

What If

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Study Guide for Teachers for Cycles I, II & III

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INTRODUCTION

Geordie Theatre is a Montreal-based professional theatre company that has presented live English-language productions for young audiences in Quebec and abroad since 1980. Pushing artistic boundaries with provocative and important stories, Geordie delivers more than 200 performances each season and reaches more than 40,000 young people and their communities annually.

Land Acknowledgement: We would like to begin by acknowledging that the territory on which Geordie Theatre operates is the traditional territory of the Kanien'kehà:ka Mohawk nation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Montreal is known in the Mohawk language as Tiotià:ke or Broken in Two because of the way the river breaks around the island. It is considered unceded territory of the Kanien'kehà:ka nation. This land has also existed as a meeting ground of many peoples including the Abenaki, St. Lawrence Iroquians and Huron-Wendat people. We extend our deepest respect to the elders of these communities and to all Indigenous peoples who carry the history of the land-caring for it and calling it home. We are privileged to share a story with you on this land.

A note on acknowledging territory: A crucial part of Geordie Theatre's visit happens at the beginning of the performance- the Land Acknowledgement. The Land Acknowledgement is researched and customized for the territory on which your school is located, and acts as a crucial bridge between Geordie Theatre and Indigenous Peoples.

ABOUT THE STUDY GUIDE

This study guide was created as a tool for teachers to help introduce young students to the world of theatre, as well as engage them more deeply with the themes and concepts developed in *What If*. The guide contains a synopsis, character and setting information, a summary of the themes and concepts at play, as well as pre- and post-show discussion questions, activity ideas and lesson plans.

The activities include presentations and handouts that are class-ready for easy distribution to students. Additionally, most activities can be adapted to an online-learning platform. Corresponding cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies from the Quebec Education Plan (QEP) are indicated for each lesson plan.

NOTE ON CONTENT & RESOURCES

The play features a young girl, Nicky, who suffers from social anxiety. We come to learn about how her anxiety makes her feel physically, and how it invades her thoughts and prevents her from doing activities she would otherwise enjoy. With help from her new friend Milo, Nicky learns to brave her anxiety and join in a school activity.

Resources for helping young students dealing with anxiety

If a child in your class appears distressed during the topic of social anxiety or stress, please speak to the school counsellor.

- [Anxiety and Kids: The Basics](#) - Child Mind Institute
- [Anxiety Canada](#)
- [Ami Québec](#)
- [Anxiety : Quebec : Mental Health Services, Help and Support](#)

QEP COMPETENCIES

English Language Arts

Uses language/talk to communicate and to learn
Reads and listens to written, spoken and media texts
Produces texts for personal and social purposes

Cross-Curricular Competencies

Uses creativity
Cooperates with others
Communicates appropriately

Arts Education - Dramatic Arts Competencies

Creates dramatic works
Appreciates dramatic works
To invent and interpret short scenes

Arts Education - Visual Arts Competencies

To produce individual works in the visual arts
To appreciate works of art, traditional artistic objects, media images, personal productions and those of classmates

Physical Education and Health

To adopt a healthy, active lifestyle

SYNOPSIS

Scene 1

Every morning, Nicky, a socially anxious and intelligent 10 year-old, dreads coming to school, riddled with anxiety. While the other children happily spend their recesses outside, Nicky prefers to read her books on birds in the Sick Room, a cozy and quiet room. Here Nicky feels safe, away from the other children. However, today, Milo, a high-energy boy barges in to check his blood glucose with his diabetic supply kit. Nicky's introversion and shyness does not dampen Milo's persistent attempts at striking a conversation and eventually Nicky gives in. We find out that Milo is close to his grand-parents and that he will be performing in a Talent Show soon, as a ventriloquist with his puppet, Frank.

Scene 2

Nicky and Milo meet again in the Sick Room. Nicky continues to slowly warm up to Milo's friendly disposition. We find out Milo is allergic to many things and that Nicky is a "twitcher", a birdwatcher who collects sightings of rare birds. Milo invites Nicky to come outside to play but her social anxiety stops her from joining him.

Scene 3

Meeting in the sick room again, Milo and Nicky share thoughts on what is making them nervous; Milo is worried about performing in the talent show while Nicky is apprehensive of her upcoming oral presentations on penguins. Nicky practices her presentation with Milo's support and encouragement.

