

# The Happiness Shop

## *Teacher's Guide*

**“To be a Roppet is to be completely happy!”**

### **Synopsis**

Three middle school students find themselves in an odd curiosity shop. They don't know what it is, where they are, or how they got there. This shop is not like any other. It is filled with Roppets.

A Roppet is a completely happy teenager. They smile all the time, they hug each other and hi-five at the drop of a hat. They give happiness demonstrations.

The three students soon learn that the Roppets do much more, as scenes from their personal struggles are played out in front of them. Blake is the tug of rope in his parents divorce, Melanie's former best friends are viciously bullying her, and Wally is dealing with being too different to even eat in the cafeteria. The three have been brought to the shop to make a choice. Will they bury their problems, and perhaps become a Roppet themselves? Will they face their problems and stand up for themselves? Or will they do something else?

**Recommended Audience:** Grades 6 – 8

### **Themes**

- Depression
- Bullying
- Conflict Resolution
- Self Acceptance

**“No one is completely happy. I’m not. Ever.”**

### **Note from Author, Lindsay Price**

I wrote this play specifically for middle school students after a couple of eye opening experiences. First, I watched a 13 year old boy deliver one of my monologues in a competition. The character in the monologues talks about his life and how his family treat him after a suicide attempt. The monologue was written for a 16 year old character and the impact of seeing it done by a 13 year old was huge. *Does suicide happen in middle school?*

Secondly the director of one of my plays shared a rehearsal exercise she did with her cast in which her middle school students wrote on post-it notes the positive and negative things they say to themselves or hear others say to them. The negative board three times more post-its than the positive one. (the exercise is included in this teacher’s guide) *Do middle school students get depressed?*

I’m the first to admit, until writing this play I did not fully believe that middle school students did get depressed. I thought depression didn’t hit until high school.

That’s when I started researching the topic. I found that not only do middle school students get depressed but it’s often overlooked as laziness, ignored because they’re “too young” to be depressed. Many times the issue is never addressed.

I knew I had to bring this issue to life in a play.

The object of the play is to show students the different faces of middle school depression and the different choices made because of it. Not all the choices these students make are good ones. I feel that’s important to stage. It’s also important to stage a positive choice. The play ends with the message that happiness does not come from burying your feelings and pretending to be happy. Students suffering from depression are not alone in their feelings and they don’t need to suffer alone.

**“Oh you did help me. You helped me see myself. I like Wallace. And I’m not alone. I wish I had said that to Melanie. If my family won’t help me out I’ll find someone. The world is a big place. I can’t pretend I’m something I’m not. You can keep your Roppets.”**

## **Characters**

*Blake, Melanie, Wally:* The three middle school students who stumble across The Happiness Shop. They have been brought there under mysterious circumstances. Each is going through a personal struggle that affects their daily life.

*Dr D/Dr Dee:* They run The Happiness Shop. They treat the Roppets like play things, and really have no idea what happiness is. They're just interested in turning more and more students into Roppets.

*Bezmo/Besme/Loupy:* The Doctors Minions. They used to live in caves before coming up to work in the shop. Bezmo is the senior assistant, and Besme is brand new. She doesn't really know how things work.

*Roppet One (Jordan):* Roppet One is the showcase Roppet Model. The first Roppet. But there's something wrong with her programming as the real teen inside wants to break free.

*Roppets:* The completely happy teen. Not a complex or sad thought ever crosses their mind. Until they can't contain their programming any more...

## **Production History**

Governor Simcoe is presenting the premiere performance of *The Happiness Shop*. Your middle school students will be the very first audience.

## **Playwright**

Lindsay Price is the author of *The Happiness Shop*. She has been a professional playwright for 19 years with over 50 published plays. She specializes in plays for schools and student performers with over 400 productions a year in schools across Canada, the US and overseas.

