

Presents

# Corduroy

## Study Guide

### ABOUT THE PLAY

Lisa Carolina Evalina Brown moves to the big city with her mother Regina, an aspiring fashion designer. Everything seems new to Lisa: buildings stretch into the sky, and the local kids dress and act differently than they did in South Carolina. Lisa nervously jabbars on and on to the neighbor children, and she finds it difficult to make friends. A new neighbor, Jeff, suggests that the key to making friends, like the key to making jazz, is to “loosen up and listen”: relax, find the groove and the rhythm of the situation and figure out how you fit into the mix.

Meanwhile, at Hampton’s Department Store, a teddy bear named Corduroy sits on the shelf with Lucille, a toy ballerina, and Eddie, a stuffed rabbit. Corduroy hopes that a child will be his friend. When Lisa meets Corduroy, she wants to take him home, but her mother refuses to spend her hard-earned money on a toy that is not perfect – Corduroy is missing a button from his green overalls.

While Lisa sits at home sewing, Regina shows her some dress designs she’s working on for a very important meeting. Lisa urges her to take Jeff’s advice and loosen up and listen – ladies in the big city tend to wear pants instead of dresses.

Lucille overhears that if she, Eddie, and Corduroy are not purchased soon, they will be put in the charity cart, which could lead to a home with a needy child, or to the garbage! The toys help Corduroy search for a button so that Lisa’s mother will let her buy him. They find buttons sewn onto mattresses in the bed department, and in trying to remove them, attract the attention of the security guard, who takes them to the charity cart.

Lisa is still trying to figure out a way to take Corduroy home, and she notices one of the neighborhood kids selling lemonade on the street. Lisa decides to become a seamstress for local children’s dolls to earn extra money. The care she takes in creating outfits for their dolls earns Lisa the friendship of the neighborhood kids.

Lisa arrives at Hampton’s just in time to see the toys being rolled away in the charity cart. When she asks for Corduroy, the security cart gives the bear to her. Lisa promises to find homes for Lucille and Eddie too. Maybe she can give them to her new friends.

### BEFORE SEEING THE PERFORMANCE

#### 1. ADAPTATION

Read *Corduroy* with your class and discuss the difficulties in adapting a simple 32-page story into an hour-long musical. What is an adaptation? Would new characters need to be invented? Would characters’ relationships need to be explored? How would toys interact with “real” people? What kind of music might be appropriate for this story?

The playwright of our adaptation, Cusi Cram, decided to develop the characters as well as create new characters for her stage version of *Corduroy*. If she told the story as written it would only run 15 minutes. So often writers will do an adaptation of a story and develop things that they feel are suitable to their point of view.

## 2. THEMES

**PERFECTION:** What does it mean to be “perfect”? Would you buy a broken toy? How important is it to be perfect? Can someone like you even though you’re not perfect?

**FRIENDSHIP:** How do you make friends? Do you bribe them? Do you bully them? Do you develop your talents so potential friends will accept you as you are? Do you remember your first day at school, or first day in a new city? How did you make friends?

**I MUST HAVE THAT BEAR!** If there’s something you really want, how do you go about getting it? Do you beg? Do you yell and scream until you get it? Do you ask politely? What if that doesn’t work? Can kids earn money? What kinds of talents do you have that you can utilize?

## AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

### 1) FOR DISCUSSION

**“LOOSEN UP AND LISTEN”** What happens when you’re nervous? Do you talk too much to cover up your awkwardness? Do you forget to listen because you’re so nervous? How did Jeff the Narrator “Loosen Up and Listen”? He practiced his sax so he can relax when he plays. Jeff can’t be concerned or afraid of making mistakes. Do you have any other ideas on how to relax?

**CREATIVE THINKING:** When the weather is hot, May earns money by selling lemonade. Lisa discovers a way for her to earn money – by repairing toys. What are other ways children can earn money in various seasons? (ie: rake leaves in the fall, shovel snow in the winter, weed gardens in the spring, etc)

**CORDUROY’S MUSIC:** Throughout the show, the composer, Scott Davenport Richards, decided to use jazz music to tell the story. How did the acting and music work together? For example, Jeff and Lisa performed a “scat” (improvising with nonsense syllables) song, and the children rapped while jumping rope. Do you think using this type of music was appropriate to the story? Did it help to create the sense of the city in which *Corduroy* takes place? Can you think of other types of music that might work well for this story?

### 2) CREATIVE DRAMATICS

#### PANTOMIME: JUMP ROPE

Find or create a cleared space so students can move freely. Write the word “Pantomime” on blackboard and explain that pantomime is when you convey emotions, actions, or feelings, by using gestures instead of speech or using props. Discuss with students the way the actors jump-roped in the play. Did they have a rope? How did they make you believe there was a rope?