Scene 4

They meet after school and celebrate the success of Nicky's presentation. Milo invites Nicky to his uncle's to birdwatch but Nicky's anxiety prevents her from accepting the invitation. Milo finds out that Nicky's birdwatching is mainly done from her window and he calls her "not a real Twitcher". Nicky, hurt, sends him away.

Scene 5

The following day, Milo and Nicky make up and Nicky opens up about her social anxiety and its effects. Nicky helps Milo, dressed as a penguin for Halloween, write his routine for the talent show. Nicky surprises Milo with a little penguin costume for Frank the puppet and a bird costume for herself, and together they head off to the school's costume parade.

MEET THE CHARACTERS

Nicky:

10 years-old
Very nervous
Very intelligent
Loves birds



Played by: Symantha Stewart



Played by: Jackson Thouret

Milo:

10 years-old
Very funny
Very energetic

Frank

Milo's puppet

SETTING

- The Sick Room at Nicky and Milo's school, Viola Davis Elementary. It's cozy and inviting with bean bags, table and chairs, and a large window.

THEMES/CONCEPTS

- Diversity and inclusion
- Friendship and mutual support
- Anxiety and healthy coping skills
- Self-acceptance and self-confidence

GLOSSARY

Twitcher: A birdwatcher who collects sightings of rare birds.

Ventriloquist: A person who can speak in a way that makes it seem like it is coming from somewhere else, such as a puppet.

Anxiety: A feeling of worry or stress someone gets when they think about a situation that can be unpredictable.

Diabetes: When someone has diabetes, the glucose, a sugar the body uses as fuel for energy, needs help to move out of their blood and into the cells of their body. For the glucose to get into your cells it needs insulin but people with diabetes either cannot make insulin or the insulin made does not work properly. People with diabetes have to measure their sugar levels in their blood and take insulin or else they don't feel well.

OVERVIEW: Activities & Lesson Plans

To help engage students with the themes and concepts developed in *What If* a variety of activities are proposed:

- Pre-show discussion questions (writing or classroom discussion)
- Lesson plans (lessons at the end):
 - Bust Through Your Stress and Anxiety (reading or watching, health, reflecting and writing)
 - But What If It All Works Out (class discussion & analysis, writing or drawing)
- Post-show activity ideas
 - Frozen in Time (dramatic arts: movement, interpretation)
 - Milo & Nicky: An Unlikely Friendship (dramatic arts: movement, improv)
 - The End? (interpretation or writing)
 - Class Talent Show (dramatic or visual arts: movement, performance)
 - Write a Review (written expression: persuasive)
- Post-show discussion questions (writing or classroom discussion)
- Quotation Station: Opposites Attract? (writing or classroom discussion)
- Quotation Station: What If (writing or classroom discussion)

Lesson Plans

→ I. Bust Through Your Stress and Anxiety (p. 14)

In this lesson students will learn the difference between stress and anxiety and their physiological responses. They will be exposed to a variety of coping strategies, given an opportunity to practice several and reflect upon which might suit them best. This lesson may be completed before or after the play.

- To explore the concepts of stress and anxiety.
- To explore coping strategies to manage worry and anxiety and reflect on which might be best suited for themselves.

→ II. But What If It All Works Out: Stepping Out of Your Comfort Zone and Into Your Learning Zone (p. 18)

Following the play, *What If*, students will reflect on the title's meaning and the benefits of stepping out of their comfort zone and into their learning zone. They will also learn to coach themselves and each other through a dramatic arts activity.

- Develop an understanding and appreciation of the play and its main themes.
- Understand the benefits of moving from their comfort zone into their learning zone.
- Understand what their panic zones look like and apply strategies (learned in Lesson Plan I) to help themselves and each other.
- To learn to help themselves and others through difficult moments.

Pre-Show Discussion Questions

The following discussion questions may be used to initiate conversation and build background information of the main themes in *What If*. They might also be used as writing/short scene prompts or as an introduction to lesson plans. Please note that the discussion questions have been put in order of most appropriate from youngest to oldest students. Please select the questions that are most appropriate to the age group you teach.

