Thank you for participating in Western Canada Theatre’s matinee programming! We would like you and your students to get the most out of your experience with us. Included in this package is some inside information exclusive to teachers and students, discussion questions, classroom activities, and online resources. We hope you find them useful before and after seeing the show.

Please take a few minutes to review appropriate theatre etiquette with your students. While clapping and laughing are most appropriate for the theatre, whispering, talking, and excessive movement during the show is distracting to others in the audience and our actors on stage.

Audience members are encouraged to get comfortable, remove coats, use the washroom and turn all electronic devices OFF before a show begins. Please remind your students that texting is not allowed during the show.

Remembering theatre etiquette makes the show more enjoyable for everyone!
Bird Brain

A Study Guide

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Production Personnel

Cast
Brooke Ballam        Bird Brain
Allandra Barton      Queen/Wife
Jessica Buchanan     Undersecretary/Fool

Creative Team
Robin Nichol         Director
Jared Raschke        Set and Lighting Designer
Cindy Wiebe          Costume Designer
Roya Mole             Sound Designer
Madison Henry        Stage Manager
## Western Canada Theatre Staff

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Position</th>
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<tr>
<td>Daryl Cloran</td>
<td>Artistic Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lori Marchand</td>
<td>General Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Administration</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ron Thompson</td>
<td>Financial Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marilyn Zuke</td>
<td>Associate Financial Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catrina Crowe</td>
<td>Marketing &amp; Communications Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryce Herman</td>
<td>Fundraiser and Marketing Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexis Tuytten</td>
<td>Special Events &amp; Fund Development Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terri Runnalls</td>
<td>Education Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathy Liu</td>
<td>Marketing and Research Assistant</td>
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<td><strong>Production</strong></td>
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<td>Ross Nichol</td>
<td>Production Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heather Cant</td>
<td>Associate Artistic Director</td>
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<td>Gal Minnes</td>
<td>Production Technical Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brian St-Amand</td>
<td>Sagebrush Technical Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cindy Wiebe</td>
<td>Head of Wardrobe</td>
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<td>Andrew Wallace</td>
<td>Head of Carpentry</td>
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<td>Jungyeon Ji</td>
<td>Head of Properties</td>
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<td>Darren John</td>
<td>Technician</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roya Mole</td>
<td>Technician</td>
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<td><strong>Facilities</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Heather Regan</td>
<td>Client and Audience Services Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jean Choi</td>
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<td>Allison Clow</td>
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<td>Carling Ryan</td>
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<td>Melissa Thomas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Janet Riggs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judy Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geraldine Penny</td>
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Playwright: Vern Thiessen

The plays of Vern Thiessen are seen around the world from Canada to China; from New York to New Zealand; from comedies to historical drama; from musicals to works for children; Thiessen is considered one of the most diverse and successful playwrights Canada has ever produced. He is the recipient of numerous awards including, the Elizabeth Sterling Haynes award for outstanding new play, the city of Edmonton Arts Achievement Award, the University of Alberta Alumni Award for Excellence, the Carol Bolt Award and in 2003 he won the Governor Generals Literary Award, Canada’s highest honour for playwriting.

Thiessen has served as Playwright in Residence at Workshop West Theatre and the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton. He is past president of both the Playwright’s Guild of Canada and the Writer’s Guild of Alberta and is an Associate Artist with Epic theatre in New York City. His work has been translated into several languages including German, French, Polish and Hebrew. His play, Shakespeare’s Will has been produced twice at Canada's Stratford Festival. Lenin’s Embalmers, A More Perfect Union and Einstein’s Gift have been produced Off-Broadway.

Born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Thiessen now divides his time between Canada and New York City. He is married to acclaimed novelist, Susie Maloney.
A woodcutter comes across a nest of freezing baby birds crying out for help. Though he resists at first, their beautiful singing enchants him and he gives them a warm home under his hat. He then heads to Hat Street, where tipping your hat is not only a courtesy, it’s the law. Unable to doff his hat to the Queen’s Under Secretary, he finds himself in trouble. The Under Secretary refuses to pay him for wood and so the man (Bird Brain) returns home with no money. This greatly displeases his wife and she becomes even more enraged when he does not take off his hat at the dinner table. She banishes Bird Brain to the woods where he has only his birds to keep him company.

