

A WRINKLE IN TIME: **FIVE LESSON PLANS**



written by Peter Royston

commissioned by

 **StagePartners**
PLAYS FOR YOUNG ARTISTS & AUDIENCES

LESSON PLAN ONE: WHAT'S NORMAL, ANYWAY?

“‘My, but isn’t he cunning.’ Mrs. Whatsit beamed at him fondly. ‘It’s lucky he has someone to understand him.’

‘But I’m afraid he doesn’t,’ Mrs. Murray said. ‘None of us is quite up to Charles.’

‘But at least you aren’t trying to squash him down.’ Mrs. Whatsit nodded her head vigorously. ‘You’re letting him be himself.’”

—Madeleine L’Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*

How are you normal? How are you different? In *A WRINKLE IN TIME*, both Meg and her brother Charles Wallace feel that they are outsiders; they feel less than “normal.” But what IS “normal” and is it something that we really want to be?

AIM: *How can we relate to our classmates/ensemble members? How do we honor our differences?*

STEP ONE: Tableau work

Like a painting or a statue in a museum, a tableau is a theatrical “frozen picture” in which actors are positioned to show a moment in time.

First, discuss with students what normal, everyday actions are, ie. brushing your teeth, walking the dog. On chart paper, create a menu of what the students offer.

Next in groups of three or four, create tableaux (plural for “tableau”) describing what you think some of these “normal” actions should look like. Share these stage pictures with the whole class.

Next have the groups adjust their tableau. How can we make this normal activity “not normal”? What do you think “not normal” should look like (in *A WRINKLE IN TIME*, “not normal” is also called “weird,” “strange” or “scary”)?

Show your tableaux to the rest of the group. How are the tableaux different? How are they the same?

STEP TWO: Writing work

Take fifteen minutes and write out brief answers to these questions:

- Describe your family and friends?

- Describe your school?
- What makes you happy?
- What inspires you? What do you do to challenge yourself?
- What do you do for fun?
- What do you do to cheer yourself up?
- What are your goals?

STEP THREE: Interview work

Split your class or group into smaller groups of two. Each set of partners will spend fifteen minutes comparing their answers to the questions above. What do you have in common? How are you different? Each set of partners will report on their findings to the rest of the group, describing what they have in common and how they are different.

STEP FOUR: Discussion and exploration

Discuss your findings. Has this work changed what you think of as “normal”? How can we celebrate what we have in common? How can we celebrate what makes us different?

VARIATIONS: Further exploration

- How do you think the characters of A WRINKLE IN TIME would answer the questions above? How would Meg answer? Charles Wallace? Calvin? Write out the answers to the questions above in the voice of one of the characters in A WRINKLE IN TIME and collect these answers in a long-form journal.
- Besides through writing or speaking, how else can we describe ourselves? Using your notes from above, create a picture, painting, collage or multi-media artwork to describe yourself.
- In A WRINKLE IN TIME, Mrs. Whatsit tells Meg that her faults will be very useful to her in her adventure. Usually our faults are things that we want to change—why do you think she says this? Write out a list of your faults and think about how they might be useful in your own adventures.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

English/Language Arts: Students will write in response to literature.

English/Language Arts: Students will write narrative accounts, such as short stories or plays.

English/Language Arts: Students will understand the effects of an author’s style on the reader (e.g. word choice, imagery)

LESSON PLAN TWO: RESIST IT!

“Suddenly there was a great burst of light through the Darkness. The light spread out and where it touched the Darkness the Darkness disappeared. The light spread until the patch of Dark Thing had vanished, and there was only a gentle shining, and through the shining came the stars, clear and pure.”

—Madeleine L’Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*

In *A WRINKLE IN TIME*, Meg, Charles Wallace and Calvin travel to the planet Camazotz to free Mr. Murray. Camazotz is a “dark world” that has been infected by the Black Thing: the dark force that is ravaging through the galaxy and even threatening Earth! Ruled by the brain creature IT, Camazotz has developed so that everyone is made to be exactly the same: behaving in exactly the same manner, thinking the same thoughts, feeling the same way at every moment.

But suppose that some of the citizens of Camazotz decide that they have had enough? They are tired of always being the same, of always being told what to do and how to think. They decide to resist IT.

How do they do it? Imagine you are part of the Resistance against IT!

AIM: *How does a social climate effect our actions and behaviors?*

STEP ONE: Tableau work

What’s the difference between the world of IT and the world you’d like to see? Split your class or group into three groups. One group will go to one side of the classroom, another group will go to the other side. The last group will stay to the side and observe.

One on side of the room, one of the groups will represent the present world of Camazotz and the lives of its citizens. Create a tableau to show what you think the lives of the people of Camazotz are like under the rule of IT.

On the other side of the room, the other group will create a tableau showing what you believe an ideal Camazotz will be without IT in the picture.

Each group will show their tableaux on either side of the room at the same time. It’s the job of the final group to create a tableau in the middle of the room to represent what actions the Resistance can take to get from BAD to IDEAL—to get from the world under the rule of IT to a Free Camazotz.

STEP TWO: Brainstorm

After presenting your tableaux, discuss what you've learned. What active things can you do to get a better world? What do you hate about IT? What has IT done to make things worse for you and your friends and family? What has IT done to make things worse for your society? How can things be better?

STEP THREE: Get to work!

Brainstorm different ideas on how you can show your resistance to IT! Some ideas might include:

- Create a hard copy or online anti-IT newsletter!
- Organize an anti-IT rally, complete with signs and chants!
- Write an anti-IT speech!
- With your parents' and/or teachers' permission and supervision, use social media to create anti-IT websites, Facebook pages, twitter hashtags.

What else can you do to resist the power of IT?

VARIATIONS: Further exploration

- What is "prejudice"? If you break the word "prejudice" down to its parts, you get "pre-judging" or judging before you have all the facts. Prejudice creates stereotypes, which are simplified and distorted views of a group. How do characters show prejudice in *A WRINKLE IN TIME*? How do the characters fight prejudice throughout the story? How can we fight prejudice in our lives?
- Using history texts or present day newspapers or websites, explore any real life cultures or countries that most resemble the world of Camazotz.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

English/Language Arts: Students will write in response to literature.

English/Language Arts: Students will understand the effects of an author's style on the reader (e.g. word choice, imagery)

Theatre: Students will apply research from print and non-print sources to their theatre work

Theatre: Students will recognize and create a variety of vivid characters in improvisation, scene work and plays

LESSON PLAN THREE: DEBATE

“‘Nobody suffers here,’ Charles intoned. ‘Nobody is ever unhappy.’

‘But nobody’s ever happy, either,’ Meg said earnestly. ‘Maybe if you aren’t unhappy sometimes you don’t know how to be happy.’”

—Madeleine L’Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*

In *A WRINKLE IN TIME*, the characters are confronted with two ways of seeing the world. The philosophy of Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which, which promotes a world where differences are celebrated and our faults are used to fight evil, and the worldview of IT, the brain who created a world where everyone thinks and acts exactly the same.

What’s so interesting and well written about *A WRINKLE IN TIME* is that both sides have compelling arguments on their side: although IT rules through intimidation and mind control, IT has created a world with no sadness, no wars and no conflict. Of course, Mrs. Which, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Whatsit would say, “Yes, but also a world with no creativity, no freedom and no love!” No wonder Meg, Calvin and Charles Wallace are so confused!

AIM: *How do we use what we know about a character and their experience to create a persuasive argument on their behalf?*

STEP ONE: Choose sides

Split your class into three groups. One group will represent Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which, one group will represent IT and one group will represent Meg.

Arrange the seats in your classroom or common room so that “Meg” is in the middle, sitting between the two final groups.

STEP TWO: Write your talking points

The teacher can read these words aloud to everyone in class –

FREEDOM
DIFFERENT
FAULTS
NORMAL
LOVE

After she or he has read a word, each group should discuss what that word means to them. Remember, you are not reacting according to your OWN ideas, but to the ideas of your character. How would Mrs. Which, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Whatsit say for each word? What would IT say?

Assign one or two from each group to write down the results of the brainstorming sessions.

STEP THREE: Debate your ideas

Using their notes and their brainstormed ideas, each group should get a chance to express their positions to “Meg.” Each side should be able to answer or “rebut” what the other side has said.

STEP FOUR: Whose side are you on?

It’s decision time! The “Meg” group should take time to decide which side of the argument they agree with the most. Will Meg side with Mrs. Who, Mrs. Whatsit and Mrs. Which, or will she go over to the side of IT? Don’t forget—Meg can go with either side OR, the Meg group can decide to accept elements of both sides.

