

Wicked Nix Study Guide

Wicked Nix

Adapted for the stage by Paula Wing

Based on the novel by Lena Coakley

Directed by Stephen Colella

Introduction

This guide was written by Jenni Saslove, YPT's Education and Participation Programs Coordinator with contributions from Tran Nguyen. As you scroll through the guide, you will find curriculum connections, discussion questions, units of study, and more. If you wish to create your own lesson plan from the study guide copy, we have created a [lesson plan template](#) for your use. We hope you will find this guide to be a useful resource. Should you have any questions or feedback, or have inquiries about the use of this guide (which is copyright protected), please feel free to contact Karen Gilodo, Associate Artistic Director, Education at kgilodo@youngpeoplestheatre.org.

Synopsis

Wicked Nix is a play adapted by Paula Wing, based on the novel by Lena Coakley. The story takes place in a fantastical world where fairies and humans live. We follow the journey of Nix, known as the “foulest of the fairies” with a responsibility to protect the forest from intruders. Nix has been left behind by the other fairies to live in the forest until the fairies’ return one year later, for Midsummer’s Eve. Though the fairies were unkind to Nix, he will do anything to return to his home called The Summer Country. In the meantime, Nix must find his own food, build a nest to live, and ensure all creatures in the forest are protected, with the guidance of Mr. Green, the spirit of the forest. Nix hopes that this hard work will please the Queen of the Fairies and that she will allow him to re-join the fairies once more.

We also meet Rose the Wise, Nix’s human friend. Rose and Nix play together, though Rose has been warned by her mother that fairies are dangerous. Rose is desperate to visit the Summer Country with Nix. However, Nix is against this plan, as he knows that fairies can be mean to humans.

One day, Nix’s world gets turned upside down when a “Man-People” arrives in the forest and begins to settle into a nearby cottage. With the help of Rose, Nix plays “tricky tricks” on the Man-People in an attempt to get rid of him and protect the forest. Unfortunately, the Man-People does not give up so easily.

In a surprising turn of events, Rose is taken by the fairies. Nix and “Man-People” agree to do everything they can to save her. When they find the fairies, their queen gives Nix a choice: He can join the fairies with Rose forever, or take Rose home and never visit the fairies ever again. Despite dreaming of re-joining the fairies, Nix knows that it is in Rose’s best interest to bring her home. Unfortunately, the Queen tricks Nix and doesn’t let them go. Luckily, Mr. Green comes to save them and everyone returns home.

Thematic Overview

One of the primary themes in the play *Wicked Nix* is identity – learning who you are and understanding that this may change over time. As we grow up, we are often forced to re-evaluate who we are and what is important to us. Similarly, this play emphasizes the challenges of understanding the world around you. Sometimes our world isn't what it seems and other perspectives are introduced. A key question in this play is “how do we adapt to change?” Finally, the story encourages us to reflect on the importance of loyalty and selflessness – thinking of others and their needs, perhaps ahead of our own. Sometimes what we want is not what's best for the ones we love. Making good choices in the best interests of ourselves and the people around us is important but not always easy.

Themes

Adapting and Accepting Change

Loyalty

Learning to be Yourself

Understanding the World

Selflessness

Curriculum Connections

The Arts - Drama

Health and Physical Education (Social-Emotional Learning)

Language

Ancestral Teachings

Honesty

Respect

Curriculum Connections

The Arts - Drama

- Engage in dramatic play and role play, with a focus on exploring themes, ideas, characters, and issues from imagination or in stories from diverse communities, times, and places
- Construct personal interpretations of drama works, connecting drama issues and themes to their own and others' ideas, feelings, and experiences

Language

- Select and use a variety of listening strategies before, during, and after listening to comprehend information and messages communicated orally and non-verbally, seek clarification, and develop a relevant response appropriate to the context

- Identify and use oral and non-verbal communication strategies, including expression, gestures, and body language, and explain how these strategies help them understand or communicate ideas and meaning
- Identify the narrator's point of view, including first, second, or third person, in a variety of texts, and describe the advantages and disadvantages of the approached used in each story
- Summarize the main idea of a text and the supporting details in sequence, and draw a simple conclusion
- Generate and develop ideas about given and chosen topics, using various strategies, and drawing on various resources, including their own lived experiences, and learning from other subject areas

