

MISS NELSON IS MISSING ENRICHMENT GUIDE  
ACTORS' PLAYHOUSE AT THE MIRACLE THEATRE  
280 MIRACLE MILE, CORAL GABLES, FL 33134



# MISS NELSON IS MISSING

January 15- February 28 &  
March 31 - April 24, 2026

Weekday Field Trips 10:30 AM  
[FIELD TRIP REQUEST FORM](#)

Saturday Public Performances  
[BUY TICKETS](#)

Sensory Friendly Performance  
Sun. Jan 25 at 2 PM



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BOOK, MUSIC, AND LYRICS BY JOAN CUSHING BASED ON THE BOOK *MISS NELSON IS MISSING* AND *MISS NELSON IS BACK* BY HARRY ALLARD WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY JAMES MARSHALL

## WHO DONE IT?

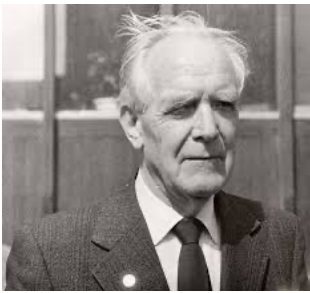
### BOOK (SCRIPT), MUSIC, AND LYRICS BY JOAN CUSHING

**Joan Cushing** (August 18, 1946 - May 21, 2024) was a former elementary school teacher and cabaret performer. She is best known for her political satirical revue *Mrs. Foggybottom & Friends*, which opened in 1986 at New Playwrights Theatre. Her passing was mourned internationally with a big story in the *Washington Post*.

She has adapted 13 popular children's books as musicals, receiving over 350 productions and 2 national tours: *Miss Nelson Is Missing!*, winner of the 2003 Nat'l Children's Theatre Festival; *Junie B. Jones & a Little Monkey Business!*; *Miss Nelson Has a Field Day!*; *Petite Rouge: A Cajun Red Riding Hood* (2007 NY Musical Theatre Festival); *Heidi* (w playwright Martha King De Silva); all commissioned by Imagination Stage. In 2002 she worked with Young Playwrights Theatre to help turn their play *Pieces of Life*, written by local middle school students, into a musical, which was performed at the Kennedy Center and toured the D.C. schools.



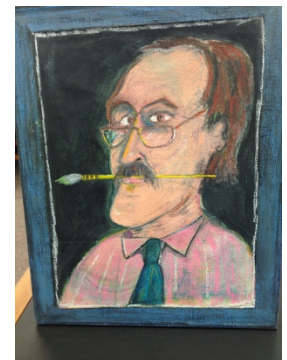
### MEET THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK *MISS NELSON IS MISSING*



**Harry Allard** was born in Evanston, Illinois on January 27, 1928 and died February 1, 2017 at the age of 89. He graduated from Northwestern University in 1949 and received a masters degree in French from Middlebury College in Vermont. He went on to get a doctorate in French literature from Yale in 1952. He is the author of *Miss Nelson is Missing*, *Miss Nelson Is Back*, *The Stupids Step Out*, and *It's So Nice to Have a Wolf Around the House*

### MEET THE ILLUSTRATOR OF THE BOOK *MISS NELSON IS MISSING*

**James Marshall** (1942–1992) was an American children's author and illustrator, best known for creating the beloved characters and stories in the George and Martha, Fox, and Miss Nelson series. Despite a childhood musical career derailed by a hand injury, he found his calling as an artist and writer, illustrating over 70 books with his distinctive, cartoonish style, and was posthumously honored with the *Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal* for his contributions to children's literature.



