

The PaperBoats

presents

Especially on Birthdays



Educational Benefits Video by Dave Brown, Artistic Director, The PaperBoats

https://bit.ly/EoB_Education

INTRODUCTION

The making of *Especially on Birthdays* began as a simple animating idea "*explore two in every which way*". The outcome is an image theatre performance about twins and birthdays which explores friendship and difference.

The show has very little language, allowing each audience member to enjoy the show in their own way according to their life experiences, interests and capabilities. Because it is so visually oriented, the performance can be enjoyed by ESL students and hearing impaired students.

It is a performance that will evoke recognition and surprise, anticipation and joy, curiosity and wonder. We hope you love it as much as we have loved creating it.

Through games, explorations, provocations and improvisations we invite you and your children to explore "*two-ness in every which way*" as it relates to the unique bond between twins and the challenges they face when separated.

BACKGROUND

Birthdays are often the most anticipated day of the year. Everything is amplified on that special day. For some it's the best day of the year; for others it's just a bit overwhelming.

Especially on Birthdays is about a pair of twins. One is quiet and thoughtful and a little bit shy, while the other is rowdy, boisterous and loves being the centre of attention. Their lives are delicately balanced around each other's needs and personalities.

When their parents tell them that they are going into separate classes after their sixth birthday, the "quiet" twin becomes anxious. He's scared he won't be able to make any friends. So, to avoid going into separate classes, he decides that he's going to stay five forever. But the rowdy twin knows that she can't have a birthday without her twin brother, so she decides to remedy the situation by teaching her brother "how to make new friends."

Her plan doesn't go so well.

The twins tussle inside their dilemma and there's a bit of sibling push and pull and a falling out but eventually they find a way to help each other through to a happy outcome.

This story is told WITHOUT words and dialogue. It is told through ACTION, MUSIC and VISUAL imagery. We use a LIMITED PALETTE of PROPS comprising bond paper receipt rolls (no chemicals), a set of nested white boxes, two miniature houses, two large rocks, two music boxes, two scarves, a stool and a bench press.

**The paper wads we create are re-used across 8-10 performances to minimise the environmental impact. We use an equivalent of 2 reams of bond paper OR a box of receipt rolls every 8-10 performances and when the paper wads need replacing, we seek the support of one school each week to recycle our old paper.



Especially on Birthdays was developed over a period of 3-years in a process involving artistic communities from Australia, USA, Singapore and New Zealand, who all explored and gave expression to a simple, shared, animating idea ~ "explore two-ness in every which way".



Preparing your Children for the Performance

Especially on Birthdays is almost completely non-verbal. There are a couple of voice-over moments and an interview scene both of which help audiences interpret what they are seeing but otherwise it's all action, imagery and music.

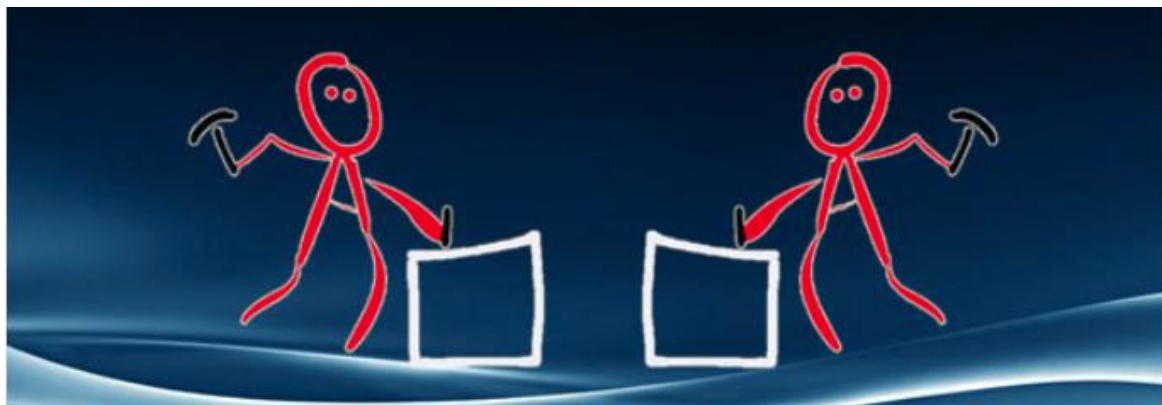
As a result, each child will “see” the events of the performance in their own way, influenced by their temperaments, age and experiences. We call this an open narrative.



