LITERATURE TO LIFE® is a performance-based literacy program that presents professionally staged verbatim adaptations of significant American literary works. The program gives students a new form of access to literature by bringing to life the world of the book with performances that create an atmosphere of discovery and spark the imagination. Literature to Life encourages reading, writing, and critical thinking and provides a catalyst for learning and self-expression.

This Literature To Life Teacher's Resource Guide was written by professional teaching artists with vast experience implementing effective, hands-on strategies in the classroom. It is designed for educators to introduce drama-in-education to their students, as both a pre- and post-Literature to Life performance guide. The activities presented meet the Learning Standards for English and the Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts. The exercises can be adapted (simplified or extended) according to the students’ special needs, maturity, interests, and abilities.

Forging the connection between theatre, literature and education is no longer a privilege—it is our responsibility as educators to not only open these doors, but to charge through them with purpose and certitude.

David Kener, Executive Director
The American Place Theatre

All excerpts from The Glass Castle by Jeannette Walls are reprinted here with permission. The text for the Literature to Life performance of The Glass Castle is taken directly from the book. All rights reserved. Photography by Paul Coughlin and Jennifer Barnette.
The following exercise is designed to be used BEFORE seeing the play!

Section 1: Introduction

Overall Objective: The students will have an introduction to Jeannette Walls and *The Glass Castle*.

In Her Own Words: Jeannette Walls and *The Glass Castle*

Objectives:
- Students will learn about the work and experience of the author by reading interviews.
- Students will begin thinking about elements of the book as a preview to the performance.

As a class, read the following excerpts taken from interviews with the author, Jeannette Walls, about her experience writing *The Glass Castle*:

**JW:** Some people think my parents are absolute monsters and should’ve had their children taken away from them. Some think they were these great free-spirited creatures who had a lot of wisdom that a lot of parents today don’t. People have said, “Oh, your experience reminds me of my own childhood.” This photographer for Entertainment Weekly told me that her parents were artists and were broke but they went to great lengths to create this magical childhood, and she took these wonderful photographs of me underwater, because that’s the part she related to. This magical, surreal childhood where rules don’t apply. *(Gothamist, www.gothamist.com, 5/27/05)*

**JW:** Somebody asked me if I believe in luck, and she doesn’t believe in luck, and I think it’s an interesting conversation. Luck is the hand you’re dealt, and we’re all dealt different hands, and life is the way you play it because you can get a crappy hand and play the heck out of it or you can get a wonderful hand and just misplay it terrible. So many people have wonderful hands that they just don’t do anything with. I got a mixed hand. You can’t sit around feeling sorry for yourself because that’s not gonna do anything. *(Gothamist, www.gothamist.com, 5/27/05)*

**JW:** While I was writing *The Glass Castle*, I was convinced that no one would be able to relate to it because my life was so very strange. I was so wrong. I cannot tell you how many people have come up to me and said something like, ‘The details of our lives might be different, but we have a lot in common.’ And then they’ll start telling me details about their own lives. Sometimes they’re people with hardscrabble backgrounds like mine, but sometimes they’ve had privileged childhoods off in boarding schools, but the thing that strikes me is that your class or geographic location or race doesn’t really matter that much. We all deal with the same issues. It’s been an incredible gift that readers have given me. *(Kansas City Star, 9/23/06)*

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**Exercise:**

After you’ve read the three excerpts as a class, ask the students to do a free write for 5 minutes. In this free write they should consider one (or more) of the following questions:

- a) What do you think the author’s life was like growing up?
- b) Where do you picture her childhood taking place? Describe it.
- c) What comes to mind when you consider the words: hardscrabble, welfare, luck, privilege, free-spirited.

Have students who are comfortable sharing their free writes do so with the rest of the class. Bring the sharing to a close by telling the class that through the performance they are going to see of *The Glass Castle*, they will gain insight into these questions and come up with others of their own.

* As a post-show follow-up to this exercise have the students revisit their free writes. Discuss how their pre-show impressions of the story were similar to or different from the actual story.
Section 2: Getting to Know the Text

Flashes of Memory...—Memoir Reading and Writing

Objectives:
- Students will gain a greater understanding of the memoir-writing genre.
- Students will read pieces from The Glass Castle text.
- Students will write their own memoir paragraph.

