

2022 – 2023

Locomotion
EDUCATOR GUIDE

children's
theatre
company



January 31-March 3, 2023

Uprooted from his family,
surrounded by the unfamiliar,
Lonnie couldn't feel more alone.

But this year, his class is learning to write poetry.

Lonnie's verses take him
from his foster home
to the classroom,
into the streets,
and back to a time when
his family was all together.

As Lonnie finds his voice,
you'll discover how poetry can bring you
closer to others and yourself.

Written and adapted for the stage by **JAQUELINE WOODSON**
Directed by **TALVIN WILKS**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Get the Facts About Foster Care in Minnesota page 4

Springboard: Discussion questions & curriculum ideas page 5

Class Act: Classroom activities based in theatre page 6

Team Builder: Classroom activities to build collaboration..... page 9

Write it Out: Classroom activities based in writingpage 11

Worksheet Station: Copyable worksheets & projects page 13

Further Resources..... page 15



For virtual activities, videos, and more, join the creativity on the

[Flip Discovery Library!](#)

Get the Facts about Foster Care in Minnesota

1,725

children are currently under state guardianship in Minnesota

905

are in pre-adoptive families with family members or foster parents

820

are in need of immediate adoptive families

63%

are children of color

58%

are siblings who need to be adopted together

66%

have special needs

39%

are over 12 years old

32%

are between the ages of 6 and 11

Get Involved!

These are local Twin Cities organizations supporting kids in foster care:

There are many reasons why a child will be under state guardianship. The top causes are:

- Abuse or neglect in the home
- Drug use in the home
- Parental violation of court orders
- Incarceration of parent
- Death of parents
- Child is given up at birth

Sheltering Arms

sheltering-arms.org

Lutheran Social Services

lssmn.org

MN Adopt

mnadopt.org

Springboard

Ideas of what to talk about, write about, or explore while connecting *Locomotion* to your classroom curriculum



Write a review of the performance or a letter to the actors.

Rewrite or retell the story from the perspective of Lili. How does the story change?

Why is Lonnie's story important right now?

Lonnie's mother gave him the nickname Locomotion, based on her favorite song. Do you or anyone in your family have a nickname? Where did that name come from?

Compare and contrast the book and play.

Explore other stories by Jacqueline Woodson.

Lonnie learns a lot from his teacher, Ms. Marcus, because he has a special connection with her. Is there a special adult in your life who has made a difference in your life?

Lonnie longs for a family. What makes a family? Are Lonnie and Miss Edna a family? Why or why not?

Lonnie is upset that Lili's foster family won't take him. He says people don't want to adopt boys unless they are babies. Why do you think people would prefer girls or babies over older boys? Is this fair?

What do you think Lonnie means when he says "people are poems?"

Lili avoids seeing Lonnie but loves him very much. Why do you think she avoids seeing him?

What is the lesson or message of *Locomotion*?

Lonnie feels at peace when he is on the roof of Miss Edna's house. Where do you feel most at peace? What do you like about this spot?

Describe Lonnie before and after his parents die. How did he change? How did his circumstances change?

Discuss rhyme, rhythm, and other poetry devices in *Locomotion*.

Write a letter to Lonnie. What advice would you give him?

Why do you think Lonnie chooses to not tell his classmates about his struggles?

Enrique and Lonnie are best friends. What does it mean to be a best friend?



Class Act: Actor's Tools

Actors use many tools to help them tell a story - three we focus on at CTC are body, voice, and imagination.

Explain that projecting means using a loud voice and enunciating means speaking clearly. Have students practice projecting and enunciating by saying the title of the play, *Locomotion*, as a group, and then individually.

Brainstorm emotions that actors might portray. Try saying “*Locomotion*” using those emotions. Students will naturally begin to use their body to portray the emotion as they say the line. Brainstorm how your body looks or feels different when you are feeling these emotions. Allow a few students to showcase their work as a solo.

Class Act: Take a Stand

Objective: This activity encourages students to examine their stance on a topic. This activity works best in an open area.

Directions: Create a line through the center of the space using either painters tape or other distinguishers. One side of the line represents “agree” and the other side of the line represents “disagree;” however, the room represents a spectrum with the middle representing neutral.

