



Don't Let  
the Pigeon  
Drive the Bus!

prepared by

NORTHWEST  
CHILDRENS  
THEATER and  
SCHOOL

EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

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## HOW TO BE A GOOD AUDIENCE



The audience is an important part of live theater performance. Without the audience, there would be no one to laugh when the show is funny, to gasp when it is scary, or to applaud at the end. It is important to be a good audience.

If you have been to the theater before, you know it is different from watching television or going to the movies. The actors will be right in front of you. It is important to be quiet and attentive. You can't hit the rewind button if you miss something an actor says, and noise can be distracting for other people in the audience.

Here are some things you can do to make this a great experience for everyone:

- Stay in your seat. Make sure you use the bathroom before the show starts.
- Listen quietly. Save comments and questions for later.
- Keep your feet on the floor. It will keep the seats clean for the next audience, and nobody likes having the back of their seat kicked when they're trying to watch the play.
- Save snacks and treats for after the show. Food and drinks aren't allowed in the theater, and crinkling candy and gum wrappers can sound loud.
- Sit quietly during the performance. Don't pass notes, wrestle with your friends, wriggle around, or stand up. Your movements could distract or annoy others.
- Please don't take photographs. We don't allow photos during the performance because when a flash goes off, it is very hard for the actors to see and can be dangerous for them.
- The house lights (the lights in the theater) dim to signal that the show is about to start. That is your cue to settle down and get quiet so the play can begin.
- Stay in your seat when the performance ends. The actors will return to the stage for the curtain call (when the actors bow and you clap). Wait until they exit for the last time and the lights come up before you leave your seat.
- Turn off all cell phones, pagers and electronic devices.

## ABOUT THE ADAPTATION

### Synopsis

When a bus driver takes a break from his route, a wheeling-and-dealing pigeon begs to take his place. This popular book takes flight as audiences get on the bus and move to a Latin groove in this original musical about a little bird with BIG dreams. The book's transformation from page to stage retains the charming simplicity of Mo Willems' illustrations and story, with each page presenting an opportunity for a scene, a song, a game or a gag.

### Music & Dance

One of the many joys of adapting a book into a world premiere musical is creating the sights and sounds of the world the characters inhabit. For our adaptation of *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!* the creative team had to find a style of music and dance that would match the Pigeon's boundless energy and excitement in his relentless pursuit of driving the bus. With this in mind, they turned to the hip-shaking body grooving sounds of Brazilian Big Band.

Using a combination of Salsa and Samba with a dash of musical theater, composer Ezra Weiss, found the perfect style of music that cast and audiences will be humming long after curtain call. In addition to more familiar Latin American dances, our choreographer also explored a style of dance known as "Frevo" to help bring the book to life.

Frevo finds its roots deep in Brazilian history. What started as part of religious processions with fast, loud music eventually turned into the bright clothes and umbrella antics that Frevo is known for today. In Frevo each dancer works very hard to develop the strength, endurance and flexibility the movement requires. Frevo dance movements include jumps, coordinated fast leg movements and flexions. Dancers twirl and pass a small umbrella to compliment their quick leg movements.

Flashy dances that scream "look at me" and catchy music that will happily stick in your head? Yup, that sounds like the Pigeon we know and love!



**John Ellingson**  
(Pigeon)

Mo Willems' brilliant book is a perfect story for children and adults. The thought of a pigeon driving a bus is ridiculous. It's so much fun to say "no!" Watching a character freak out and not get what he wants is something young children easily relate to. The illustrations in the book are flawless and funny.

Theater is simply storytelling. There are many ways to tell stories, but John likes to act silly, play a fool, or simply be a clown. When he performs he feels like he's at recess. John tries to always be in a state of "play" when he is performing. Playing is what children do best.

Performing for children requires as much energy and focus as performing for an older audience. Children require an honest connection with a performer. If it's not honest they will play with their Velcro shoes. Children are the next generation, and there's nothing like live theater to engage their minds and hearts, and theater is a great activity that families can enjoy together.

**Leona Kindermann**  
(Ensemble)

Theater has been a big part of Leona's life since her first grade music teacher helped the class write and perform their own musicals. After taking some classes at NWCT, Leona realized she wanted to perform for the rest of her life.