**ACTIVITY:** Tell students that in order to participate, they need to concentrate and use their eyes. Tell students they will hear you side-coaching them throughout the activity; students are not to stop and look at you but to hear and react.

**INDIVIDUAL JUMP-ROPE:** See an imaginary rope on the ground. Pick it up with both hands. Make circular pattern with the “rope”. When do you jump? Where are your hands?

**TWO PERSON JUMP-ROPE:** Arrange students in pairs. Tell one student to control the rope and instruct the other to jump in later. See the imaginary rope on the ground. Pick it up. The rope controller begins. (Let controller establish

a pace before jumper enters). The jumper watches the rope. When it touches the ground jump in. Are you in sync with your jumping?

**LARGE GROUP JUMP-ROPE:** (ideal for older students) Divide the class in two. One group participates while the other half waits for their turn. Two students start twirling an imaginary rope in sync, from opposite sides of the room. Let the controllers establish a pace before the jumpers enter. The jumpers watches the rope: when it touches the ground, one jumper goes in. After a few seconds call out “next” and the second jumper joins the first. Repeat this pattern till all jumpers are in. Encourage students to be aware of other jumpers – they should all jump at the same time.

### **PLAY ACTING: “SITTING ON A SHELF AT HAMPTON’S”**

If toys could talk what might they say to each other? For example, they might talk about how rough the children are with them, how happy they are when the children play with them, or they might discuss their physical condition (lost an eye, stuffing coming out, etc.) What kind of toys might you find in a store or in the playroom? For example: ballerinas, soldiers, puppets, fashion dolls, toy cars, stuffed animals, or dinosaurs. Clear a space so students can move freely and explain that students are going to become a special toy. Let them choose they favorite type of toy, and tell them to sit or stand of the doll they chosen. How does this toy move? What kind of voice might it have? Can this toy do something special? Let them explore these ideas simultaneously. Tell them the following story in which the toys come alive and talk to each other in the middle of the night, and persuade them to act along as you tell the story:

**THE STORY:** The room is absolutely still. Imagine you’re a quiet non-moving toy. Suddenly the old clock on the wall begins to chime. *Bong, Bong, Bong* (make this sound 12 times). At 12:00 am something magical happens. The toys slowly wake up. They move just one part of their bodies. Then another part of their bodies (for example: eyebrows, toes, belly, etc.). Soon their entire bodies begin to stretch. The toys begin to talk to each other.

Tell students you have a pretend microphone. Explain that if you come to their group with your microphone, everyone can hear their conversation – all other groups must be quiet and listen.

**ADD CONFLICT:** (great for older students) Join the students in their game and become a toy. Announce that you heard a rumor that they are going to get rid of some of the toys. PANIC!

### **3) VISUAL ARTS: “LOOSEN UP AND LISTEN”**

**PREPARATION:** Gather art supplies: crayons, colored chalk, pastels, oil base crayons, felt tip pens, colored and black construction paper. Also a tape recorder or CD player with an instrumental jazz recording.

**ACTIVITY:** Explain to students that they are going to create designs inspired by the instrumental jazz music they hear. They may use only lines and dots (circles). Play the recording and encourage students to close their eyes and imagine lines and dots dancing to the music. Students then gather the art supplies they need. Play the recording again while students create their art. When they’re finished, display the great variety of images they have created.

### **4) LITERARY ARTS: “SOFT AND COMFORTABLE”**

**PREPARATION:** Get swatches of different fabrics (for example: nylon net, silk, wool, flannel, and of course, corduroy). Put a different swatch of fabric into each paper bag. It might be wise to have many bags with the same fabric inside. Each student (or group of students) gets their own bag. Write the word “Texture” on blackboard – the feel or appearance of a surface or substance.

**ACTIVITY:** Have students put their hands into their set of bags and feel the fabric. After they have had a chance to feel the content in all of the bags discuss what they felt. Did it feel good to touch? Was it soft or hard? Did it feel sharp or smooth? Did a picture come to your mind when you felt the fabric? Would you like to wear something made of this fabric? Use the blackboard to list some of the adjectives the students used in their descriptions. Have students pick their favorite fabric for a teddy bear. Tell the students to write a paragraph describing their “perfect” teddy bear. Encourage students to share their description with rest of the class.

## 5) **IMAGINE YOUR VERY OWN CORDUROY!**

On the last two pages of this study guide, there are two teddy bear templates - a connect-the-dots and a blank outline. Pick one that suits your needs.

**CONNECT-THE DOTS:** Have students connect the dots in order, #1-43. Students should then color their pictures.

**BLANK OUTLINE:** Encourage children to imagine what their perfect Corduroy bear is like... What kind of clothes does Corduroy wear? Can Corduroy be a girl? Is Corduroy wearing shoes, slippers, or sandals, or is Corduroy bare-foot? How does Corduroy feel today? Students should then fill in the bear outline, based on their individual image of their perfect Corduroy, using crayons, colored pencils, or whatever media is available. Students can also create an environment around the teddy bear – is Corduroy in outer space, in the jungle, under water, in a forest?