The Queen soon learns about the man (Bird Brain) and decides to hold a Festival for Fools inviting Bird Brain as a special guest. At the Festival, Bird Brain has fun dancing with the “Beautiful Fool” who turns out to be the Queen. On a tour of the Palace, the Under Secretary reminds the Queen that it is the law that everyone must remove their hat in front of Her Majesty. Bird Brain again resists and is sentenced to death. To save him from his fate, the Queen asks Bird Brain to marry him and become the King so that he does not have to take his hat off for anyone. The Queen reveals that she too has birds under her crown! Bird Brain agrees and they wedding takes place. But the Under Secretary meanwhile hatches a plot to get rid of Bird Brain once and for all. Before the plan is carried out the Under Secretary hears the beautiful singing of the birds and his heart melts. When the Under Secretary apologizes, Bird Brain promotes him to Bird Secretary of All the Land!

Bird Brain is based on the book Vogelkopf by Albert Wendt.
Characters

**Storytellers:** The narrators of the story, they make it up as they go along, adding commentary and giving important information.

**The Birds:** A nest of baby birds cold, hungry and alone, in the middle of a deep winter forest.

**The Man/Bird Brain:** Our protagonist: A woodcutter who lives in a hut in the woods with his wife. He saves the baby birds and his life changes forever.

**Wife:** She makes soup and wants Bird Brain to bring her money, not birds.

**The Under Secretary:** He works for the Queen. And he cares more about the rules and laws of the land than anything else.

**The Queen:** A brave woman who has recently taken control of the kingdom after her husband, the king’s, death. She is a kind woman and has a little secret of her own!

**The Fools:** People at the Festival for Fools who have their own special conditions. They have been locked up in an institution and now that the Queen has organized the Festival, they are free to play. The fools include, Fred the swinger, a fortune teller and a wordsmith.
Western Canada Theatre’s Young Company

*Bird Brain* is a special performance in our lineup this year! It is our first production being performed by our Young Company! WCT’s Young Company is a combined effort between WCT and Thompson Rivers University’s Actors Workshop. The show will enable actors from the university program to be involved in a professional show for young audiences. We sat down with WCT’s Artistic Director, Daryl Cloran to discuss this new endeavour.

**Q:** *What is the concept of the Young Company? What is the goal of introducing this new idea to Kamloops and WCT?*

**DC:** I believe it’s our responsibility as the professional theatre for the region, to provide training opportunities to emerging artists. And in particular here at WCT, where it’s in our blood - we started as a Youth Theatre! We’re doing a great job offering training to children and teens through our Stage One program, and I wanted to expand that to include opportunities for young artists training at a post-secondary level. This is a great way for students who are graduating from a University Drama program to have their first professional experience. It’s a way to ensure they have professional training and opportunities to build on as they enter the professional theatre industry.

**Q:** *Why is it important to have this relationship with TRU?*

**DC:** We’re so lucky to have both a professional theatre and a University with a theatre training program in this city. It’s a great idea for us to partner and provide opportunities for the students to work with the professional artists at WCT. WCT is the first professional step for many young actors, designers, stage managers and technicians graduating from TRU.

**Q:** *What does it mean to the company and the community?*

**DC:** What’s great about the Young Company is that it involves community participants of all ages. Professional theatre artists are training Emerging theatre artists, who are performing for Young theatre audiences. Everybody wins! Young children in the audience will see the production performed by emerging actors from the community and understand that in a few years they could participate in the Young Company as well. It makes theatre accessible - not only as something to see and enjoy, but something to participate in.
Q: What can we expect in the future for the Young Company?

DC: Our hope is to operate the Young Company each season, providing opportunities to new emerging artists each year. Our focus right now with the young company is producing Theatre for Young Audiences (3-8 years old) at the Pavilion Theatre. But in the coming years we hope to tour young company productions around the community (and the region!) as well as involving Young Company members in other aspects of WCT - training young artists themselves.

Cool Note!!

This is not the first time that Western Canada Theatre has had a young company! In fact, that’s how we began! In the early 1970’s, founder and director of Western Canada Theatre, Tom Kerr began the company with a similar vision. A small group of performers got together to entertain and bring theatre to young people! It wasn’t until a couple of years later that we had planned seasons!
Activities in the Classroom

Activity #1 – Themes in *Bird Brain*

*Curriculum Connections*

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Below is a list of themes that are within Bird Brain. Prior to seeing the show, discuss some or all of these ideas with your class. There are some short questions under each to get you started.

**Compassion**
What does compassion look like? Why is it important? Have you showed compassion lately to someone? How?

**Kindness**
Have you showed kindness to someone recently? Who? How did this make you feel?

**Consequence of actions**
What is a consequence? Can consequences be good and bad? How? Why and how are consequences important?

**Friendship**
Think of a really good friendship that you have. How long have you been friends? Why are you friends with this person? What do you share in common? What are your differences? Do they enhance the relationship or make it more challenging?

**Nature Conservation**
What is nature conservation? Why is it important to talk about? How can we contribute to nature conservation?