Pose a question to the group and ask them to stand on the point in the agree-disagree spectrum that describes their feelings. After everyone has found their spot, ask select students why they stood where they did. Encourage students to be persuaded by their peers; they can move to different points as their outlook shifts or perspective changes. Spend time unpacking each question and responses as needed.

Below are a few prompts to get you started. We encourage starting at questions with low stakes and moving to higher stakes as students become comfortable with the activity. Spend time unpacking after the activity concludes.

Example prompts:

- Pizza is the best food ever created.
- I like to read poetry.
- I can easily express myself through writing.
- Everyone deserves a safe place to live.
- I feel protective of my family members.
- I would sacrifice my own safety and security for my family to be happy.

Class Act: Tossing Lines

Objective: This activity allows students to explore lines from the story and create a kinesthetic anchor to remember the meaning of the line.

Directions: Cut up the lines below into strips. Every student in the class should receive a strip of paper and each line should be held by 3-5 students because these will dictate groups.

Pass out the lines so that each student has one. Students should group themselves by line so that everyone with the same line is working together. Groups should work together to create a tableau or frozen image that illustrates the meaning of their line.

When students are finished, allow each group to showcase their tableau and say their line as a group.

Sometimes I sit counting the stars. Maybe one is my mamma and one is my daddy. And maybe that's why sometimes they flicker a bit.

People say stuff to you over and over and then you start believing it's true even if it's not.

Up here the sky goes on and on like something you could fall right up into. And keep on falling.

The monsters that come at night don't breathe fire, have two heads or long claws. The monsters that come at night don't come bloody and calling your name.

just wanted to be regular and do what all the other kids do on a Saturday – going to parties and making cookies and stuff like that.

There's this poem I've been trying to write for forever. And it doesn't want to come out.

I think I'm still sad, Lonnie. Except the days when I forget about not living with you. When I just make believe I'm regular. Miss Selma's only child.

But even if I disappear one day, the stuff I'm always writing down is still gonna be here.

A harder, deeper poem that burned hot against the inside of my brain—fire and smoke and the moment coming quick.

Just group homes where people come sometimes to bring us food and toys and read us books they wrote. Then they go on home to their own families.

Once we were real...There used to be four of us. Mama, Daddy, Lili and me. At night we went to sleep. In the morning we woke up and ate breakfast. That was years ago.

Class Act: Character Interview

Objective: In this activity, students will use their imagination to invent backgrounds, justify actions, and answer questions from a character's perspective. Students will generate questions to better understand a variety of characters and build empathy. Students will offer advice and ideas to help the characters.

Directions: Place a chair at the front of the room. Ask for a volunteer to come to the front of the class and pretend to be Lonnie.

The rest of the students will play the role of news reporters who are interviewing Lonnie for the local newspaper. The teacher can model by asking Lonnie a few questions, then invite the class of reporters to ask him questions.

Sample questions

- Who in your family are you closest with?
- Why do you love poetry?
- What do you miss the most about your parents?
- How do you feel about living with Miss Edna?
- How do you feel about Lili's foster home?

After interviewing Lonnie, do the same activity for other characters in the story such as Lili, Miss Edna, and Enrique.

Class Act: Story Dance

Objective: This activity encourages students to create a dance inspired by poetry. This activity provides students with kinesthetic anchors to remember a sequence of events or facts. This activity can be used in combination with the "Where I'm From" activity on page 12 for students to bring their original poem to life.

Directions: Work as a team to identify 4-8 sections of a poem. This can be from a poem you are reading (such as the "Where I'm From" poem on page 12) or an original poem. The more sections, the longer the dance.

To start, students are only going to focus on the first section. When you say "go" students will perform a short, repeatable action that represents that section of the poem. Observe the group and choose 2-3 actions to feature in the dance. String these actions together into a 4-8 beat sequence. Practice that phrase a few times, then do the same for the rest of the plot points. Don't forget to go back and rehearse often to review.

If you would like to set your dance to music, discuss as a group what type of music you should choose. Discuss the emotions of your dance. What type of songs might convey that emotion? Perform your dance!

Team Builder: Late for Class

Objective: This activity challenges students to create a story that justifies why Lonnie is late for class including a beginning, middle, and end. Students will use their bodies to physically communicate the story.