- Diversity and inclusion
- Friendship and mutual support
- Anxiety and coping strategies
- Self-acceptance and self-confidence

Diversity and Inclusion

- ★ What do the words *differences* and *similarities* mean? Can you give me an example?
- ★ How are you the same as others in your class? How are you different?
- ★ Have you ever felt bad for being different? Is it bad to be different?
- ★ Do people sometimes tease others for being different? Why would they do that?
- ★ Have you ever felt not included in a group? How did it feel?
- ★ What does being inclusive mean? Why is it important to include others?
- ★ Have you ever made an effort to include someone that might be feeling excluded? How did it feel?
- ★ What can we do to make others feel included? For example, if you notice a new student sitting alone on a bench at recess, what can you do to help? How would it feel?
- ★ Do you prefer to spend time alone or with others? When are times you prefer to spend alone? When are times you prefer to spend with others?
- ★ What do you think about when you are by yourself?
- ★ What parts of ourselves are difficult to share with others? Why?
- ★ Do you dream of a better world that reflects ideas that are important to you? Describe it. Do you share these thoughts with others? Why or why not?

Friendship and mutual support

- ★ How do you make a friend?
- ★ What is a friend? What makes a good friend? Can you give examples?
- ★ What characteristics do you look for in a friend?
- ★ Do you have to be exactly like your friends? What happens when you have differences?
- ★ Have you ever been in a situation in which your friend is very different from you? Were you able to support your friend despite your difficulties? How?
- ★ How can a friend help you grow and become a better version of yourself? What are things a good friend can do to help you improve yourself?

Anxiety and coping strategies/Self-acceptance and self-confidence

- ★ How are you different from other students in your class? How do these differences make you feel?
- ★ What are your strengths? What are your difficulties?
- ★ How do you feel when you are doing something you find difficult? Does the voice inside your head criticize you or encourage you during these moments?
- ★ What are some thoughts or situations that make you scared or anxious? What do you do to manage your anxiety?
- ★ Getting out of your comfort zone means doing something even if it makes you nervous or anxious, usually something new. When was the last time you did something out of your comfort zone?
- ★ What strategies did you use to manage your stress or anxiety about having to do something new? How did you support yourself? How did others support you?
- ★ When you are with a friend and they are worried or anxious about something, how can you help them?

Post-Show Activity Ideas

Frozen in Time

Students create a live tableau (a scene in which all students are “frozen” in their action) based on the scenes of *What If*. Each group of 3-4 students selects a scene of their choice and practices their tableau. Have them present and hold the tableau for the rest of the class. Have the class guess which scene is being presented.

Milo & Nicky: An Unlikely Friendship

Using the *Quotation Station: Opposites Attract?* activity on page 12, have students reflect on the differences and similarities between Milo and Nicky. While they seem quite different in many aspects, they share similar values like kindness and generosity, and they are both supportive friends. Emphasize how differences in traits such as extraversion/introversion or risk-taking/cautiousness can still make for quality friendships. In groups of two, have students perform an improv skit as Milo and Nicky, using suggestions from the rest of the class as prompts.

The End?

After highlighting Nicky and Milo’s character traits through the above activity or through a classroom discussion, have students perform a scene depicting Nicky’s visit to Milo’s grandmother’s house to spot the Orange-Crowned Warbler, perhaps as an epilogue to the play. The scene should reflect Nicky and Milo’s personality traits and dynamic. Alternatively, students could write the scene or a short narrative as an English Language Arts activity.

Class Talent Show

In the play, Nicky gives an oral presentation and Milo shows off his ventriloquism in the school talent show. Allow your students to showcase their strengths, interests or special skills to the rest of the class in a class talent show. It can be an opportunity to boost self-esteem, build community and also have students work through the stress of performing with some of the coping strategies from both lesson plans included in this study guide.

Write a Review

Have students discuss the show. What was the play called? What was it about? What was the acting like? What were the set, costume, sound, lighting, video design and special effects like? What did you think of the play? Why? Have older students write a critique using the following sections: (1) introduction, (2) plot summary, (3) performance, (4) design elements and (5) personal reaction and recommendation.

Post-Show Discussion Questions

The discussion questions may be used to build an understanding of *What If* and its messages. They can be used as writing prompts or as an introduction to lesson plans. Please select the questions that are most appropriate to the age group you teach.