Health - Physical Education

- Apply skills that help them develop self-awareness and self-confidence, in order to support the development of a sense of identity and a sense of belonging
- Apply skills that help them think critically and creatively, in order to support making connections, analyzing, evaluating, problem-solving, and decision making

About the Playwright: *Paula Wing*



Paula Wing is a playwright, translator, dramaturge, and teacher. Upcoming plays are: a translation of Stefano Massini's *Intractable Woman* at Brandeis University (in 2025); and *Roadkill*, a play for teen audiences for Roseneath Theatre (in 2026). Paula has been a story consultant for the Calgary Stampede Museum, and wrote the program notes for productions at Soupepper Theatre for more than 15 years. Her teaching takes her across the province with the Gryffon Trio's Listen Up program. She is the Educator in Residence at Tarragon Theatre where she facilitates writing programs, the National Youth Playwrights Unit and the Writer's Room this year. Paula is a Sessional Professor at the University of Windsor and the University of Waterloo and for the past twelve years, she has been the creative writing instructor at the Native Men's Residence in Toronto.

Interview with the Director: *Stephen Collela*



What do you feel are the central themes in the show and why?

For me, it's about identity – grappling with changes in identity and what it is to discover that you might not be who you thought you were. As a young person, I feel like you end up having to confront the latter multiple times. Young people are in this time of trying on identities and seeing what fits. I don't mean that in a pejorative way, but rather that they experiment and learn. We have to try different things to find out who we are. We can come to embrace that identity, only to later find out that's not actually us. This is a really interesting story to explore that notion of confronting changes in our own identity and perception of our self.

Similarly, when I first read the book I felt like I was always shifting my understanding of what the world was – is it a magical place or not? How do we navigate a world where we don't know what is and isn't true?

That feels particularly relevant right now – where the messages we get are inconsistent. And linking back to the first theme, how do we know ourselves and anchor ourselves in a world that is constantly shifting? When we often define ourselves in relation to our world, what happens when that world isn't what we think it is?

I also find myself thinking about the very end of the story and why Nix decides not to go back with the Fairy Queen. He decides that Rose needs a better life than he had. He puts a friend before himself. It's about selflessness and thinking of others first.

What made you want to direct this show? What drew you to it?

Paula [Wing] brought us this book in 2017 and I was really captivated by it. I never expected that big twist in the story and that change really hooked me. It made the tale much more complex in a good way. I've been invested deeply in this piece from the beginning as we developed it over many years so it was a great joy to get to continue as the director. When we're in development of a new play, I'm focused on story but there's always part of my brain (whether I'm going to direct the show or not) that's wondering, "How attainable is this as a staged play?" I don't answer those questions fully during development, but now that I actually am the director I need to figure that out. There are some pretty fantastical challenges in this piece, which is exciting because I am currently in the process of discovering how this is going to manifest alongside my fantastic design team. I like pieces that call for inventive and imaginative solutions to fantastical problems and this is definitely one of those shows!

What do you hope young people will take away from seeing this show? What do you hope the impact will be?

One of the things that I always say to writers when we're developing a play is, "I want to know what questions we're leaving the kids with, not what answers." I think leaving them with questions is where learning happens. They have the chance to leave the theatre with elements of the play still unsolved; they can come to their own conclusions. The impact is always going to be dependent on them. "What do I want them thinking about?" is what I ask more than what I want the impact to be on them.

People often have a very firm notion of how the world works. We're very attached to our own ideas. But it's important to be open to the idea that there are perspectives that we have no idea about. Our understanding of the world can and should be able to change. There could be a version of this story where Nix doesn't accept the truth he is given - what would happen if Nix didn't believe it and completely resisted it? I'm interested in that capacity to be open to change, to listen to other ideas even when they impact, to your core, what you think and what your identity is. That's a discourse that we're lacking in this world quite often right now. We're unwilling to hear the other side because it might mean needing to change who we are. We're afraid to take that risk. I hope that young people will be able to see what Nix has gone through and consider for themselves what they would do in that situation. What does it would mean to face a difficult truth, especially if it means having to make a sacrifice or change ourselves? Would they be willing to make that leap?

