

Annabelle's Star

Classroom guide



WELCOME!

Thank you for booking tickets to see **Annabelle's Star** at The Ark. We firmly believe that attending a live performance is simply the best way to ignite a life long interest in theatre, and we hope that attending the show will be an enjoyable and thought-provoking experience for the children in your class.

This Classroom Guide contains information on **Annabelle's Star**, as well as suggestions for relevant classroom activities that will help children to develop a deeper understanding of the play and its key themes.

The exercises in the guide can be practised either before or after you attend, but we recommend that most of the discussion take place after attending, so that the children don't have too many pre-formed ideas formed about the experience beforehand.



Introduction to *Annabelle's Star*

by Director and Co-writer Raymond Keane

I am excited by making theatre for young audiences that is engaging, challenging, beautiful and above all life affirming. I am interested in children's stories that are not afraid to engage in real and deep emotional conversation.

What strikes me most about the response to *Annabelle's Star* is how active audiences are in the performance and the story. Because Annabelle is voiceless, the audience seem to speak for her. Because of her state of being and loss they seem to encourage her on her journey of discovery and celebrate her success. While doing so I believe viewers reflect on their own loss and success – in short they find empathy in her story.

Annabelle's Star is a story of loss and acceptance, fall and recovery, despair and hope. Preset is but a series of stepping shapes of coloured light on the floor. Pink (Unconditional Love), Yellow, (Joy), Red, (Christmas Cheer/Peace), Purple. (Loss), Gold, (Higher Self/Acceptance), Green, (Hope).



Key themes

- Loss, hope, acceptance
- Journeys
- The wonder of the cosmos
- Imaginary versus Real
- Expression without words



Annabelle is all alone in her world. She has faced the ultimate tragedy, the loss of both of parents in a war-torn city. Acceptance and recovery are beyond her and she has withdrawn from the world and into herself. Sleep is her safe place and when she sleeps she dreams of being held in a protective cloud.



Her traumatic past has rendered her voiceless leaving her other senses hyper alert.

One morning as she wakes from that peaceful, place her senses tell her she is not alone. Before she opens her eyes she can feel a presence with her fingertips, smell and hearing before seeing. Confronted by this new audience she retreats to hiding. Her braver self, in the form of her hand puppet, returns to investigate eventually encouraging her back out of hiding to find an audience of new friends. She is happy in her wakefulness for the first time in a long time.

A beautiful bright Gift Box descends from above. It carries a card on which is written "To Annabelle". She shares the excitement and happiness with her new found friends until she turns the card over to reveal what the audience has already seen, the words "From Mummy and Daddy X". The stark reality of her loss envelops her.

She connects with her deceased parents in the heavens in her daily offering of two flowers she wears next to her heart. Her parents come to visit as they do always when she calls. They are represented by two stars that descend from the

heavens. She kneels before them and we see a strong and vibrant connection. As they come they go again, and we become aware once more of Annabelle's aloneness until the cover of the bright gift opens bringing exciting expectation of what it will contain.



This magical Gift Box will reveal a series of gifts that will bring joyful memories and painful challenges that will take her on her inevitable journey of hope

and acceptance. It is a journey orchestrated by the deceased parents. The gifts reveal themselves in the following order:

- A miniature version of herself to remind her of her once-happy self.
- Two miniature versions of her childhood friends to remind her that she was not always alone.
- A Beautiful Gold Dress, a confidence skin
- A Set of Wings that will ultimately fail her in her imagined flight
- A miniature version of her self with wings that can fly towards the heavens. A poetic signal that she can too, but not in physical terms.
- A smaller gift box that contains a box within a box. Each box is colour code to as in the stepping shapes of coloured light from preset.