Directions: Choose one student to play Lonnie. This student will leave the classroom for a moment. Once Lonnie is out of the room, work as a class to decide the story of why Lonnie is late for class. Include a beginning, middle, and end (example: First, Lonnie's alarm clock didn't go off, then his bus got a flat tire, finally he got to school on a pogo stick). NOTE: first time around, choose a simple story that is easily acted out. Give students an opportunity to think about how they will act each part of the story out.

Bring Lonnie back into the classroom and let him know he is late! He must come to the front of the class and tell you (the teacher) exactly why he is late. You (the teacher) will stand with your back to the rest of the students. Students can physically communicate to Lonnie the reasons he was late. However, if you turn around and look at the class, they must appear as though they were sitting still, not telling him anything. If you hear them, you can eliminate certain players as speaking is not part of the game. Once Lonnie has listed the beginning, middle, and end of his story correctly, he (and the class) have won! If he cannot correctly tell his story, the teacher wins!

You can coach your students along by reminding them to slow down, repeat information, clarify the movement, etc. Once the class has the hang of it, you can challenge them with more specificity or more relation to the book (Lonnie was late because Miss Edna forgot to make breakfast, then he missed the bus because he was on the phone with Lili, and finally Enrique forgot his lunch so they had to go to the store).

Team Builder: I Dream Of...

Objective: This activity allows students to explore their dreams for the future through physicality and gesture. Students will make observations and infer meaning.

Directions: Gather students in a circle. One at a time, each student will step forward and say, "Hello, my name is (insert name here) and for my future, I dream of..". They will then show their dream for the future through gesture or mime. Allow each student to have a turn showcasing their dream.

When everyone has had a chance, reflect with students about what they observed. What were the similarities they saw? Did any gestures stand out? What emotions did they feel while watching these gestures?

Team Builder: Classifications

Objective: This activity encourages students to think about the aspects of themselves they have in common. This activity works well in a large open space such as a gym or playground.

Directions: Challenge students to group themselves based on what they have in common from the ankles down. Students will naturally group themselves based on footwear. Everyone needs to be included in a group. Do the same thing with what they have in common from the waist down, neck down, and neck up. Finally, challenge them to just group themselves based on what they have in common without giving any further directions about what they need to have in common. Keep giving them that challenge until they have transitioned from what they are wearing or physical traits and begin to group themselves based on shared interests. The goal is to get students to think about what they ALL have in common (we are all in 6th grade, we all are wearing t-shirts, we all go to school, etc.).

Discuss the activity with your students. How did they feel when they found a group that they had in common with? Did it feel better to find a they were left out of a group or couldn't find a group?

Team Builders: Hopes & Fears

Objective: This activity allows students to voice their hopes and fears for the future while comparing those with their classmates. This activity aims to give perspective and commonality.

Directions: Instruct all students to put their heads down and close their eyes. Sit for a moment in the silence then instruct students to begin to popcorn out their hopes and dreams for the future. Once the ideas begin to die down, instruct students to think about similarities and differences in those statements.

After the students have had enough time to think silently, instruct them to popcorn out their fears for the future. Assure students that these statements should be ones they are comfortable sharing with the class. Again, give students a moment to think about the similarities and differences.

Invite students to slowly open their eyes. Reflect as a group about similarities and differences they heard with the hopes and dreams. How did they feel when they were hearing the hopes and dreams of their classmates? Reflect on the similarities and differences they heard in the fears for the future. How did they feel while hearing the fears of their classmates?



Write It Out: Role on the Wall

Objective: This activity allows students to brainstorm external and internal factors for characters and create deeper, more empathetic understanding of character motivations. Students will consider different character's point of view.

Directions: Draw an outline of a person on the board. Choose a character from the play such as Lonnie, Lili, or Enrique for your shape to represent. Brainstorm all the external things that impact the character (other characters, incidents we see and those we hear about, societal pressures, etc.) and write those around the outside of the figure. Next, fill the inside of the character with ideas of how the character feels about all the things on the outside.

Dismiss students to work individually on the activity focusing on a different character. Retell or rewrite the story of *Locomotion* from the perspective of that character. How does that change the story? Did this activity change your opinion of that character? Have you ever experienced similar feelings or events?

