



EMILY BROWN AND THE THING

TEACHERS PACK

*For the stage show based
on the much-loved book by
Cressida Cowell & Neal Layton*

About Tall Stories

Tall Stories was founded in 1997 by joint artistic directors Olivia Jacobs and Toby Mitchell. We create entertaining and imaginative performances for audiences of all ages. The company is a registered charity which tours theatres, schools and other venues throughout the UK and the world, with its exciting blend of storytelling theatre, original music and lots of laughs.

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'Tall Stories sets the benchmark for children's theatre'
Sunday Times

About the book

Emily Brown and the Thing is the second in the series of four books about Emily Brown, by Cressida Cowell and illustrated by Neal Layton. The first book in the series (*That Rabbit belongs to Emily Brown*) won the Nestle Gold Award. Cressida Cowell is also the author of *How to Train Your Dragon*. Neal Layton wrote and illustrated the Smarties Prize-winning *Oscar and Arabella*.

Everyone at Tall Stories loves Emily Brown and her old grey rabbit Stanley. It's great to find a strong, quirky heroine with such a fabulous imagination. But even the irrepressible Emily Brown is scared sometimes – which is OK. If we were never afraid, we could get into all sorts of danger. We'd be doing crazy things like walking into oncoming traffic! Stepping off rooftops! Cuddling poisonous snakes! It's good to be scared sometimes – and it's also good to find a way to conquer some of your fears.

About the show

We worked with nine actors, two composers, a set designer, a lighting designer, and a puppeteer to develop the story for the stage. About a year before opening, we carried out a week-long workshop – then six months later we did another week. After that, we designed set, costumes and puppets – and wrote the music and songs. Then there was a final four-week devising/writing/rehearsal period before the premiere at the Old Town Hall in Hemel Hempstead.

It was slightly scary for us when Cressida Cowell and Neal Layton (the author and illustrator of the book) came to see Emily Brown on stage for the very first time. Would we have done justice to their creation? Thankfully they loved the show and we could banish our fears and breathe a sigh of relief. Here's hoping you enjoy meeting Emily Brown – and good luck with conquering some of your own fears too!

Theatrical style

The production combines Tall Stories' unique physical storytelling style with specially-written songs, humour and a touch of magic. In addition, puppetry is used to depict all the main characters at one point or another in the show. We are led through the tale by two narrators – and Emily Brown also talks directly to the audience.



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Cressida Cowell and Neal Layton

Cressida grew up in London and also on a small, uninhabited island off the west coast of Scotland. The island had no roads, houses or electricity, just a storm-blown, windy wilderness of sea-birds and heather. Cressida has been writing books since she was 9 years old, but the first book she had published was in 1999, when she was 33. She has had 20 books published. Cressida now lives in London with her husband and three children.

Whilst Neal was growing up in Chichester, UK he spent much of his time playing in the dirt, making homemade catapults and drawing pictures. Neal has illustrated a huge number of books with lots of different authors. He's also written and illustrated his own books. Neal's studio is a room in his house where he can make a mess. The walls are covered with pictures, scribbles, badges, photos, packaging and anything else that he finds inspiring. He uses all sorts of different media to make his illustrations: pencils, paint, pens, pieces of collage, photocopiers, cameras, a computer, bits of stick, old tooth-brushes, dough, hair, leaves, anything that comes to hand... Neal now lives in Portsmouth with his family.

Themes

No matter how old you are, everyone struggles to get to sleep at some time or other – some because their brain cells are thinking of new ideas or worrying about the next day, others because they are scared. 'Emily Brown and the Thing' looks at the problems of going to sleep and how it can be scary. In the story the Thing can't sleep because he's scared. Emily helps him to sleep by advising him to 'think of nice things'.

We asked lots of children and adults about the times they found it difficult to go to sleep. The answers we received were so brilliant and so different we put them into the show. When these recordings are played at the beginning of the show, the problems like not being able to go to sleep 'when I'm worried', or not being able to sleep 'when my daddy snores' are real problems from people that we interviewed.

We realised that this is something everyone in the world has in common. This is why we think everyone, no matter what age you are, can relate to the show.

Set, Costumes and Puppets

With so many different adventures and characters our very talented designer Isla Shaw had to come up with some ingenious ideas. She decided that the set would have the sketchy and detailed effects of Neal Layton's illustrations – but it also has to be able to tour to lots of different theatres and schools.

Isla designed a set that had many different functions. It has a window on the outside of the house that also becomes the window sill for the Thing – and Emily's bed at the end of the show. It has a front door that can transform into a cellar door or a fridge – whilst the polar bear's little cupboard becomes a cauldron for the witch. Isla also had to make the small and the large versions of all of the costumes so that the human Emily and Stanley dressed exactly like their puppet versions.

Yvonne Stone is the brilliant creator of the show's four puppets. The puppets are used in the performance to change scale. They help the audience to see the size of a troll or to visualise an avalanche.

