

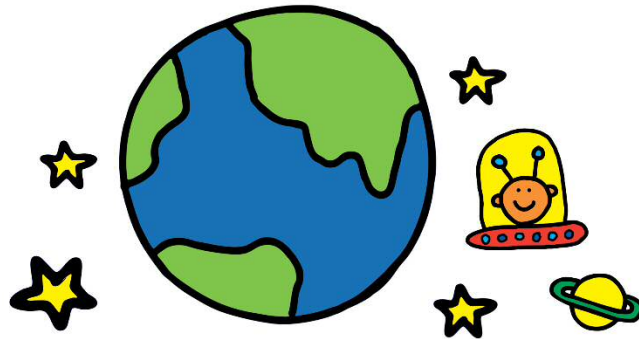


It's Okay to Be Different – Stories by Todd Parr

School Show Study Guide
from the Artist

Luther Burbank Center for the Arts
October 17, 2023

PRODUCED BY
**MERMAID
THEATRE**
OF NOVA SCOTIA



IT'S OKAY TO BE DIFFERENT

Stories by Todd Parr
The New York Times Best Selling Author



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IT'S OKAY TO BE DIFFERENT, THE EARTH BOOK, THIS IS MY HAIR
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Author/Illustrator: Todd Parr

Composer: Asif Illyas

Project Manager: Struan Robertson

Scenic Painter: Lisa Bedard

Narrator: Rebecca Thomas, Laura Britton, Nicholas Wang, Lachlan MacSween, Lydia Muchangi, Milena Tucker, Anik Jeyakumar, Logan Robins, Ivy Abbott-Charles

Performers: Logan Robins, Ivy Abbott-Charles

Director/Production Designer: Jim Morrow

Sound Producer: Shehab Illyas

Associate Production Designers: Deborah MacLean, Rosie Browning

Stage Manager: Kate Redding

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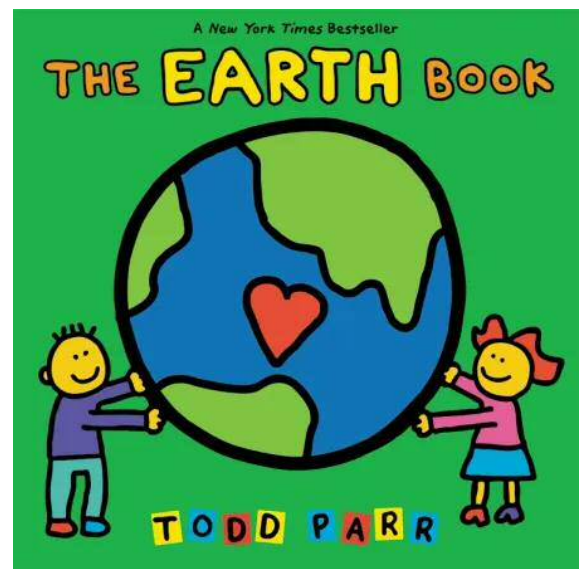
Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Province of Nova Scotia. Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia is a member of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres and engages professional Artists who are members of Canadian Actors' Equity Association under the terms of the Canadian Theatre Agreement.

About the Show:

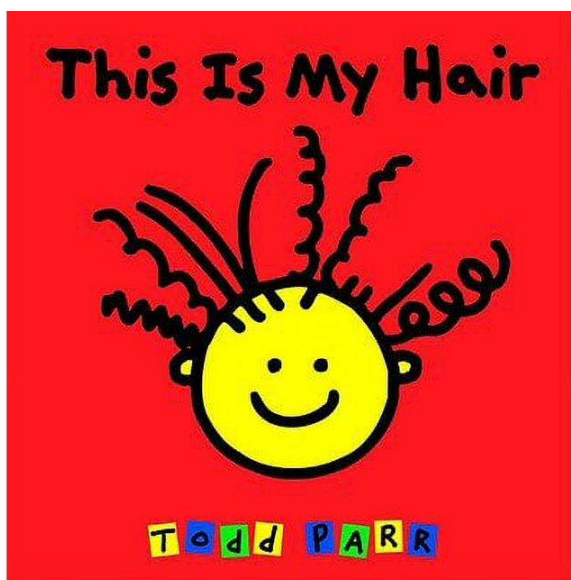
It's Okay to Be Different—Stories by Todd Parr is a live performance based on a series of children's books written and illustrated by Todd Parr. The performance includes large-scale puppets operated by performers, with audio narration of the text from the books. There are three books featured in the show:



With his signature blend of playfulness and sensitivity, Todd Parr explores important and timely subjects. *It's Okay to Be Different* cleverly delivers the important messages of acceptance, understanding, and self-confidence.