Brainstorm:
Ask students to create a class brainstorm about the different genres of writing they know. If memoir isn’t mentioned, add it to the list and ask students to share what they know about memoir. (A remembered event, universality, intimacy, conversational style, emotional truth, humor, and self-reflection are all elements to mention to encourage the discussion.) Make sure to put particular emphasis on the notion that the five senses play a big part in memoir writing.

Read:
Next, have the students break into small groups of 3-5 people. Give each group these four excerpts from The Glass Castle.

a) When dad wasn’t there, we invented our own games. We didn’t have many toys, but you didn’t need toys in a place like Battle Mountain. We’d get a piece of cardboard and go tobogganing down the depot’s narrow staircase. We’d jump off the roof of the depot, using an army-surplus blanket as our parachute and letting our legs buckle under us when we hit the ground, like Dad had taught us real parachutists do. We’d put a piece of scrap metal—or a penny, if we were feeling extravagant—on the railroad tracks right before the train came. After the train had roared by, the massive wheels churning, we’d run to get our newly flattened, hot and shiny piece of metal. (p. 54-TG C)

b) Mom decided hand-to-hand combat was the best tactic. We conducted (cock)roach massacres in the kitchen at night, because that was when they came out in force. We armed ourselves with rolled-up magazines or shoes—even though I was only nine, I already wore size ten shoes that Brian called “roach killers”—and sneaked into the kitchen. Mom threw the light switch, and we kids all started the assault. You didn’t even have to aim. We had so many roaches that if you hit any flat surface, you were sure to take out at least a few. (p. 100-TG C)

c) I looked for Brian in the cafeteria at lunchtime, but fourth-graders were on a different schedule, so I sat by myself and bit into the sandwich Erma had made for me that morning. It was tasteless and greasy. I pulled apart the two slices of Wonder bread. Inside was a thin smear of lard. That was it. No meat, no cheese, not even a slice of pickle. Even so, I chewed slowly, staring intently at my bite marks in the bread to delay as long as possible the moment I would have to leave the cafeteria and go out to the playground. When I was the last student left in the cafeteria, the janitor, who was putting the chairs on the tabletops so the floor could be mopped, told me it was time to go. (p. 138-TG C)

d) It got so cold in the house that icicles hung from the kitchen ceiling. The water in the sink turned into a solid block of ice, and the dirty dishes were stuck there as if they’d been cemented in place. Even the pan of water that we kept in the living room to wash up in usually had a layer of ice on it. We walked around the house wearing our coats and wrapped in blankets. We wore our coats to bed, too. There was no stove in the bedroom, and no matter how many blankets I piled on top of myself, I still felt cold. I lay awake at night, rubbing my feet with my hands, trying to warm them. (p. 176-TG C)

Compare:
Ask the small groups to come up with ideas or elements the excerpts have in common. Have them come back together and discuss the commonalities they discovered. List these commonalities on the board so that they can be used as a reference for the next part of the activity.

Write:
Tell the students that they are going to use what they just learned to write their own memoir paragraphs. You can offer them a prompt for beginning (“When I walked into first grade for the first time...”) or just encourage them to go with a family story that they have heard many times before. They should write the memory in paragraph form, making sure to include the elements that have been discussed.

Share:
Ask volunteers to share their ‘mini-memoirs’ with the class.

Discuss:
Use the excerpts to the left from The Glass Castle to begin a conversation about poverty.
- What do you notice about the living conditions described in the excerpts?
- How does the writer of these excerpts feel about these living conditions?
- Are the people in these excerpts happy? Does economic status always determine happiness?
- What are the positive aspects of these people’s lives?
- Does having no luxuries bring about anything positive in people’s lives?
- How does poverty affect the people in your neighborhood?
Section 3: Exploring the Themes

Help Wanted—Creating a Job Posting for Parents

Objectives:
- Students will consider and articulate the attributes of a parent.
- Students will work in groups to create a job description.

Exercise:
Ask the students to think about the types of information a job posting contains. Basically, the posting needs to communicate the characteristics that the person who applies needs to possess. What do they think a job description would be for the principal of their school, a librarian, or a video game designer? What are the skills that someone in one of those roles would need? How do you phrase them to make it clear to the potential applicants?