For this reason, we DON'T want teachers to share the story of the performance with the children before they experience it for themselves.

Instead, we'd like children to explore the animating idea that inspired us to make the performance in the first place.

We invite you to open your children to the adventure of “*exploring two-ness in every which way.*”



Two stonecutters were engaged in a similar activity. One said, “I’m squaring the block”; the other said, “I’m building a cathedral”.

Animating Idea - "Exploring Two-Ness in Every Which Way"

Using this animating idea, The PaperBoats has created five new productions for children in four different countries over a period of six years, so for us it has been a very rich source of inspiration.

Below, we have outlined some game ideas, activities, provocations, explorations and improvisations that could help introduce the concept of "exploring two - in every which way" to children.

They can be done in any order at any level, by way of delving into the animating idea.



1. SNAP! A card game of pairs recognition.

2. OPPOSITES – Using Closed and Open Questions

Define for children the difference between a closed and an open question.

Play a simple game of opposites, using closed questions:

The opposite of fast is

The opposite of stop is ...

The opposite of up is ...

See how many "opposites" the class/group can name.

Did you come across any "opposites" that might have more than one answer?

Have some fun by asking open questions.

The opposite of television is ...

The opposite of book is ...

The opposite of tree is ...

Encourage children to be whimsical. There are no correct answers.

Ask them why they chose their answer. What is their reasoning, their connection?

We call this "associative thinking" and such thinking lies at the heart of creativity.

Open questions lead us to hearing different ideas and perceptions and a better appreciation of how we often see the same thing differently.

In fact, nothing is more basic to the process of human thinking than how we divide everything into oppositions between one thing and another.

We orient ourselves to the world by speaking of up or down, left or right, hot or cold, future or past, good or bad, light or dark, alive or dead.

We use such dualities in establishing our own identities – in sensing our own difference from others.



We are male or female, tall or short, this religion or that, this political belief or that. It gives us not only a sense of where we fit in but also a sense of our own uniqueness.

However, this kind of reductive or logical thinking, if it is not matched with intuitive, imaginative, open-ended, whimsical thinking is incredibly limiting.

Logic wants to reduce the world to something we can process. So our enemies tend to be "evil" whilst we are "good" - which is rarely the case.

The combination of thinking styles helps us struggle with ambivalence and complexity – the true order of nature and reality.

3. THE HOT SEAT

The Hot Seat exercise is a drama game in which a student sits on a chair – "the hot seat" – while the other students sitting in front of the chair on the floor ask questions. It's a two-way engagement of questioning, answering and careful listening.

The purpose of the game is to help students develop their communication skills and to encourage critical thinking and empathy.

The student in the hot seat is encouraged to be honest and open with their answers and the other students are encouraged to ask open-ended questions that promote discussion and exploration of a particular theme or topic.

The game can be adapted to suit different age groups and learning outcomes. It is a fun and engaging way to explore complex themes and ideas through drama.

The aim of the game is for children to learn how to ask good questions and for children to gain confidence in sharing their responses.

By listening carefully they can form new questions that take the lead from the answers they get.

The HOT SEAT activity is about the big TWO'S of... GIVE and TAKE ... QUESTION and ANSWER ... ACTION and REACTION OFFER and RESPONSE.

Similar questions asked of different people will affirm the notion that we all have different likes, dislikes and temperaments.

Some simple questions that the teacher can help model.

- What is your favourite colour?
- What is your favourite animal?
- What is your favourite food?
- What is your favourite thing to do?
- What is your favourite place to go?
- What is your favourite toy?
- What makes you happy?
- What makes you sad?
- What do you like to do for fun?
- What is something you are good at?
- What is something you want to learn?
- What is something that scares you?
- What is something that makes you laugh?
- What is something you like about yourself?
- What is something you wish you could do?

Once students get used to the game ... (it's infectious – children love this game), the HOT SEAT can be used to explore friendships and sibling relationships.

Such a session could lead to questions such as ... (with support from the teacher modelling and supporting good questioning.)

