets is Minerva. Minerva is very smart, but she and the prince have nothing in common. Minerva enjoys spending her days doing math problems and reading books, while Valiant would much rather go fishing. Valiant does not have much luck with his second princess, Diana Dingaling, either. Diana exhausts Valiant with her excessive dancing and singing. The third princess, Princess Beaulah, is too caught up in her own beauty to pay attention to Valiant, and Princess Stella, the fourth princess, is far too interested in athletics for him. After an unsuccessful journey Prince Valiant and Donald decide to return home and wait for a princess to come to him.

To the family’s surprise, a princess shows up at their doorstep moments after Prince Valiant’s return home. The royal family is very skeptical of the princess, Princess Olivia, and her lady in waiting, Lady Hildegarde. The family is unsure of Princess Olivia’s status because of the poor condition of her clothing and her lack of luggage. When Princess Olivia and Lady Hildegard begin to leave, Prince Valiant apologizes for their rude behavior and asks Olivia to stay the night.

**ACT II**

The second act begins with Queen Maude setting up the “secret test” for Olivia. While Valiant has not officially asked Olivia to take the test, his grandmother has sensed the connection and begins preparing anyway.

Soon Valiant and Olivia meet up in the Great Hall, and Olivia explains the reason of her journey and her reason for being poor. We learn that Olivia’s
father gave up all their money to help the people of their kingdom, and now their kingdom is suffering heavily from poverty. Valiant asks Olivia to take the test. He suggests that his family will contribute to restoring Olivia’s native kingdom if she passes the test.

While the family is preparing for the test, we learn from Granny that the test is to place a single dried pea under a stack of mattresses to test the princess’s sensitivity. If she cannot sleep she passes the test; however, if she does sleep she fails. Donald overhears this conversation and prepares to tell Valiant immediately. However, Donald never has the chance to tell Valiant what he has learned. Therefore, he decides he will help Princess Olivia by placing a few extra things under the mattress.

When Princess Olivia finally gets her chance to go to sleep, she cannot sleep because of all the lumps in her bed. The rest of the family cannot sleep either, because they are all worrying about Olivia.

When morning comes, the mood is merry. Olivia has passed the test, a wedding is in the making and everyone rejoices. Meanwhile, Donald sneaks away during the celebration to pull everything out from under the mattress. Since no one slept well, they all decide to go back to sleep. When Olivia goes back to rest, she still cannot sleep because of the dried pea. We learn that Olivia did not need Donald’s assistant because she is a TRUE princess.
BEFORE THE SHOW

Imagination and Creativity Questions and Exercises

Have the students use a blank sheet of paper to write responses to the following questions. The non-bulleted questions are the main questions, and the bulleted questions are prompters. After the children are given a few minutes to answer each question, ask if anyone wants to share their answers. Students may rather discuss, draw, or act out their answers as well.

What is the first idea that comes to mind when you think of a Prince or Princess?
- Do you think of a person or a character from a movie?
  - If so, who?
- How do they dress?
- What do they eat?
- Where do they live?
- What do they do for fun?
- Do you think of them in terms of history or our current time period?

If a prince and princess lived in today’s society how do you think they would act?
- What music would they listen to?
- Where would they hang out and play?
- How would they walk?
- What books would they read and what T.V. shows would they watch?
- What sort of attitude do you think they would have?

If you were a prince or a princess, how would you act?
BEFORE THE SHOW

Concept and Setting

Our production of *The Princess and the Pea* is set in modern day. The costumes, set, and acting choices were all made with the time we are living in mind.

Ask the children if they know what the set and costumes are? Allow them to discuss what they believe these terms mean, and if necessary give them the following definitions.

Set: The set is the free standing scenery that creates the environment of the play.

Costumes: Costumes are what actors wear when they are playing a character.

When a designer is working on creating a set or costumes, they usually complete something called a rendering before they begin to actually build their designs. A rendering is an accurate drawing of what the costumes and set will look like when they are completed.

Let the students choose to do a set rendering of a royal environment or a costume rendering for a prince or princess of their choice. Have them create their designs in a modern day setting.
BEFORE THE SHOW

The Rehearsal Process

Some of the students in your classroom may have been in a play before. If so, allow them to share their experience with other students about what rehearsing and creating a character is like. Your students may also be interested in the rehearsal process of our cast. Below you will find interviews with The Princess and the Pea cast members regarding rehearsals and auditions.

The Princess and the Pea Cast Interview

What was your favorite part of working on this production?

All the fun people you meet doing theatre. I get along with everyone in the show really well, and three hour rehearsals are a lot easier when you have friends there with you. -Madeline Paschen, King Max

My favorite part was seeing the show and characters develop. Everyone did a great job making their wacky characters fun and exciting and so funny. -Julie Reynolds, Princess Minerva

What characteristics did you pursue in order to modernize your character?

I watched videos of Prince William and I watched princely movies like The Prince and I and Stardust. -Katee Tyler, Prince Valiant

Hildegarde's a little sassier than I imagine a medieval lady-in-waiting would be; also I try to play her relationship with Donald in a first-crush-in-high-school kind of way. -Emily McLemore, Lady Hildegarde

What was the rehearsal process like for this production?