The job posting starts with a brief description of what the job is, followed by a list of requisite skills/attributes the applicant would ideally have, and then a list of the tasks that will be involved in the job. Create a job posting together as a class.

Now students are going to be creating another job posting, but this time the job being advertised is that of ‘a parent’. Students can choose to work independently or in small groups and they have a certain amount of time (20+ minutes) to create their job posting. Tape the finished postings around the room and have students read their classmates’ work.

Discuss:
Discuss insights the students have as a result of a) doing the posting themselves and b) reading the postings of others.

‘People in Glass Houses’—The Blueprint for a Dream House

Objectives:
- Students will create a design/floor plan for their ideal home.
- Students will deepen their understanding of the symbolism of the glass castle.

Exercise:
Have a student read the following quote from the performance they are going to see:

‘All of Dad’s genius is being put together for one thing... The Glass Castle. It will have a glass ceiling and thick glass walls and even a glass staircase. The Glass Castle will have solar cells on the top that will catch the sun’s light to make electricity. Dad has worked out the plans. He carries around the pictures, what he calls blue prints, for the Glass Castle wherever he goes. All we have to do is find gold. He is going to build us a great big Glass Castle in the desert.’

Generate a discussion among the students about the following questions: Why would someone want a glass house? And why a castle? And why would they want it to be in the desert? Students are going to create their own ‘blueprint’ for a dream home of their own. Their blueprint must include: the material the house would be made of, the layout of the house, and the locale where the house would be built. In addition, they are to come up with a description of how the house represents them. Students will then present their blueprints to the rest of the class.

Discuss:
- Why are blueprints needed before a house gets built?
- Do you think you could build a house without a blueprint?
- Is a blueprint enough to make your dream house come true?
- What are the steps necessary to go from blueprint to actually building the house?
**MAP/TIMELINE of THE WALLS’ SKEDADDLE**

**Arizona**
- A Fish Creek Canyon, AZ (40 miles e. of Phoenix) - Rose Mary and Rex meet.
- B Somewhere in “southern Arizona” (no town specified) - Jeannette catches fire at the age of 3.

**Nevada**
- C On their way to Nevada a train jumps the tracks and delivers a cantaloupe feast to the Walls family. On the way to Las Vegas Jeannette falls out of the car.
- D Las Vegas, NV – Rex hits it big and takes the family to a fancy restaurant where they have “Flaming ice-cream cake”

**California**
- E San Francisco, CA - The hotel where the Walls family is staying catches on fire.
- F Midland, CA – Jeannette’s father gives her and her siblings stars for Christmas.
- G Blythe, CA – Jeannette’s first grade teacher, Ms. Cook, always chose her to read aloud when the principal came into the classroom.

Between Blythe, CA & Battle Mountain, AZ the Walls children ride in the back of the U haul.

**Arizona**
- H Battle Mountain, AZ – The old railroad depot that the Walls’ lived in was “the first real home” that Jeannette could remember.
- I Phoenix, AZ – (They lived in Grandma’s old adobe house) For her birthday Jeanette asks her father to quit drinking.

The Walls family leaves Phoenix to head for W. Virginia (their exact route is not specified but it says on pg. 130 “after crossing the Mississippi, we swung north toward Kentucky, then east”)

**West Virginia**
- J Welch, WV – Jeannette begins to work for her school’s newspaper. Foundation laid for the Glass Castle, never to be built.

**New York**
- K New York City, NY – Jeannette begins her successful career as a journalist.

**POVERTY RATES BY STATE**

<table>
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<th>State</th>
<th>Population/Rank</th>
<th>Poverty Rank</th>
<th>Child Poverty Rate</th>
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<td>Arizona</td>
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<td>Nevada</td>
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<td>New York</td>
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<td>14.6%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following exercises are designed to be used AFTER seeing the play!

Section 4: Post-Show Activities

People...Are Not As They Appear—Challenging Assumptions*

Objectives:
• Students will challenge their own assumptions that they make about people based on appearance.
• Students will adopt different character perspectives.

** In advance of class clip photographs of people from magazines, newspapers and other media sources. Ideally, they will be involved in an action of some sort. Number each picture. There should be at least one photo for every student in your class.

Read:
Have the students think back to the beginning of the performance of The Glass Castle and read the following quote aloud:

‘I was sitting in a taxi, when I looked out the window and saw Mom, my mother, rooting through a Dumpster. Mom stood fifteen feet away. She had tied rags around her shoulders to keep out the spring chill and was picking through the trash. Mom’s gestures were all familiar—the way she tilted her head and thrust out her lower lip when studying items of potential value that she’d hoisted out of the Dumpster, the way her eyes widened with childish glee when she found something she liked. Her long hair was streaked with gray, tangled and matted, and her eyes had sunk deep into their sockets—to the people walking by, she probably looked like any of the thousands of homeless people in New York City. But still she reminded me of the mom she’d been when I was a kid, swan-diving off cliffs and painting in the desert and reading Shakespeare aloud.’

Consider:
Pay attention to the details that Ms. Walls chooses to include in this passage. She mentions the ‘sunken eyes’, the hoisting of things from the dumpster, the tangled hair. She ALSO includes the reading of Shakespeare aloud, the painter and the childish glee she exhibits. Is one of these descriptions any more accurate than the other? Ms. Walls is writing about what she sees directly, like an artist sketching a still life, but she is also writing about this woman who is her mother, the history involved there, and what she means to her.

MY GREATEST HOPE FOR THE GLASS CASTLE WAS THAT IT WOULD TOUCH THE LIVES OF STUDENTS IN THE SAME WAY THAT CERTAIN BOOKS INSPIRED, ENLIGHTENED OR COMFORTED ME. LITERATURE TO LIFE IS BRINGING THE GLASS CASTLE TO CLASSROOMS WITH AN INTELLIGENCE, ENTHUSIASM, AND CREATIVITY BEYOND WHAT I WOULD HAVE EVER DARED DREAM.”

—JEANNETTE WALLS, AUTHOR OF THE GLASS CASTLE
Exercise:
Students will each get a photograph with a number on it from the front of the room. On a piece of notebook paper students should do the following:

1) Write the number of the photograph they have.
2) Write WHO they are in relation to the person in the photo (encourage them to use their imaginations to create a character that has some relationship to the person in the photo; are they a complete stranger on the street? A sister? An uncle? A boss? A teacher?)
3) Write a monologue from the Point of View of this new character which includes a description of what they see when they look at the person in the photograph. Students need to make sure that they are incorporating their relationship to the person into the monologue. Once students are done with this, they should put the photo they used back at the front of the room and exchange it for another. They should repeat the same activity, choosing a different character and perspective from which to write.

For or Against–The Great Debate

Objectives:
- Students will examine a central conflict of the book through taking a position and trying to sway a jury.
- Students will work in groups that require teamwork and support.

Exercise:
Break the class into thirds. One third of the class will be arguing for the Walls children to stay with their parents. One third is arguing for the Walls children to be removed from the custody of the parents. The final third will be the panel of jurors who needs to determine which side is more persuasive. Give the class 15-20 minutes to discuss and prepare their case. While the sides are preparing their arguments, the ‘jurors’ should be coming up with ‘characters’ they will take on for the debate. How old are they? Do they have their own children? What do they do for a living? This will shape the perspective that they have when they are listening to the debate. Flip a coin to see which side gets the power of decision about presenting first. Each side will get the same amount of time to present their case. There can be a few minutes at the end for questions from the jurors. At the end of the debate, the jurors can vote on which side was most persuasive.

Discuss:
After this activity, make sure to allow time for discussion. If time permits, have the students switch roles and replay the debate. Was it easier to argue one side over the other? What went into a compelling argument for each side? What impact does the ‘character’ of a juror have on how they weigh in on the debate?
A Fighting Chance—Inner Conflict and Character Development

Objective:
- Students will represent inner conflict through the form of written dialogue.

Consider:
There are many different examples of fighting in *The Glass Castle*. Some are fights that we can see happen. Rex and Rose Mary get in violent, physical fights that end just as intensely as they begin. Dintia Hewitt and her friends pick a fight with Jeannette and beat her up on the playground. Jeannette gets into a verbal fight with her mother about who is the parent in the family and Rex enters the fight and has to ‘choose sides’, resulting in a severe whipping for Jeannette. There are other types of fighting going on in the book as well, but it isn’t visible in the same way. The Walls fight to survive. Children are taught to ‘fight back’ when other kids pick on them. Jeannette’s mixed feelings for her father ‘fight it out’ inside her as she grows up and her thoughts about him begin to change. This last form of ‘fighting’—Jeannette having conflicting emotions about her parents will be the focus of the next activity.

Exercise:
Tell the students that they will be writing a ‘fight’ dialogue between the two different ‘sides’ of Jeannette—the side that wants to trust and follow the lead of her parents, and the side that needs to break free from them. The scene can be written individually or in pairs. In writing the scene it is important to remember that the two sides need to really be listening to each other and responding to what the other says. Students should then rehearse and stage the scene and present to the class.

For more information about Literature to Life programs, please visit our website at www.americanplacetheatre.org

A Message in a Motto

Objectives:
- Students will create personal mottoes for a character and for themselves.
- Students will use motto messages as a springboard for improvised scenes.

Both Rex and Rose Mary are passionate individuals who are committed to living life to its fullest. They are also both big believers in mottoes—sayings that encapsulate their ‘philosophies of life’:

Rex:
- You can’t cling to the side your whole life.
- No point in building a good house unless you put down the right foundation.
- Rich city folks lived in fancy apartments, but their air was so polluted, they couldn’t see the stars.

Rose Mary:
- Never hate anyone. Not even your worst enemies.
- If a woman looks good, she feels good.
- All seasons have something to offer.

Exercise:
Based on what students know about Jeannette Walls’ past and her current career have them work in pairs to create a list of mottoes that they think Jeannette would ‘live by’. Next, ask them to create personal mottoes for themselves and add them to the list. Combine the pairs of students to create groups of 4 or 5. Within these groups students should choose one of the mottoes on their list (one of Jeannette’s, one of their own or one from the book.) The motto becomes the title of a scene that they are going to write and then present to the class. After each scene is presented, have a discussion about the characters involved and how they each connect to the motto that inspired the scene.
Bibliography

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Bailey, Sally Dorothy. *Wings to Fly.* (Woodbine House, 1993)
Eron, Polly. *Drama in the Classroom.* (Lost Coast Press, 1996)
Heathcote, Dorothy and Gavin Bolton. *Drama for Learning.* (Heinemann Drama, 1995)
Morgan, Norah and Juliana Saxton. *Teaching Drama.* (Heinemann, 1987)
Sklar, Daniel Judah. *Playmaking.* (Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1990)
What to Do After You See the Performance

Discuss:
The following topics could be discussed or explored through essay writing
• Why do you think Jeannette Walls devotes a good portion of her story to her evolving relationship with Dinitia Hewitt?
• What does it mean to feel safe?
• How big a role does Rex’s alcoholism play in the story?
• The hole for the glass castle gets filled up with garbage. That could be described as a metaphor in this story. Explain.
• How does rural poverty differ from urban poverty?
  How are they the same?

Draw:
• Draw a picture of how you think Jeannette might have imagined the Glass Castle that her father was going to build.
• Draw a picture of how you imagine a Glass Castle.
• Draw a picture of one of the other houses that
  Jeannette lived in from the memoir (Ninety-three Little Hobart Street, the train depot, or her grand mother’s house in Phoenix)
• Draw a picture of any other images that came to you while you watched the play.

Write:
Jeannette Walls is a very successful journalist; she began her career at an early age when she wrote for her high school’s newspaper. Design a school (or class) newspaper and dedicate a few pages to your experience at the performance of The Glass Castle. Include some of the following in the newspaper spread: 1) A review of the play as if you were a famous theatre critic. 2) Interviews with your classmates who attended the play. 3) An editorial piece on the issue of poverty in America. 4) A newspaper column discussing how the play enlightened your view of poverty in America.

Write a letter to the actor, director, or teaching artist in response to the play.

Write a letter to Jeannette Walls in response to the novel.

Wynn Handman, Artistic Director/Co-Founder
David Kener, Executive Director
Jennifer Barnette, Managing Director
Jillian Mojica, Office Manager
Adi Ortner, Arts Education Associate