Each one she encounters she opens to reveal a soundscape of her past:

Pink – Nursery unconditional love

Yellow – First Birthday joy

Red – Christmas peace

Purple – The dark event of her parent's shooting

Green – Contains a piece of star (of her parent's stars)

The piece of star will have it's own gravity and force that has the power to connect her to the

cosmos and therefore her parents. She will ingest it into her third eye to complete her connection. Her connection is short lived as the memory of her catastrophic event crowds her consciousness. No matter how or where she tries to escape it will not let her go. Finally she gives up and lies on the floor.

Mum and Dad stars reappear. They descend to her earthly level and heal her, tracing her body while she sleeps. When they have left again she rises to a new dawn. Having finally and completely faced the darkness of her traumatic past she finds release.

She skips through her stepping shapes of coloured light to recount her journey.

Her miniature self returns holding a mirror to show/reflect her new self. She shares the mirror image with her new friends/audience until her childlike boldness compels her to smash it. She throws the mirror into the past darkness and it shatters creating a universe of stars/particles that fill the space. Her mirror self can be everywhere at once. The moon appears reflecting light and hope and with its gravity pulls her closer to the heavens. A step on light, (stairs of the heavens), appears



and as she steps on it another appears and as she steps on that one so another and another appear and she climbs to the heavens. Her physical image disappears as she becomes her star and is joined by her parent stars.

We are all connected through our past present and future in this life and the after.

Warm-up Exercise 1: Rainstorm

Everyone stands in a large circle for this exercise. The teacher leads by showing an action that everyone in the circle copies. Students should be instructed to allow the sound from each action to build before changing to the next action. Once the class have been told this, the teacher should try not to speak again until the end of the exercise.

Actions to follow include:

Rubbing your hands together fast, as you would do to warm them up.

Teacher starts. Pupils copy

Using your index finger and middle finger on the right hand to slap the palm of the left hand.

Teacher starts. Pupils copy

Clicking your fingers.

Teacher starts. Pupils copy (those who can't do this can continue last action)

Slapping your thighs with your hands.

Teacher starts. Pupils copy

Stamping your feet.

Teacher starts. Pupils copy

Reverse the sounds back through slapping thighs, clicking fingers, slapping palm and rubbing hands before coming to rest.

The sound created should resemble a thunder storm growing and receding.

Warm-up Exercise 2:

Who is it?

Arrange the class in a circle for this exercise. One student is chosen to be the “Seeker.” After that person leaves the room, another person is chosen to be the “Whoozit.” This player makes constant rhythmic motions that change every twenty seconds or so. For example, first the Whoozit might clap his hands, then snap fingers, then pat his head.

The other circle members discretely follow along. The Seeker then enters, hoping to figure out which student is the Whoozit.

Standing in the middle of the circle, The Seeker gets three guesses while the Whoozit tries his best to constantly switch actions without being noticed.

Drama Exercise 1:

Theme: The Cosmos

Improvisation Exercise:

Annabelle follows two golden stars on a magic journey. Imagine you are on a magical journey amongst the stars, way up in the cosmos.

Recreate a version of the cosmos in your classroom...

Sitting in a circle, ask the students to respond on how would it feel to be up in space. How would they move around? How would their bodies react to the different conditions?

What would they be able to see/hear?

Physical, verbal or drawn responses can be encouraged.

Drama Exercise 2:

Theme: A Journey

Annabelle went on a journey guided by the stars.

Divide your class into groups, asking the children in each group to imagine they are on a journey to the stars to a new unknown planet.

Ask each group to discuss what their planet is like and what might be found there. The children could also consider the nature of any dangers that might be lurking for an unsuspecting space traveller, and how the group would cope with them.

Working in the same groups, encourage the children to freely improvise the exploration of the planet. Playing music such as Gustav Holst's *The Planets* would provide a good backdrop.

The children should then listen to each other “reporting to base” about some of the things they found on the planet.

Drama Exercise 3:

Theme: A Journey/Gifts

What magical gifts did Annabelle receive on her journey? Can you name them?

Two stars, a golden cloak, white feathered wings, a little puppet of her, a box filled with light etc.