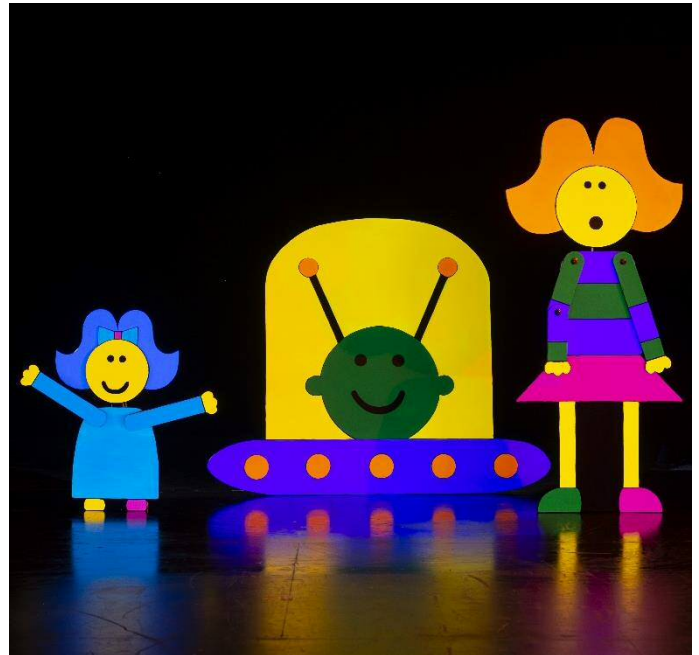
Equally whimsical and heartfelt, *The Earth Book* is a sweet homage to our beautiful planet inspiring readers of all ages to do their part to keep the Earth happy and healthy.



This is My Hair is a funny exploration of how silly hair can be and that no matter how your hair looks, always feel good about yourself.

About Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia

Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia ranks among North America's most respected theatres for the young, and plays an important ambassadorial role for Nova Scotia and for Canada. The company regularly crosses the continent, and has represented Canada in the United States, Japan, Mexico, Australia, England, Northern Ireland, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Holland, Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, Vietnam, South Korea and Taiwan, Bahrain, and the People's Republic of China. Mermaid Theatre has earned Export Excellence awards from both the Governments of Canada and of Nova Scotia. Based in the Town of Windsor, Mermaid has performed for more than 6 million spectators on four continents. The company was founded in 1972.



About Todd

Todd Parr is the author and illustrator of more than 50 books for children including the New York Times bestselling *The I Love You Book*, *The Earth Book*, and *The Thankful Book*. His books have received numerous awards and are available in over eighteen languages throughout the world. He is the co-creator of the popular Daytime Emmy® nominated television show, *ToddWorld*, as well as short films for *Sesame Street*. Todd is also working on a new show based on his books, produced by Spider Eye in the UK. In a review of his 2019 release, *The Kindness Book*, *The School Library Journal* states "Parr encourages consideration of all people and creatures great and small." Kindness and empathy remain at the forefront of Todd's books and in his collaborations with SF-MARIN Food Bank, Stouffer's, People Magazine and several companies working towards helping people, animals, and promoting literacy. Todd lives in Berkeley, California with his three adopted Pit Bulls.

Classroom Activities

I Am ME!

- Think about one way you are unique and different—for example, you like to wear mismatched socks, you can whistle any tune, your favorite hobby is crocheting, and so on—and share it with your students.
- Now ask them to think about one way they are unique and different and encourage volunteers to share their ideas.
- Read aloud *It's Okay to Be Different* by Todd Parr. Discuss: What can you learn from this book? What lesson does the author want you to understand? Guide children to understand that the author wants them to recognize that everyone is different—and that is okay!
- Circle back to your initial discussion and talk about how everyone shared something that makes them unique, which also makes them special.
- Give each child a piece of paper, with the words “I Am ME!” at the top. Have children think about four different things that make them unique and different – if needed, you may give them specific topics (their favorite food, their favorite place to go, a special hobby or talent they have). Encourage them to draw a picture for each category.
- Allow children to share and talk about their completed list.

Inspired Illustrations

- Look at Todd Parr's pictures and discuss his style.
 - What geometric shapes does he use?
 - What kinds of colors does he use?
 - What do you notice about all his pictures?
- Draw a person the way Todd Parr does. First, you will be drawing the outline of your person with a black marker. Start with a circle for the head.
- Next, use other geometric shapes for the rest of the body. (Students can choose the shape they want – rectangle, trapezoid, squares, etc.)
- Then, add a pattern to the clothes.
- Finally, use fine line markers to color your person.
- Discuss your images and compare your drawing with one of Todd Parr's. How are they the same? How are they different? How many shapes did you use?

