The Hundred Dresses
By Mary Hall Surface

Adapted from the Book by Eleanor Estes

Central Michigan University
Bush Theatre
February 11 – 15, 2015

What You’ll Find...

Did you know?
The author, Eleanor Estes, was born in the same town where the play takes place!

Louis Slobodkin illustrated the book for Mary Hall Surface.

Synopsis........................................................................................................2
The Great Depression .............................................................................4
Immigration ..........................................................................................4
Meet the Characters .............................................................................5
Style ........................................................................................................5
Biography of the Author ......................................................................6
Biography of the Playwright .................................................................6
The Book vs. The Play ...........................................................................7
Vocabulary .............................................................................................8-9
Teacher Websites and Sources ............................................................10-11
Pre/Post Show Activities .....................................................................12
Bibliography .........................................................................................13
Wanda Petronski, a fifth grader, simply wants to fit in with the other girls at school. She lives quite far from town in Boggins Heights and does not have very many friends. Polish immigrants had a tough time assimilating to life in the 1930s America. Wanda wears the same blue dress to school everyday, yet brags about having 100 dresses. When Peggy, the most popular girl in school, begins to tease Wanda, Maddie knows that it is wrong but hesitates to intervene. Eventually the bullying becomes so extreme that the Petronski’s are forced to leave the town unannounced, leaving Maddie feeling exceedingly guilty. This drives Maddie to realize that being a bystander of the bullying can be just as damaging as being the bully herself. Is there a way to get Wanda to come back to school?
The Great Depression lasted from 1929 to 1939 and followed the stock market crash in October 1929. Franklin D. Roosevelt took his presidency as the Depression was in full swing. This period of time is remembered as the longest and deepest economic downturn in the history of the Western industrialized world. By 1933, 13 million individuals were unemployed. It seemed that the country was at a complete standstill. Franklin D. Roosevelt’s reform measures attempted to lessen the effects of this troubling time. He aimed to bring recovery to various businesses and help to the farmers, and relief to the unemployed.

Individual lives were greatly affected. So many lost their jobs and therefore could not provide food or shelter to their families. The Depression even affected what advertisements were being put out. Many were thankful for the more persistent governmental involvement because it meant jobs, money, and security for their families. Unfortunately children were also negatively affected because majority of them could no longer attend school. Overall, the country had to make some major adjustments to make it through that difficult time. With the help of the FDR, the country was able to overcome this hardship.

History Channel created a fantastic video that presents information about The Great Depression in a very intriguing way. Take a look!

http://www.history.com/topics/great-depression
Immigration from Poland to America

1938 was a representation of what was coming in the next few years. Right around the corner was World War II and it highlighted some issues in the world. At this time, Nazi troops were entering Austria and setting up concentration camps around Europe. This unrest was caused by the government attempting to revoke the citizenship of Polish Jews living in Germany. Those Poles living in Germany were facing many hardships that drove them to America. Germans were boycotting Jewish businesses, multiple riots were spanning Germany/Poland/Europe killing or injuring many Jews, and they were forced to carry identification cards everywhere they went. Anti-Semitic Poles were rioting and reeking havoc on the country. America appeared to be the beacon of freedom and hope for Polish Jews.

With the growing unrest worldwide, there was pressure on the Polish people to flee Poland for a safer environment and the rapidly approaching of World War II. Once Poles made the decision to immigrate, there were significant language barriers in the U.S. Most Polish adults had no grasp of the English language, which made assimilation difficult. There was also a physical barrier between the Americans and the Poles because majority of these immigrants were competing with Americans for jobs. They often received the lowest wages, forcing them to live in conditions that were unacceptable. Children had an easier time assimilating because they had the ability to pick up the American language. After a generation of children, the Poles were more successfully integrated into American society and became an integral part of how American life.

There are currently an estimated 10 million Polish Americans in the United States today. Polish Americans are known to have pride in their heritage but have rejected certain aspects of their culture; they have adopted many American traditions and customs.
Now let’s…

Meet the Characters!

Wanda Petronski: 10-11 years old. She is shy and soft spoken. Wanda is the daughter of a Polish immigrant.

Peggy Thomas: 10-11 years old. She is the most popular girl in school, very verbal and powerful. She is the “queen bee.”

Madeline (Maddie) Reeves: 10-11 years old. Maddie is very creative and spirited. She is Peggy’s best friend.

Cecile Allen: 10-11 years old. While rather giggly, Cecile is well dressed and well spoken. Friends with Peggy and Maddie.

Jack Beggles: 10-11 years old. He is very entertaining and intelligent. Jack is a boat design extraordinaire.

Willie Bounce: 10-11 years old. Very full of himself and adventure. Willie is more than willing to take a dare.

Jacob Petronski: He is 13-14 years old. Wanda’s brother. He is much more closed off, less likely to be social.

Miss Mason: In her 30s. She is the classroom teacher. Incredibly compassionate, clear, and helpful.

Shelly Reeves: In her 40s. Maddie’s mother. She is kind, very resourceful in a time of need.

Mr. Petroski: In his 40s. He is Wanda and Jacob’s father, a Polish immigrant. He speaks very broken English but is a hard worker. Absolutely adores his children.

Mr. Svenson: In his 50s/60s. Old Man Svenson is a reclusive, immigrant man who lives in a run down house on a hill in Boggins Heights.

Style

The style of this play mimics that of a movie. The scenes tend to be a little shorter and easy to understand. While the book and the play differ on some plot points, the play focuses on most of what the book has to offer.
Did you know?
The radio was a huge part of society

More Facts:

- **Electronics**
  In 1938, the radio was an advanced piece of technology. It was the center of social events and family time.

- **Fireside Chats**
  This was direct communication from FDR to citizens. There were thirty separate episodes.

- **Information!**
  Citizens at this time relied on the radio for news, both nationally and internationally.

---

**Biography of the Author**

**Eleanor Estes: May 9, 1906 – July 15, 1988**

Eleanor Ruth Rosenfeld was born in West Haven, CT. By the end of her writing career, she had published over 19 children’s book and even one adult novel. She was a career librarian and even married one, Rice Estes. Most of her writing came to be because she contracted tuberculosis so she was bedridden and could do nothing more than write. *The Hundred Dresses*, a Newbery Honor book, is a real life story from Estes, who claims that she is Maddie and feels great guilt for not having stood up for Wanda.

She received the Newbury Medal for *Ginger Pye* and her *Moffat* series of books are sent in Cranberry which is her native town of West Haven. Her other works include: *The Tunnel of Hugsy Goode*, *Miranda the Great*, and *The Curious Adventures of Jimmy McGee*.

**Biography of the Playwright**

**Mary Hall Surface: June 15, 1958 – Present**

Mary Hall Surface (pictured above right) is a director, producer, playwright and teaching artist. When she is not writing plays, she is a teaching artist at the Kennedy Center. There, she puts on professional development seminars for elementary and middle school educators. One seminar Surface created is called “A Playful Approach to Writing.” During their time with her, teachers and students expand their writing base by creating scenes and plays and even performing what they write.

Surface is an incredibly successful children’s playwright. Along with *The Hundred Dresses*, she has written *Alice, Most Valuable Player, and Prodigy*, to name a few. Many of these plays have earned Surface awards. Some notable awards are: The Helen Hayes Award in 2002 for Outstanding Director of a Musical, the Charlotte Chorpenning Prize for her outstanding body of work as a playwright, and a 2011 nominee for the D.C. Mayor’s Art Award for Outstanding Service to the Arts. Along with those nominations and awards, her work has been featured all across the United States and the world!
# The Book vs. The Play

## The book...
- Takes place during World War I (July 28, 1914- November 11, 1918)
- Longer, elaborate dialogue and explanations
- Is a real-life depiction of the authors experiences
  - Based on actual events versus something already written
- No TV at this time

## The play...
- It’s an adaptation. This means that Mary Hall Surface took Eleanor Estes’ book and created a play.
- Takes places during The Great Depression (1930s)
- Much more cinematic, short scenes
- Different scenes
  - The movie theatre scene is not present in the original book
  - Fantasy scenes are told through Maddie’s conscience.
- No TV at this time

## What Was Life Like in 1938 America?
- The average cost of a house was $3,900 in 1938. In 2010 is was $272,900 and continues to rise.
- An average person made $1,730 per year.
- A car cost about $763 at this time.
- A loaf of bread cost nine cents.
- Hamburger meat was thirteen cents per pound.
- One gallon of gas cost ten cents.
- Seeing Eye Dogs were used for the first time in this year.
- The New England Hurricane took place on September 21, 1938.
- Howard Hughes set the Round the World Record with a time of three days and 19 hours.
- Superman was becoming very popular.
- Some notable inventions from this year: the ballpoint pen, freeze dried coffee, and the photocopier.
Vocabulary!

1. **Four Square**- Originating from another children’s game called “boxball,” four square is set up with a large box, divided into four smaller ones. Each player takes one square and begins to toss/hit/maneuver the ball attempting to systematically move up the ranks. Specific rules vary.

2. **Hopscotch**- a game where the object is to jump through a series of squares to retrieve the marker thrown at the very beginning. The marker will be in a square, the child hops all the way down and all the way back to pick up their stone. First to do so wins.

3. **Dick Tracy**- a comic strip character. This detective is known for his square jaw and great crime solving abilities. Strip created by Chester Gould and debuted October 4, 1931 in the Detroit Mirror. Ran until 1977.

4. **Buck Rogers**- this comic book character was created by Phillip Francis Nowlan in August 1928. Anthony Rogers was a United States Army Air Corps officer who falls into a coma after he is exposed to leaking gas in a mine. This storyline eventually transferred to newspaper strips and was titled, “Buck Rogers in the 25th Century.” Rogers appeared in films, on the radio, and in comic books. Buck used many different weapons, including a Spectrometer!

5. **Superman**- In 1938, Superman was most popular in the comic book style. Eventually, closer to 1939, Superman began to show up in more newspapers. The origin of Superman is spelled out in Action Comics #1 and eventually expanded into two pages and titled Superman #1. As time progressed, Superman did better and better, but did not start out successfully.

6. **Charlie McCarthy/Edgar Bergen**- Charlie is the ventriloquist dummy for Edgar Bergen’s famous comedy act. The pair began when Bergen was in High school. McCarthy has a mischevious personality with an Irish accent. The puppet was created by noted carpenter Theodore Mack. Frank Marshall later rebuilt it.
7. **Gettysburg Address**- November 19, 1863. President Abraham Lincoln gave this address for the official dedication ceremony for the National Cemetery of Gettysburg in Pennsylvania. This cemetery was the site of the bloodiest and most decisive battles of the Civil War. The address was 273 words long and said to bring the Declaration of Independence to life. “...that government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth,” is one of the most iconic lines from this speech.

8. **Empire State Building (pictured left)**- opened on May 1, 1931 and was the tallest building in the world at that time. It stands at 1,250 feet tall. It’s an iconic building for New York and America and showed the strengths and progression of American architects of the time. It still stands in New York today.

9. **Newsreels**- in the first half of the twentieth century, newsreels were released to inform the public of stories of interest. People went to the movies to see these. They usually consisted of news, current affairs, and entertainment.

10. **Polack**- This word is a derogatory term for an individual of Polish descent.

11. **Greta Garbo (pictured above)**- born in 1905 in Stockholm, Sweden. She was in 28 different movies between 1922 and 1941. Those roles earned her 4 Academy Award Oscar nominations and actually received one in 1954 for Best Actress. Garbo is also credited for bringing “method acting” to the surface.

12. **Mickey Mouse (1938)**- This iconic mouse was created on November 18, 1928 in *Steamboat Willie*. Across the years his physical appearance and voice changed but his impact remained the same. The only distinct difference that Mickey gained in this year was the addition of his pupils! He is pictured below. Mickey can be seen in many movies/TV shows like *Fantasia* or *The Mickey Mouse Club*. 
In this section you’ll find...

Informational Videos
Helpful Sources
Pre-show Activities
Post-show Activities

Some general facts about education at this time...

- Public school was already established by 1938.
- It served as a way to reward students for good behavior and hard work.
- What the educational system represented and what it wanted to represent were not synonymous.
- This time is when getting a college degree started to become important for upper class men. Few women attended college.
- Education reinforced the status quo.
  - This extended to race, gender, and financial status.
- Business and labor were heavily emphasized due to the economic issues of the time.
- Financial support for schools and teachers was severely lacking.
Informational Videos

The Great Depression:
http://www.history.com/topics/great-depression

The Gettysburg Address:
http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/gettysburg-address

Helpful Sources and Books!

The Playwrights Website:
http://www.maryhallsurface.com/Home.html

For more information on daily life in 1938:

The Empire State Building:
http://history1900s.about.com/od/1930s/a/empirestatebldg.htm

Mickey Mouse Timeline:
http://artsdigitalera.com/mickey-mouse-a-historical-timeline/

History of Education in America:
https://www.raceforward.org/research/reports/historical-timeline-public-education-us
Before coming to see the show...

1. Read the first chapter of the book either aloud or as a class. Have the students really try and focus on details and picking out what they feel is important. After reading the chapter, discuss as a class what you think may happen in the story. You could ask some of the following questions:
   - What will happen to Wanda?
   - What kind of relationship do Peggy and Maddie have and what will they do?
   - Can you predict what might happen and how the hundred dresses may come into play?

2. The book and the play focus on “merciless teasing” which we call bullying today. Discuss the following:
   - Compare how students “tease” in the book to bullying today. How is it the same? How is it different?
   - Why do people tease and hurt others?
   - What can be done to stop bullying?

After coming to see the show...

1. Have the students pretend that they are Maddie or Jack. Have them write a letter to Maddie and Jack explaining why they behaved the way they did.

2. Write a critics review! Any Broadway or Off-Broadway show has critics who come to see the show, let’s pretend the students are those critics! Have them write a review of the production, with particular emphasis on remembering details and their reactions to certain moments.

3. Can You Convince Me? In this activity, students will write a letter to the playwright or director, whichever they choose. Based on their decision, they will write a letter with a suggestion of something you would have written in the script or what you saw in the actual production. In other words, what would you change or add?


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Play Directed</strong></th>
<th><strong>By:</strong> Nancy Eddy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Play Adapted</strong></td>
<td><strong>By:</strong> Mary Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Surface</strong></td>
<td><strong>Book Written</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>By:</strong> Eleanor Estes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture borrow from: Turtleandrobot.com</td>
<td>Teacher Guide Created By: Kendall Day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>