Music

Music is hugely important in our production. It isn't just used in songs. Music supports all of the adventures, creating atmospheres and even introducing characters. The brilliant Jon Fiber and Andy Shaw from Shock Productions came into several rehearsals and worked alongside the performers and the rest of the creative team to fit the music exactly to the moves we were developing on stage. They would edit and write new music in the rehearsal room. The rehearsal room became a recording studio! Chris (who plays the Thing) also uses a foley microphone on the stage to create sound effects throughout the show as a live accompaniment to the music.

SLEEP – Did You Know?

The world record for not sleeping was set by 17-year-old Randy Gardner in 1964 when he was awake for 264 hours and 12 minutes.

Scientists haven't been able to figure out why exactly we need sleep.

Somniphobia is the fear of sleep.

12% of people have black and white dreams. But before colour TV, the number was 75%.

You forget 90% of all your dreams.

It's impossible to sneeze while sleeping.

Scientists have determined that counting sheep isn't a good way to go to sleep. It is better to imagine a calm landscape. Think of nice things!

When you die you will have slept about 1/3 of your life, which for the average person is approximately 25 years.

The average person spends 6 years of their life dreaming.

Parents of new babies miss out on 6 months' worth of sleep in the first two years of their child's life.

Before alarm clocks were invented, there were 'knocker-ups' who went tapping on customers' windows with long sticks until they were awake.

Animals dream.

A snail can sleep for 3 years.

Sea otters hold hands when they sleep so they don't drift away from each other.

Cats sleep for 70% of their lives.

Giraffes only need an average of 1.9 hours sleep per day.

Bats sleep for 20 hours a day.

Horses and cows can sleep standing up.

Both whales and dolphins literally fall half asleep. Each side of their brains takes turns to rest so they can continue surfacing to breathe.

Almost everything we know about sleep, including the facts on this list, has been learned in the last 25 years

Follow-up activities (3–6 year olds)

Emily Brown and the Thing uses a variety of storytelling and physical theatre techniques to create different characters and situations with three performers and a minimal set. The following ideas aim to encourage students to think imaginatively about the story that they have seen.

Soundscapes

Sound effects and background music play a huge part in our production creating atmospheres and bringing the story to life.

As a group recreate the noises of the Thing. How quietly can you make the sounds? How loud can you be? How silly can the sounds be?

Splish! Splash! Sploosh!
Rumbles getting louder and louder!
Coughing that splutters more and more!
Scatch, scratch, scratch quietly from under the bed!

Talk about the sounds in the Dark and Scary wood.
What can you see and smell? What can you hear?
Allow the students to physicalise the adventure whilst other students make the sound effects.

<i>Walking in the rain</i>	<i>Running through leaves</i>
<i>Splashing in puddles</i>	<i>Howling of wolves</i>
<i>Creeping into the woods</i>	<i>Yelping of the troll</i>
<i>Hooting of an owl</i>	<i>Climbing the twistiest, thorniest tree</i>
<i>Crunching branches</i>	<i>Cheering when Emily finds the cuddly</i>



Can you use instruments to create your own background music for an adventure?

Wild and Whirling Wastes – Mini World

You saw how we used puppets to make small versions of Emily Brown, Stanley and the Thing. Now it's your turn to make small versions of the Wild and Whirling Wastes!

- Take a shoe box and stick cotton wool around it to create a snowy setting.
- Use glitter and PVA glue to make an icy pool.
- Take an egg box and cut out one of the egg holders. Paint it white and cut a small door shaped hole in it to make an igloo.
- Find some mini arctic animals to put inside. (If you don't have any figures why not make them yourselves out of modelling dough.)
- To explore sensory play, make some fake snow for your small world: mix three cups of baking soda with half a cup of white hair conditioner.
- Model to the children how to make up a story with the characters inside the story box, naming the characters and leading them through different settings, meeting various objects along the way.
- Invite parents in and model how to use the story box with the children. Send the box home and encourage the parents to let you know how they got on.
- To add some non-fiction writing why not watch videos of polar bears in their natural environment. Share-read a non-fiction book such as 'Bears' (Usborne Beginners). Draw the outline of a polar bear on a display wall and get the children to stick on post-it notes of facts they have learnt about polar bears.



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Follow-up activities (3–6 year olds, continued)

Any-‘Wear’ you can Imagine

If you had the chance to go on an adventure like Emily Brown and Stanley wearing anything at all in the world (or out of this world), what would it be? Draw a picture of yourself wearing this extraordinary adventure outfit. Make sure you show all the colours and textures of the outfit. Carefully cut out this picture, leaving a tail of paper at the bottom (like the stick of a lollipop).

Now think, if you found yourself dressed in this special outfit and stepped through the fridge door, or down the steps into the cellar, or somewhere completely different, where might you find yourself? Take a fresh sheet of paper and draw the scenery of the world where you think this costume would take you.