*Miss Nelson is Missing* Actors' Playhouse at the Miracle Theatre, 280 Miracle Mile, Coral Gables, FL 33133

## IT'S A MYSTERY

What is a mystery anyway? A mystery is a type of story, we call it “genre”, pronounce ZHAWN-ruh. A mystery always contains the following parts:

- **Crime or Puzzle:** A central element of a mystery is the presence of a crime, often a murder, theft, or a significant event that needs to be solved. Alternatively, it may involve a perplexing puzzle or “enigma” that requires unraveling.
- **Investigation:** The heart of the mystery genre lies in the process of investigation. The protagonist or leading character, often a detective or investigator, gathers clues, interviews witnesses, examines evidence, and analyzes the facts to piece together the truth. The investigation often follows a logical or deductive approach, emphasizing the protagonist’s ability to reason and solve complex problems.
- **Suspense and Tension:** Mysteries build suspense by withholding information from the reader, gradually revealing clues, and introducing red herrings—misleading elements designed to confuse and misdirect the investigator and the audience. This creates a sense of anticipation and tension, making the reader eager to discover the truth.
- **Plot Twists and Surprises:** Mystery stories frequently incorporate unexpected plot twists, surprises, and revelations. These twists challenge the reader’s assumptions and keep them engaged. They may involve the introduction of new evidence, the discovery of a hidden motive, or the revelation of an unexpected culprit.
- **Clues and Foreshadowing:** Authors of mysteries often provide subtle clues and hints throughout the narrative, allowing astute readers to piece together the puzzle alongside the detective. These clues may be cleverly concealed within the text or hidden in plain sight, requiring careful attention to detail.
- **Resolution:** The resolution of a mystery typically involves the identification of the culprit or the unveiling of the truth behind the puzzle. The protagonist’s investigative efforts culminate in a climactic revelation or confrontation, bringing closure to the mystery and tying up loose ends.

### AN INTERACTIVE MYSTERY LESSON - PRE SHOW EXPERIENCE AT SCHOOL

#### (Florida best Standards R.3.1 and R.1.3)

To really sell this lesson, you will have to put on your best acting! Facial expressions are key— wide eyes, gasps, hand over the mouth, are especially useful when pretending to listen to each stuffed animal answer a question.

#### Prep Work/Needed Materials

- caution tape around the crime scene
- 3 stuffed animals (best if one is a dragon or something else that might burn paper)
- a baby blanket
- a burned piece of paper (you might download a picture with effects from the internet)
- iridescent paper cut into small pieces

Have students enter carpet or story area (preferably in a library) as they usually would. Tell them you have a little problem. You had picked out the funniest book to read to them. Describe the book a little and what it was about. You put it \_\_\_\_\_ (now surrounded by crime tape) so you wouldn’t lose it, but it’s missing! Request their help in solving *The Mystery of the Missing Library Book?*

You must really SELL your story with your best acting! Tell the students you knew that if they were going to solve this mystery, you needed to gather some clues. Tell them what you found.

*First, I found these 3 suspects (refer to your three stuffed animals) and isolated them from everyone else so you could question them. I also found a piece of burned paper and some weird things that look like scales. What do you think might be a reason - motive - for these characters to steal the library book?* Various answers like “If the book was about a Lion maybe that stuffed Lion was worried about being embarrassed if someone read it.” Encourage the “pretend” aspect now, really get their imaginations going - what would make a teddy bear steal a library book?

Now you might take them on a walk to get a closer look at the crime scene. Discuss the questions you should ask the suspects. You may land on questions like:

- Where were you last night?
- Did you see anyone near the book?
- Can you think of any reason someone would want to take the book?
- Did you take the book?

Ask the questions of the stuffed animals and have them whisper back the answers. An example might be with a teddy Bear “I was curled up in the corner with that baby blanket! You know, I’m supposed to be hibernating right now but it’s hard to sleep during the school day! I didn’t take the book and I didn’t see anyone near it. I fall asleep as soon as the kids leave.”

Then question the second stuffed animal “I had a bad case of the zoomies last night. I ran circles around the shelves for most of the night. I didn’t go anywhere NEAR the books because you remind us every night to leave the books alone while you aren’t here!” Here, you might nod and say something like “It’s true! Remember how we talk at the beginning of the year about taking care of your library books by keeping them away from animals?” Or any way you can connect the location and characters to their own experience.

