

Shoes of Sand

**Written by Suzanne LeBeau
Translator John Van Burek**

**Presented by Quest Theatre
Calgary, Alberta**

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ABOUT THIS STUDY GUIDE

Live theatre performances are an exciting and complementary part of education for students. Quest Theatre hopes that watching the play, SHOES OF SAND, will be meaningful and memorable for you and your students. This study guide has been created to enhance your students' theatrical experience. Suggestions are provided to prepare students for the play they will see, as well as to follow up after. We hope you will take some of these ideas and adapt them to suit the needs of the curriculum and the interests of your classes. Enjoy SHOES OF SAND!

ABOUT THE PLAY SHOES OF SAND

In this English première of a critically acclaimed French play, Élise and Léo are brother and sister, living a regimented life and schedule dictated by the sand in their hourglass. All that they know and fear about the world beyond their door comes from *The Great Book of the World Outside*.

One morning, Léo wakes up first and accidentally lets their flying shoes escape out the front door. Forced to face his fears, and not wanting to wake his sister, Léo races off to capture the shoes.

When Élise awakens from an exquisite dream, although afraid for Léo's safety and her own, she follows him.

By opening their eyes to the world around them, daring to challenge their fears and discovering the joys of exploration, sister and brother break down time and open new doors. The world looks, tastes, smells, feels and sounds much different than they ever could have imagined.

The play reveals what it's like to be a child in a world where fear and exploration collide. After all, every stubbed toe is an experience worth the sacrifice.

ABOUT THE CHARACTERS

Élise is the keeper of the time, protector to her brother. She tries to teach her brother all the important lessons she has learned, such as “to catch cold is terrible”, “to walk around in stocking feet – that’s just not done”, and “those who run fall – he who falls gets hurt.”

Léo appreciates being taken care of by his sister. He enjoys being younger because he can leave to Élise the trouble of doing what he doesn't like. He soaks up every experience in the outside world on his delightful journey.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT, SUZANNE LEBEAU

“I want to talk about life in all its complexity, without trying to give simple answers to questions that aren't simple.”
Suzanne Lebeau

Suzanne Lebeau holds a B.A. in Arts and Education and also trained as an actress, studying in Montreal under Gilles Maheu and Jacques Crete (1970-73), in Paris under Etienne Decroux, and in Wroclaw, Poland at the Pantomime Theatre and Puppet Theatre.

After co-founding Le Carrousel, a Montreal-based children's theatre company, with Gilles Gaudreault in 1975, Suzanne gradually gave up acting to devote herself exclusively to writing. For over several decades, she has been exploring the world of children, enriching young imaginations and constantly questioning “what's “allowed,” what's “right” and what's “possible”. Today, with more than twenty original plays to her credit, she is internationally recognized as a leader in playwriting for young audiences, and is among the most-performed Quebec playwrights in the world. Most of her plays have been translated (many into several languages) and produced internationally.

Ms. Lebeau has been the recipient of many prestigious awards, including the Literary Award Governor General of Canada (2009) for her play THE SOUND OF CREAKING BONES.

ABOUT THE PLAY TRANSLATOR, JOHN VAN BUREK

Born in Toronto, John Van Burek studied at St. Anselm College in the United States, at the University of New Brunswick, and at the University of Toronto. He has been a practicing theatre artist for over twenty years, in both French and English, throughout Canada. He has also worked in the fields of opera, film and television.

In 1971, he founded the Théâtre Français de Toronto where, over the years, he directed some sixty productions. He stepped down as Artistic Director of the company in 1991. Mr. Van Burek has taught at Ryerson Theatre School, York University and the National Theatre School in Montreal. He is also one of Canada's leading translators for theatre, most notably of Michel Tremblay's plays.

DISCUSSION TOPICS FOR BEFORE THE PLAY

1/ What would it be like to be locked in your room and never allowed to leave? How would you spend your time?

2/ Do you remember your dreams when you wake up? Share stories / moments from your dreams.

3/ What does the word *time* mean to you? Do you worry about time? Is your daily routine always the same or does it change from day to day? How would you feel if your schedule were so strictly set up that each day was exactly the same as the day before?

4/ What are you most afraid of? Have you ever feared something and later realized that you worried for nothing when you faced that fear? How do you handle your fears? What do you do when you feel afraid? How can you help a friend or family member who is feeling scared?

5/ What is the best adventure you have ever had? Where were you? What did you see and do? What will you always remember about that special time?

6/ Have you ever seen a play? What was the name of it? What did you like/dislike about it? What is your favourite memory about that experience? What makes watching a play different from watching television?

DISCUSSION TOPICS FOR AFTER THE PLAY

- 1/ In your own words, tell the story of the play, SHOES OF SAND and what you thought of the characters. What did the title of the play have to do with the story?
- 2/ Who was your favourite character and why? Would you like to have Élise as your older sister or Léo as your younger brother? Why/why not?
- 3/ Did you feel the same way about the characters at the end of the story as you did at the beginning or middle of it?
- 4/ Which part of the play did you like the most and why?
- 5/ Was there any part of the story you didn't understand?
- 6/ Would you want to live the way Élise and Léo did for most of their lives until Léo ran off after the shoes? Why/why not? Why do you think they obeyed the rules of the hourglass?
- 7/ What did you think about the *Great Book of the World Outside*? Why was it so important to Élise and Léo? Was everything in the book true?
- 8/ What might Élise and Léo's lives be like if the story continued?
- 9/ Why do you think the shoes were kept locked up in a cage?
- 10/ Would you encourage other people to see this play? Why/why not?

THEMES TO EXPLORE IN SHOES OF SAND

Time

In the play, SHOES OF SAND, Élise and Léo are prisoners of time. Each run of the sand in their hourglass means something in their rigid daily routine must be done; for example, after the first hourglass, it's time to get up. After the second hourglass, it's time to wash their hands. And after the third, it's time for Léo's lessons.

There are many definitions and connotations for the word *time*. Expressions such as "be on time", "in the nick of time", "pass the time", "pressed for time", "have no time for", and "it's about time" are frequently used in our daily lives. Why are we always worried about time? Why is time so important to our culture and way of life? What will happen in the lives of Élise and Léo if they step out of their routines and defy the dictates of the sands of time in their hourglass?

Fear

In the play, Élise and Léo live in a walled-up world in which fear and the desire to explore confront each other. They are accustomed to the safe routine that rules their lives until one morning when the world opens up for them. Léo embraces this freely, bravely, and with total abandon. Élise, on the other hand, having always been Léo's protector, ventures out to look for him with great trepidation: "*Outside there are ... germs and epidemics ... the wolf that lurks at night in the forest; I'm scared.*"

Why can the unknown be so scary? How can we manage our fears when we approach something new? And what can we learn about ourselves when we finally do face what we fear the most?

Exploration and Discovery

What would it be like to see the outside world for the very first time when all you have ever known about it was found in a book? Élise and Léo's *Great Book of the World Outside* has been their only source because they have never left their living quarters. The book imparts such knowledge as: "rivers flow to the sea and that sea goes all the way around the world", "the road and the mountains are dangerous", and "to help someone in danger, we must act quickly and with courage ..."

How can children make discoveries about themselves and the world if they do not explore it? Does keeping them wrapped up in a soft cocoon prepare them for adulthood? Are all rules important to follow? Which ones are most important to follow and which are not? How can we learn to think for ourselves if someone or something else is always telling us what to think?

ACTIVITIES FOR BEFORE THE PLAY **GRADES K - 2**

Time

1/ In order to have students explore the idea of time and what it means in their lives, ask them the following questions.

- a) What time do you wake up on school days? On the weekend? Is it always the same?
- b) What time do you eat meals on school days? On the weekend? Is it always the same?
- c) What time do you leave for school in the morning? What time do you arrive home from school at the end of the day? Is it always the same?
- d) What time do you do your homework? Is it always the same?
- e) What time do you go to sleep on school days? On the weekend? Is it always the same?
- f) What other activities are you involved in outside of school such as sports, music, drama, dance, etc.? When do you take part in these? Is it always the same?

- g) Do you have any free time? What do you do then? Is it always the same?
h) What would you do if you had permission to change your usual schedule and routine for a whole week and do whatever you wanted whenever you wanted to? How do you think this would make you feel?

2/ Ask students how they think people knew what time or season it was before clocks and watches were invented?

Teach the following poem by having students repeat the words and coming up with a series of simple actions to reinforce the meaning.

The Faces of the Clock
The Big hand is busy
But the Small Hand has power.
The Large One counts the minutes.
But the Little One names the hour.

When both hands stand at the top together,
It's sure to be Twelve O'clock. But whether
That's twelve at noon or twelve at night
Depends on if it's dark or light.

Fear

1/ Fear can evoke many visceral reactions coming from instinct rather than intellect.

Ask your students to complete the following phrases to see how they respond to the idea of fear and what it means to them.

- a) Whenever I feel afraid, I ...
- b) If fear were a colour, it would be ...
- c) If fear were a sound, it would be ...
- d) If fear were a smell, it would be ...
- e) If fear were a taste, it would be ...
- f) If fear were a shape, it would be ...
- g) If fear were an object, it would be ...
- h) If fear were an animal, it would be ...

2/ Using the phrases found in Activity #1 on the theme of fear, encourage students to create colourful artwork expressing their feelings about fear and facing their fears.

Fold a piece of art paper into three equal panels. On the left-hand side, students draw portraits of themselves feeling very afraid. In the middle section, create an abstract art depiction of fear. And on the right-hand side will be student self-portraits showing them bravely facing and conquering their fears. In effect, they have triumphed over their fears and come out the other side!

Exploration and Discovery

1/ Ask students to think about a time when they learned or experienced something brand new that they had never known before. Was it a trip out of town, tying their own shoelaces, swimming, riding a bike, baking cookies, reading new words, playing a sport, singing a song, going to a new school, or any number of other things?

Encourage students to share their thoughts. Ask them if they were nervous or afraid before they tried what they had never done before, and what they thought and felt when they made the new discovery.

2/ Take your students on a journey. Work in a large empty space, if possible, and begin by having students lie on the floor, eyes closed. Use the following scenario for your narration. Students will perform all the actions as the story goes along.

You are asleep in your bed at home. You wake up slowly, stretch and jump out of bed. Today is the day you are going, going, going on a journey, going on a journey to a brand new place. Say it with me as you get dressed and pack your back pack (repeat the chant) going, going, going on a journey, going on a journey to a brand new place.

You walk out into the sunshine and look both ways before you cross the street to get to the park where you climb a huge hill. When you get to the top, you realize you're hungry so you get an orange out of your pack, sit down and slowly peel and eat it. It is sweet and cool, and the sticky juice drips down your chin and all over your hands. As soon as you finish your orange, a big black cloud covers the sun and a cold wind begins to blow. You stand up, put on your hoodie and grab your pack just as a huge gust of wind picks you up and spins you around. You are now flying on the wind and you're scared. To calm yourself, you say – going, going, going on a journey, going on a journey to a brand new place. You travel over your town to the nearby forest where the wind spins you gently down to the ground under a huge tree. The forest is dark and you have never been there before. As you sit and catch your breath, you feel something tap you on the head. You're scared that it might be a dangerous animal. As you jump up, you see that it was only a pinecone that has dropped from the tree.

You want to go home, so you carefully start to move through the forest to try to find the way out, but the trees are so tall and the branches so low that you have to bend over to get under them. To give yourself courage, you repeat going, going, etc.

You finally see a clearing, but to get to it, you have to walk over a big log to cross a stream to get to the other side. Just as you get to the clearing, another huge gust of wind spins you up, up, up, over the town, and gently sets you down on top of the hill in the park across from your house. You run home, looking both ways before you cross the street, back into your house, safe and sound.

ACTIVITIES FOR BEFORE THE PLAY GRADES 3 – 6

Time

1/ In the play, SHOES OF SAND, Élise and Léo, prisoners of time, must complete certain tasks after each run of the hourglass. Create a class poem about having something to do as each hour elapses. Use the following format.

You say: “*The clock strikes one*”, then students suggest a line to complete the stanza and rhyme with the word ‘one’. For example, “*It’s time to have fun.*” Continue through all the numbers up to and including twelve (some poetic license may be required). Use the phrase “*It’s time to ...*” at the beginning of each rhyming line.

Once your class poem is completed, try saying it with some variations. For example, you may wish to incorporate musical or rhythm instruments to make the sound of the clock and/or repeat the last word of each stanza the number of times the clock strikes adding simple movement or gestures.

2/ Brainstorm with your students to come up with a list of expressions that include the word *time*.

Some examples are:

Be on <i>time</i>	<i>Time</i> will tell
Have a good <i>time</i>	<i>Time</i> off
<i>Time</i> to go	It’s about <i>time</i>

As you create your list, examine each expression in terms of that it means to your students and what they associate it with. An expression such as ‘*time to go*’ might evoke different responses in different circumstances; if you are not ready when you hear ‘*time to go*’ will feel different from hearing it when you have been waiting to leave for a long time, or if you are leaving for something you are dreading or looking forward to with excited anticipation.

Fear

1/ Eleanor Roosevelt was married to United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt. His presidency lasted from March, 1933 until April, 1945. She once said: “You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing which you think you cannot do.”

Talk about this quotation with your students. Ask them what they think it means and whether they agree or disagree with the statement. In the discussion, students should be able to back up their opinions with reasons. Encourage them to speak with confidence and authority as they share their ideas as well as listening respectfully to each other. Some students may change their original opinion based on the ideas of others; they should have the opportunity to express their new choices and why they changed their minds.

2/ Have students write the word FEAR in the top centre of a piece of blank paper. Fold the paper in half or draw a line down the centre from top to bottom. On top of the left-hand side, write *fear is good and useful when ...* On the top of the right-hand side, write *fear is not good and useful when ...* Students will then complete each phrase, coming up with as many examples as possible. Some suggestions might be – *fear is good and useful when the sign at the beach warns of jellyfish in the water so you don't go for a swim.* Or, *fear is not good and useful when you just run away from the bully who stole your lunch and bus tickets and don't tell an adult about it.* Once students have completed their lists have them share their work with each other.

Exploration and Discovery

1/ Write each of the following suggested settings on separate index cards. You may also wish to come up with your own settings.

- on a pirate ship
- on a desert island
- on the moon
- on the ocean floor in a submarine
- at the summit of Mount Everest
- in a tropical rain forest
- on a life raft in the Pacific Ocean
- trapped in a mine

Divide students into small groups and give each group one index card. Their task is to come up with group stories set in their assigned locations where they, most likely, have never been before.

One person in each group can be the secretary and jot down notes so the stories can be shared later on.

Each story must have a definite beginning, middle, high point or climax and ending.

Prompt them by asking a few questions. What are the dangers? How can you get to safety? What might you discover about yourself and others along the way?

Encourage students to listen to each other's ideas, consider them, and work cooperatively to combine their ideas to come up with their stories.

2/ In the play, SHOES OF SAND, Élise and Léo will make many discoveries about themselves as they explore the outside world for the very first time.

Take your students through their own explorations moving through places and environments, some real and some kind of silly. The important thing is that they buy in and go on the different journeys with full commitment.

If possible, have students begin by standing in their own spaces in the room. As you announce each of the phrases listed below, students will silently move through that environment. You may also wish to alter the speed with which they move, from slow motion, to regular motion, or fast motion. Encourage them to

exaggerate all their movements while respecting each other's space at the same time.

- a) You are moving through tall underbrush.
- b) You are moving through a dark, dangerous alley.
- c) You are moving across a wide street on a rainy, windy night.
- d) You are moving in the burning desert, looking for water.
- e) You are moving through a forest of man-eating plants.
- f) You are moving in outer space, weightless.
- g) You are moving down a road of sticky asphalt and tar.
- h) You are moving across a log over a ravine full of crocodiles.
- i) You are moving through a giant bowl of whipped cream.
- k) You are moving across a street of broken glass.
- l) You are moving through a swamp.
- m) You are moving through a bowl of chewed-up bubble gum.
- n) You are moving across a room of bouncy springs.
- o) You are moving in a bowl of feathers.