**Diversity**
What is diversity? Share examples with your class and ask them to contribute. You can use your own class as an example of different backgrounds, genders, ages, heritage, etc.
Forgiveness
Have you ever had to ask someone for forgiveness? How did that make you feel before you asked and after you asked? Why do we ask for forgiveness?

Faith
What is faith? What are some forms of faith? What does it mean to you? Why is it important in our society?

Courage
Remember a time that you were courageous. Why did you have to be courageous? Remind your students that courage does not always come in the form of a physical feat. Talk about standing up for yourself or others, or the courage it takes to be honest and true to yourself and your beliefs.
Kindness, Compassion and Friendship; Putting Themes into Action!

Talk to your class in more detail about these three themes: Kindness, Compassion and Friendship. After you see the production, you can discuss them in direct relation to the story.

The Man shows much compassion and kindness when he originally decides to give the birds a home under his hat. He knows that they are shivering in the cold and after hearing their beautiful chirping, decides to befriend them. Despite the reaction he knows he is going to get by not taking his hat off, he insists on keeping his promise to them. He is a true friend. The Man is not treated with kindness when he encounters his wife and the Under Secretary. They have no compassion for the birds’ plight and they end their friendship with the man. The Queen understands the man and has compassion for his difficult position because it is revealed later that she too has birds under her hat. She shows much kindness for the man by saving him from a cruel punishment and changing the laws of the land. They become true friends.

How does kindness, compassion and friendship change the story? What would have happened if the Man didn’t show kindness to the birds, or the Queen didn’t show kindness to the man?

Have your students write down 5 ways that they can be kind. Have them be distinct and have each entry be something that can be carried out within your classroom (I can let someone go before me in line, I will help another student clean up, I will ask another child to play on the playground, I will tell another student that I like something about them, I will clean the board today, I will talk to someone today that I didn’t talk to yesterday, etc...)

Put a plan in place where these 5 things can be accomplished. Perhaps set a timeline (a day, a week?) in which these kind actions can be completed. Have your students place their list on their desk and cross them off when they are complete.

Talk to the students about how it feels to be kind. How did they feel making the list? How did they feel completing acts of kindness? How does it feel to give of yourself rather than a physical object?

How can you incorporate these acts into your everyday? Can you make a kindness list for your family? Your soccer team, your youth group, your neighborhood?
Activity #2 – Become a Bird Brain!

Curriculum Connections

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Have your class learn a little more about birds!! Below are some cool facts about birds that you can share with your class!

**FACT:** Birds are divided into 30 groups.
Although there are several different ways experts classify birds into subgroups, it has been recognized that there 30 groups of birds. To see these classifications visit:

[www.animals.about.com/od/birds/tp/bird-groups.htm](http://www.animals.about.com/od/birds/tp/bird-groups.htm)

**FACT:** There are 9,865 species of birds alive today, according to the International Union of the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
Of the 9,865 bird species, 1,227 species are considered threatened with extinction, 838 species are near threatened, 7,735 species are considered to be of least concern, and 65 species lack the data to determine their status. 133 species of birds are known to have gone extinct since 1500. There are also four species of birds that are classified as extinct in the wild. The last living members of those species survive only in captivity.

**FACT:** The earliest known bird, Archaeopteryx lithographica, lived about 150 million years ago during the Jurassic Period.

Archaeopteryx possessed a blend of reptilian and avian characteristics. It had feathers and wings but instead of a bill it had a reptilian snout. Archaeopteryx did not have a keeled breastbone, a key feature for flight, so scientists are uncertain whether it was capable of true flight or if it merely glided. A total of ten Archaeopteryx fossil specimens have been unearthed over the years. All of these fossils were recovered from the limestone deposits in quarries near Solnhofen, Germany. The first Archaeopteryx skeleton, now known as the "London Specimen", was discovered in 1861.

**FACT:** Feathers are unique to birds.
Feathers are a defining characteristic of the group, meaning simply that if an animal has feathers, then it is a bird. Feathers serve many functions in birds but most notable is the critical role feathers play in enabling birds to fly. In addition to helping to enable flight, feathers also
provide protection from the elements. Feathers provide birds with waterproofing and insulation and even block harmful UV rays from reaching birds' skin.

**FACT: Birds are not the only animals that are capable of flight.**
Flight is not a characteristic restricted to birds. Bats, which are mammals, fly with great agility and insects, which are arthropods, were fluttering through the air several million years before

**FACT: All birds reproduce by laying eggs.**
Eggs vary in size and color depending on species. Although there is a wide range of egg colors, only two pigments contribute to the color of the shell. The first pigment is derived from hemoglobin and the second from bile. Most species lay their eggs in a nest. Nests may vary in size, shape, and construction material, but the most common nest shape is cup-shaped.

