



A BOY CALLED NEWFOUNDLAND

STUDY GUIDE



SYNOPSIS

Newfoundland “Flounder” Willow is an awkward, fifteen-year-old cadet. A loner who is scared of being alone, he thrives on stability, order and rules. Newfoundland’s life revolves around his family, his synthesizer, his French-camp love Evelyn, and his parents’ family business – *The Romantic Times*, a self-published newspaper. When his mother returns home from her second honeymoon without her husband, Newfoundland and his sisters Brigid and Arley struggle to recreate the home and family they once knew.

CORE THEMES

- A coming of age story
- Dealing with divorce
- Love within and without the family
- Journeying to find what you need
- The power of words
- The influence of family
- The innocence of love
- The power of imagination

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

THEMED ACTIVITIES

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Newfoundland's nickname is "Flounder," which is both a noun and a verb.

FLOUNDER:

(v): "making clumsy uncontrolled movements while trying to regain balance or move forward, to act in a way that shows confusion or a lack of purpose, and to have serious problems and be close to failing."

(n): "Flat fish having eyes on one side of the head, as they lie and hide along the murky bottom; the flounder is also described as a neurotic fish."

A. Discuss nicknames. Have the group brainstorm alternate names for themselves and find reasons for these new names.

B. Create a scene in which we see the name change take place or explore the reasons behind the name change. Once the scenes have been shared, try to take the moments further by removing the words, using only action, tableaux, mime and movement.



GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Newfoundland's family expects him to stay a child. They don't believe he has the maturity or ability to solve their family's problems.

A. Have the students discuss their family's expectations, and how they have been influenced by them.

B. Hand out a simple outline of a body on a blank sheet of paper (image below). Tell the students that this sheet is private and will not be shared. Ask them to write, outside of the outline, all of the pressures, expectations, traditions and even putdowns in their lives. Inside the outlines ask them to describe the feelings that result from these outside expectations, as well as their own personal goals and dreams.

C. Have the students write and perform a monologue about their own life quest. In the face of opposition and expectation, what is their story and how will they be truthful to themselves?

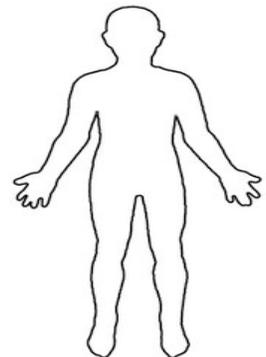
TRADITIONS IN TRANSITION

Family traditions are very important to Newfoundland. With his family in the midst of a huge transition, he clings to the order that these traditions provide.



A. Discuss the role of traditions in the student's homes: Do they exist? What events do the students celebrate? What is their favorite family tradition?

B. Create a scene involving a family during the holidays – something big has just changed. All the members of the family react differently. Share and discuss.



PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

SCENE STUDY

A MOTHER / SON CHAT

In A Boy Called Newfoundland, Flounder's closest relationship is with his mom. However, with his father gone, Newfoundland's family's dynamics start to change. Examine the scene below to see how Newfoundland and his mom interact.

NEWFOUNDLAND

I was asking if you wanted to buy some chocolate.

MARIANNE

Oh. Well sure. What for?

NEWFOUNDLAND

For Cadets. For French Camp.

MARIANNE

Can a person ever graduate from Cadets?

NEWFOUNDLAND

What do you mean?

MARIANNE

Well in pilot school, say, they make you a pilot and then you can fly.

NEWFOUNDLAND

But Cadets isn't about –

MARIANNE

And I know Cadets isn't about flying, sweetie. But they never seem to make you into anything. You just, stay a Cadet.

NEWFOUNDLAND

They have ranks and squads.

MARIANNE

I know dear.

NEWFOUNDLAND

I'm a lieutenant.

MARIANNE

I know dear. Look, think of it like a video game, see? Each stage is harder and harder and you get better and better and finally you roll the game. That's how it works,

right? You get the high score? But in Cadets you never roll the game. It's like you're Pac-Man, you just keep running around the same old maze.

NEWFOUNDLAND

I don't play video games Mum.

MARIANNE

Right.

NEWFOUNDLAND

They're for the weak.

MARIANNE

I wish you did play video games, Flounder. Or smoked cigarettes, or smoked drugs even, or did something just a little bit destructive. Now don't any of the other Cadets even, don't they ever rebel even a little?

NEWFOUNDLAND

I wouldn't know.

MARIANNE

I wish you did dear. There must be a couple of boys there that you like.

NEWFOUNDLAND

I prefer not to fraternize with the men.

MARIANNE

But isn't it part of the Cadet mission to make friends?

NEWFOUNDLAND

Yes. It's a conflict.

MARIANNE

You need some pals.

NEWFOUNDLAND

I pal around fine around here. I pal around with you and –

MARIANNE

Yeah.

NEWFOUNDLAND

With you.

MARIANNE
Flounder you're getting to an age where that's not enough. You got to have pursuits. Enthusiasms.

NEWFOUNDLAND
Quests?

MARIANNE
Well no not really quests. Like your keyboard, music's a good thing. Just things you like to do, besides just family things.

NEWFOUNDLAND
I like French.

MARIANNE
French?

NEWFOUNDLAND
I really like it. I mean I think I love French.

MARIANNE
Aren't you a little old for French Camp now though?

NEWFOUNDLAND
I have to finish what I started. It's a quest, Mum.

MARIANNE
What about that girl you met last summer?

NEWFOUNDLAND
No. There's no girl, okay Mom, there's no girl, I started to learn French and now I got to get back so I can finish it, so I can speak and write again, because right now none of my sentences make any sense. Or my actions. Or anything else. In English or French. I am torn between two languages. And if I don't get to Jonquiere, and I don't finish French, then I'll rip out my guts right here and die on the carpet. And none of us will quite understand why, and even if I leave a note, none of the sentences will make any sense. See? Now I ask you again Mom, do you want to buy some chocolate?

MARIANNE
You've never spoken to me that way before.

NEWFOUNDLAND
You've never suggested I smoke drugs before.

MARIANNE
Yeah.

NEWFOUNDLAND
It's upsetting.

MARIANNE
You're right. Maybe neither one of us is quite ourselves today. But you know I would like to buy some chocolate.

NEWFOUNDLAND
Thanks.

MARIANNE
How much?

NEWFOUNDLAND
Two hundred bucks.

(pause)

MARIANNE
I didn't mean you should run out and smoke drugs dear.

NEWFOUNDLAND
They're for the weak.

MARIANNE
Yes, yes. But this whole military mindset was never my idea. I never agreed with it at all. You should feel free to pursue a more...bohemian lifestyle. We all should.

A. In partners, have your students read the passage through once to each other. As a class, discuss the following questions:

How old do you think these characters are?

Why do you think Marianne asks her son if he can graduate from Cadets?

How would you feel if your mom encouraged you to rebel?

Why doesn't Newfoundland like video games? Why does he "prefer not to fraternize with the men"?

How does it make Newfoundland feel when his mom asks him about his Quebecois girlfriend?

Why does Newfoundland tell his mom that he is going to rip out his guts and die on the carpet?

How is Newfoundland and Marianne's relationship shifting in this scene?

B. Have each student write a letter, monologue, or article for *The Romantic Times* from Newfoundland's point of view, in response to his mother.

Perform and share these scenes.

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

STORY DEVISING

PRIVATE VS. PUBLIC

A Boy Called Newfoundland asks its performers and audience to explore private family issues in the more public setting of the theatre. Social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, blogging and MySpace can also make what is private public.

A. As a class, use Facebook to explore the private lives of the characters in the play. Have the students create fictional on-line profiles for the characters, NOT linked to their own profiles and overseen by the teacher.

B. By contributing every evening or once a week, watch the artificial universe created by the profiles grow and change. As conflicts, connections and groups start to evolve, examine the dramas through scene study in class. Discuss how different issues are addressed privately (behind a computer monitor) and publicly (face to face).



RUN YOUR OWN NEWSPAPER

***The Romantic Times* was created by the Willows to chronicle everyday romance. What kind of magazines, 'zines, blogs, websites, TV shows, and periodicals do your students read?**

A. Have the students create a proposal for a new periodical. This periodical could be recorded like a podcast, or it could be text-based like a website or newspaper. Discuss the importance of the audience (the age, culture, gender, etc) they are communicating with and encourage them to develop a theme for their publication that will be of interest to their chosen audience.

B. Once the proposals are in, you may want to divide into smaller groups, or perhaps each student will want to try and develop their own first issue.

C. Once the first issue has been developed, explain that each magazine-developer will have to look for future funding for their newspaper. Have the rest of the class take on roles that would appear on a funding panel (think *Dragon's Den*), and each developer has a chance to defend and sell their newspaper.

POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

Theatre Smash would like to thank both you and your class for coming to see *A Boy Called Newfoundland*. We hope that you enjoyed the show and that you will continue to use the play to propel activities within your classroom. The activities in the following section take the work you have done pre-show to the next level now that you have seen the production.

THEME ACTIVITIES

Discuss the play and how it lines up with the core themes that were listed on the first page of the Study Guide. Are there any themes that your students would add?

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|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| A coming of age story | Dealing with separation |
| Love within and without the family | Journeying to find what you need |
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SCENE STUDY

Create a scene that shows the next time Newfoundland sees Evelyn.

Create a scene that shows the next time Newfoundland sees his father, Bill.

Create a scene that shows what happens to Newfoundland's sister Brigid after the play ends.

Create scenes that show what happens to *The Romantic Times* and Marianne after the end of the play.

STORY DEVISING

Write a Review

Sharing and expanding on one's own opinions is the best way to learn about theatre. By writing a theatre review, your students can explore their opinions in depth and see how their ideas line up with those of their classmates.

It may be valuable for the students to read other theatre reviews. Suggested sources include: *The Globe and Mail*, *The Toronto Star*, *NOW Magazine**, *EYE Weekly**, www.scenechanges.com, and www.torontostage.com
*often contains adult content

Submit your reviews to Theatre Smash – we love to hear what you think!

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