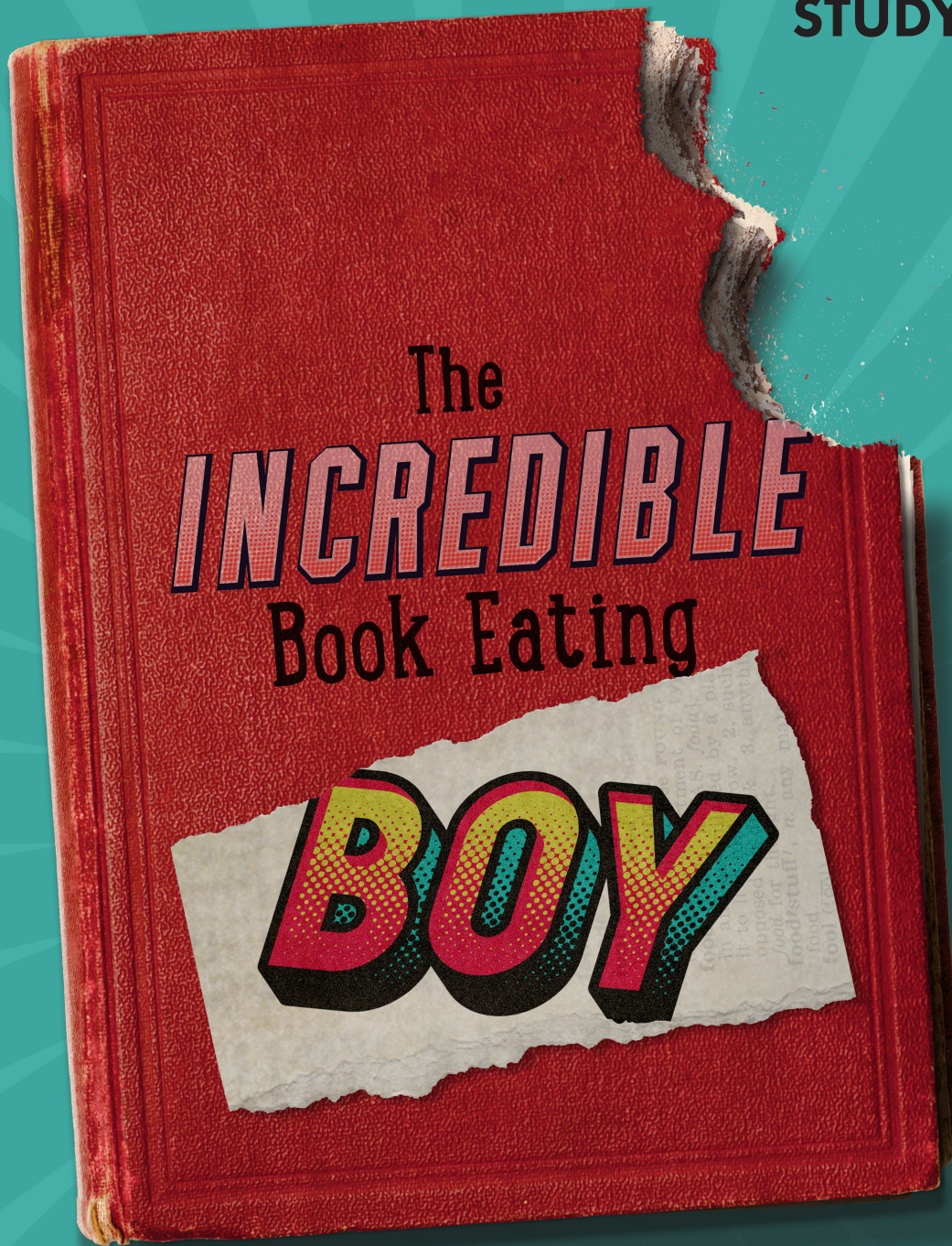




South Coast Repertory

STUDY GUIDE



book by Madhuri Shekar
music by Christian Magby
lyrics by Christian Albright
based on the book by Oliver Jeffers
directed by H. Adam Harris

Welcome to the Theatre

Theatre is an art form that depends on both the artists and the audience. A performance is influenced by an audience, just as an audience is influenced by a performance. With this play, the artists and staff of South Coast Repertory have created a special new world for you. Sometimes that world is so exciting that you can barely hold still. But remember: once the play begins, you are connected to all the other people in the audience, as well as to the actors on the stage, because you're all in the same room. The actors can see you, hear you and feel you, just as you can see, hear and feel them. Your attention, involvement, responses and imagination are a real part of each and every performance. The play can actually be made better because of you!