Can there be a balance between the two sides? Is it only one way or the other?

VARIATIONS: Further exploration

- Why do you think Madeleine L’Engle chose a brain to represent the ruler/controller of the planet Camazotz? What do you think the brain represents in this case?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

English/Language Arts: Students will write in response to literature.

English/Language Arts: Students will understand the effects of an author’s style on the reader (e.g. word choice, imagery)

English/Language Arts: Students will organize ideas for oral presentations

English/Language Arts: Students will listen to and understand persuasive messages

Theatre: Students will recognize and create a variety of vivid characters in improvisation, scene work and plays

LESSON PLAN FOUR: CREATING THE WORLDS OF A *WRINKLE IN TIME*

Theatre artists are problem solvers. It's one thing to write a description of an alien world, using only your imagination; it's quite another to show that world on stage in a play adaptation. But that's exactly the challenge the theatre artists who have adapted *A WRINKLE IN TIME* for the stage have taken on.

Now it's YOUR turn!

Besides Earth, *A WRINKLE IN TIME* describes three different alien worlds: Camazotz, Uriel (the planet of flying centaurs where Mrs Whatsit tells the kids the truth about the Black Thing), and Ixchel (the world of Aunt Beast, the strange-looking but nurturing and maternal creature who saves Meg's life). How can a theatre artist show these worlds in a live theatre performance?

AIM: *How can we use the text as a springboard to design and create an actual set?*

STEP ONE: Choose your world!

Split your class or group into three smaller groups. Each group will choose one of the alien worlds from *A WRINKLE IN TIME* to design for a stage production. Which one will you choose: Camazotz? Uriel? Or Ixchel?

STEP TWO: Begin at the source.

If you're a designer tasked with creating a set for a play adapted from a novel, you're going to want to begin with the original source material.

Below find descriptions of each alien world from the original novel, *A WRINKLE IN TIME* by Madeleine L'Engle. Choose one person from your group to read the passage aloud to the group:

CAMAZOTZ

“Below them the town was laid out in harsh angular patterns. The houses in the outskirts were all exactly alike, small square boxes painted gray. Each had a small, rectangular plot of lawn in front, with a straight line of dull-looking flowers edging the path to the door. Meg had a feeling that if she could count the flowers there would be exactly the same number for each house. In front of all the houses children were playing. Some were skipping rope, some were bouncing balls. Meg felt vaguely that something was wrong with their play. It seemed exactly like children playing around any housing development at home, and yet there was something different about it. She looked at Calvin, and saw that he, too, was puzzled.”

URIEL

“They were standing in a sunlit field, and the air about them was moving with the delicious fragrance that comes only on the rarest of spring days when the sun’s touch is gentle and the apple blossoms are just beginning to unfold...They had left the silver glint of a biting autumn evening; and now around them everything was golden with light. The grasses of the field were a tender new green, and scattered about were tiny, multicolored flowers. Meg turned to face a mountain reaching so high into the sky that its peak was lost in a crown of puffy white clouds.”

IXCHEL

“Now she was able to look around a little, and everything she could see was rusty and gray. There were trees edging the field in which they lay, and their leaves were the same brown as the grass. There were plants that might have been flowers, except that they were dull and gray. In contrast to the drabness of color, to the cold that had numbed her, the air was filled with a delicate, spring-like fragrance, almost imperceptible as it blew softly against her face.

STEP THREE: Brainstorm!

As someone is reading the passage from the novel, the others in the group will write down impressions and elements that L'Engle mentions in the passage and those that come to mind. These can include colors, textures, landmarks, sounds, scents and more. What emotions does the passage evoke? What does the air feel like on your world? What does it smell like? What major landmarks do you see when you visit?

STEP FOUR: Get to work!

It's your job to create a set design for your alien world: this will be for a live production of A WRINKLE IN TIME. Use your brainstorming notes to:

- Start in two dimensions with a drawing, painting or photo collage of your proposed set.
- Expand to three dimensions by creating a shoebox diorama or model of your set.
- As you imagine building a true set for a production of A WRINKLE IN TIME, consider what materials you will need.