Once you have finished this scene, choose the best place in the picture for your costumed figure to appear. Now cut a long slit in the paper so that your cut-out costumed character can appear out of nowhere and you can even move it around in the scene by holding the tab/tail at the bottom.

Magic Medicine

Like Emily Brown does in the story, tell stories to get the medicine! Create a story-telling circle and share stories across the circle. These could be known retellings of fairy stories, books they have read, experiences they have had, or their day so far. Create a class story book which you can read to the witches later.

Talk about making your own medicine like the witches make for the Thing’s cough. You could use other books like ‘Room on the Broom’ by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler, ‘Meg and Mog’ by Helen Nicholl and Jan Pienkowski or ‘Spells’ by Emily Gravett for some ideas on what makes a great witches’ spell.

Share-write a recipe, focusing on words like ‘pinch’, ‘spoonful’ and ‘shake’ to describe instructions and quantities. Make a potion lab with empty plastic bottles, water, glitter, bicarbonate of soda and food colouring. Make a label for the potion saying what it is for and an instruction, e.g. ‘For a tickly cough. Drink it.’

Don’t actually drink it. 😊

Follow-up activities (5–9 year olds)

Crazy Characters

Emily Brown and Stanley go on three adventures in the story. They meet a troll, a polar bear and a witch. Reread the section of the book where the character appears. Choose one of these characters.

Look at the illustrations. Ask the students to spot what was added in the performance that isn't in the book, e.g. the polar bear is lonely and looking for friends – or there was only one witch and she didn't have any confidence.

'Hotseat' a character. Let's imagine you've chosen the polar bear. Teachers and classroom assistants should first model this activity for the children if it is unfamiliar. The teacher sits in a chair and adopts the role of the chosen character. The assistant asks sample questions to find out more about him/her, for example:

What is it like living in the Wild and Whirling Wastes? How did you feel when you saw Emily Brown and Stanley? What is your favourite food? What makes you happy? What are you scared of?

As the process progresses, allow the students to add questions of their own. Later, students could occupy the hotseat as the troll, the polar bear or the witch.

Ask the students to write a 'Day in the Life' diary entry from the perspective of their chosen character about what happened on the day they met Emily Brown and Stanley. Remember to write about what happened before and after meeting them too!



Make your own Amazing Adventure

Being Cressida

Alliteration is the repetition of the same sound or letter at the beginning of each or most of the words in a sentence. Cressida Cowell, the author of *Emily Brown and the Thing*, uses it to great effect describing the Wild and Whirling Wastes, or the Weird and Whiny Witches.

Now it's your turn to write an adventure using alliteration – starring you! Perhaps you are in the Magical Monstrous Mountains or the Desolate and Dangerous Depths. Choose something you are on a mission to find for the Thing. Choose a best friend to go on the adventure with and write your adventure with as many alliterative words as possible.

Being Neal

Neal Layton, the incredible illustrator of *Emily Brown and the Thing*, uses a variety of different styles to bring the story to life. Discuss the different styles – e.g. some parts of the picture are extremely detailed, some are sketchy, even colouring outside the lines, and some are sketchy without colour. On a piece of A3 paper make a picture of your adventure. You could even stick on different materials to create texture. Remember to write in sound effects!

Make your own puppets

There are four puppets in the show – all made differently. It's really easy to make your own puppets just using cotton reels, sponge, cork, string, etc. Here are some links to instructions of how to make your own string doll:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aH3HLV1gK7I>

<http://crafts.answers.com/kids-crafts/kid-crafts-how-to-make-your-own-string-doll>

Being Tall Stories

Working in pairs, use the dolls to act out your own adventure and then use them to act out your partners. You can use the soundscape project in the worksheet for 3-6 year olds to give you ideas of how to bring the story to life like we did on stage. Those students who are brave enough can show the whole class!



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Still Life

If Emily Brown were a colour, what colour would she be? If she were an item of clothing, what would she be? What vegetable would she be? Or what animal? Collect some objects and pictures and textures and colours that you think could represent the character of Emily Brown. Position them as you think would suit her and then take a picture of them, creating a still life representation of her. You can do exactly the same thing for the Thing or Stanley– how different are their still life pictures? This is often a useful technique for us when creating a show to find more details for characters and to make them feel more real and three dimensional.

Wish You were Here

Imagine that you are Emily Brown or Stanley and are on one of the adventures from the story. Which adventure would you most like experience? Pretend that you are exploring there and write a postcard to someone back home (who would Emily Brown write to? A school friend? A brother or sister? Her granddad?) describing what you are seeing and doing and feeling. Make sure to mention what you are on a mission to find!

When All's Said and Done

Do you think the show has a message at all? If so, what might it be?



CRESSIDA
COWELL
AND
NEAL
LAYTON

THE **THING**

.....
thinks ^{THE} **THING** might look like this

Please email your pictures to info@tallstories.org.uk or post them to:
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www.hachettechildrens.co.uk