Write It Out: Paper Plate Assumptions

Objective: This activity challenges students to think about prejudice and create deeper, more empathetic understanding of character motivations. Students will consider point of view and also think about the prejudices that affect them.

Directions: Start by discussing the concept of prejudice as a class. What does prejudice mean? When are moments students have witnessed or experienced prejudice?

Give each student a paper plate. Choose a character from the play such as Lonnie, Enrique, or Miss Edna for your plate to represent. On the back of the plate or the bump side, write all the things people may assume about the character without knowing them. (ex: Lili is a girl so she can't be good at math and science, Enrique is clumsy because he has bruises). Discuss how these assumptions might make these characters feel. Then, turn the plate over to the eating side and write all the things that are true about each character (ex: Enrique is sick, Lili is very good at math and science). Discuss which statements on which side of the plate are the most important about the character.

Dismiss students to work individually on the activity focusing on a different character. Retell or rewrite the story of *Locomotion* from the perspective of that character. How does that change the story? Did this activity change your opinion of that character? Have you ever experienced similar feelings or events?

To explore the concept further, ask students to do the same activity but do it about themselves. Write on the outside of the plate things that people may assume about them without knowing them. Then, turn the plate over and write the things that are true about them. Share the finished products with the class and discuss. What surprised the students? Did students find any similarities with the characters in the play or with their classmates? How does this activity connect to the concept of prejudice? What can we do if we notice or experience prejudice?



Write it Out: Where I'm From

Objective: This activity uses the poem "Where I'm From" by George Ella Lyon to build community and explore belonging. Students will practice writing skills by creating their own versions of the poem.

Directions: Gather students in a circle. One student begins by standing in the center of the circle and saying "Where I'm from everyone eats..." and completing the sentence. If that statement rings true for anyone in the circle, that person also takes a step into the circle. If they feel it is very true for them, they

"Where I'm From" By George Ella Lyon

I am from clothespins,
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.
I am from the dirt under the back porch.
(Black, glistening,
it tasted like beets.)

I am from the forsythia bush
the Dutch elm
whose long-gone limbs I remember
as if they were my own.

I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,
from Imogene and Alafair.

I'm from the know-it-alls
and the pass-it-ons,
from Perk up! and Pipe down!

I'm from He restoreth my soul
with a cottonball lamb
and ten verses I can say myself.

I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,
fried corn and strong coffee.

From the finger my grandfather lost
to the auger,
the eye my father shut to keep his sight.

Under my bed was a dress box
spilling old pictures,
a sift of lost faces
to drift beneath my dreams.

I am from those moments--
snapped before I budded --
leaf-fall from the family tree.

step farther into the circle than if it is only somewhat true for them. Assure students that they only need to share statements that they are comfortable sharing and that they get to decide if something is true for them.

After everyone has a chance to observe the commonalities, everyone re-joins the circle and another student has a turn being the person in the center.

Allow everyone to have a chance to complete the prompt then give them another prompt.

Example Prompts:

- Where I'm from everyone says...
- Where I'm from everyone knows...
- Where I'm from everyone believes in...
- Where I'm from everyone smells like...
- Where I'm from everyone feels...

Ask students to return to their seats and reflect on the activity as a group. How did they feel? Were there any moments that surprised them? What connections did you make with classmates?