As a performer, Leona has found young audiences to be vocal and expressive. You can feel whether they are enjoying it because they don't act interested if they're not. With an older crowd it's difficult to tell whether they are enjoying it because they're not as obvious about it.

Audiences in live theater see the actors working, and are essentially a part



**Genevieve Andersen**  
(Mom/Ensemble)

Pigeon is filled with life and humor. We've all had things we have wanted to do, and been told no. The Pigeon is a wonderful character, and he tries everything, EVERYTHING to get what he wants. Everyone can relate to that. It puts kids in the parental seat, so they finally get to be the one to say "no", and they know why.

Children are our most important audiences and the stories we tell them—the lessons we teach them—are the most important to tell. As they say in *Into the Woods*, "Careful what you say. Children will listen...Careful the tale you tell, that is the spell..." And it is true. Children know when an actor is being silly, just to be silly, or big just to be big. To do that is a disservice, I believe, to the child and the story. If you really believe what you are doing and weave the world of the story for them, children will be the most grateful, attuned and precious audience.



of the show. The energy of the audience affects the performance. It's a beautiful thing because there are mistakes, and nothing is perfectly edited. This allows them to use their imagination; a muscle that is getting harder to exercise.

## Many Aspects to a Story

### PRIOR to getting on the bus!

Know before you go! Read *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!* and then try these activities!

#### Voice and Body

- Each page from the book is a scene in our production. Act out how you think each page will be performed on stage.
- There is a good chance the Pigeon may ask you if he can drive the bus. And what will you say? That's right—*NO!* To be ready, practice saying "No!" in many ways. Also practice saying no without saying anything.
- At the park, watch a pigeon move. Can you walk like a pigeon?
- During the show you will see a lot of dancing. How do you think the Pigeon and his friends will dance? How would the Pigeon dance if he was happy, sad, or even hungry?
- Get your singing voices ready with a couple of rounds of *The wheels on the bus go round and round!*

#### Arts and Crafts

- Try drawing the Pigeon! But don't stop there; draw him at many different places, or even what it would look like if the Pigeon DID drive the bus! The Pigeon would love to see your creations after the show and even sign your creation!
- See if you can make a bus out of things you can find at home. Some examples include an old shoe box, building blocks, clay; even a simple drawing makes a great bus!
- Every bus trip starts with a ticket. Create a ticket so you can get onboard the bus. Try using a note card and fill with details of where you want to go.

## Recommended Reading

### Other Stories of Stubborn Animals

- *The Grouchy Ladybug* by Eric Carle
- *Stellaluna* by Janell Cannon
- *If you Give a Mouse a Cookie* by Laura Joffe Numeroff
- *Tacky the Penguin* by Helen Lester

### AFTER your big trip!

What a great time! Relive your theatre experience by re-reading *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!* and then try out these activities!

#### Voice and Body

- Now that you have seen our production go through the book again and see if you can act out each scene from the pages of the book as you saw them onstage.
- There were a lot of songs in our production; can you remember any of the words or tunes?
- The Pigeon did a lot of acting without saying any words. This is called mime. Act out some of your favorite stories without saying any words.
- Everyone loves game shows – so did the Pigeon! Create your own crazy show like the Pigeon did onstage.



#### Arts and Crafts

- The Pigeon and friends wore bright, colorful costumes with many different patterns. Can you re-create them on paper?
- During the show you learned to draw the Pigeon. You have already practiced so see if his tips have helped you and draw the Pigeon again.
- The Pigeon has big dreams. So do you! Draw your big dream.
- As you saw in the show, things are better with friends. Create something you can give to a friend. Anything from cookies to a card, the Pigeon is sure your friend will love it!
- The Pigeon and Friends LOVE fan mail! Feel free to write your favorite character (or all of them) a letter! You may want to write about a part of the show you liked, your favorite costume, or which song you are still singing—anything! Mail them to:



#### The Pigeon and Friends

c/o NWCT

1819 NW Everett St., Suite 216

Portland, OR 97209

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**HEY, MO!** We got some questions for you!