Then question the final stuffed animal. He talks in your ear for a much longer time. You occasionally stop and look at him with various looks- shock, anger, sadness, understanding. Then you give him a big hug and say “Let me talk to everyone else and see what they say.”

You turn to the class and say something like “OK friends, here is what happened. Library Dragon said he was bored last night. He tried to take a nap, but he wasn’t tired. He tried flying laps around the library but there wasn’t a lot of room to spread his wings. He knew he wasn’t supposed to touch the books... but he couldn’t help it. Unfortunately, the book was SO funny, he accidentally snorted fire and burned the book up. He is very, very sorry and promises never to do it again. Should we forgive him?”

By this point, students are so enthralled, most of them call out “YES!” Although a few of them say “No!”

You wrap up the lesson by pointing out that mystery books will often have a detective or other problem solver, a crime or problem to solve, suspects, and the clues that are collected, but may not have anything to do with the crime. Then read aloud *Miss Nelson is Missing*.

Credit to [The Library Teacher Lesson Ideas for Teachers and Librarians](#)

[Miss Nelson is Missing Actors’ Playhouse at the Miracle Theatre, 280 Miracle Mile, Coral Gables, FL 33133](#)

## GET A CLUE - SYNOPSIS OF THE MUSICAL

*Miss Nelson is Missing* with book, music, and lyrics by Joan Cushing, is based on the children's books by Harry Allard and James Marshall. The plot follows the unruly students of Room 207 who take their gentle teacher, Miss Nelson, for granted until she vanishes and is replaced by a strict substitute, Miss Viola Swamp.

### Musical synopsis

- **A class of "Worst Kids":** Room 207 at Horace B. Smedley Elementary is home to the most ill-behaved class in the entire school. Despite their kind-natured teacher, Miss Nelson, the children throw spitballs, make paper airplanes, and are generally unruly.
- **Miss Nelson goes missing:** Fed up with their antics, Miss Nelson decides to teach her students a lesson and disappears.
- **The arrival of Viola Swamp:** The following day, a terrible, no-nonsense substitute named Miss Viola Swamp arrives. She wears an ugly black dress and gives the kids piles of homework, canceling story hour and recess. The students are terrified of her, and their classroom quickly turns from chaos to fear.
- **The hunt for Miss Nelson:** While the students struggle with their new reality, they begin to miss their kind teacher dearly and regret their behavior. They launch a desperate search to find Miss Nelson and bring her back.
- **Detective McSmogg's investigation:** The students enlist the help of Detective McSmogg, a bumbling private eye, to solve the mystery of Miss Nelson's disappearance. The children visit Miss Nelson's house and investigate possible disappearances, but with no luck.
- **(Spoiler Alert) Miss Nelson's return and the big reveal:** After days under the iron rule of Viola Swamp, Miss Nelson mysteriously returns. The children, now polite and well-behaved, express how much they missed her and explain that they've learned their lesson. Miss Nelson notices their improved behavior and, in a moment alone, reveals to herself (and the audience) that she is, in fact, Viola Swamp. The musical ends with Detective McSmogg now on the hunt for the missing Viola Swamp.
- **Classroom Management:** One of the main skills a teacher learns when they begin their teaching career is how to manage a classroom. Have you ever been in a class that was out of control? How did that affect your learning? Do you think Miss Nelson did the right thing to get a hold on her student's behavior?

*Miss Nelson is Missing* Actors' Playhouse at the Miracle Theatre, 280 Miracle Mile, Coral Gables, FL 33133

# PUZZLING ISN'T IT?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## MISS NELSON IS MISSING

O C F M J X C F T F F R D V X H Y  
 C M T E R C E S E R B H H J K K Y  
 M F H H H M C M D V X W C O A U D  
 Q M I S S V I O L A S W A M P G N  
 T P D C J M L O O H C S O N S N D  
 Y S X N M G W C X S Y F V K E N V  
 A H D P R E V L K X Y Z A J I E W  
 J A M O J L L N S E G E R Z L L E  
 R R R H B W P C F V L C C C F Z S  
 C K T C T T M Z E C I L O P R J B  
 Y E M T Y Y J Q O O I B E O E M I  
 Q X I I K R O W E M O H K H T A V  
 U Y S W M I S S N E L S O N T R C  
 B H S V N C F B N Q G H G I U S L  
 P E I X V F Y Z S G N M X L B H A  
 O S N F Y V W F D Z E C Q I Q H S  
 D I G Q Y D Z E V A H E B S I M S

miss viola swamp      miss nelson      missing      misbehave      witch  
 shark      secret      school      police      class      mars      homework  
 butterflies

*Miss Nelson is Missing* Actors' Playhouse at the Miracle Theatre, 280 Miracle Mile, Coral Gables, FL 33133

## AN ALMA MATER MYSTERY?

An Alma Mater is the anthem of a school, college or a university. An Alma Mater is typically sung at sports games, graduations, or school events to celebrate school pride and values. In *Miss Nelson is Missing* the students of room 207 sing the Horace B. Elementary School Alma Mater to begin the school day:

HAIL TO THEE, OH ALMA MATER.  
 WE ARE LOYAL, THROUGH AND THROUGH.  
 PROUD TO BE YOUR SONS AND DAUGHTERS,  
 TO YOUR COLORS WE ARE TRUE.  
 GREEN IS FOR THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE.  
 GOLD IS FOR THE GOLDEN RULE.  
 HAIL TO THEE, OH HORACE B.  
 ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
 HAIL TO THEE, OH HORACE B.  
 ELEMENTARY SCHOOL!  
 FOR PEARLS OF WISDOM, WE ARE YEARNING,  
 AND OUR TEACHERS WE RESPECT.  
 EAGER TO ENGAGE IN LEARNING  
 OUR REPORT CARDS DO REFLECT.  
 MODELS OF GOOD CONDUCT, WE.  
 THE PRIDE OF OUR COMMUNITY.  
 HAIL TO THEE, OH HORACE B.  
 ELEMENTARY SCHOOL!

**Does your school have an Alma Mater or School Song? What is the mission or values of your school? Can you express them in a song? Give it a try!**

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## HYPOTHESIS: WHAT IF???

A Hypothesis is an educated guess. It's usually based on previous knowledge or experience. Most solutions to mysteries begin with a hypothesis based on the facts at hand. Miss Nelson's students have a number of these guesses, (although not always "educated" guesses), as to what might have happened to Miss Nelson.

**ALLISON:** *What if she was gobbled by a shark?*

**ADAM:** *What if she got sucked up by a vacuum?*

**CHERYL:** *What if she was squirted by a skunk?*

**GREGORY:** *What if she was stolen by a swarm of angry butterflies?*

**What do YOU think could have happened to Miss Nelson? In the space below write your hypothesis and draw a picture to illustrate your idea.**