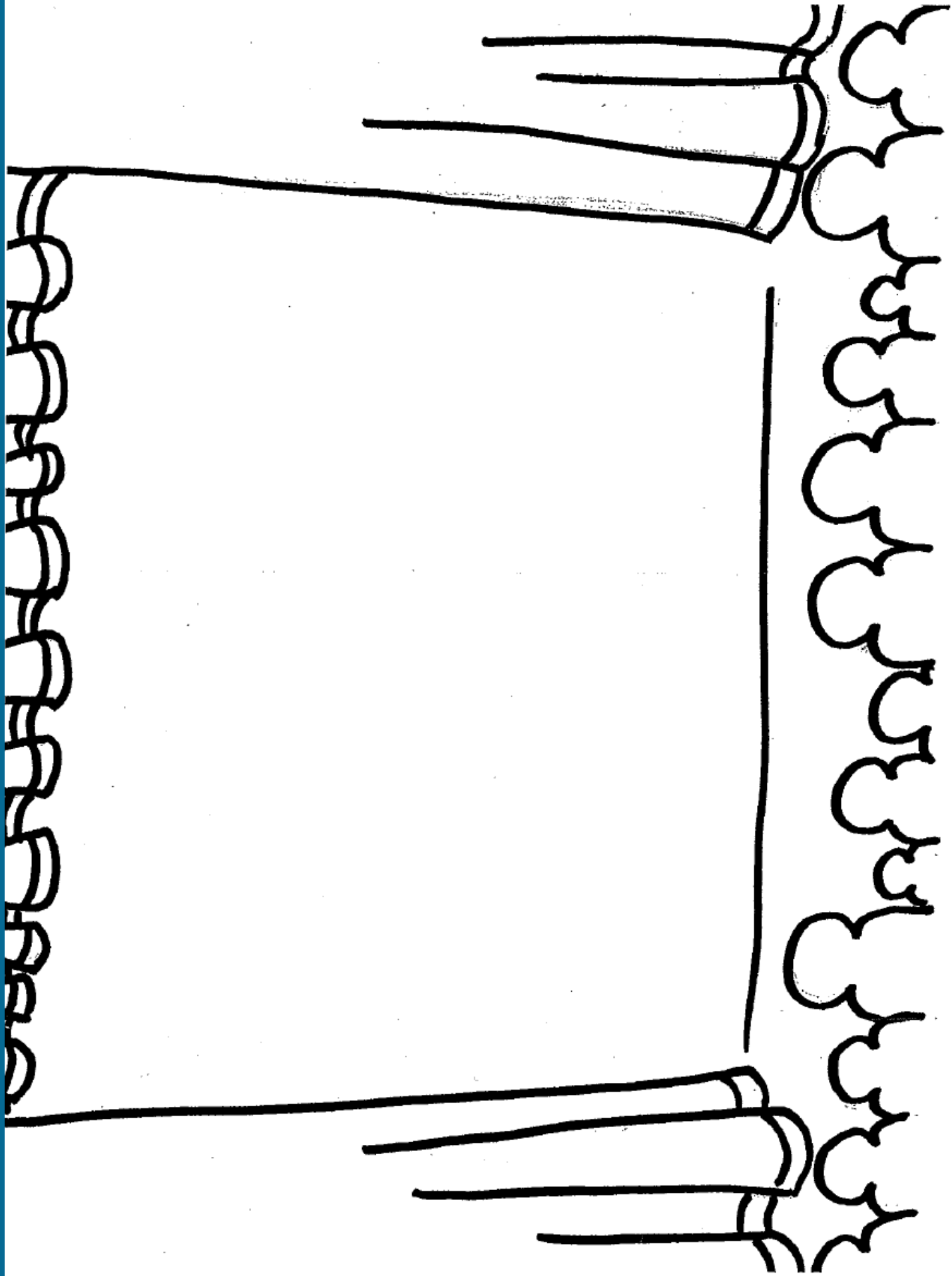
Read or listen to the poem "Where I'm From" by George Ella Lyon. Using the poem and activity as inspiration, students can write their own version of "Where I'm From." Students can either free write or use the template available below:

[Poem Template](#)

Ask for volunteers to showcase their poems for the class.

Design The Set

It's your turn to be a designer! Use the stage template below to design the scenery for *Locomotion*.



Corkboard Conversations

Use the sticky notes below to think critically about *Locomotion*

Three adjectives that describe this play are...

- 1
- 2
- 3

This play made me feel...

This play made me think about...

A status I would post on my social media after seeing this show is...

A question I still have is...

This play taught me...



My Rating of *Locomotion* at Children's Theatre Company

FURTHER RESOURCES

More About Locomotion

Page to Stage with
Jacqueline Woodson

[Watch](#)

Reading is Fundamental
Resources

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Students Will Love

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Mail Letters to:

Children's Theatre Company
2400 Third Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55404

Submit Student Questions at:

www.childrenstheatre.org/offbookquestions

Check out more activities on:



Questions? Email:

schools@childrenstheatre.org

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