- Have you ever had a best friend? What was that like?
- Do you have any siblings? What is your relationship like with them?
- Have you ever felt lonely or left out? How did that make you feel?
- Have you ever had to share something with someone else? How did that go?
- What are some things that are better when you have someone to do them with?
- Have you ever had to say goodbye to someone you love? How did that make you feel?
- What are some things that you are good at doing with a partner?
- Have you ever helped someone else in some way? How did that make you feel?
- What are some things that are hard to do alone?
- Have you ever had to compromise with someone else? What did you learn from that experience?





4. TWINS

Have students research and present interesting facts and information about twins. This activity could include pictures, videos and information about different types of twins and the unique bond that twins share.

Do a HOT SEAT activity where you ask the child in the HOT SEAT to pretend that they ARE a TWIN. They are invited to make their answers up as they go. We call this improvisation. Children do it all the time in their “pretend play”.

Make it up. Have fun!

The teacher models some questioning and does some “coaching on the side” to get the improvisation (pretending) going.

E.G. SOME MODELLING QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS TO ASK.

- What is your name? (get them to make it up)
- What is the name of your twin brother/sister? (make it up)
- What’s an activity you like doing together? (make it up ...)
- What are some of the things that you and your twin sibling like to do together?
- How do you think being a twin is different from having a regular sibling?
- Have you ever wished that you weren't a twin? Why or why not?
- What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of being a twin?
- Can you describe a time when you and your twin sibling were mistaken for each other? How did you feel about it?
- How do you think your relationship with your twin sibling might change as you both grow older?
- What advice would you give to someone who is a new twin?

The teacher could also take the HOT SEAT to model how to “just make stuff up”.

After a session or two of improvisational HOTSEATING where children answer questions whilst playing a role, teachers can introduce through “modelling” and “coaching on the side”, the idea of the LEADING QUESTION.

A LEADING QUESTION is a question that provides information for the HOT SEAT child to accept and develop ...

It’s a way for the questioner to introduce ideas and possibilities into the improvisation.

E.g. 1. The questioner asks “I’ve heard that your twin brother loves running but you don’t. Why don’t you like running?”

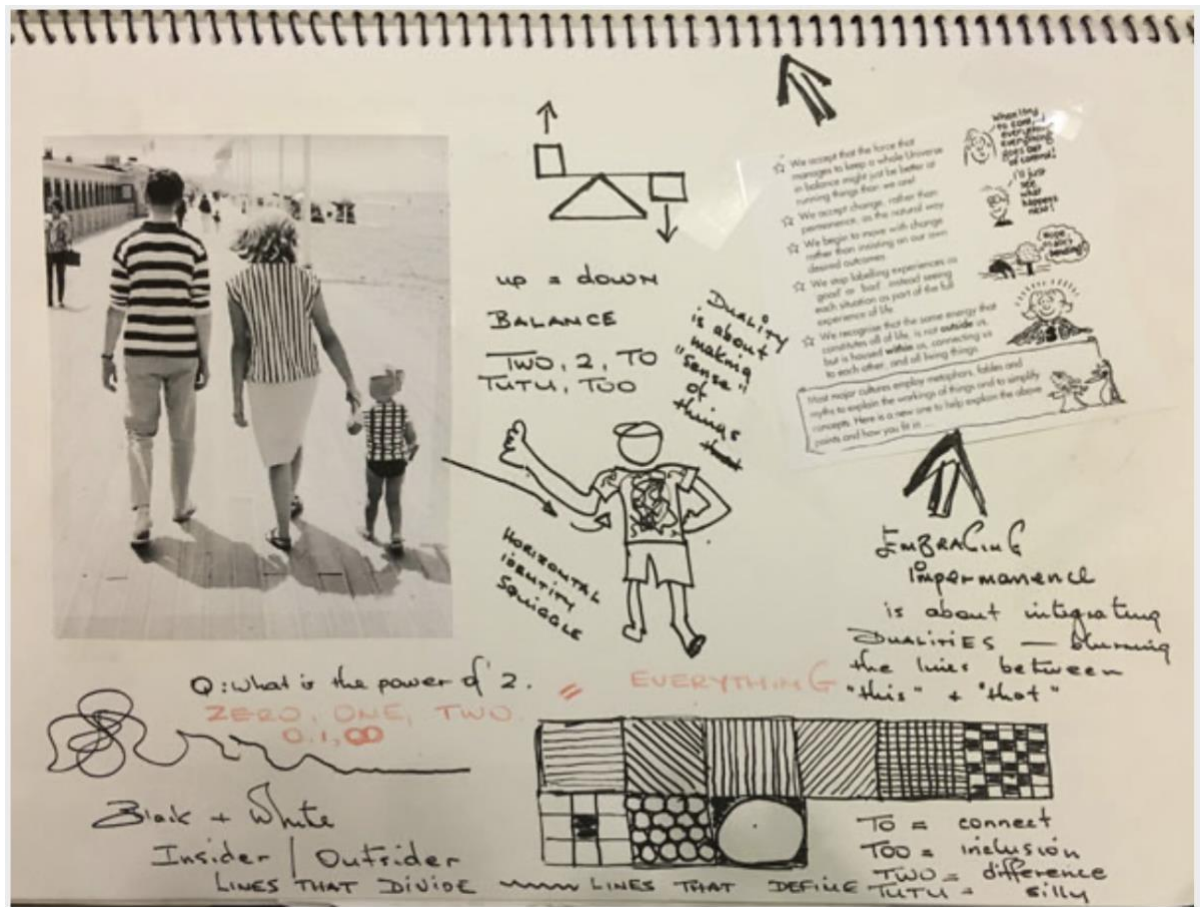
Here are some other examples:

- Why did your parents pick you up from school early yesterday?
- I hear you're going somewhere special for your birthday ... tell us about that?
- Your twin is very rowdy in class. Is s/he rowdy at home too? How do you get him to be quiet?
- You're going to the interstate cross-country next week end. What's it like when you are apart from each other?
- What happened to your hand?

A LEADING QUESTION thrown in every now and again is a great way to develop children's capacity for storytelling.

5. SCRAP BOOK

Collect everything and anything – thoughts, pictures, scribbles, songs, poems, books, movies... - anything and everything ... that connects to “two” or “two-ness”



6. THE “TWO” LIST

Begin a list of all the things that come in two's or pairs.

Add to the list over a couple of days and see how many the class can gather.

E.g. Shoes, Socks, Gloves, Earrings, Chopsticks, Speakers, Headphones, Eyes, Legs, Arms, Ears, Nostrils, Thumbs, Lungs, Knees, Bicycle Wheels, Scissor Blades, Contact Lenses, Dice, Salt and Pepper Shakers, Bookends, Cufflinks, Drumsticks, Twins, Dumbbells, Iceskates,

Gloves, Number Pairs, Twins, Opposites, You and Your Shadow, You and Your Reflection, Cross Roads, Parallel Lines, Conscious and Unconscious.

Performance Link: The audience for *Especially on Birthdays* sits in two blocks facing each other across the performance space. Theatre people call this a “traverse stage”; although sometimes it's called an “alley” or “corridor” staging. This allows the performance to be very close-up and personal.

It also ties into our theme of "two" referencing the idea that twins are a reflection of one another in their "sameness" and "difference". Every audience member not only gets to watch the performers and their performance but also the audience's responses on the other side of the stage. It's almost like looking into a mirror.



Two children from the audience are invited to play roles in the performance. They are selected before the performance begins and spend some time with the performers doing an activity and getting to know them. This allows the actors to build the level of trust required for the children to feel comfortable participating in the show.

7. CROSS THE ROOM – A GAME of SAMENESSES and DIFFERENCES

I have played this game with 2 year olds and 70 year olds. It's simple and effective.

- everyone starts at one side of the room
- teacher calls out “cross the room if you ...
- And name something e.g. ... had cereal for breakfast”
- some stay; others cross the room – so now we have two groups
- Note: the teacher participates too
- teacher offers another invitation
- e.g. “cross the room if you have white socks on”
- some stay; others cross the room
- teacher offers another invitation
- e.g. “cross the room if you are feeling playful today”
- once modelled – teacher can nominate a child to make a call
- a child “cross the room if ... “
- then another child ... and so on

A post-game reflection could be a HOT SEAT that focusses on sameness and difference.