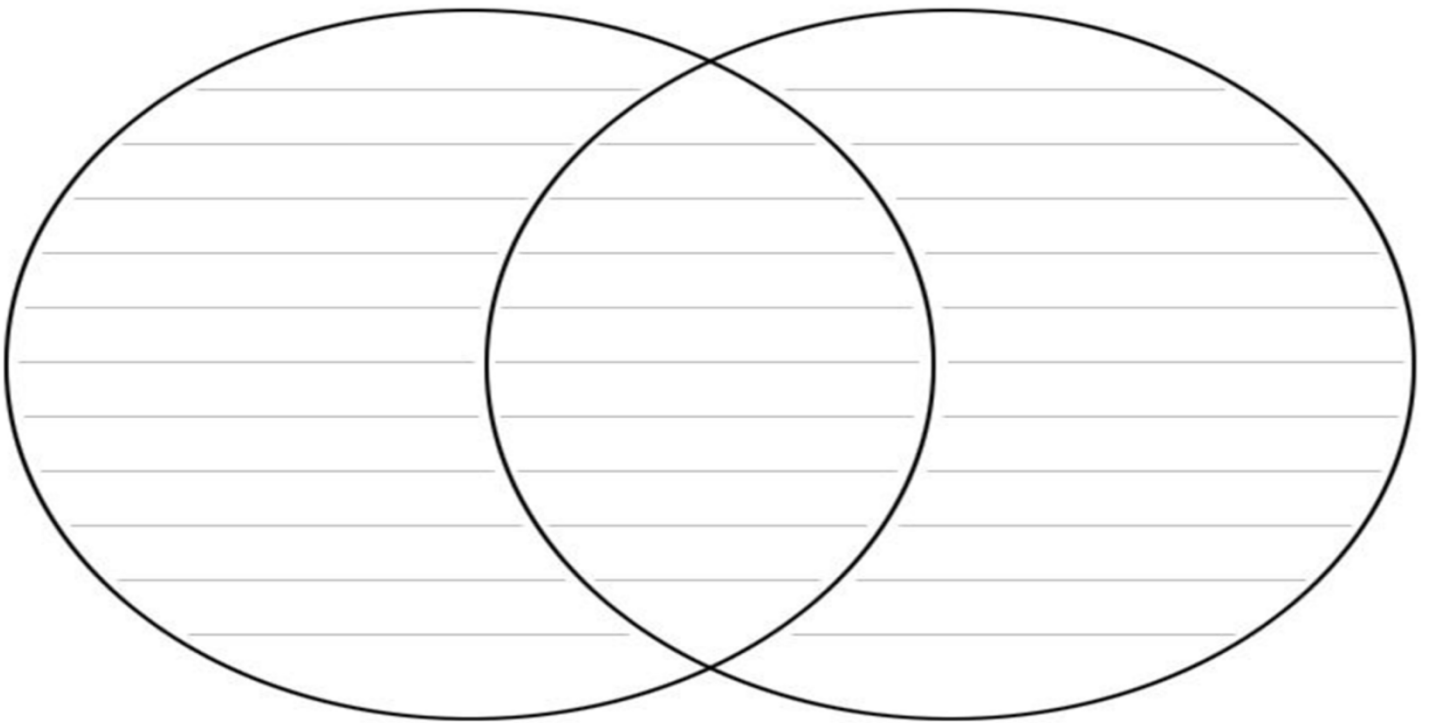
## VENN WE COMPARE

Venn diagrams are used to compare and contrast topics, stories, characters, and much more! Venn diagrams were invented by an English logician named John Venn and are visuals which consist of two or more circles or ovals that intersect in the middle. The differences of each topic you are studying are written into the circles that do not intersect and the similarities are written into the overlapping section of the diagram. You've probably used these a lot in school.

**Use the Venn Diagram below to compare and contrast the two teachers in Room 207.**

Miss Nelson

Miss Viola Swamp



**Think & Write:** Imagine a third oval was added to this Venn Diagram. What other character would you want to add to this comparison? Why?

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## WHERE IS THE WORLD IS MISS NELSON?

Detective McSmog tells Room 207 he will search everywhere for Miss Nelson, but where in the world is he going?

- **Botswana** is a landlocked country in southern Africa.
- **Sands of Arabia** is located in southwestern Asia and covers the vast majority of the Arabian Peninsula. The Arabian Desert is the largest desert area in Asia and covers about 900,000 square miles.
- **The English Channel** is part of the Atlantic Ocean and it separates England and France and joins the North Sea to the Atlantic Ocean.
- **Himalaya of Tibet** refers to the great mountain range of Asia ranging east to west from Afghanistan through Pakistan to India and into Nepal, then from Tibet through Bhutan and ending in Burma.
- **Antarctica** is the southernmost continent and site of the South Pole. It is an ice covered land mass.