**FACT: Birds do not have teeth.**
Instead they have bills that are made of the protein keratin. Bird bills come in a variety of shapes and sizes and are adapted to the particular diet of each species. Herons, for example, have a sharp, pointed bill that enable them to capture fish. Finches on the other hand have a short, conical bill that is well-suited for cracking open seeds.

**FACT: The largest of all birds is the ostrich.**
Ostriches are flightless birds that have a large body, small head, long legs, and a long neck. Although they cannot fly, they are remarkable runners, able to run at speeds of up to 45 mph for half an hour. Adult ostriches weigh between 220 and 350 pounds and measure between 7 and 9 1/4 feet in height.
In *Bird Brain*, The Man refers to his wife as several different pet bird names that you will see below. Draw a line from the word to the corresponding picture.

- **Robin**
- **Dove**
- **Chickadee**
- **Partridge**
- **Turkey**
- **Ostrich**
Activity #3 – Saying Hello Around the World

Curriculum Connections

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In *Bird Brain* it is the law to tip your hat whenever you meet someone, especially on Hat Street. The Man tips his hat to say hello and he tips his hat to say thank you. It is also customary for him to remove his hat when greeting royalty and when eating a meal. When he does not do so, it results in dire consequences.

In the world outside the play, this tipping or removing of the hat can be referred to as a ritual and considered social etiquette. At different historical times, as well as different geographical areas of the world, there have been plenty of social expectations when it comes to greeting someone, thanking someone, saying goodbye or simply passing them by.

Below is a list of gestures made when saying hello in various parts of the world. Have your class pair up and try some! Be sure to try the gesture from the Central African Republic!!

**Bangladesh** – one makes a relaxed salute with the right hand.

**Belgium** – three kisses, going from cheek to cheek.

**Botswana** – people touch hands, like a handshake that doesn't include a grip, just lightly grazing palms and fingers.

**Cambodia** – one would put your hands together like "praying hands" holding them against your chest. The higher you hold your hands, the more respect you show.

**Greece** – backslapping takes the place of shaking hands in many greetings

**Canada** – handshake with eye contact, or a kiss or hug.

**Central African Republic** – good friends slap rights hands, then grab each other's middle finger using a thumb and middle finger, then "snap" the other person's finger.

**China** – a nod or bow

**India** – palms together as though praying and bend or nod, called *Namaste*
Japan – bow from the waist, palms on thighs, heels together

Korea – a slight bow and handshake (right hand in one or both hands)

Malaysia – both hands touch other person’s hands, then are brought back to the breast, called salame gesture

Philippines – a limp handshake

Mozambique – northern people clap hands three times before saying hello

Maori – some press noses together while closing their eyes

Niger – the Kanouri people shake a fist at head level and call "Wooshay! Wooshay!" ("Hello! Hello!")

Russia – shake hands firmly, followed with a "bear hug" and 2 to 3 kisses on alternating cheeks.

Singapore – greeters slide their palms together back toward their own chests, then end with the hand over heart.

Turkey – clasp both hands in a handshake and hug on both sides while saying, “merhaba” (“greetings”). (This gesture is generally performed among old friends of the same gender.)

Tuvalu – relatives press a face to a cheek of the other and sniff deeply

Zambia – some greet each other by gently squeezing a thumb

Zimbabwe – the Shona people often show respect by doing a series of slow, rhythmic handclaps

Create your own greeting!

Have your students create their own greeting! Put them into larger groups of 4 or 5. Have them develop a new greeting or handshake. Remind them using the above examples, that greeting gestures often are a sign of respect or admiration. Have each group show their new handshake to the class and have the partnered classmates try them out! Remind your class that the movement should be meaningful and have them explain that meaning to the class in their short presentation!
Activity #4: Post-Show Discussion

Curriculum Connections

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1. Discuss the play with your class. What did they like, what did they dislike? Why? Be sure to have them address the characters and story as well as the theatrical elements of the play; the set, the costumes and the lighting.
2. What character was your favourite and why?
3. Would you have made the same decision as Bird Brain? Would you consider risking what people thought of you because something made you happy? Would you consider risking what people thought of you because you were helping someone else with a problem?
4. Revisit the themes of the play in Activity #1. What examples of these themes did they see in the show?
5. Why is it important for theatre as an art form to demonstrate virtues? How does theatre and other art forms help us learn about kindness and compassion?
Resources Used


www.animals.about.com

www.brucevanpatter.com/world_greetings.html

www.factmonster.com

www.posocketcultures.com

www.verntheissen.com

www.wikihow.ca