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY & RESOURCE AIDS**

### **BOOKS**

Freeman, Don. Corduroy. New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1968.

Freeman, Don. A Pocket for Corduroy. New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1980

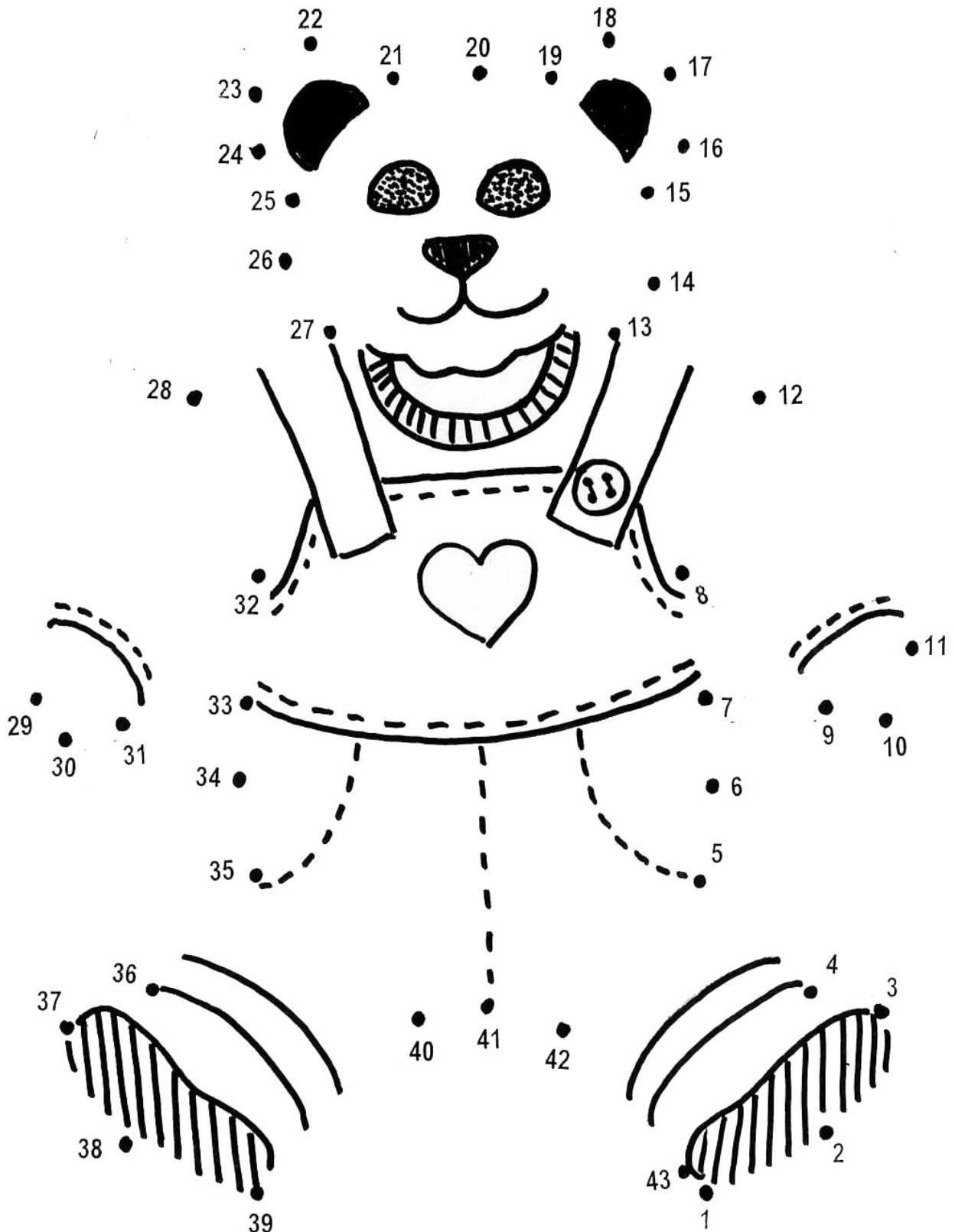
### **INTERNET**

There is an incredible amount of information regarding jazz that can be found on the internet. Be sure to check out [www.WyntonMarsalis.net](http://www.WyntonMarsalis.net)

### **RECORDINGS**

Ella Fitzgerald	Count Basie
Louie Armstrong	Dizzy Gillespie
Duke Ellington	Wynton Marsalis
Charlie Parker	Mel Torme

Find Corduroy by connecting the dots in order, #1 - 43.



After connecting the numbers color the picture you discover.

