An educational supplement to the live theatre experience of

**CHICKEN LITTLE, THE MUSICAL**

By Gene Mackey with original music by Cheryl Benge
Theatre for Young America’s CHICKEN LITTLE is based on the old English folktale sometimes called CHICKEN LICKEN or HENNY PENNY. The old tale tells of an acorn that falls upon the befuddled little head of Chicken Little and she jumps to the conclusion that the sky must be falling. She gathers all her barnyard friends to travel with her to tell the news to the King. Unfortunately, the local fox is included in the group. He says he will lead them to the King, but he proceeds to lead them into his lair where he gobbles them up. That’s the end of this early tale.

CHICKEN LITTLE is a traditional repetitive, or cumulative, tale. These kinds of tales have been passed on from generation to generation because the rhythm of frequently repeated phrases makes them easy to memorize and fascinating to children. Other repetitive tales include THE BILLY GOATS GRUFF and GOLDILOCKS AND THE THREE BEARS.

Many versions of CHICKEN LITTLE are found throughout the world. In Australia the folktale is called KERPLUNK and the characters include a kangaroo, a platypus, Tasmanian devil and other animals native to Australia. In India the tale can be found in the PANCHATANTRA, a story collection from the fifth-century.

The English version was included in a book, ENGLISH FAIRY TALES, that was published in 1890. The man who put together that collection was Joseph Jacobs, a folklore scholar born in 1854. He was one of the most popular and famous of the 19th century folk tale adapters. Jacobs wanted his stories to appeal to small children. He wrote them in a form that would sound as if the child’s parent or nanny were telling the story to them. Joseph Jacobs also collected and published THE FABLES OF AESOP, CELTIC FAIRY TALES, and INDIAN FAIRY TALES. He emigrated to the United States in 1900 and died in New York City in 1916.

Gene Mackey, Resident Playwright and Artistic Director, updated, amplified, countrified, and musicalized the tale with original music by Cheryl Benge. The simplicity of the original folktale lends itself to embellishment by the playwright. He adds interest with mistaken identity of two sets of twins with contrasting personalities. He has reinforced the original theme that it is wise to think things through and consider the consequences of actions before doing them. He allows these birds to use their talent and cleverness to escape being eaten, thus providing the audience with a good example of creative problem-solving. Tales that have been passed down through many generations have always been personalized by the teller as they have been told. Continuing this tradition, Gene has the characters become members of the World Famous Chicken Little Country-Western Band.

When the play begins, Chicken Little, Henny Penny, Cocky Locky, Goosey Poosey, peace-loving Foxy Woxy are onstage to tell you how they got their big break into Big Time Showbiz.
Here is the tale they re-enact: Foxy Woxy receives a letter from this twin brother, Foxy Moxie. He hasn’t been around for awhile, having been run off the farm by Farmer Fred after dining on some of Fred’s poultry! Now that he is a big time name in show business, Foxy Moxie invites Foxy Woxy to come up to Big City so he can introduce him to all the “important” people in showbiz. The rest of the band stays behind in the barnyard, dreaming of their impending stardom!

After Foxy Woxy departs, who should show up but…his twin brother--Foxy Moxie. Assuring the group that he is there to escort them to Big City (via a little short cut, of course, through his liar), Moxie leads them off. The group is reluctant to go down into the cellar because they remember what happened when a nasty fox lived in that cellar and dined on some of their friends down in that darkness. The call of stardom is so strong that they descend. Foxy Moxie tricks them and ties them up to become his next meal.

Morning comes and Cocky Locky just has to crow. His morning warble alerts Foxy Woxy, who has returned and found the barnyard empty. He descends into the cave to rescue his friends. During the ensuing melee, the fowl get free and a mad chase begins. Into this pandemonium saunters Miss Chickie Lou Pokalong, Chicken Little’s long lost twin. (This script contains two sets of twins.) Chickie Lou has come to visit the land of her egg-birth. Later she was transported in the shell to Louisiana by a swan. She is astounded by these hurrying squaking fowl, and confounds everyone by her resemblance to Chicken Little. Eventually she decides that she prefers her slow Southern lifestyle and departs for home.

After figuring out who the real Chicken Little is, Foxy Moxie climbs a tree and drops an acorn on her head. The excitable chick rallies the fowl to tell the President that the sky is falling. A disguised Foxy Moxie leads the gullible group back down into the cellar, where they are again tied up to be dinner. Chicken Little’s last request is that they be allowed to sing a song to him. Moxie grants the request and band warbles out a tune about peace, love, and cooperation. The message does not stop Moxie as they had hoped, but their singing ability does! He decides the group is worth more to him alive and singing. The band is named after Chicken Little while Foxy Moxie departs for Big City to set up their first big time gig!

CHICKEN LITTLE’S MUSIC STYLE IS COUNTRY-WESTERN

Country-western music has a strong folk heritage. It began as a form of entertainment in early, rural America. It gradually came to blend the varied musical styles of immigrants to America into a sound that is now recognized around the world as American County-Western Music. The music deals with universal subjects, such as love and hate, life and death. The music tells the story of everyday people, often with a moral included. The formal history of country music began with the coming of the radio. Radio brought free entertainment into the smallest, most remote communities. Then in the 1960s entertainers such as Dolly Parton and Johnny Cash crossed over styles to create “pop” hits. This helped the popularity of country-western music. What began in the remote backwoods of America has
become celebrated worldwide. Listeners often find their feet tapping and their hands clapping to this form of music. CHICKEN LITTLE’S background instruments are simple but effective. Sticks, spoons, a washboard, and a homemade bass provide backup to the electronic keyboard, banjo, and guitar.

### CHICKEN LITTLE PRE AND POST SHOW ACTIVITIES

**MUSIC**
The students create a rhythm band to play with a recording of a favorite song. A pan and spatula, a tightly closed jar of uncooked rice or beans, sticks, spoons, or anything else you can find will make great accompaniment. Explore the different sounds you can create. Give each participant a chance for a solo time to play by themselves.

**LANGUAGE ARTS**
Discuss the themes that were brought up by the play. For example, the characters get carried away with excitement several times during the play. What happens to them when they don’t think their situations all the way through? Write or discuss what the animals could have done differently to avoid some of the trouble they got into? What does the phrase “jumping to conclusions” mean? What examples do you see of that in the play?

**BIOLOGICAL SCIENCE**
The characters in the play are all animals. Investigate what each of these animals eat. Investigate what makes a rooster, a hen, and a chick different. What is the difference between a goose and a chicken? Why do foxes eat chickens? There is much animal behavior to identify.

**CREATIVE DRAMATICS**
Have the students walk around the room randomly but without touching each other. As you call out the name of one of the characters in the play, the students must alter their bodies to move as much like that character as possible. Then have them add the sounds that the animals would make. Be sure to include Chickie Lou Pokealong so the students can move in slow motion and make drawn out chicken noises. Make sure the students differentiate between the animals.

**NAME GAME**
The format of the names of the characters in the story and play deals with adding a “Y” or “IE” on the end of the name and then rhyming it with a nonsense word (Goosey Poosey, Foxy Woxy, and so on.) It is fun to do with everyone’s name. The class could make nametags with their new name addition to wear to the CHICKEN LITTLE production. The cast would love looking at these!