Units of Study

The units of study within this guide prompt students to think about the main themes in *Wicked Nix* through engaging with drama and other creative outlets. Before you bring your students to the theatre, we encourage you to talk to them about what the experience of seeing a play is like, especially for those who will be experiencing it for the first time.

Pre-Show Units of Study

Pre-Show Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean to be loyal? What are ways to show loyalty?
2. What can a person do when they have a different opinion than someone else?
3. In the play, *Wicked Nix*, identity (who you are) is a central theme. What are some ways in which people identify themselves? What makes a person unique?

Pre-Show Activity #1: Energy Ball

Objective:

Students will explore their imagination and creativity through improvisation, focus, and teamwork.

Materials:

Space for students to make a circle standing up.

Instructions:

1. In a large circle standing up, ask your students to hold their hands up, palms facing each other.
2. Ask students to imagine that they're holding a ball of energy. Invite them to feel the energy of the ball and change the shape of this ball. Students can make it bigger or smaller, flatten it, make it heavy, etc. Encourage students to practice "showing not telling" - make sure it is clear what they are doing to the ball and what is happening without them having to describe it in words.
3. After a minute of practicing, ask students to drop their hands (and in turn, drop their energy ball). Choose one person to create a new energy ball, shape it how they want to, and then throw it to another student across the circle. Encourage students to consider how they would throw the ball as well - is it heavy? Light? Flat? Small? Fast?
4. When students receive the energy ball, they must change the ball to whatever they want it to be by showing, not telling. When they have changed the ball, they must then throw it to someone else. Continue passing it around until students have each had at least one turn.

Debrief:

Ask students:

- Could you clearly imagine what this energy ball looked like?
- Did you find it easy or hard to mold the energy ball in new and creative ways?
- Why do you think we did this exercise today?

Explain to your students that this exercise encourages you to use your imagination and creativity, which are at the forefront of theatre, especially in a play like *Wicked Nix*. The exercise requires that students keep thinking of new ways to mold this invisible ball, while also making their own choices clear to those around them. In theatre, actors and the creative team find ways to represent a story onstage and engage the audience. This includes portraying everyday things like a forest, to fantastical things like fairies!

Pre-Show Activity #2: Get to Know Your Partner

Objective:

This activity aims to encourage students to connect with their peers and explore what makes them who they are.

Materials:

Paper, art supplies (markers, pencil crayons, crayons).

Instructions:

1. Start by discussing the concept of identity. What is identity? Does it change over time? Is it different for every person?
2. Explain what a mind-map is: A mind-map is a way to visually represent ideas that are linked to one main idea. Mind maps typically have one word or phrase in the middle of the page, then branches off of it with related words, pictures, etc.
3. Assign students to partners (it is encouraged that students work with individuals they may not know as well as others).
4. With their partners, ask students to find out at least five fun facts about them. This can include: favourite food, number of siblings, hobbies, etc.
5. Provide each student with a piece of paper. Inform students that their task is to create a mind-map for their partner. Their partner's name will go in the centre of the page, then they can draw branches with different words and pictures to describe them. Encourage students to avoid words that describe their partner's physical features. An example is provided in the appendix.
6. If students feel comfortable, they may present their drawings to the class.

Debrief:

Ask students:

Did you find it easy to represent your partner? What was challenging about it?

How did you feel having someone else represent you?

Do you think those outlines represent everything about that person? Is it possible to know everything about someone?

Post-Show Units of Study

Post-Show Discussion Questions:

1. How did the character of Nix change from the beginning of the play to the end?
2. Why do you think Nix hated the Man-People so much?
3. Why did Nix choose to take Rose home instead of joining the fairies in the Summer Country?
4. In the original novel, the story is told from a first-person perspective, through Nix's eyes. In the play, we see it from a third-person perspective. Do you think that made a difference in our understanding and experience of the story? Why or why not?
5. Do you think it was easy for Nix to find out that he wasn't who he thought he was? Why do you think that?
6. Why do you think this play is called Wicked Nix? After watching the play, do you think that Nix is truly wicked? Why or why not?

Post-Show Activity #1: This Isn't A Pencil

Objective:

This activity motivates students to think outside the box and see new possibilities in everyday objects. They will use their imagination to re-invent an item and look at it from different perspectives.