ACTIVITIES FOR AFTER THE PLAY **GRADES K – 2**

Time

1/ Ask students why they think the hourglass was so important to Élise and Léo. What did it mean to them? Why did they usually follow the rules of the hourglass? How did Élise feel when she broke the hourglass on her journey to find her brother? Was this a good or a bad thing? Will Élise and Léo ever need or want another hourglass? In case they do, ask students to create colourful pictures for them of what a new hourglass might look like.

2/ Take students through Élise and Léo's daily routine, as dictated by each run of the hourglass. Note: there are a few changes here as not all actions were in the script.

Have students start standing and complete the actions silently, in pantomime, as you announce each one. It might be fun to change up the timing by doing some actions in slow or fast motion.

1st Hourglass: Time to get up.

2nd Hourglass: Time to eat an orange and take your vitamins.

3rd Hourglass: Time for your lessons from the *Great Book of the World Outside*.

4th Hourglass: Time for your exercises – walk carefully, head held high.

5th Hourglass: Time for lunch.

6th Hourglass: Time for your nap.

7th Hourglass: Time to get up from your nap.

8th Hourglass: Time to run after Léo.

9th Hourglass: Time for your snack.

- 10th Hourglass: Time to tidy up.
11th Hourglass: Time to eat dinner and wash up.
12th Hourglass: Time to go to bed.

Fear

1/ Ask students what they thought and felt about Élise when she said:

*“Léo is outside ... He’s outdoors!
He doesn’t know that stones make us fall,
He has never met an unfamiliar face ...
He doesn’t know how to cross the street.
He’s going to get lost.”*

What about when she later said:

*“It is written: he who falls GETS HURT.
the elbows,
the knees,
the back,
the hands,
the toes ...”*

What was Élise afraid of? Was Léo as afraid as his sister? Why didn’t he hurt himself when he fell yet Élise did? What did each of them learn about fear from their adventure in the outside world?

2/ How much do students remember about what Élise and Léo had been taught to be afraid of by the *Great Book of the World Outside*?

Some examples are:

- *Those who run, fall.*
- *Clouds protect us from the sun and warn us of storms.*
- *The terrifying word ‘storm’ means when nature gets angry announced by black clouds.*
- *The road and the mountains are dangerous.*
- *Never go near an unknown river.*
- *To drown is terrible.*
- *You can’t go outside at night.*
- *Too much sand blinds you and the waves are dangerous.*

Ask students which ideas they remember from the book and use the above examples, if necessary. Go through each one, talk about it, and decide whether the statement is true or false.

Exploration and Discovery

1/ Léo described the beginning of his discovery of the world outside this way:

*The shoes are running along
this road that never ends
and the wind on my cheeks is soft ...
I am running as fast as the shoes, even barefoot ...*

My legs are running as if they had always run.
Élise describes her first experience like this:
The trees ... very tall ... impressive!
It's true that the smell of the flowers is ... exquisite.
The blue sky, immense ...
And those little white clouds, that are taking shape ...
Clouds!
I don't like the sound of that word.

Ask students to imagine they are Élise or Léo discovering the world outside for the very first time when all they knew about it before was from a book. Draw or paint bright landscapes of what they saw then sign the work as either Élise or Léo and give it a title. These landscapes may be as exaggerated as possible to give a sense of the heightened experience – mountains are huge, the sky is bluer than blue, etc.

2/ Seat students in a circle and ask them to think about the end of the play. Why was Élise so afraid that the Sandman knew they went out, the shoes ran away, some pages of the *Great Book* were torn out and the hourglass was broken? Why did she blame herself and not Léo? Why were the shoes so happy to be home? Why did Élise leave after saying, “Hey, what if the Sandman didn't exist?” Going around the circle, have students each take a turn continuing the story about where Élise goes and what she discovers when she leaves at the end. Does she go back to the mountain and the river? What does the world outside look like by moonlight? Is she afraid? Does she get hurt? Does she ever go back? What happens to Léo?