It was a fun rehearsal process! We got to come in and be as big and silly as we could be. We worked really hard, but still had a good time. -Dani Herd, Princess Diana

We worked really hard, but we had a lot of fun too. First we warm up our bodies and voices, then we focus on our characters, and finally we work the show. -Erin Linsenmeyer, Princess Stella
**What made you decide to audition for this show?**

I love performing shows for young people. Also, theatre has always been a passion of mine and I cannot imagine not having theatre in my life. -Mary Pope, Princess Beaulah

I love participating in shows and this was my last time to audition in college. I also have always wanted to perform in a show that I thought would impact young people. The actual audition process was not so bad either. I read several monologues as different characters, and then I was called back and performed different scenes with other actors who audition. -Katee Tyler, Prince Valiant

**How long have you been interested in theatre?**

I've been interested in theatre for more than 7 years. I did theatre camps in my hometown for several years. I also did musical theatre, theatre production, and theatre for youth in high school. -Nicole Wood, Donald Dunce

I have loved theatre for as long as I can remember, probably dating back to my preschool production of *Robin Hood*. -Erin Linsenmeyer, Princess Stella

**What process did you take in developing your character?**

I look at the scenes my character is in and figure out what's going through her mind both while she's talking and while the other characters are talking. I also try to imagine how she would react in different situations to have a better grasp of her as a whole, and not just as she is in the script. -Emily McLemore, Lady Hildegarde

I had to read the play a lot and then I thought about her relationships with other characters. I compared stereotypical grandmas to Granny and I decided how my character fit outside the stereotype. I also thought about what was old about her and what was still young. I had to think about what her life is like outside of the script as well. -Indira Cruz, Queen Maude/Granny
BEFORE THE SHOW

An All Female Cast

In the early years of theatre men played every role. From the Greek and Roman theatre all the way through Shakespeare, men were playing both men and women onstage. Agnes Scott College is a women’s college, so therefore our production of *The Princess and the Pea* is acted by all women.

Acting in a play and creating a character can be very challenging, but it is very fun as well. Can you imagine what it would be like playing a boy if you are girl and a girl if you are boy? If the children are interested in giving this a try, allow them to create scenarios where they would play roles opposite of their gender.

If any one is having a hard time coming up with a scenario, here are a few suggestions.

Suggested Scenarios:
- A prince and princess play a game of basketball together
- A grandma and grandson walk to the store
- A prince and a princess have a phone conversation about school
Questions to ponder

Discussion Question:
In *The Princess and the Pea*, Olivia, the main princess, is not treated very nicely upon her initial arrival to the castle. Prince Valiant’s family does not think she looks pretty or well off enough to be a princess. Throughout the course of the play we learn that Olivia’s real princessness is expressed not in her appearance but rather in her selflessness and her kind heart.

How did you feel about the way Granny and King Max responded to Olivia in her first scene?
- How would you feel if someone made judgments about you based on the way you look?
- How would you feel if you were a princess or prince and someone told you that you were not?
- Do you remember how Olivia responded to their not so warm welcome?
  - Do you think that she responded well?

What do you think makes Olivia and the other princesses in the show different from your typical idea of a princess?
- Do you think there is more to beauty than appearance?
- Do you think being a nice and kind person is more important than being pretty?
- What did you think about the large sacrifice Princess Olivia was willing to make for her father?
- What did you think about the four princesses Valiant encountered before returning back home?
- Would you like to arm wrestle Princess Stella or dance with Princess Diana?

What do you think makes Valiant and his family different from typical royalty?
- What was the relationship of King Max and Queen Maude like?
- Did you find Valiant charming?
- What is Valiant’s favorite hobby?
- What does Valiant say he is looking for in a princess?
- How is Queen Maude’s attitude?
AFTER THE SHOW

You be the Critic

Now that you have seen the show, tell us how you felt about it. When a show opens in the professional theatre, critics will attend the show and write a newspaper article based on their thoughts and feelings about the production. There are a number of ways you can do this activity. Students can draw their favorite moments of the play, or they can write a letter based on their own opinions of the show.

If the children are interested in writing a letter, you may find the following questions helpful.

- What was your favorite moment of the play?
- What happened before and after that moment?
- Did you enjoy the set and costumes?
- Who was your favorite character and why?

If your students are interested in sharing their feedback with us, we would love to hear from them. Also, if your students have a question for any character feel free to have the students ask the question in the letter. If any questions are asked, a letter can be sent back to the student from the character.

Please send any letters or drawings to:

ASC Blackfriars
ATTN: The Princess and the Pea Company
141 E. College Ave
Decatur, GA 30030
AFTER THE SHOW

How about directing a picture of your favorite moment?

Often when directors set a scene, they block it (arrange the actors in relationship to the scenery and the stage) to make a pretty visual image on the stage. A little bit like how a photographer might pose his subjects for a picture.

In this next activity, appoint students into small group or allow them to group themselves. Allow them to choose two or three of their favorite moments from the play. The students will work on freezing into a moment of each scene they choose (like they are posing for a picture). They will create a series of freeze frames. After the students are comfortable with the frozen positions they have created, allow each group to do their scenes in front of the class. Let the other students guess what scenes they are creating.

By doing this activity each young student has practiced their directing skills.