Recycling Sorting Game

In *The Earth Book*, Todd Parr presents practical activities that help children lessen their ecological footprint, such as recycling. Young students love sorting and matching, so make recycling into a learning game! This activity also has a very practical benefit: children who learn how to recycle at school will help out with recycling at home.

- Set up four recycling bins: one each for metal, glass, paper, and plastics. Use visual clues to indicate what belongs in each bin (for example, a picture of a soda bottle for the plastics bin).
- Fill another box with aluminum cans, bottles of various shapes and sizes, plastic containers, papers, cardboard boxes, and bags.
- If this is done as a group activity, each child takes an item from a sample box and then “sorts” it into the right bin. If this is done as an individual activity, the child sorts each item from the sample box into the appropriate recycling bin.

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Mermaid Theatre recommends Todd Parr's
website for more fun activities!

<https://www.toddparr.com/landing-page/todd-parr-fun/>

Interview with the Director, Jim Morrow

Why did you choose these Todd Parr stories?

Todd's work is very playful. He's very prolific and has written many books. We were attracted to the brightness of Todd's imagery, and the simplicity of his characters in *It's Okay to Be Different*. He's not trying to overwhelm you with detail; he leaves a lot to the imagination. We are attracted to his bold use of color and the idea that, currently, many of us are struggling with what it means to be different. I think it's important to introduce children to the notion that if you're sitting in the audience, and you feel somehow different from the people around you, that's okay. Not only that, but let's celebrate our diversity because that helps us grow and learn. The story is about learning to appreciate how we are different from one another and how much we are all the same in many respects. I love the fact that Todd shares these ideas in a playful way. He creates interesting characters and fun little situations that we can bring to life. It's an important message that young children should be hearing, and it's a perspective that we at Mermaid share and want to promote.

The Earth Book is a good complement to *It's Okay to Be Different*, because it's promoting good stewardship of the earth and our own place in that collective responsibility. Certainly, it's very topical, asking what we can do as individuals to help Mother Earth become healthy. And I think this is also an important message for very young children to hear. I felt we needed a third story to complete the show, and I found *This is My Hair* intriguing because it's about being happy with who you are. It's about having confidence in who you are and expressing yourself in a way that makes you feel comfortable. All those ideas are wrapped in a simple, silly story about different hair. While *It's Okay to Be Different* is general, *This is My Hair* is more specifically about body image. Our show is a "jumping off" place to start a conversation with children about these topics. Teachers can continue to explore these ideas in the classroom and reinforce them through dialogue with their students.

What is the order of the stories in the show?

We open with *This is My Hair* and transition into *The Earth Book* and then we'll finish with *It's Okay to Be Different*. We've designed a sensory friendly production and we're honoring that approach by gently introducing sound and gently introducing darkness. To open the show, the two performers will come out on stage and introduce themselves. The audience will see the performers, who will talk about themselves and share what the experience of the show will be like. They'll talk about the color and the lights. For the first book, *This is My Hair*, the lights will be dimmed in a way that allows the performers to remain visible while moving the objects as they tell the story. Then, by degrees, we will ease the children into the darkness, so they won't even realize it's happening. Next, we'll move to *The Earth Book*, which is performed on play boxes. Then the final story, *It's Okay to Be Different* will take over the whole stage. So, we start small, and build slightly bigger and then we end with a full production of large movement. We find that works quite well. We aim to change things up physically, emotionally, and sonically for each story to keep the audience engaged throughout the experience.

Will the performers be narrating the book as it was written?

Nothing has been altered in terms of the wording. The children will hear narration using language that comes directly from the book. *This is My Hair* will be narrated using the recorded voices of the two performers. First the audience will hear the performers speak live, and then they'll hear their recorded voices as they animate the objects and move around the stage. For *The Earth Book*, we're very excited to partner with highly respected Mi'kmaw, spoken word artist, Rebecca Thomas, as narrator. The Mi'kmaw are the indigenous people of Atlantic Canada, and we think it's perfectly fitting to have a Mi'kmaw spokesperson for good stewardship of the earth. For *It's Okay to Be Different*, we have six children in grades three and four from different cultures who narrate the story. We had a lot of fun working with and recording these six young children from Armbrae Academy in Halifax. They were incredible and brought a lightness of touch, a beauty and warmth to the piece that an adult couldn't bring.