### Tell us about yourself?

Ok, here is the long answer. I began my career as a writer and animator for PBS' *Sesame Street*, where I garnered six Emmy Awards for my writing. During my nine seasons at *Sesame Street*, I also served as a weekly commentator for BBC Radio and created two animated series, Nickelodeon's *The Off-Beats* and Cartoon Network's *Sheep in the Big City*.

While serving as head writer for Cartoon Network's #1 rated show, *Codename: Kids Next Door*, I began writing and drawing books for children. My debut effort, *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!* became a New York Times Bestseller and was awarded a Caldecott Honor in 2004.

The following year *Knuffle Bunny: a Cautionary Tale* was awarded a Caldecott Honor. The sequel, *Knuffle Bunny Too: A Case of Mistaken Identity* garnered me my third Caldecott Honor in 2008.

In addition to picture books, I have created the *Elephant and Piggie* books, a series of "Easy Readers", which were awarded the Theodor Seuss Geisel Medal in 2008 and 2009, and an illustrated memoir of my year-long trip around the world in 1990-91 entitled *You Can Never Find a Rickshaw When it Monsoons*. My family and I live in Massachusetts (I have a wife, a daughter, and a dog, which means I'm outnumbered).

And now for the short answer, I make funny drawings that hopefully will make you laugh.

### Why did you choose a Pigeon to star in your books?

A hippopotamus wouldn't fit on the page.

### When is your birthday and where did you grown up?

My birthday is February 11th, and I grew up in New Orleans.



Always think  
ABOUT your audience,  
never think  
FOR your audience.  
— Mo Willems

### How do you draw your pictures in the Pigeon books?

Mostly, I draw the pictures in my books with pencils, pens, and crayons and color them using a computer.

### What's your favorite book?

My favorite book is my next one. I'm always hoping to make my next book my best one.

### How do you come up with ideas for your books?

I find ideas the same place that you do: I make them up. I just spend a whole lot of time playing with them before putting them in a book.

### Can I send you some fan mail?

I'd love to get your mail. Please send it to:

**Mo Willems Fan Mail**  
c/o Jennifer Crowell  
**Hyperion Books for Children**  
114 5th Ave, 14th fl.  
New York, NY 10011

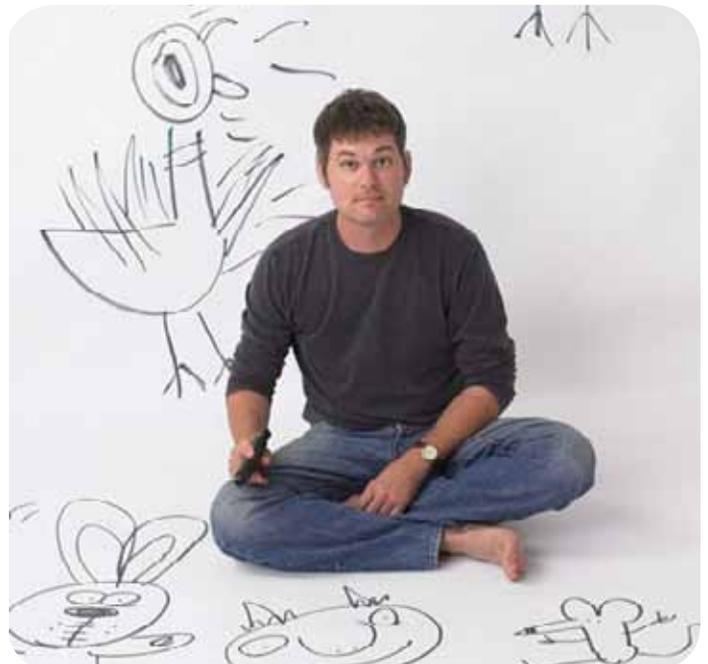


photo credit: marty umans

**Mo Willems' Pigeon Series** • *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!* • *Don't Let the Pigeon Stay Up Late!*  
*The Pigeon Finds a Hot Dog!* • *The Pigeon Has Feelings, Too!* • *The Pigeon Loves Things That Go!* • *The Pigeon Wants a Puppy*

For more information about Mo Willems, visit [www.mowillems.com](http://www.mowillems.com)