Ask your class to imagine they are going on a journey to a faraway foreign land. What items or magical gifts might they like to bring, to help them reach their destination. How would these items help them along the way?

Drama Exercise 4:

Theme: Expression without words

Annabelle is non-verbal. Ask the children in your class to imagine they had to communicate without using words. Think of a scene or small story, try to relay this to your class without using words.

Older children might also be able to work in groups to relay non-verbal versions of other scenarios or well-known stories to their peers.

You may also like to try asking your class to speak in an imaginary space language using repeating words or sounds. It is important that we are able to judge the content by the manner in which the words are expressed, rather than by an understanding of the meaning of the words.

Drama Exercise 5:

Theme: Gifts

Annabelle receives a box containing gifts. What surprise gift might we receive?

Arrange the class in a circle and pass around a box. This could be decorated like a gift box, or it may just be a cardboard box or file box with a lid.

Play pass the parcel with music playing in the room. When the music stops the child with the box must take off the lid and lift out an imaginary object. Through mime, the child should show the class what their surprise gift is.

As the box is a magic box the gift they receive may be bigger than the size of the box.

Afterwards the class can discuss their gifts and their reason for selecting each.

Craft activity: Make a hanging Christmas Star

Create a 3D Christmas star for hanging on your Christmas tree or in your home.

Here's what you Need:

- White or coloured strong card
- Pencils
- Scissors
- Glue stick
- Ribbon or twine
- Stickers, glitter, felt tip pens etc. to decorate

Note: Be as creative as you like when decorating your stars. Use glitter pens, tinsel, family photos, felt or material, pretty Christmas paper or draw and colour with markers.