As a class, use sticky notes to label all the places Detective McSmog is searching on your classroom world map. Label all seven continents on the map below, then color them in different colors.



## PRE-SHOW LESSONS:

### WITHOUT A WORD

**Subjects: ELA, Arts**

Pre-read the book *Miss Nelson is Missing*. Have the students act out a section from the story without words while it is being read aloud by other students or the Teacher. Next have the students perform the story using improvised (made up) dialogue and movement based on the story's plot. Finally discuss how dialogue and movement can help tell a story.

**Applicable B.E.S.T. Standards:** R.1.1, R.1.2, R.1.3, R.3.1, R.3.2, ELA.C.2.1, V.1.3, ELA.K.C.2

**Florida Arts Standards:** TH.A.1.2.1., FL.TH.B.1.2, TH.E.1.2.3

### THE CHANGING PLAY

**Subjects: ELA, Arts**

Using a sentence or nursery rhyme. Place emphasis on different words to change the meaning of the piece. How many different ways can you say: Yes, No, Maybe? Read a short poem or story out loud changing your expressions each time. (Try it softly, creepily, comically, etc.) Ask the children to react to the story as though they were watching it in a theatre and observe how a performer and an audience change as the style of the play transforms from one style to another.

**Applicable B.E.S.T. Standards:** R.1.1, R.1.2, R.1.3, R.1.4, R.3.1, R.3.2, R.3.4, C.2.1, V.1.2, V.1.3

**Applicable Florida Arts Standards:** TH.D.1.2.4, TH.E.1.2.3

### FEELINGS **Subjects: ELA, Theatre, Social Emotional Learning (SEL/Health), Arts**

Have the students sit or stand in a circle. Each student should say their name, a word that describes their immediate feeling, and add an abstract gesture to represent that feeling. The next person in line repeats the feeling word and gesture of the previous person and then takes their turn adding their immediate feeling and adding an abstract gesture as before. Continue around the circle until the last person has their turn and is then repeated by the first person.

**Applicable B.E.S.T. Standards:** R.3.1, C.2.1, V.1.3, Florida SEL – Resilience Building

**Applicable Florida Arts Standards:** TH.D.1.2.4, TH.E.1.2.1, TH.E.1.2.3

### OVERCOMING OBSTACLES **Subjects: ELA, Social Emotional Learning (SEL/Health), Theatre**

The students in Room 207 have a problem to solve. Have students write a story of a time when they had a big problem and found a way to solve it. Use guiding questions to elicit details and descriptions. Time, place, people, challenge, outcome, etc.

**Applicable B.E.S.T. Standards:** ELA.K.C.1.2

**Applicable Florida SEL:** Resilience Building, Empathy

**Applicable Florida Arts Standards:** TH.C.1.2.2, TH.D.1.2.2, TH.E.1.2.3

### MYSTERY WRITING **Subject ELA**

Apply narrative writing skills to the specific elements of the Mystery genre. As a class, share examples in the student's own lives about mysteries that occurred for them (i.e. lost pet, missing toy, hidden holiday gifts). Together vote on the problem you are going to establish for your story. Create a structure and outline that includes an introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. Ensure completeness; the falling action should tie up loose ends and the resolution should refer back to the original problem. After writing a short group mystery in outline form, send the students back to write their own mystery, establishing an interesting set of characters, a setting, and incorporate clues. Teach "red herrings" or the idea of false clues dropped along the way to push the reader off track. Make sure they include dialogue - like lines in a play - to help them tell the story.

**Applicable B.E.S.T. Standards:** ELA.3.C.1.2

## POST-SHOW LESSONS:

### WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, HOW Subject: ELA

After seeing *Miss Nelson is Missing*, re-tell, write, draw, or act out some of the scenes that were in the musical. Then answer the following questions: Who were the main characters in the scene? What was the problem or conflict? Describe where the scene took place? When in history or in the character's life did the scene take place? How did the characters resolve or react to the problem or conflict?

**Applicable B.E.S.T. Standards: R.1.1, R.1.2, R.1.3, C.1.2, C.2.1, C.5.1, V.1.3**

### THINGS ARE NOT WHAT THEY SEEM Subject: ELA, Arts

After watching *Miss Nelson is Missing*, give each student one found object in the classroom and have them sell the item to the class. It does not have to be sold as what it appears. For example, a hat could be a portable bowl. Then divide into groups and have each group gather five everyday objects and create a short play or scene that includes all five things. Make sure that each scene has a clear beginning, problem or conflict, and a clear resolution.

**Applicable B.E.S.T. Standards: ELA.C.1.2**

**Applicable Florida Arts Standards: TH.A.3.2.2, FL.TH. B.1.2**

### TELL THE STORY AND DISCOVER THE TRUE MEANING Subject ELA

After watching *Miss Nelson is Missing* have one or several student lead a class discussion of the main events of the plot (story) in order, characters in the show, each characters important moments, and the resolution. Together, figure out the underlying meaning of the whole thing. See if students can pick out evidence in the text for their conclusions about the subtext.

**Applicable B.E.S.T. Standards: R.3.2, ELA.C.1.2, ELA.C.2.1**

### WALK IN MY SHOES Subjects: ELA, Theatre

After seeing *Miss Nelson is Missing*, have individual students or groups of students re-tell the story from a particular character's point of view. Assign different characters to different students or groups. Have the class note how the story differs depending on whose perspective is shared. How would Miss Nelson herself tell the story? Mr. Blandsford? Detective McSmogg? Adam? Cheryl?

**Applicable B.E.S.T. Standards: ELA.C.2.1, R.1.3**

**Applicable Florida Arts Standards: TH.C.1.2.3**

### LET THEATRE CHANGE YOUR POINT OF VIEW Subjects: Theatre

After seeing *Miss Nelson is Missing* might you think differently about your behavior in the classroom? Might you try to adjust that in any way? Did you feel sorry for Miss Nelson? Have you ever felt sorry for a substitute teacher when your classmates were giving them a hard time?

**Applicable Florida Arts Standards: TH.C.1.2.3**

### WRITE A REVIEW Subject: ELA

Professional actors in productions are subject to critics from news organizations writing reviews of their performance and the production they're in. A "rave review" is where the critic likes everything about the show and mentions people and designers by name with compliments. A "pan" is when the critic hates everything about the show, including the production and says so specifically about the acting, the set, the direction, even the playwright. Most reviews are somewhere in between. Copy the playbill for the students or share a link that lists the actors, director, designers, etc. and have them write a review of the production they saw.

### [HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF A THEATRE REVIEW](#)

*Miss Nelson is Missing* Actors' Playhouse at the Miracle Theatre, 280 Miracle Mile, Coral Gables, FL 33133

**SEND US FEEDBACK!**

We love getting letters, pictures, questions, and feedback from all our audience members, but especially the children. Here is a template you can print if it would be helpful. Please scan and e-mail them to [education@actorsplayhouse.org](mailto:education@actorsplayhouse.org) or mail to Actors' Playhouse, 280 Miracle Mile, Coral Gables, FL 33134. If they draw a picture on the back of their letter, the actors will love it!

Dear Actors' Playhouse,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am in the \_\_\_\_\_ grade at  
 \_\_\_\_\_ School.

I just saw *Miss Nelson is Missing* and I had a few things to say about it.

My favorite part was:

I felt scared when:

I felt sad when:

I felt happy when:

My favorite character was \_\_\_\_\_ Because:

I have a question:

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I want to see another play, and next time I would like it to be about:

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My favorite book is \_\_\_\_\_

Is there a musical based on that book?

Sincerely,

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PS: I drew a picture on the back!

*Miss Nelson is Missing* Actors' Playhouse at the Miracle Theatre, 280 Miracle Mile, Coral Gables, FL 33133