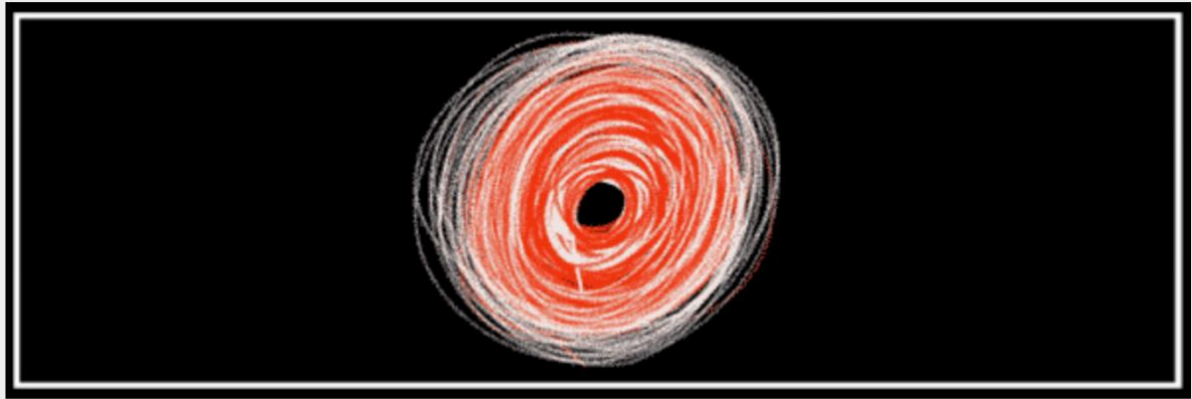


8. MIRRORING WITH MUSIC

The mirroring exercise supports the key educational benefits of exploring the theme of "two in every which way" by encouraging children to work together in "twos" to develop their communication and coordination skills whilst exploring the concept of reflection and symmetry.

- Begin by explaining the concept of mirroring to the children. "Mirroring is when one person copies the movements of another person, like a reflection in a mirror."
- Pair up the children and have them stand facing each other. Make sure that the pairs are evenly matched in terms of height and physical ability.
- Explain that one person in each pair will be the "leader" and the other person will be the "follower."
- Explain and model the activity showing the leader moving very simply and very slowly with feet planted in one spot and the follower mirroring those movements.
- Explain that success in the game is when a viewer can't tell who is leading and who is following.
- From the music pieces we've provided you from *Especially on Birthdays* we suggest using *5. Separate Houses* and *10. The Homecoming* in the first instance.
- Start the music and have the leader begin making movements in very slow motion.
- Encourage the follower to watch the leader closely and try to copy their movements as closely as possible.
- After a few minutes, switch roles so that the follower becomes the leader and vice versa.
- Use the word "synchronicity" to describe the idea of being connected through movement.
- In follow-up sessions use different pieces of music.
- As they get better at mirroring, encourage the children to be more adventurous and creative with their movements without losing connection and synchronicity.
- After the exercise is finished, have the children gather together and reflect on their experience.
- Ask them questions such as: What was it like to be the leader? What was it like to be the follower? Did you find it easy or challenging to mirror your partner's movements? How did you feel when you were successfully able to mirror your partner's movements?

- Ask children if they know any other examples of “synchronicity.” Get children to research this question. There are some amazing examples to be found. E.g. synchronous swimming, synchronous marching, birds in flight, schools of fish.



9. COMPARE and CONTRAST GAME

Choose two different objects such as a pencil and a crayon and have students compare and contrast them using for example colour, shape, texture, purpose.

This can help students practice the art of description and observation as it relates to the qualities or sameness and difference.

Through these pre-show activities, students can gain a deeper understanding of the themes of the show and the complexities of the twin relationship. They can also develop their drama skills, including communication, collaboration, and creativity.



POSTSHOW ACTIVITY

1. VIDEO REVIEW

The opening scene of *Especially on Birthdays* features a rock pendulum and balancing rocks.

Having introduced the “explore two” animating idea for the making of the performance as a pre-show focus, we thought a good post-show activity would be to review the opening scenes of *Especially on Birthdays* to see how different children experience the show differently and similarly. Then as a follow-up to this review, we invite classes to do a rock balancing activity of their own.



We have included a video of the opening scenes from the show so that you and your students can review the scenes and discover what meanings children might take from it.

VIDEO LINK: <https://vimeo.com/thepaperboats/review>

As we said from the outset, every child and adult will make meaning from what they see, in their own way. There are no wrongs or rights.

We have our own particular rationale for the images we created and I have outlined a couple of them below but the intention of a 'poetic' image theatre performance is that it is simply beguiling to watch, it conjures curiosity from its audiences and it "speaks" in some way to the viewer, either as "felt meaning" or as "literal meaning".