Inferential questions

- ★ What are some of Milo and Nicky's strengths? What are some of the things they struggle with?
- ★ How did Nicky feel about Milo when they first met? How did she feel about him at the end of the play? What made her change her mind?
- ★ In which ways are Milo and Nicky different from one another? How do they make their friendship work even though they have differences?
- ★ What did Milo learn over the course of the play? How did Nicky help Milo?
- ★ What did Nicky learn over the course of the play? How did Milo help Nicky?

Reflection questions

- ★ Do you have a friend that is different than you? How are they different? How does it affect your friendship?
- ★ What does the title "What if?" signify? In what kind of situation would it be helpful for you to ask yourself this question, but with a positive outcome?
- ★ Do you know anyone with anxiety? What might they think of this play? Could it help them? If so, how?
- ★ What might be next for Milo and Nicky? How might their friendship evolve? How might Nicky's anxiety evolve?

Quotation Station: Opposites Attract?

MILO: We're gonna head outside and go down the caterpillar slide!

NICKY: Don't you worry you'll go down it too fast and fly off the edge and everyone will laugh at you?

MILO: That would be AMAZING.

NICKY: Really?

MILO: Yeah, I'd be a legend!

NICKY: Oh.

Milo and Nicky are quite different in several ways. Here we see Nicky concerned about having others laugh at Milo for falling off the slide, but Milo thinks that would be fun.

- ★ How are Milo and Nicky different? How are they similar? Can you give any examples?
- ★ Do their differences cause any problems in their friendships? Can you give any examples?
- ★ Do their differences prevent them from being friends? How do they stay friends even though they are different?
- ★ Milo and Nicky are supportive and helpful friends to one another. Can you give any examples?
- ★ Do you have a friend that is quite different from you? Does it sometimes create conflict? How do you make it work?

Quotation Station: What If

MILO: Nicky, what're you worried about? You know everything about penguins! You know everything about birds!

NICKY: It's not about not knowing what to say, it's about not knowing how it'll go. Like, what if I stutter and things come out wrong? What if Mrs. Popov doesn't like it?

MILO: Okay, but what if she does! What if she's so impressed with your bird facts that she declares today International Nicky Day and throws a party in your honour!

NICKY: What makes you think any of that good stuff will happen?

MILO: Well, what makes you think the bad stuff will?

Here we can see and hear Nicky's anxiety. Nicky is worried about all the bad things that might happen during her presentation. Milo, on the other hand, is more positive about the possibilities of what might happen.

- ★ Why do you think Nicky is worried about her presentation? Why do you think she was anxious about going out to recess or doing new activities? What are some of the thoughts she was having in her mind?
- ★ How might Nicky's body be reacting to her anxiety? How do you feel when you are stressed or anxious?
- ★ Will Nicky always be able to avoid situations in which she cannot predict everything that might happen? What are some situations she will have to face?
- ★ Does Nicky have any strategies to help herself with her anxiety? What role does Milo play in helping Nicky?
- ★ What are some strategies that Nicky could use to help herself?

I. Bust Through Your Stress and Anxiety

Overview & Purpose

In this lesson students will learn the difference between stress and anxiety and their physiological responses. They will be exposed to a variety of coping strategies, given an opportunity to practice several and reflect upon which might suit them best.

- To explore the concepts of stress and anxiety.
- To explore coping strategies to manage worry and anxiety and reflect on which might be best suited for themselves.

Competencies

- **English Language Arts:** Uses language/talk to communicate and to learn; Reads and listens to written, spoken and media texts; Produces texts for personal and social purposes
- **Cross-Curricular Competencies:** Cooperates with others; Communicates appropriately
- **Physical Education and Health:** To adopt a healthy, active lifestyle

Materials Needed

- Activity handouts (below)

Activity

1. Class discussion:
 - What comes to mind when I say the word stress? What about worry? What about anxiety?
 - Highlight [the differences between stress and anxiety](#)
 - What are situations that make you feel stress? What goes through your mind? How does stress feel in your body? What do you do to manage it?
 - Do you or someone you know have anxiety? How does it feel? What do you do to manage it?
2. Individually, have students fill out the *Stressing Out!* handout.
3. When completed, regroup as a class and ask for volunteers to share and discuss the information on their handout. Help clarify students' thoughts and feelings while giving them terminology and modeling appropriate responses to other's feelings.