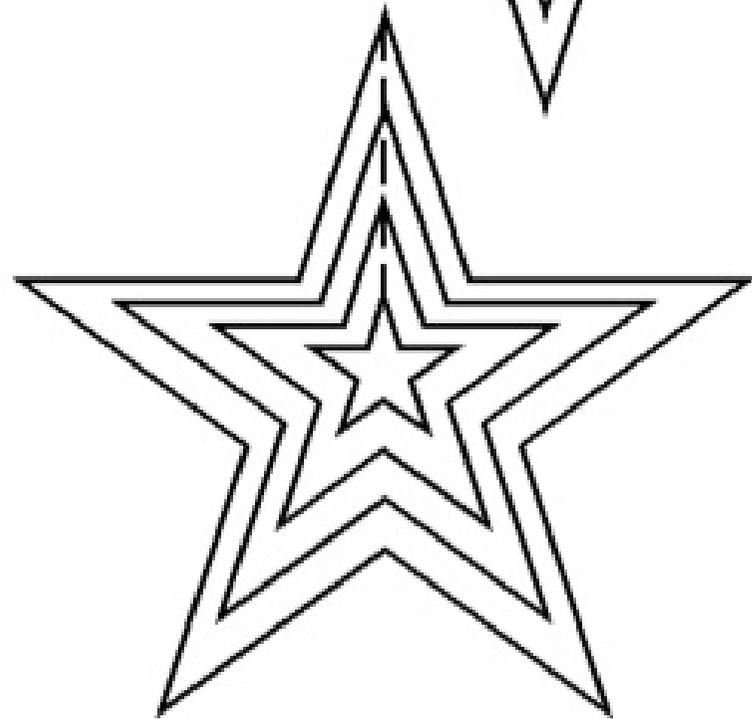
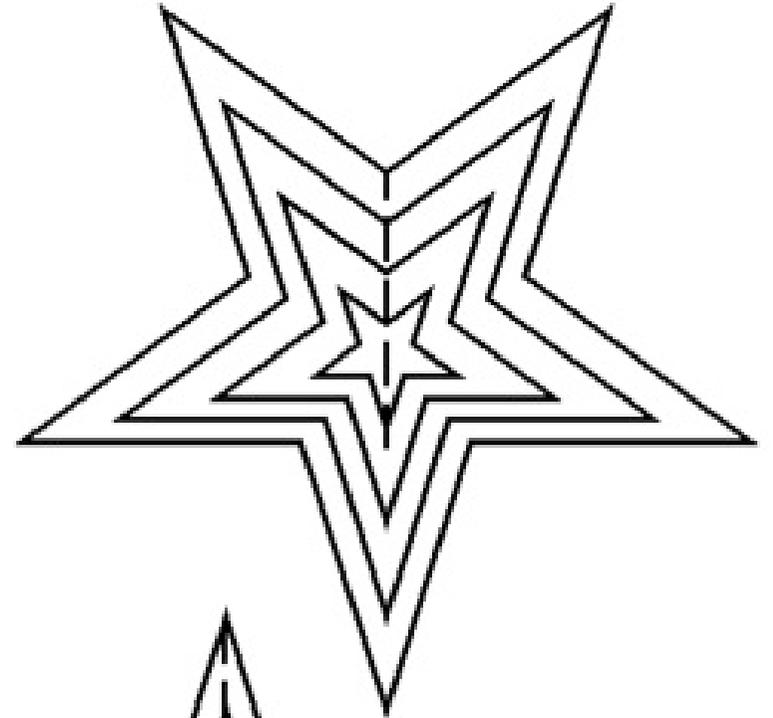
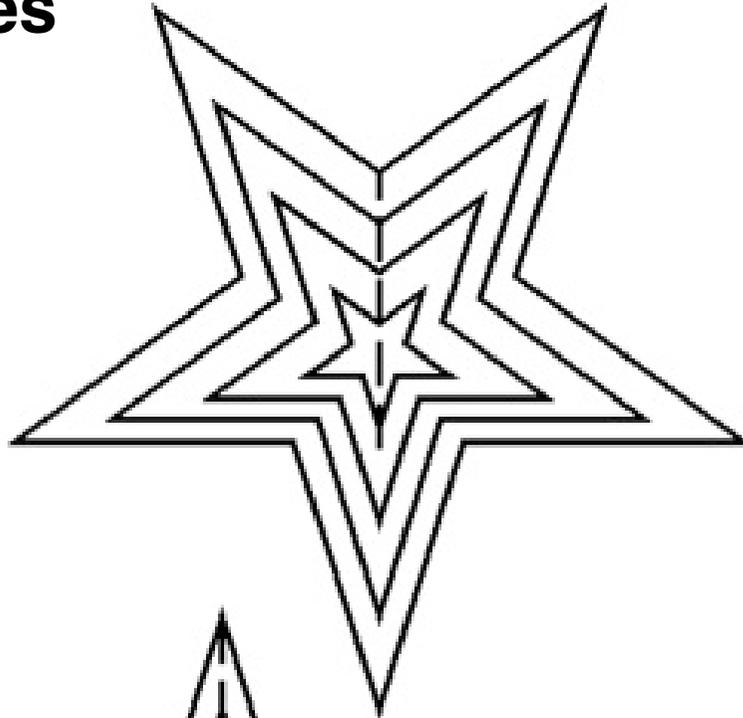
Instructions:

- Cut out the star templates provided.
- Allow the children to trace around the

templates onto the card. They should create two identical stars.

- The children then cut out their stars and decorate them on both sides.
- Encourage the children to use any number of materials to decorate with. They could even use fancy paper to cover each of their stars before decorating.
- Once the glue dries, make a slit in each of your two decorated stars, as marked on the stencil. Carefully cut one star from point to centre. Then cut the other star from between two points to its centre. (See template)
- Slip the two stars together through the slits you just made. You may need to use tape at the ends for strength and security.
- Pierce a hole in one tip and attach some string or ribbon. The children now have a wonderful 3D ornament to hang in their school or home.

Star Templates



Finished exmample





This Guide was prepared by The Ark for teachers attending *Annabelle's Star* in winter 2013.

Catriona Ennis as Annabelle (pictured)
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