

# JANEFranklinDANCE

## *The Big Meow, adapted from the book by Elizabeth Spires* Integrating Movement with Poetry, Language Arts, and Social Science

### 1. Program description

*The Big Meow* is adapted from the book by Baltimore author Elizabeth Spires. Little Cat is taunted by neighborhood felines because her meow is just too loud. The neighborhood cats are reluctant to include her in their games. An ever-hopeful fluff ball, Little Cat desperately wants to belong and even tries to 'retrain' her meow with help from the audience.

The locations in the story are made significant once Bruno the Bulldog demands that the lawn, turf and trees are hers alone. Imagination is led through a slumbering world of words, to tolerance and self-confidence. The five dancers fully develop the characters through movement, dialogue, song and physical story telling. When Little Cat opens her mouth, what comes out is one big CAT-astrophe. Her earth-shattering meow disturbs catnaps, scares off catbirds in the catalpa tree, and even swallows the sun. Who would want to play with someone so little -- and so loud?

Elizabeth Spires and Cynthia Jabar tell a funny fable about a lovable underdog -- a Little Cat who learns not to be afraid of using her BIG, brave voice.

### 2. Program goals and objectives:

The purpose of *The Big Meow, adapted from the book by Elizabeth Spires* is to inspire students to explore poetry, language arts, and to nurture self-expression through movement and the literary arts. An objective is to understand the message of the book, to promote tolerance and to value differences. When Little Cat opens her mouth, what comes out is one big CAT-astrophe. Her earth-shattering meow disturbs catnaps, scares off catbirds in the catalpa tree, and even swallows the sun. Who would want to play with someone so little -- and so loud? This funny fable reveals a lovable underdog -- a Little Cat who learns not to be afraid of using her BIG, brave voice.

The goal is to inspire students to read, write, and to appreciate the different gifts and talents waiting to be explored in everyone.

### Program outline:

Below is an outline of the performance which highlights the book's contents.

Video excerpt can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ci2LR0M8KQ>

### **Introduction**

Little Cat tries to join the game but the group has decided she is just too loud.

### **Little Cat:**

I have a big meow  
As loud as a lion's roar  
When I meow the trees quiver, the ground shivers  
And the other cats run away.  
Why, Oh, Why did I get this way  
I'm just a little cat who wants to play  
And that's the only thing I want to do today

### **Educational Resource Guide**

3700 S Four Mile Run Drive  
Arlington VA

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info@janefranklin.com  
www.janefranklin.com/dance-education  
703-933-1111

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## I. How did I get this way?

Little Cat:

my mommy dear, I'm so glad you are here because I have a question to ask,  
please tell me hear? Is my meow too loud?

Mother: Oh, no Catkin. We're proud of your meow so big and so loud. Not timid --  
really brimming with ear splitting hiss, and a meow that can't be missed. It's purrfect

Little Cat: How did I get such a big Meow

Mother: The Me is from me, and Ow is from father. Then there's something in there  
from sister and brother. The Me is from me, and the Ow is from father. His yowling  
in the neighborhood was really a bother.

## II. Dreaming

Little Cat, Little Cat, go away! Scat!

Little Cat, we're not going to play . Not today, not tomorrow, not the day after that!

Little Cat, Little Cat, go away! Scat!

Little Cat:

What's so wrong with my meow? Maybe I need some practice with my meows.

Meow, Meow, Meow, Meow

I just can't get it right

Can you show me how? to meow?

Audience participates

Little Cat: Let's make the meows into a song, like notes on a scale & stretch them  
out long

Call & response with audience

Me,

Me,

Me

Ow,

Ow,

Ow

Meow, Meow, Meow, Meow

I'm tired of meowing. Time to curl up and nap.