4. As a class, review each of the coping strategies below and then In groups of 4-5, have students practice each strategy, by rotating students through stations. This can also be done in daily workshops, as a class, over the course of a week. Feel free to choose the activities that are best suited to the age level you teach.
 - Grounding through the 5 senses: [Instructions](#) & [Video](#) & [Handout](#)
 - Square breathing: [Instructions](#) & [Video](#) & [Handout](#)
 - Calming thoughts with a snow globe: [Instructions & Handout](#) & [Video](#)
 - Yoga sun salutation: [Video](#) & [Handout](#)
 - Colouring a mandala [Free Printables](#) or [Lesson Plan](#) (how to create a mandala)
5. Using the *Getting Through It!* handout, close the activity by having students reflect and either draw or describe (level dependent) on a potentially stressful event and which strategy they could employ to regulate themselves.

Extensions & Resources

- Video for children: [Fight Flight Freeze – A Guide to Anxiety for Kids](#) by Anxiety Canada
- Fun art activity: [How to Make a Calming Bottle](#)

STRESSING OUT!

What situations make you feel stressed?

What goes through your mind?

How does stress feel in your body?

What do you do to manage it?

GETTING THROUGH IT!

Here is a picture of me doing something that makes me nervous by using my favourite strategy!

II. But What If It All Works Out: Step Out of Your Comfort Zone and Into Your Learning Zone

Overview & Purpose

Following the play, *What If*, students will reflect on the title's meaning and the benefits of stepping out of their comfort zone and into their learning zone. They will also learn to coach themselves and each other through a dramatic arts activity.

- Develop an understanding and appreciation of the play and its main themes.
- Understand the benefits of moving from their comfort zone into their learning zone.
- Understand what their panic zones look like and apply strategies (learned in Lesson Plan I) to help themselves and each other.
- To learn to help themselves and others through difficult moments.

Competencies

- **English Language Arts:** Uses language/talk to communicate and to learn; Reads and listens to written, spoken and media texts; Produces texts for personal and social purposes
- **Arts Education - Dramatic Arts Competencies:** Appreciates dramatic works
- **Cross-Curricular Competencies:** Uses creativity

Materials Needed

- Activity handouts (below)

Activity

Pre-lesson: Before teaching this lesson, consider watching [this video](#), by Tutor Doctor, on the benefits of encouraging children to step out of their comfort zones.

1. Start with the *Quotation Station: What If* activity on page 13, first individually, then as a classroom discussion.
2. Have students share activities that are outside of their comfort zone that elicit stress or anxiety:
 - What does “comfort zone” mean? Can you give examples of activities that are within your comfort zone?
 - Can you give examples of activities that are outside of your comfort zone? What activities worry you or make you shy or anxious? In sports? At school? Socially? Remind them that it might be as simple as learning a new concept in

math or asking an adult they do not know for something.

- How do you feel in your body?
- What do you do to calm yourself during these moments? What would you say to calm a friend who is showing signs of stress because of a situation or activity that is outside of their comfort zone?

3. Review [this infographic](#) with your students on the benefits of stepping out of their comfort zone and into their learning zone in order to grow.
4. Read them the following scenarios and have students share what they think both Laura and Ravi should do to help the other step out of their comfort zone. Review the coping strategies learned in the first lesson, *Busting Through Your Stress and Anxiety*.

★ Laura and Ravi are at the fair and Ravi really wants to try the bumper cars with Laura, but he feels very nervous. He is worried that he won't know how to drive the bumper car or how he will feel when others bump into his car. Laura tried to encourage him.

★ Ravi and Laura are walking to school and Laura is stressed about a chess competition she signed up for. She suddenly regrets signing up because she feels that she won't do well and others will laugh at her mistakes. Ravi tries to help her.