STUDENT TIPS FOR THEATRE TRIPS

- Stay with your group at all times and pay attention to your teachers and chaperones.
- Take your seat in the theatre before going to the bathroom or getting a drink of water.
- Make yourself comfortable while keeping movement to a minimum.
- Do not stand up, walk around or put your feet on the seat in front of you.
- Absolutely no chewing gum, eating or drinking in the building.
- No backpacks, cameras or electronic devices are permitted in the theatre.
- Feel free to talk quietly in your seats before the show.
- Show your appreciation by clapping for the actors at the end of the play.
- After the lights come back up, wait for the ushers to escort your group out of the theatre.

THEATRE VOCABULARY

- **Backstage** The space behind the acting area, unseen by the audience.
- **Blocking** The movement designed by the director and performed by the actors.
- **Box Office** A windowed space at the front of the theatre building where tickets are sold.
- **Choreography** The art of creating and arranging dances onstage.
- **Cue** The last words or action of an actor immediately preceding the lines or business of another actor.
- **Downstage** The part of the stage closest to the audience. At one time, stages were raked, or sloped, with the lower (“down”) part closest to the audience, and the higher (“up”) part farther away.
- **Green Room** A room near the stage where actors await entrance cues and receive guests. The room’s name comes from Elizabethan times, when actors waited on a real “green” (or patch of grass).
- **Matinee** A morning or afternoon performance of a play.
- **Props** All the hand-held items and stage furnishings, including furniture, that are physically used by the actors.
- **Rehearsal** Time performers use to practice privately before a performance in front of an audience.
- **Script** The text of the play, including dialogue and stage directions, all written by the playwright.
- **Upstage** The area of the stage farthest away from the audience and nearest to the back wall.



The Play

THE STORY OF *THE INCREDIBLE BOOK EATING BOY*

It's the first day of third grade, and eight-year-old Henry is feeling queasy. His friends, Jeff and Olivia, think third grade is where it's at, and Ms. Penny, their new teacher, seems super nice. But for Henry, there's one big problem—there are no books with pictures in the third grade. Henry hates reading books, especially the ones that have too many words in them!

After a frustrating first day at school, Henry feels behind already and doesn't know what to do. That is until he sees his dog, Rover, swallow a book whole and—miraculously—start to speak in English. Henry is surprised to say the least, but then he decides to give it a try himself. He eats a page of his math textbook, and once he does, he's suddenly ready for the big test the next day.

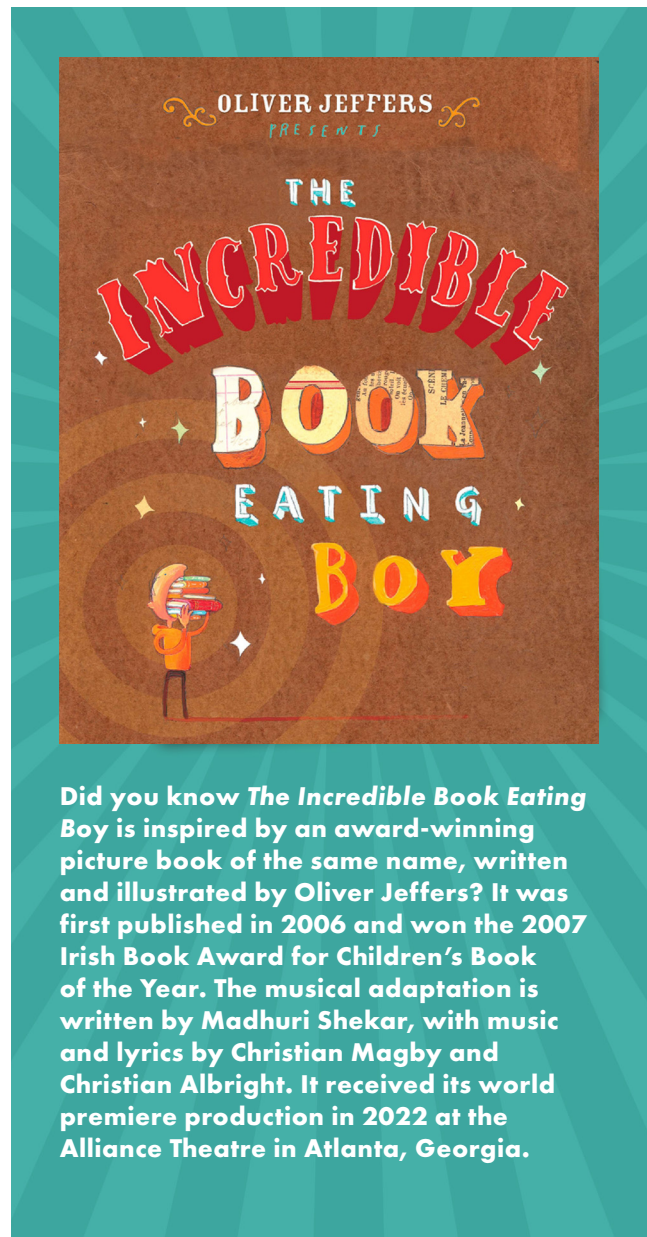
Henry doesn't stop at just one book, though. He begins eating all his textbooks, and his new diet puts him at the top of his class. The more books he eats, the more facts he has at his fingertips. The Louisiana Purchase? Henry knows all about that. Newton's Law of Gravity? Easy to explain. The lifespan of a tortoise? Who doesn't know that they can live nearly 200 years?! Henry certainly does. He knows everything. He's the Incredible Book Eating Boy!

But after a while, Henry's eating habits start to cause some problems. Without realizing it, Henry has eaten all the books in the classroom, and now there are none left for the other students to read. Even worse, Henry's stomach hasn't been feeling all that well. In fact, it feels awful—awful enough to throw up. And when Henry does, papers go flying everywhere!

The doctor writes Henry a prescription: No more eating books. That's the best way to avoid the jumbly-wumblies, the medical term for what happens when someone eats too many books. Unfortunately, that leaves Henry in his original predicament, with books all around him and no way to absorb the information. There's only one thing left for Henry to try...and that's reading.

The reading is slow going at first, but soon Henry discovers that everyone approaches reading a little bit differently and that everyone likes reading different things. Henry likes comic books, for example, specifically the way they combine text, pictures, and imagination.

By the time he reaches the fourth grade, Henry has fallen in love with books. Not eating them but *reading* them.

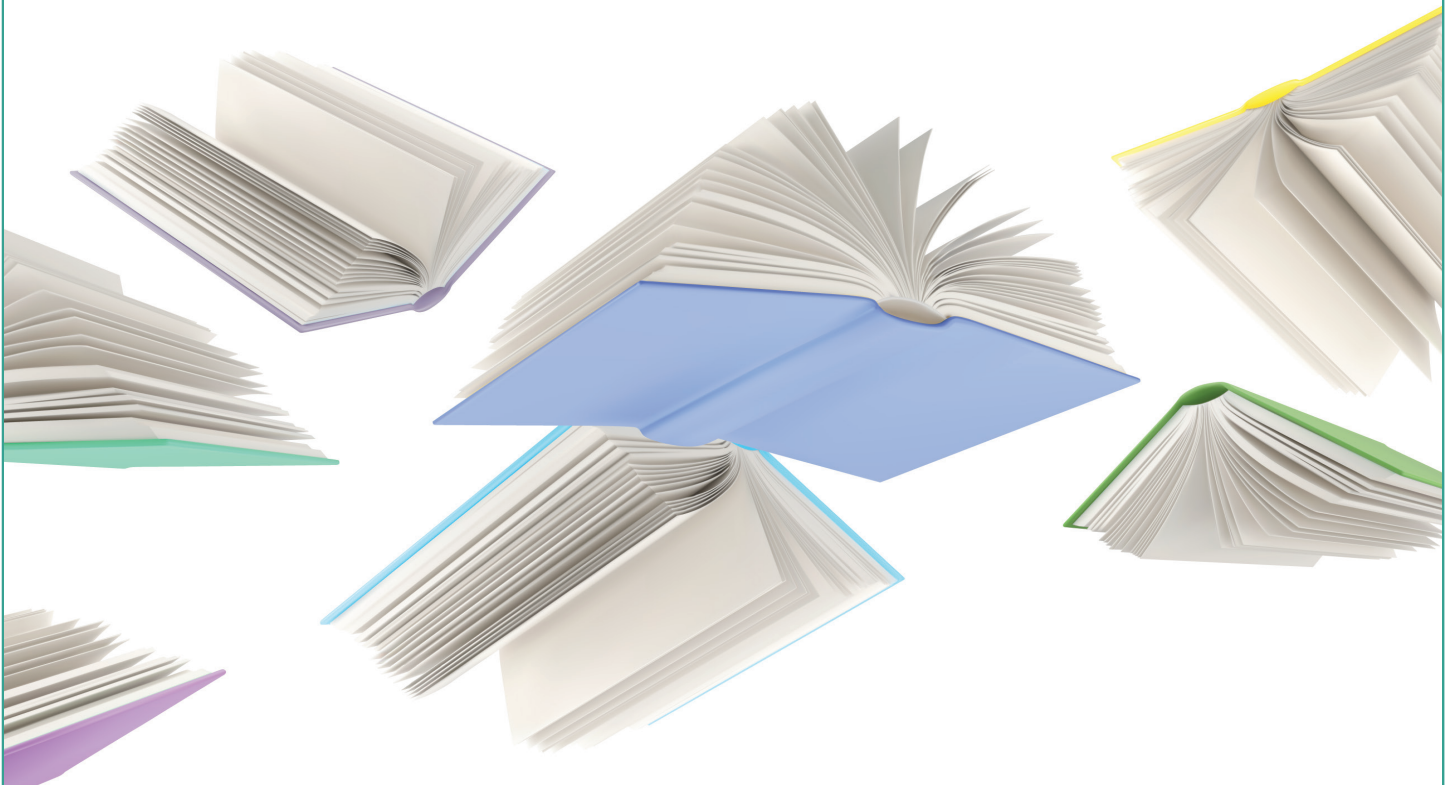


Did you know *The Incredible Book Eating Boy* is inspired by an award-winning picture book of the same name, written and illustrated by Oliver Jeffers? It was first published in 2006 and won the 2007 Irish Book Award for Children's Book of the Year. The musical adaptation is written by Madhuri Shekar, with music and lyrics by Christian Magby and Christian Albright. It received its world premiere production in 2022 at the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia.

Classroom Activities

BEFORE THE SHOW

1. Have your students read *The Incredible Book Eating Boy* on their own—or read it aloud as a class. (A link to the full text can be found on the Resources page of this study guide.) After reading, ask your student to:
 - a. Recall the plot’s main events.
 - b. Identify the story’s themes and underlying messages.
 - c. Discuss the book’s artwork. What did author and illustrator Oliver Jeffers use as his canvas?
2. Henry likes eating books (which probably don’t taste very good!). What’s your favorite food?
3. Henry doesn’t like to read at first, but by the end of the book, he loves it. What’s your favorite genre of book and why?
4. Discuss the difference between fiction and drama and explore what it means to “adapt” a book into a musical.
5. Have the students talk about how they think the story of *The Incredible Book Eating Boy* will be brought to life in South Coast Repertory’s musical stage version.
 - a. What might the scenery on stage look like?
 - b. What about the costumes?
 - c. What do you think the songs will sound like?
6. Discuss the different jobs involved to bring a production like *The Incredible Book Eating Boy* to life. Have the students research the occupations on the list below and share what they find with the class.
 - a. Actor
 - b. Director
 - c. Playwright
 - d. Composer
 - e. Lyricist
 - f. Music Director
 - g. Choreographer
 - h. Designer
 - i. Stage Manager
 - j. Stage Crew



WORDS! WORDS! WORDS!

Listen for the following words during the performance.

Amalgamation: (noun) the process or result of joining or bringing together two or more things

Dissertation: (noun) a long document about a certain topic

Hassle: (verb) to bother or pester

Predilection: (noun) a preference or liking for something

Gastronomical: (adjective) relating to the art or science of good eating

Logically: (adverb) in a way that is clear and makes sense

Fortified: (adjective) improved or enhanced through the addition of ingredients, such as vitamins

Ironic: (adjective) when something happens in the opposite way to what's expected

Culprit: (noun) someone guilty of a crime or fault

Compulsive: (adjective) resulting from an irresistible urge

Perspective: (noun) a point of view or a particular attitude towards something

Peers: (noun) those belonging to the same group, often based on age or grade in school

Can you unscramble these words from the list to the left? (Answers on page 8.)

1. Ticmlasonogar
2. Seper
3. Trsitisaedno
4. Ifftedior
5. Aagnmalotaim
6. Cluprti
7. Vcmlspueoi
8. Ptsiereecpv
9. Elencodiprti
10. Ashsel
11. Liglyloca
12. Nrciio

WORD SEARCH

Can you spot all the words from the list above? They can be found in all directions—vertically, horizontally, and even diagonally. (Some words are listed backwards, too!)

E H R A O H R I W B Q A X W Q
V J D P M U A S H I M Y E S H
I H W K E L Y S P A F S L O K
S B E Z Y F A L L E F O K X N
L C I N O R I G G O L O M O I
U O N O I T A T R E S S I D X
P G G A U M I T D M B T S O S
M P C I A G I R D O C U W A O
O X E T C F B X P E Y W Y T H
C A I E I A M Y L L I T D H I
Y O L E R Q L I I U U X N C L
N F D X D S D L O P P C J A U
M H I D I E J W Y K M M M K D
G A S T R O N O M I C A L Y W
H H P P E R S P E C T I V E P

AFTER THE SHOW

Discussion about the Theatre

When you return from the performance, hold a class discussion and ask the students about their experience attending live theatre.

1. What was the first thing you noticed about the theatre? What did the stage look like?
 2. Discuss the technical elements of the production—the sets, costumes, lights, and sound. Ask the students what they liked best and why. How did these elements create and define Henry's world?
 3. The original book inspired the overall production design for the play. What similarities or differences did you notice?
 4. In musicals, characters express themselves through music and movement. How did the songs help move the story forward? How did the choreography show you the differences between the characters?
 5. How is attending a live performance different from attending a movie? How does your experience change when you know the story is being performed live and the actors can see and hear you?
3. Henry develops a habit of eating books. Have you ever had to break a bad habit? What steps did you take to stop?
 4. Henry discovers he loves knowing things. What is your favorite school subject and why?
 5. Transitioning from one grade to the next can be scary but also exciting. Name three things you are looking forward to next school year.

ACTIVITIES

1. Pictures in Your Mind: Henry learns that one way to overcome his fear of reading is to use his imagination. Use the space below to draw an image inspired by the musical you just saw.

Discussion about the Play

1. What was your favorite moment in the play? What was the funniest? What was the most surprising?
2. Ms. Penny encourages Henry to take his time and not rush when reading. Can you think of a time when a teacher helped you overcome a challenge?

2. **Cooking & Writing:** Henry's favorite activity is cooking and eating with his family. At home, ask a caregiver to teach you a family recipe step-by-step. As you go through each step, write it down in your own words. Keep it or share it with your friends!
3. How many books did you read in 2024? Picture books count! List them below:

TITLE	AUTHOR

1-3 Books: GREAT!

3-6 Books: AMAZING!

6+ Books: INCREDIBLE



LETTERS OF THANKS

Write a letter of thanks to SCR and describe the most memorable aspects of attending a performance of *The Incredible Book Eating Boy*.

South Coast Repertory
Attn: TYA
PO Box 2197
Costa Mesa, CA 92628-2197

Resources

MORE ABOUT THE INCREDIBLE BOOK EATING BOY PICTURE BOOK

The full text of *The Incredible Book Eating Boy*:

<https://www.orange.k12.nj.us/cms/lib/NJ01000601/Centricity/Domain/1020/The%20Incredible%20Book%20Eating%20Boy.pdf>

MORE ABOUT AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR OLIVER JEFFERS

Official website: <https://oliverjeffers.com/>

MORE ABOUT PLAYWRIGHT MADHURI SHEKAR

Official website: <https://www.madhurishekar.com/>

OTHER STUDY GUIDES

Alliance Theatre study guide for *The Incredible Book Eating Boy*:

<https://www.alliancetheatre.org/sites/default/files/BEB-studyguide-k-5-v2.pdf>

WORD SCRAMBLE ANSWER KEY:

- | | | | |
|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 1. Gastronomical | 4. Fortified | 7. Compulsive | 10. Hassle |
| 2. Peers | 5. Amalgamation | 8. Perspective | 11. Logically |
| 3. Dissertation | 6. Culprit | 9. Predilection | 12. Ironic |

WORD SCRAMBLE ANSWER KEY:

E H R A O H R I W B Q A X W Q
V J D P M U A S H I M Y E S H
I H W K E L Y S P A F S L O K
S B E Z Y F A L L E F O K X N
L C I N O R I G G O L O M O I
U O N O I T A T R E S S I D X
P G G A U M I T D M B T S O S
M P C I A G I R D O C U W A O
O X E T C F B X P E Y W Y T H
C A L E F A M Y L L I T D H I
Y O L E R Q L I U X N C L
N F D X D S D L O P P C J A U
M H I D I E J W Y K M M M K D
G A S T R O N O M I C A L Y W
H H P P E R S P E C T I V E P