## III. Bruno the Bulldog

Bruno:

These cats are always playing on my lawn, my turf, on my trees

They scratch and dig and think they're so smart invading my territory

These cats are really awful too small too little too loud

stop jumping stop hissing stop meowing

stop playing You're too cute too little too loud

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## IV. Be Brave

Neighborhood cats: Little Cat, wake up. A nasty bulldog names Bruno is chasing us, and we need a place to hide.

Little Cat, we're sorry we were mean today. We are sorry we wouldn't play. Please, please scare Bruno away.

## V. Courage

Little Cat: Bruno, sir, no bullies allowed. You'll have to leave now. If you don't, I'll let loose with my big meow

Bruno laughs: An itty-bitty thing like you is going to tell ME what to do? Why what a delicious snack you'll make. A tasty tidbit before I have that bunch of quivering cowards for lunch.

Little Cat is shaking, a tiny meow comes out

Bruno giggles: That was your big meow. Why I've heard mice squeak louder than that.

Little Cat: Meow

Bruno: If that was your biggest meow, I don't have much to worry about.

## VI. Finding a Voice

Little Cat: Meow - Bruno is blown over like a paper doll

Little Cat: Meow - Bruno is pinned against a house as flat as a pancake

Little Cat: Meow - Bruno catapulted over the horizon, clear into the next town.

Other Cats: Little Cat, that was terrific. That was great. Now how about chasing all the dogs away?

Little Cat: I think I'll save that for another day. I'm just a little cat who wants to play. That's the only thing I wanted to do today

Other Cats: Then let's play

### 3. Relationship to core curriculum:

Examples for how this material may be used for Language Arts/English related goals and Standards of Learning in K-5:

- K.1 The student will demonstrate growth in the use of oral language.
- Listen to a variety of literary forms, including stories and poems.
  - Participate in choral speaking and recite short poems, rhymes, songs, and stories with repeated patterns.
  - Participate in creative dramatics.
  - Recognize rhyming words.
  - Generate rhyming words in a rhyming pattern.
- 1.1, 2.7 The student will continue to demonstrate growth in the use of oral language.
- Participate in a variety of oral language activities, including choral speaking and reciting short poems, rhymes, songs, and stories with repeated patterns.
  - Express ideas orally in complete sentences.

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- 4.7 The student will write effective narratives, poems, and explanations.
- e) Utilize elements of style, including word choice and sentence variation.
  - f) Write rhymed, unrhymed, and patterned poetry.

## PRE AND POST PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY

### 1. A Story to Tell.

"I am an ECCE student who has just finished her practicum at a daycare center, and I'm telling you, that this has been a favorite book of mine since it came out. I read this book for one of my circle times and the children were quiet with anticipation wondering what was going to happen next and were very pleased when Little Meow saved the day. I think the book has a good lesson to be learned from it. As someone who has been ostracized, I feel this is a good book for children to learn to stand up for themselves and not be ashamed of what they are or what they have that is different."

**2. When, Where and How Writing Exercise** Explore where you live and your neighbors of varying age, of different occupations. Do your best to write about the varying differences and how those differences enrich the community Write about a time when you were brave or when you came to the aid of a neighbor in need.

### 3. Interactive Explorations and Physical Story Telling

Find a cat like vocabulary of movement. Explore how different feelings are represented in your body without saying a word. Work with a partner to share cat like movements. Put the movements in a linear order giving your physical story telling a beginning, middle, and end. How can you arrange your story in the space or in relationship to each other or to the audience?

## SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

[The Mouse of Amherst](#) by Elizabeth Spires

[Creative Dance For All Ages](#) by Anne Green Gilbert

[Teaching the Three R's](#) by Ann Green Gilbert

### Artists whose work appears in the show:

Mark Sylvester, composer: <http://www.marksylvester.net/>

Steven Rogers, composer: [http://www.stevenrogers.us/Steven\\_Rogers/home.html](http://www.stevenrogers.us/Steven_Rogers/home.html)

Elizabeth Spires, writer and poet: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/elizabeth-spires>