Materials:

One pencil. Space for students to sit in a circle.

Instructions:

Once everyone is sitting in a circle, show students the pencil that you will be using for the activity. Tell them that you will be passing the pencil around the circle and when it is their turn, they will say, "This isn't a pencil, it's a ..." and then tell the class something else that it could be. For example:

This isn't a pencil, it's a magic wand!

This isn't a pencil, it's a worm!

Encourage students to not only say what the object is, but to show it! For example, if the pencil is a magic wand, how would you hold it? Would you wave it around? If it's a worm, show it moving along the floor.

Prompt students to avoid objects that are too similar to an actual pencil, such as a pen or marker. Students should try their best to think creatively. Anything is possible!

It is possible that students might reach a point in which they can't think of anything anymore. Encourage them to push past that feeling and without thinking about it too much, just go with whatever comes to mind!

Debrief:

Ask students:

- Tell us one word about how you felt doing this activity?
- Was it easy using your imagination? Was it challenging? Describe why.
- In watching your peers make choices did it expand your imagination or what you thought was possible?

In this play, students may have noticed that some things weren't what they seemed. How did their perspectives change throughout the show? What did it feel like to have to shift your understanding of what was going on?

Post-Show Activity #2: Ensemble Storytelling

Objective:

Students will develop their creativity and collaboration skills through storytelling in small groups.

Materials:

Paper, pencils, and an empty space for students to move.

Instructions:

1. Ask the students to help summarize the main events in Wicked Nix. Encourage students to share one idea at a time, and list the events in chronological order.
2. Divide the class into groups of 3-4 students.
3. Inform the students that their task is to create their own story in their group with a theme inspired by Wicked Nix. Options for themes might include:
 - Friendship
 - Family
 - Adventure
 - Magic
 - Fairies
 - Identity
4. Once each group has chosen a theme, provide them with a sentence to start their story. For example, you could start with, "Once upon a time, there was a royal family." Or, "There once was a magical island filled with fairies." Alternatively, students may have the option to create their own starting sentence.
5. Invite each member of the group to continue developing the story by adding one sentence at a time. Each group will have about 2-5 minutes to complete their story.
6. Ask students to review their story and write it down on paper. They are welcome to edit their story as necessary. Ensure that students' stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end. If you choose to extend this writing activity, students can be asked to include more specific story elements, such as:
 - Exposition (setting up the story, introducing the time, place, and characters)
 - Rising Action (introduction to a problem)
 - Climax (the biggest moment in the story)
 - Falling Action (the problem begins to resolve)
 - Resolution (conclusion to the story)
7. If students feel comfortable, they can share their stories with the rest of the class.

Drama-Based Extension:

If you would like to extend this activity to include more theatrical elements, ask students to then create a short dramatic performance of their story. They are encouraged to get on their feet, play different roles, and share the story from beginning to end. Students do not have to include every word of the original story, but they can adapt it to suit this dramatic version.

Debrief:

Ask Students:

- What is challenging/rewarding about collaborating with people to tell a story?
- The play, Wicked Nix, was adapted from a book. This means that the person who wrote the script had to take the ideas provided in the book and make changes so that it could be performed onstage. Do you think that would be easy or difficult? Why?
- Did you ever have a moment where your peers brought the story in a direction that you didn't expect? How did you handle that?

Glossary

Adaptation:

A movie, television drama, or stage play that has been made from a written work, typically a novel.

First-Person Narrative:

A mode of storytelling in which the narrator is a person in the story, telling the story from their own person point of view, using words like “I”, “me”, “my”, and “myself”.

Identity:

Our sense of who we are as individuals and as members of a group. It also refers to our sense of how others may perceive and label us.

Imagination:

The ability to be creative or resourceful, envisioning things beyond the current reality.

Loyalty:

The act of being supportive, faithful, and committed to someone or something.

Man-People:

The term that Nix uses for a human.

Third-Person Narrative:

A mode of storytelling in which the story is written from an observer’s perspective, instead of any particular person in the story.

External Sources:

- [Facing History and Ourselves](#)
- [Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#)
- [Oxford Languages](#)

Appendix

Pre-Show Activity #2 Mind-Map Example:

