At CTC, our mission is to Educate, Challenge, and Inspire our multigenerational audience. This Audience Resource Guide is just one of the ways through which we aim to enhance your experience and further your engagement, beyond just seeing the shows on our stage. Use these articles, conversation starters, and activities both before and after you see Spamtown, USA!

Prepared by the CTC Education, Marketing, and Audience Services teams

Children’s Theatre Company – Spamtown, USA
SPAMTOWN, USA

February 16 – April 5, 2020
Cargill Stage

Best enjoyed by ages 9 and up

Written by PHILIP DAWKINS | Directed by WILL DAVIS

Spamtown, USA is a moving portrait of Austin, Minnesota, during the 1985 Hormel strike. While five kids dream of space camp, tennis teams, and out-of-state college, they find their families and community suddenly divided by picket lines and opposing agendas. This is the story of having the strength to stand up for what you believe in, the challenge that comes in disagreeing with those you love, and the humor that helps keep friendships alive.

Things to Know About the Show:

- The playwright traveled to Austin, Minnesota, and interviewed many adults and kids about their real-life experience living through the Hormel strike and the aftermath. Stories from these interviews directly influenced scenes and dialogue in the show.

- This play takes place in the 1980s—references to pop culture, slang, and views of that decade are represented throughout this play.

- This show contains scenes depicting tension between family members, friends, and coworkers, resulting in harsh language, bullying, and some instances of physical violence. There is one instance of a “factory floor” sound effect that may alarm young children.

EDUCATE: Background Information

Growing up in the 1980s and growing up today have many similarities and differences. In Spamtown, USA, we take a look at growing up in the 1980s in Austin, Minnesota, during the P-9 Hormel strike. Use the resources on the next few pages to familiarize yourself with the external events that had an impact on kids in Austin during that decade!

More About Austin, MN

Hormel Strike photo gallery: https://tinyurl.com/y4h89x9a


“We were the poor people”—Hormel Strike of 1933: https://libcom.org/history/we-were-poor-people-hormel-strike-1933-larry-d-engelmann

More About Challenger Disaster

Challenger Disaster: https://www.history.com/topics/1980s/challenger-disaster


More About the Show, the 1980s, and other helpful info can be found at offbook.childrenstheatre.org!
EDUCATE: Five Things to Talk About with Your Kids Before the Play

Since Spamtown, USA takes place in the 1980s and is set during a labor union strike, there might be a few concepts, events, and vocabulary with which children won’t be familiar! Use this page to talk with your family before you see the show to help better understand the story.

What is a union?
A union is a group of workers that join together in order to protect their rights, including working conditions, pay, hours, and benefits. Unions were created during the Industrial Revolution when the typical working conditions were not safe and workers could not advocate for better conditions without losing their job.

What is a strike?
A strike occurs when a labor union decides to revolt against its employer. During strikes, unions are protesting against unfair and unreasonable working rights. During a strike it is common for unions to protest and picket with signs. Interesting fact: In France the right to strike is recognized and guaranteed by the French Constitution.

What does P-9 mean?
P-9 refers to members of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW). P stands for Packinghouse. Local P-9 represented 1,500 men and women who worked at the Hormel plant in Austin, Minnesota.

What is worker’s comp?
Worker’s comp is a program that reimburses an employee for damages for injuries that occurred during while the employee was working.

What happened to the Challenger?
In the play, Scott wants to be an astronaut when he grows up. During the play, the audience hears audio of the 1986 space shuttle Challenger explosion. To prepare your family, you may want to talk to them about what happened, where you were, and what you remember when the Challenger exploded. If you feel your child could benefit, show them footage at this link of the event: https://youtu.be/AfnvFnzs9Is

Spamtown, USA | Photos by Glen Stubbe Photography
On January 28, 1986, the NASA Challenger shuttle exploded 73 seconds after lift off from Cape Canaveral, Florida. Onboard were astronauts Michael Smith, Dick Schobee, Ron McNair, Ellison Onizuka, Gergory Jarvis, and Judith Resnik. Additionally, school teacher Christa McAuliffe was chosen to join the mission after President Ronald Reagan announced the Teacher in Space program, which was designed to send an ordinary citizen into space who could communicate with students while in orbit.

On the morning of the launch, media coverage was extensive since it marked the first time a civilian was permitted to join a space mission. As the shuttle hit 48,000 feet, the O-rings that provided a pressure seal on the Rocket Boosters failed, due to unseasonably low temperatures and the shuttle exploded. The explosion was witnessed live all over the country as students were watching from their classrooms. In the play, Scott watches the event from his home and actual footage may be shown on-stage.
**EDUCATE: Timeline of P-9 Strike at Hormel: Austin, MN**

### 1933

Workers at the plant, upset by the introduction of a new insurance program that would cost them 20 cents per week ($3.88 current dollars), organize into a union and demand recognition from corporate. Striking union workers physically remove Jay Hormel from the company’s general offices and shut down the refrigeration system, causing the meat to go bad. This is the first officially-recorded, sit-down strike in U.S. history. Luckily, the parties reached a compromise within three days. Hormel develops the “Annual Wage Plan” that guarantees employees weekly paychecks, allows working hours to fluctuate as needed, and guarantees a year’s notice of termination, profit sharing, merit pay, pension pay, and a joint earnings plan. These benefits make the Austin, MN, Hormel employees the highest paid in the industry.