A couple of personal artistic insights ...

For us, (the makers of the show) the two big rocks represent the two twins. Balancing them represents their co-dependence. One of the twins, Temeka says, *"Even though we're twins, we're totally different. If we were one person, I'd be the top half and Tim would be the legs. That sums us up really. I like being the boss but I'd be lost without my legs."*

When Temeka topples the balanced rock, the image alludes to them going into separate classes and having to survive that event ... i.e.. to build their lives (their houses) on the foundation of who they are.

Hence the image of the miniature houses sitting on their foundation stones surrounded by the thread of paper (an image of their umbilical cord or their DNA strand that they laid out as their birth was being announced in the voice over) holds that kind of "literal" meaning for us.

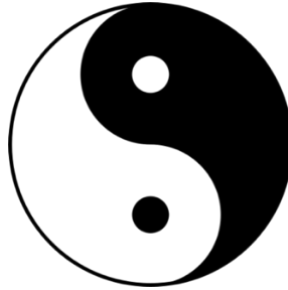
Of course there are a host of other references the children may discover, such as mirroring and synchronicity, pendulum swings, balancing, lines that connect and divide, images of connection and separation etc.

2. BALANCING ROCKS

Balance and Harmony

- Begin by introducing the concept of Yin and Yang with the children in a simple way.

E.g. The idea of Yin and Yang comes from ancient China. The Tao is a symbol that encourages us to keep things in balance and harmony.



- Yin and Yang are like two opposite sides of a coin. They are always together, but they are different. Like twins!

Rocks in Balance and Harmony through Sameness and Difference

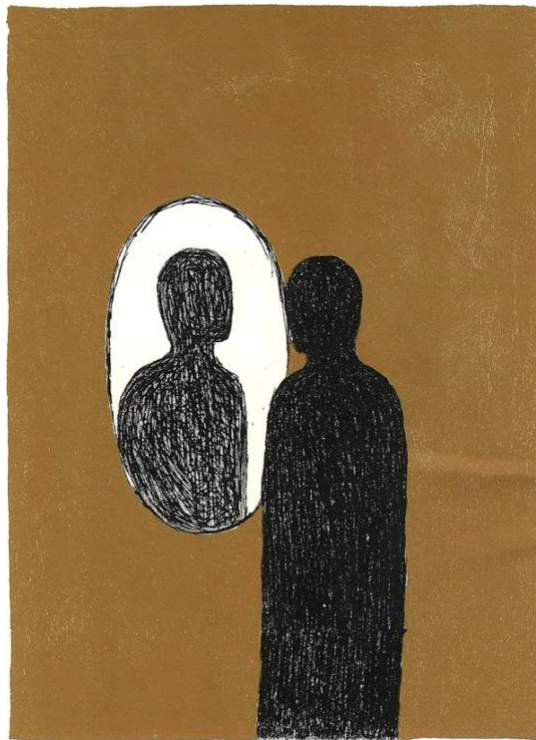
- Take children on a nature walk to find rocks of various sizes and shapes.
- Ask children to have a go at balancing pair of rocks.
- The teacher should model how to go about this.
- Rock balancing is a skill that many people practice and there are lots of online examples and plenty of clues about how to go about it.
- It's great fun for children to do.
- After some playing with possibilities and getting in some practice, get children to work in pairs to create some balanced rock sculptures that give expression in some way to the number two. E.g. it could be two rocks or two piles of rocks or two circles of rocks with balancing elements ... check out some of the examples below.



- Once the children have finished their sculptures, have them share their creations with the group and get them to reflect on their experience.
- Ask them questions such as: Did you manage to work together to achieve your goal? What was good about the way you helped each other? What challenges did you face while trying to balance the rocks? What makes for a great rock sculpture? Do you have any hints for other rock balancers? Was it a relaxing thing to do or was it

stressful or even a bit of each? What are some things that make you feel balanced and harmonious? What are some things that disrupt your sense of balance and harmony?

- This activity combines the practical skill of balancing rocks with the educational concepts of yin and yang, encouraging children to explore the importance of balance and harmony in their own lives.



“We believe that the best performances for children aren’t created just for children; they are enjoyed by children, but they speak to all of our deepest longings and fears and thus enchant humans of all ages.” Dave Brown - Artistic Director - The PaperBoats

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 Government of South Australia
Department of the Premier
and Cabinet

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