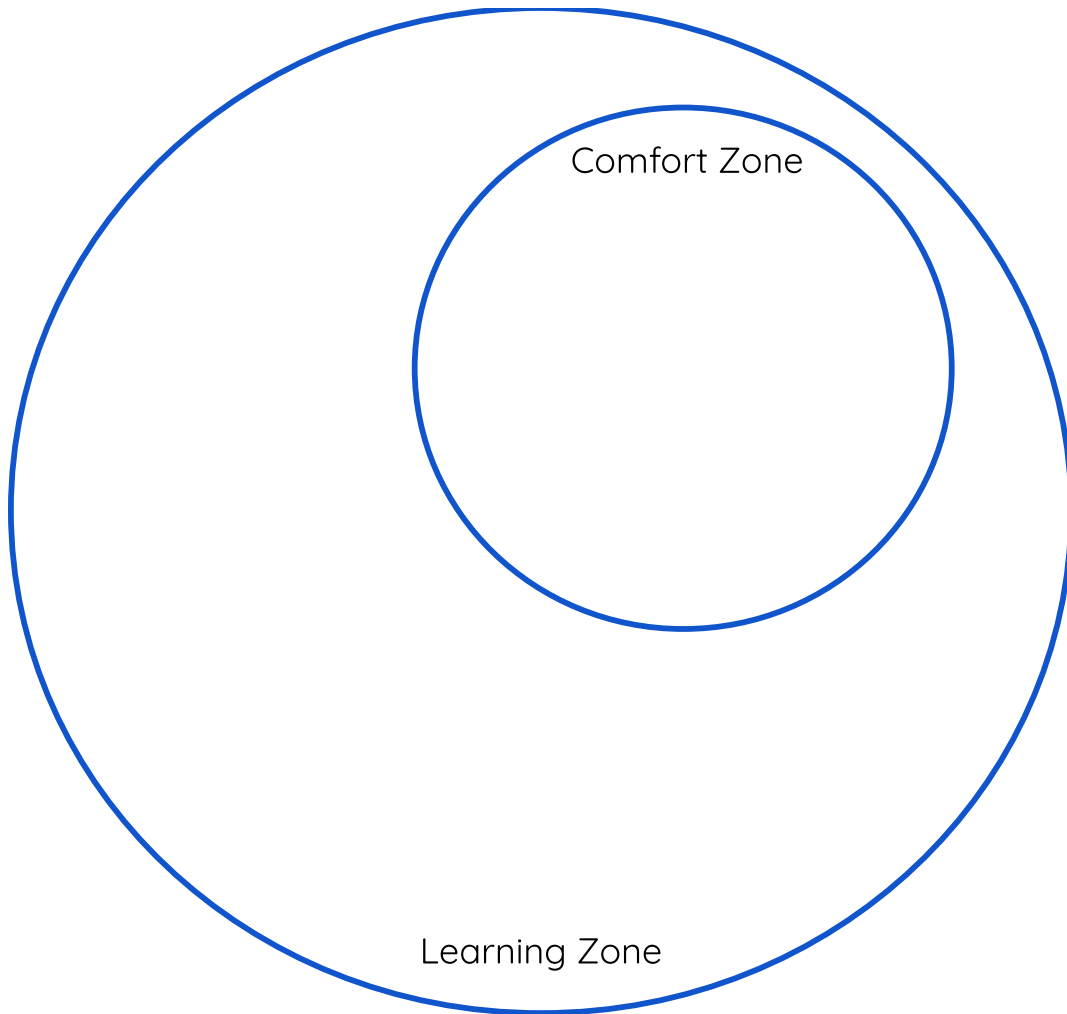
5. Have students fill out the *Stepping Out of My Comfort Zone* reflection handout.
6. In groups of 2-4 students, using the *Set the Scene!* handout, students develop their own dramatic arts scene in which one or more characters are facing a situation which creates stress and, using coping strategies, manage to move beyond their comfort zone and successfully complete the activity. They should include a debrief in which the characters discuss how they feel once they successfully triumphed in the face of challenge. Have students present their scenes to the rest of the class.

Extensions & Resources

- To push students outside of their comfort zone and foster a sense of community in your classroom, hold a talent show for the class. See the activity on page 10.

STEPPING OUT OF MY COMFORT ZONE

Name or draw activities that are in your comfort and learning zones.



What can I do to step out of my comfort zone?

What can you tell a friend to help them step out of their comfort zone?

SET THE SCENE!

Characters: _____

Situation that causes stress: _____

Characters reactions and dialogue: _____

Resolution: _____