VARIATIONS: Further exploration

- Use the same methods above to consider bringing the Aunt Beast or the IT characters to life for a possible stage production. What materials would you need? What challenges or obstacles might you face? How would you overcome them?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

English/Language Arts: Students will write in response to literature.

English/Language Arts: Students will understand the effects of an author's style on the reader (e.g. word choice, imagery)

English/Language Arts: Students will understand a variety of messages conveyed by visual media

Theatre: Students will apply research from print and non-print sources to their theatre work

Theatre: Students will investigate and analyze theatre design components

Theatre: Students will demonstrate an understanding of the skills required to work as a set designer

LESSON PLAN FIVE: What's Next?

“Mrs. Whatsit said breathlessly, ‘Oh, my darlings, I’m sorry we don’t have time to say good-bye to you properly. You see, we have to—’

But they never learned what it was that Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which had to do, for there was a gust of wind and they were gone.”

— Madeleine L’Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*

In most stories, we are introduced to characters for a certain amount of time in their lives, but not their entire lives. As audience members, it’s up to us to use our imaginations to “fill in the blanks”—to think about what happens, to fill in the “missing scenes” in the characters’ lives.

AIM: How can we use the text from *A WRINKLE IN TIME* as a starting point for our own writing?

OPTION ONE: What might have happened?

Aim your imagination at a “missing scene” in *A WRINKLE IN TIME*. These might include:

- How Mr. and Mrs. Murray met
- How Mr. Murray discovered how to use the tesseract
- How Mrs. Which, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Whatsit met
- What happened the first time Mrs Who, Mrs. Whatsit and Mrs. Which encountered the Black Thing.
- What happens on Camazotz after Meg and Charles Wallace escape

In story, play or multi-media format, create one of these “missing scenes” or make one of your own.

OPTION TWO: Turning points!

In any story, or any life, a turning point is when an important or significant change occurs, when a decision is made that changes the course of events. In a group or individually, write out a list of the turning points in *A WRINKLE IN TIME*. What were the decisions that were made in the story, and how did they change the direction of the story?

Choose one of the decisions in the story that created a turning point. Describe the decision and what might have happened if another decision had been made?

In story, play or multi-media format, either create one of these turning point moments from the story, or create an “alternate universe timeline” where the decision was made differently.

OPTION THREE: Write a sequel!

What happens to the characters in A WRINKLE IN TIME after the events of the story—after the final page is turned or the final curtain closes? What happens to Meg, Charles Wallace and Calvin? What happens to Mr. and Mrs. Murray? To Mrs. Which, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Whatsit? To Aunt Beast? To IT?

Choose one of the characters from A WRINKLE IN TIME and consider what happens to her, him or it after the end of the story.

In story, play or multi-media format, create a brief sequel to A WRINKLE IN TIME, exploring the continued life and adventures of one or more character.

VARIATIONS: Further exploration

Lucky for you, Madeleine L’Engle actually continued the story of the characters from A WRINKLE IN TIME herself in what has become known as the “Time Quintet,” with the novels *A Wind in the Door*, *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, *Many Waters* and *An Acceptable Time*. These stories explore the continuing lives of Meg, Calvin and Charles Wallace as well as their family members and eventually, their own children! Read one or all of these novels. How do L’Engle’s sequels to A WRINKLE IN TIME compare with your own?

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English/Language Arts: Students will write narrative accounts, such as short stories or plays.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A writer, director and educator, **Peter Royston** is a former Off-Broadway director who has worked in various capacities to bridge the gap between the entertainment industry and the educational community. As the co-founder and co-director of Theatre Direct's educational program, Broadway Classroom, Peter helped to bring thousands of students to Broadway, to experience—and learn from—the history, grandeur, and just plain fun of live theatre. Peter has written historical material and essays for Actors' Equity and educational material for The NYC Department of Education, including The NYC DOE Blueprint for the Arts and the book *Al Hirschfeld: A Blueprint-based Arts Resource*. These days, along with his continuing efforts as a writer of educational material and teaching Theatre History at City College, Peter works with schools and student groups throughout the tri-state area, creating theatre residencies, classes and productions with a focus on musicals, plays and especially the works of William Shakespeare. As the Hudson Independent wrote, "Watching one rehearsal is enough to observe Royston's talent at turning Shakespeare's verse into relevant tales for youngsters..."

A WRINKLE IN TIME adaptations by
John Glore, Tracy Young, James Sie
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