### 1978

Hormel announces plans to build a new state-of-the-art meat packing plant. Workers agree to a 5-year wage freeze and a 20% increase in work standards. In addition, workers lose incentive earnings, and the ability to strike for three years after the plant was built. In exchange, Hormel promises workers they will “never be worse off” in the new plant.

### 1982 – 1984

Hormel opens the new plant and decides to terminate the 1933 agreement. Hormel announces the plan to cut wages from $10.69 to $8.25 per hour ($28.05 to $21.65 in current money)—a 23% cut. The new factory made processing more efficient; however, the new plant experienced a 120% increase in worker injuries. Regardless of these changes, workers cannot strike due to the 1978 agreement. The Hormel workers’ union, P-9, hires Ray Rogers to organize public relations and fundraising for the anticipated strike.

### August 1985

P-9 workers reject the Hormel contract offer by a 1,261 to 96 vote. The state of Minnesota denies the P-9 union members’ request for unemployment compensation.

### December 1985

Hog slaughtering at the Austin plant is suspended due to the strike. Picketers begin to march outside of the plant’s gates.

### January 1986

P-9 announces plans for roving picket line, a move that was not sanctioned by the United Food and Commercial Workers union. Approximately 450 P-9 members choose to return to work and others are brought in to fill gaps in production. People who choose to work during the strike are taunted by the protestors and called “scabs.” Governor Perpich orders the National Guard to Austin after protesters block the gates of the factory with several hundred cars. After five months of striking, Hormel begins firing striking workers.
After a month in Austin, the National Guard leaves, but with looming negotiations between Hormel and P-9ers, violence ensues at demonstrations. Upwards of 100 demonstrators are arrested. Leadership at the National United Food and Commercial Workers union order the local P-9 Hormel union to end the strike. P-9 strikers face police while overtaking I-90 – Austin ADaily Herald 1986

March 1986

Tear gas is used to stop protestors. Seventeen people are arrested and eight police officers are injured. Reverend Jesse Jackson visits Austin amid his presidential run to speak with both P-9ers and Hormel executives. More than 5,000 people come to Austin to support local P-9 employees. Tear gas is used to stop protestors. Seventeen people are arrested and eight police officers are injured. Reverend Jesse Jackson visits Austin amid his presidential run to speak with both P-9ers and Hormel executives. More than 5,000 people come to Austin to support local P-9 employees. P-9 strikers take over Interstate 90, which leads to several arrests. Hormel plants resume slaughtering hogs again.

April 1986

May 1986

United Food and Commercial Workers Union gains control of the P-9 Hormel union.

June 1986

UFCW evicts P-9 from the Austin Labor Center, which leaves striking members without financial or organizational support.

September 1986

The strike is declared over. Hormel union employees vote to accept the contract agreement by a vote of 1,060 to 440. A portion of the strikers return to work. However, many are out of a job due to positions being replaced during the strike.
EDUCATE: Meet the Families of Spamtown, USA

While the characters below are fictional, they were inspired by interviews with real people and families who experienced the P-9 Strike at Hormel first-hand.

Olsen Family

Scott's Mom
Mexican-American. Runs a beauty salon out of her living room.

Scott's Dad
Hormel plant worker. Starts out supporting the strike, but crosses the P-9 picket line to go back to work.

Trig Olsen

Cathy Berg

Scott Olsen
Middle schooler. Best friends and cousin with Jude Olsen.

Jude Olsen
Middle schooler. Best friends and cousins with Scott Olsen.

Travis Olsen
In his sophomore year of high school at the start of the strike. In a relationship with Amy Bolton.

Bolton Family

Mr. Bolton
Corporate leader at Hormel.

Mrs. Bolton
Scientist at Hormel Research and Development Lab.

Amy Bolton
In her freshman year of high school at the start of the strike. In a relationship with Travis Olson.

Carol Bolton
Age six at the start of the strike.
**CHALLENGE: Conversation Topics and Activities**

Check out ideas below for what to talk about, write about, create, and explore before and after you see the show!

- **What does, “Never back down, never surrender” mean to you?** How does it apply in your life?
- **Choose a character and write a diary entry from their perspective.**
- **What does “power in numbers” mean to you?**
- **How do your social justice values impact your decisions as a consumer? What power do you have as a consumer to impact change?**

- **Scott’s favorite subject in school is science. What is your favorite subject and why?**
- **Why is the story important right now?**
- **Create picket signs or buttons for or against a cause you care about.**
- **What is the lesson or message of Spamtown, USA?**

- **Jude, Scott, and Amy dream of leaving Austin, for something more. Do you want to stay in your hometown? If not, where do you want to live?**
- **Do you think the strike was successful? What does it mean to be successful?**
- **Jude and Scott are best friends, but the strike divides them. Have you ever disagreed with a friend? Were you able to work through your differences?**
- **What is the story important right now?**

- **What does it mean to treat workers fairly and with dignity? What are the basic rights all workers should expect?**
- **What does, “Never back down, never surrender” mean to you?**
- **Choose a character and write a diary entry from their perspective.**

Scott’s favorite subject in school is science. What is your favorite subject and why?