## Quick Facts About Middle School Depression

*"Middle school has almost a bump to it, where kids have a decrease in a whole bunch of outcomes ranging from their GPA to their attitude toward school. ...It's not that it's creating depression in every child, but overall, kids report being more depressed, more anxious, in that middle-school transition."*

Dr. Glen Veed, clinical psychologist

## American Academy of Adolescent and Child Psychiatry

Children with depression often have:

- Low energy
- health issues - headaches, stomachaches
- complaints of being bored

## National Alliance on Mental Illness

Children with depression often have:

- difficulty concentrating
- a lack of motivation
- a tendency to internalize feelings
- a tendency to separate themselves from others

## National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (2008-2010) sponsored by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

- 5.1% of all 12 year old girls experienced a major depressive episode in the last year
- Only 32.4% of those girls received treatment.

## Discussion Questions

1. What is depression? What causes it?
2. Do you know anyone who is depressed?
3. How do people deal with being depressed?
4. Can you cure depression?

# Getting your students ready for the Play

## Before the Show

Please remind your students of the following:

- Phones are to be turned off and left out of sight.
- No talking or whispering during the show - the actors can hear you!
- No eating or drinking in the theatre.

## Active Viewing

Guide your students to pay attention to the following during the show.

1. Study the characters who run The Happiness Shop and work for the owners. Are they real or not real? If they're not real, what are they?
2. Study Blake, Melanie and Wally. What is the main problem in their life? How do they deal with it?
3. How is happiness portrayed in the play? Do you agree or disagree with the portrayal?

## Pre-Show Writing topics

1. What does it mean to be happy?
  - a. What do they look like?
  - b. What do they sound like?
  - c. What do they wear?
  - d. Write out a day in the life of a happy person.
2. Describe a person who is completely happy.
  - a. What do they look like?
  - b. What do they sound like?
  - c. What do they wear?
  - d. Write out a day in the life of a happy person.
3. Describe a person who is very sad.
  - a. What do they look like?
  - b. What do they sound like?
  - c. What do they wear?
  - d. Write out a day in the life of a sad person.

## Pre-Show Exercise

### *Post it Note Reflection*

1. **Play the mirror game** with students. Students get into pairs, one is A the other B. A is the leader, they go through a number of physical movements. B is the mirror image and the follower. They have to mimic what A is doing. After a time, call out for them to "Switch." Now B is the leader and A is the follower.
2. Discuss with students what it's like to look in the mirror.
  - Do you believe your mirror image reflects you exactly?
  - Do you think other people see you differently than how you see yourself?
3. Students write on post-it notes the negative words they think of when they look in the mirror and the negative words they have heard from others about themselves. They are only allowed one word or phrase per post-it.
4. The post-its are placed on a large piece of orange paper hung on the wall.
5. Students then write positive words they have heard from others or think of when they look in the mirror.
6. These are placed on a large piece of blue paper hung on the wall.
7. Review the sheets with students.
  - What words are repeated?
  - What words surprise you?
  - What words don't surprise you at all?
8. Direct students to write a reflection.
  - What is it like to see the two sheets side by side?
  - Are you surprised by the words your classmates wrote?
  - How do they make you feel?
9. Students pick one word from the positive sheet and one word from the negative sheet.
10. Direct students to personify these two words. Turn the positive word and the negative word into characters.
  - What would their names be?
  - How old would they be?
  - What would they look like?
  - What would they wear?
  - Where would they live?
  - How would they interact with their living environment?
11. Students write a one page scene between the Positive Word and the Negative Word.
12. Students share their scenes with the class

## After the Show - Discussion Questions

1. After seeing the production of *The Happiness Shop*, is it what you expected it to be? Discuss some things about the play that were different than what you expected.
2. Some of the characters were not presented realistically, why do you think that was?
3. Were the problems of the three students (Blake, Wally, Melanie) presented realistically?
4. Blake, Melanie and Wally choose different ways of coping with their problems. What were these? Do you agree with their decisions? What might be some problems they will face based on their decisions?
5. What happened to Melanie after she left The Happiness Shop?
6. Have you seen other students act the way that Blake, Melane and Wally do?
7. Wally says of Melanie "I'm not alone. I wish I had said that to Melanie" Why is it important to tell someone they are not alone?
8. How do you view depression after watching the play?