

RUSSELL, the Hermit Crab

A Family Musical by Magical Music for Life™



A Study Guide

TEACHER'S INFORMATION

Cast of Characters



Russell

a young hermit crab who doesn't know who he is because he lives in other creatures shells



Crab

Russell's not-always-very positive friend who defines crabbiness



Lobster

Russell's good, caring buddy who wants to help Russell figure out his identity

Shrimp Russell's kind and warm friend who suggests going to see the wise Sea Turtle



Roy, the Seahorse

the happy ocean traveler who befriends Russell

Sea Turtle

the wisest creature in the ocean who offers no easy answers to Russell



Gus & Angel

the evil, thieving octopus and his nightclub singer angel fish girlfriend



Elizabeth

the human girl on the beach who helps Russell discover his identity

SYNOPSIS

SCENE 1: Crab, Shrimp and Lobster greet a new day. Song: *Morning Time on Ocean Floor*. Russell enters in a new shell. He is very unhappy in this foreign outer self. Song: *Who Am I?* Russell's three friends want to help him discover who he is, and Lobster suggests Russell imitate his movements and become a lobster. Song: *Just Like Me*. Russell tries for weeks, but all are disappointed when Russell's changing red color turns out to be the result of the red seaweed from red tide. Shrimp convinces them all not to give up and to venture out into the unknown deep sea to seek the wisdom of the great wise Sea Turtle. Song: *We'll Be There For You*.

SCENE 2: The four make the difficult three-day journey out into the scary ocean where they are suddenly (*) caught in a lobster trap. When Lobster with his great strength fails to release them, he suggests Russell remove his shell so he can squeeze through the mesh of the trap and open the trap's door. Scared, but wanting to save all their lives, Russell succeeds and finds his removable shell to be an asset for the first time in his young life.

SCENE 3: The friends finally speak with the Sea Turtle, but he does not offer Russell a definitive answer. Song: *You Will Learn About You*. Suddenly a boat overhead churns up the water, and Russell finds himself separated from his friends and forced to face his worst nightmare, being lost and alone out in the deep sea.

SCENE 4: Scared, Russell crawls into his shell to hide and overhears Angel Fish singing the blues about her past performing career that she misses. Song: *My Life at the Sands*. Angel can't leave Russell alone, so she brings him home to her thieving husband, Gus, the Octopus.

SCENE 5: Gus wants to eat Russell for lunch, but when he hears Russell can remove his shell, he hatches a plan on how to use Russell for stealing sunken treasure. He tries to convince Russell that the answer to his identity lies in selecting a name that describes who he is. Song: *It's All in a Name*. Angel and Gus are so intent on working out how Russell can help them that they do not notice that he has overheard their plans and wisely, made his escape.

SCENE 6: After narrowly escaping with his life, and convinced by Gus that a name is truly the clue to who he is, Russell decides to call it quits and live alone as a hermit. His thoughts are interrupted by Seahorse, a fun-loving, larger than life ocean cowboy who sets Russell straight about names not determining who you actually are. Song: *I Like Livin'*. Seahorse cheers up Russell and then directs him back to his home in the Bay, suggesting he might find some answers from the people on the beach. After Russell departs, Shrimp and Lobster, searching for their friend, find the Seahorse who tells them where Russell is headed. They leave to get Crab who is searching nearby.

SCENE 7: Once back to the bay, Russell summons up the courage to do the unthinkable, go up on the beach in search of his identity. Realizing he can use his shell to help him roll up onto the shore, he throws himself into the crashing surf and is tossed up onto the beach where he is found lying semiconscious by a little girl, Elizabeth. Quickly she takes off her sweatshirt to offer shade from the hot sun. When Russell realizes he is not the only one who can "take off his clothes," he is ecstatic. Elizabeth explains that her clothing changes all the time, and doesn't determine who she is, just how she wishes to appear. Song: *That's Me*. Freed of his burden and reunited with his friends who have found him on the beach, Russell embraces the world. Song: *There's a Great Big World*.

