



ALEXANDER AND THE TERRIBLE, HORRIBLE, NO GOOD, VERY BAD DAY

Book and Lyrics by Judith Viorst

Music by Shelly Markham

*Produced by special arrangement with Dramatic Publishing Company
A California Theatre Center Study Guide for Teachers and Students*

SYNOPSIS

Alexander is having a bad day. A terrible day. A terrible, horrible day. To be quite honest, it's a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. But everybody has bad days, sometimes. In this delightful adaptation of her popular children's book, Judith Viorst sets Alexander's rather trying life to music and brings to the stage one of America's feistiest characters. Not only does Alexander wake up with gum in his hair and drop his sweater in the sink while the water's running, but he gets squished in the middle of the backseat in the carpool, and his teacher doesn't like his drawing of an invisible castle. The catastrophes continue at lunchtime, when he discovers that his mother did not pack dessert in his lunch, and his best friend Paul decides he's not his best friend anymore. If that's not bad enough, at the dentist, Alexander's siblings don't have any cavities, but Alexander does. Then, at the shoe store, only boring white sneakers are available in Alexander's size, not the cool colorful ones that he really wants! Just when it can't get any worse, there are lima beans for supper and kissing on TV. Yuck! It is enough to make anyone want to move to Australia. Alexander's struggles with life's daily dramas will not only entertain, but educate young audiences as they identify with Alexander and the obstacles he encounters, encouraging them to share their feelings and to realize that every now and then, bad days come. In the words of Alexander's mother, "Some days are like that." Even in Australia.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

1. What can we learn from watching a play or reading a story about someone, either real or imaginary, who is having a rough time? How can it help us to deal with the disappointments, both small and large, that we all experience sometimes?
2. Why does Alexander think that going to Australia will make things better? If things were going badly for you and you wanted to escape, where would you go?
3. What if there were no bad days, ever? It may sound nice, but if there were no bad days, would we appreciate the good days as much?
4. Discuss ways of dealing with bad days. What techniques have you used in the past to cope with disappointment? Some possible ways are: talk to someone you trust, such as a parent, teacher, neighbor, or grandparent; write down your feelings on paper, focus on the things in your life that are going well or make you happy, and make a list of them or draw a picture of them; think of something you like to do and go do it.
5. How can you tell if someone else is having a bad day? What kinds of sounds might they make? How might their body language or facial expressions show what they were feeling?
 - a. If someone you know was having a bad day, what could you do to help them? How would it make you feel to know that you had done something helpful for them?
6. Many of the annoying things that happen to Alexander in the play could be avoided if he were more careful or would take a bit more responsibility. For example, if Alexander had remembered to take his gum out of his mouth before going to sleep, it would not have gotten stuck in his hair. What other things could have been avoided?
 - a. Make two lists on the board: one list of the bad things that could have been avoided, and one list of the bad things that Alexander did not have control over (for example, the lima beans at dinner).

LITERATURE/CREATIVE WRITING

1. Read the book Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day as a class. Compare and contrast the play with the book. What things did you see in the play that were not in the book?
2. At the beginning of the play, the caped characters recite letters to Alexander describing bad things that happened to them. This reminds Alexander that he is not alone—other people have bad days just like him. Write a letter to Alexander describing a bad day that you had—then, to reassure him that good days are ahead, describe one of the best days that you have ever had!
3. Did you know that Alexander is a real person? Judith Viorst's youngest son, Alexander, inspired the book. Judith Viorst wrote more books about Alexander after the first one became so popular.
 - a. Read Alexander, Who Used to Be Rich Last Sunday and Alexander, Who's Not (Do You Hear Me? I Mean It!) Going to Move. Would you like to see them adapted for the stage too?
 - b. Write your own story for Alexander, in which he has a wonderful, sensational, not bad, very GOOD day!

DRAMATIC ARTS

1. Discuss the costumes, set pieces, and backdrop for the production. What kinds of colors were used? How did these colors express the energy and mood of the play? How did the shapes and forms in the backdrop and set pieces express this as well?
 - a. Because this play has several locations, the production relies on smaller set pieces (or even costume pieces) appropriately arranged to indicate place, rather than a large set. Did you find the set pieces effective in establishing the setting for each scene? What are the advantages to using small, representational set pieces rather than large, complex scenery?
2. The actors portraying the kangaroo and koala wear large, furry animal masks to play the animals. What do you think it is like inside the mask? What challenges does it present to the actor? How does an actor use his or her body to show that they are playing an animal?
3. Because there are many small roles in the play, one actor can play several parts. What are some of the challenges of playing multiple roles in one play? Sometimes, actors must do a “quick-change” in which they must change costumes in a short amount of time, either offstage or concealed onstage.
 - a. When did quick-changes happen in this play? Were there any done onstage? If so, how were they accomplished?
 - b. How much can a performer change his or her appearance just by changing his or her body movements, facial expressions, and voice?
4. In one scene, several of the characters play a ball game. However, no actual ball is used in the scene—the actors “pantomime” using a ball. “Pantomiming” is when a performer uses physical movements and gestures to make it look like they are using an object that is not really there.
 - a. Divide the class into groups and have each group pantomime an activity, such as cooking dinner or playing a game. Have them present their pantomimes for the class. They should be very specific with their movements so that everyone else will understand what they are pantomiming.

SOCIAL STUDIES

1. One of the worst parts of Alexander’s day is when his best friend Paul says that they are no longer best friends. Sometimes when people have a disagreement, they use “mediation” to work it out. Mediation is when two people resolve their differences with the help of an impartial third person, a “mediator”, who helps each person to understand both sides of the conflict. Is this a good way for people to resolve disputes? Do you think it would work for Alexander and his friends? What are some other situations in which mediation could be useful?
2. When things go wrong, Alexander says he’ll move to Australia. Study Australia as a class. Locate Australia on a map of the world--it is the only country in the world that is also a continent! What is the population? What are the capital and largest cities? Why is it called “The Land Down Under”? How is it governed? Who first colonized it?
3. At his father’s office, Alexander messes with the new photocopier, although his father instructs him not to touch it. When was the first photocopier invented, and by whom? What did it look like? Use the Internet or the library to find pictures of early photocopiers.

VISUAL ART

1. At the shoe store, Alexander's siblings are able to find exactly the shoes they want in their sizes, but the ones Alexander wants aren't available in his size. Only the white ones are! To make him feel better, draw a cool pair of new shoes for Alexander. Be creative with color, texture, and shape.
2. In class, Alexander's teacher does not like his picture of an "invisible castle." Draw a castle (a visible one) for Alexander to live in. Be creative in your design—draw it in any style you want and feel free to experiment with line, shape, and all elements of the design.

SCIENCE

1. At the dentist's office, Alexander learns that he has a cavity. What is a cavity? How does a dentist treat them? How can you prevent getting them? What are the basic steps in maintaining good dental health?
2. At dinner, Alexander is served lima beans, which he detests. What are lima beans? Where and how are they grown? What do they look like and taste like? Use the Internet or the library to find pictures of lima beans.

WRITE TO CTC!

After watching the play, write us a letter about it. Tell what you liked or disliked about the story, the characters, costumes, set, or anything else you observed. Support your thoughts with examples and reasons. (*Teacher's comments are appreciated!*)

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