ACTIVITIES FOR AFTER THE PLAY **GRADES 3 – 6**

Time

1/ The play is called SHOES OF SAND. The sand is trapped in the hourglass until Élise breaks it. Léo discovers that sand runs freely at the river: “*Sand ... and it's playing in the water, without counting the minutes.*” Both Élise and Léo seem to be intimidated by the Sandman. Who is he and what does he stand for? Ask students what they thought the image or idea of sand represents in the play. And what did it mean for the lives of Élise and Léo when she asks: “*Hey, what if the Sandman didn't exist?*” Does this mean that he will no longer have control? Students will now imagine that they are either Élise or Léo. Write letters to the Sandman telling him about what they have learned about time throughout the story and informing him that they no longer want or need his control over their lives.

2/ How much do students recall of the strict routine Élise and Léo followed as dictated by the turns of the hourglass? Create a list of all their regular activities; for example, waking up, lessons from the Great Book, snacks, exercises, etc. In small groups, ask students to create tableaux (freeze-frame) statues of one moment in time that shows a routine activity in Élise and Léo's usual day. Then have the students choose another moment in time when Élise and Léo were free from the control of the hourglass, out in the world, to enact in another statue. Rehearse and share.

Fear

1/ In the play, SHOES OF SAND, Élise referred to the symbol of a skull and crossbones. *"The word STORM is terrifying: there's a skull and crossbones in that word."* *"Never go near an unknown river ... To drown is terrible ... There is a skull and crossbones on this word."*

Ask students what the symbol of the skull and crossbones looks like. What does it mean? Where might they see that symbol?

Create black, white and red posters using the symbol of the skull and crossbones to serve as warnings of situations or objects that are dangerous and must be feared. Write captions to clarify the meanings of the images. For example, if the skull and crossbones poster contains a bottle of a corrosive cleaning liquid, the caption might read: DO NOT DRINK!!!

2/ Ask students to imagine that they are hosts of a television talk show. Today's episode is on 'fear of the unknown' and the special guests to be interviewed are Élise and Léo from the play, SHOES OF SAND.

Brainstorm to come up with a list of questions, some just for Élise, some just for Léo, and some that they might be able to answer together.

Some examples might be:

- For Élise - Why were you afraid of the Sandman?
Why did you keep the shoes locked up in a cage?
Why were you afraid for Léo when you realized he had gone outside?
- For Léo - Were you afraid to follow the shoes when they flew out the door?
Why did you go?
What were you most afraid of when you were outside?
Were you afraid your sister would be really angry with you and what did you think she might do?
- For both - Why did you never go outside before the day the shoes flew out the door?
What scared you the most about the outside world?
Are you still afraid of the outside world?

Once you have your list of questions, ask for volunteers to play the roles of the interviewer, Élise and Léo. Change volunteers as often as possible so that everyone gets a chance to play one of the roles.

Exploration and Discovery

1/ How much do your students remember about Élise and Léo's *Great Book of the World Outside*? What had the characters in the play learned from the book about life, rules of what to do or not to do, and what to fear? Was everything in the *Great Book* true? What did Élise and Léo discover when they went out into the world for the first time?

Have students create their own version of the *Great Book* using their own knowledge and life experiences. Create a class collage-style mural entitled *The Great Wall of the World Outside*. The purpose of the wall is to share students' knowledge, experiences, advice and cautions with each other and others who may visit your classroom such as younger students or those who have recently come from another country or culture.

The mural should contain images and words. Images can be anything from drawings, paintings, photos, cartoons, computer graphics or pictures from a magazine. The words accompanying each image may be anything from a description of the image, to a statement of fact, to advice or warnings. The important thing to remember is that students are creating this wall to educate and inform others like Élise and Léo who have not had much experience in the outside world.

2/ What if the story, *SHOES OF SAND*, continued after Élise went out into the moonlit night?

Have students write a continuation of the story in the first person, from Léo's point of view. Perhaps he wakes up from a nightmare to find his sister gone, his shoe on his bed, and the door wide open. What does he do? Does he go after his sister? Does he go back to sleep? Does Élise come back? What could possibly happen?