NOTE TO TEACHERS:

As you can see from the summary of the story, Russell's desire is to figure out exactly who/what he is, given the confusion caused by living in other creatures' shells. The characters he meets on his adventure and the experience of being lost alone at sea help Russell to realize that many of the things we "think" contribute to our identity, i.e. copying others, a name or a title, being a part of a clique, are really not the true essence of who we are.

Because of the time constraints of many school schedules, this hour long show may have been shortened to accommodate a 45 minute class period. As there are messages in every part of the show, we have included a few discussion points (indicated with *) about sections that may have been edited from the performance you saw.



PRE-SHOW QUESTIONS

In the show you are going to see, the main character, a hermit crab named Russell seeks to find out who he is. You should keep an eye out for some of the following information that we will discuss after the show:

1. Identity – why is Russell confused about his identity?
2. Friendship – which friends of Russell's would you consider a positive influence and which would you consider a negative influence?
3. Attitude – how does Russell change his attitude toward himself and how to others help lead him in that direction?

POST-SHOW QUESTIONS / DISCUSSION POINTS

What are ways that we explain who we are? Are these accurate or fair?

Examples: How we look
Who our friends are
How we dress
What we are called
What we excel at: academics, sports, music, etc.

Are there some better indicators of who we really are?

Examples: What we feel
What we think
How we treat other people
So how should we really define our identity?

Who are Russell's closest friends, and what influence do they have on Russell? How do they show their feelings?

Examples: Shrimp is kindly and takes care and protects Russell.
Lobster is almost like a best friend/pal.
Crab cares about Russell, though he shows it differently.

Who are the characters Russell meets who are kind and try to help him?

Examples: Seahorse is very positive about life, optimistic. He helps convince Russell that just because he's a hermit crab doesn't mean he has to be a hermit, and he shows Russell the way to get home.
Elizabeth, the girl on the beach, shows Russell the most important thing of all, that his outside does not define his inside, and changing his shell, like she changes her clothes, is not a bad thing at all.

Who are the characters Russell meets that are not good for Russell? Why?

Examples: Angel kind of helps Russell by not leaving him in the ocean alone, but she does not have his best interest at heart once Gus starts his scheming.
Gus only wants to eat Russell for lunch or get him to help steal things from shipwrecks. He only wants to use Russell for his own benefit.

What positive things did Russell learn that changed his negative attitude toward himself?

Examples: His shell does not change who he is inside.

His shell helps protect him, even helping him get up onto the beach.

His shell can camouflage him and protect him from those who would eat him.

- * His shell can come off and allow him to slide through small spaces, as he did when he helped his friends escape from the lobster trap.

Did anyone else in the show have a positive change in attitude?

Hopefully the Crab!

PERSONAL WRITING

1. Russell comments to Lobster that “the fish look like everyone else in their school.” Do you have cliques or groups of children in your school who dress alike or behave similarly? Identify them by their common characteristics, a descriptive title, and what about them appeals or disturbs you personally.
2. Have you or anyone you know ever judged someone wrongly based upon the way they look or dress or behave? If so, describe the person and how it was discovered that they had been misjudged.
3. Are you surprised that Russell has three good friends who are so different than himself? Describe some reasons why these four have successfully become friends.
4. Have you ever been confused about your own identity? Most of us are at times of our lives. What or who has helped you discover characteristics of your own identity? Explain.

THE LYRICS

Below are song lyrics you heard during the show. Choose one and try to identify which character(s) sang it. Describe what you think it means, how it makes you feel and how you can relate to it.

“What you think you see isn’t really me, who am I?”

“If you walk like me, and you talk like me, then you’ll be like me and not like you.”

“It’s all in a name...it tells who you are, what you’ve done, what you’ll be. A name is your claim to your fame.”

“The best thing about my travels are the creatures that I meet; I find that once I know them, they’re all great company.”

“I know I’m unique, that’s what I’m meant to be. For deep within the heart of me, there’s a special part of me. That’s who I am, that’s me!”

“Don’t rush, little one. The answers will come. They grow from within with all that you do. Through living your life, you will learn about you.”

COLOR-IN ILLUSTRATION OF “RUSSELL” © by Don Maitz

On the last page, please find an illustration that can be reproduced for children to color-in.