Create picket signs or buttons for or against a cause you care about.

Jude, Scott, and Amy dream of leaving Austin, for something more. Do you want to stay in your hometown? If not, where do you want to live?

Do you think the strike was successful? What does it mean to be successful?

Jude and Scott are best friends, but the strike divides them. Have you ever disagreed with a friend? Were you able to work through your differences?

What does “power in numbers” mean to you?
**CHALLENGE: Role on the Wall**

Flex your muscles of empathy and imagination while you brainstorm external and internal factors for characters to create deeper, more empathetic understanding of character motivations, while you consider different points of view. This activity will be especially interesting after you see *Spamtown, USA*.

Draw an outline of a person on a whiteboard, large piece of construction or recycled paper, or chalkboard! Choose a character from *Spamtown, USA* for your shape to represent. Brainstorm all the external things that impact the character (other characters, incidents we see and those we hear about, societal pressures, etc.) and write those around the outside of the figure. Next, fill the inside of the character with ideas of how the character feels about all the things on the outside.

Retell or rewrite the story of *Spamtown, USA* solely from the perspective of that character. How does that change the story? Did this activity change your opinion of that character? Have you ever experienced similar feelings or events?

**Mix It Up:**
This activity can be helpful to explore characters from books, historical figures, or current events.

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**CHALLENGE: Scene Work**

In this activity, you'll use a page from existing script text to analyze characters, setting, and conflict, performing as a character in a scene from *Spamtown, USA* by Philip Dawkins.

Did you know that a script is written differently than a book? The character who is speaking will be in ALL CAPS on the left. Words appearing in *italics* are stage directions. Stage directions are not read aloud in the play and they provide information that clarifies the action, setting, intentions, etc.

Find a partner and read the script excerpt on the next page, taking turns reading the character’s lines. It may be helpful to have another person to read the stage directions aloud. When you’re finished reading through it once, take a break, then read it again. Does anything change? When you’re done, answer the following questions:

- Who are the characters in the scene?
- What is the setting of the scene?
- What is the most important moment in the scene?
- What are the actions in the scene?
- What is each character’s goal in the scene?
AMY  Could you give your mom a message for me?

SCOTT  Okay.

AMY  But you have to promise not to tell my mom or dad what I told you, or even that I was here, okay?

SCOTT  Did you a rob a bank? Cuz you’re acting like you robbed a bank.

AMY  I’m not supposed to come to my hair appointments any more. And my mom is going to cancel her monthly touch up.

SCOTT  Why?

AMY  Because she’s a mom and moms are the worst!

SCOTT  It’s okay. It’s not like mom’ll be surprised. Your dad already cancelled your subscription to the Herald cuz I’m the one who delivers it.

AMY  He did?!

SCOTT  Didn’t you notice you’ve stopped getting the newspaper?

AMY  I don’t really read the newspaper.

SCOTT  Maybe you should?

AMY  Maybe. I came here because I wanted to tell your mom in person that I can’t come here anymore. Because that’s the polite thing to do. And I wish my mom would do it. But nobody asked me what I want.

SCOTT  Nobody asks me what I want either.
**CHALLENGE: Oral History**

Spamtown, USA was written by Philip Dawkins, who conducted over 60 hours worth of interviews with residents of Austin, Minnesota, who were there during the time of P-9 strike. This activity will challenge you to gather information about a historical event through interviewing first sources. You'll use active and open questioning to obtain information, as well as practice basic communication and social skills required for an interview.

Select a local and/or historical event they can interview an adult about (ex. the 2007 Minneapolis 35W bridge collapse, 2018 Minneapolis Vikings Miracle, 2016 presidential race, etc.). Brainstorm a list of potential interview questions that are relevant and open-ended that can be answered with more than just “yes” or “no.”

Then, pick an adult to interview; it could be a parent, grandparent, other family member, a neighbor, or anyone you can think of! Ask them your questions about the historical event. Do any of their answers surprise you? What were they feeling during that time? What do you think you might have felt if you were in their place?

When you’re done, create a poem, scene, song, rap, dance, or visual art project inspired by their interview and the historical event.
INSPIRE: I Dream Of...

Explore your dreams for the future through physicality and gesture, while you make observations and infer meaning! Gather a group of family members, friends, or fellow students. One at a time, step forward and say, “Hello, my name is (insert name here) and for my future, I dream of...” Then, show your dream for the future through gesture or mime. Allow everyone a turn showcasing their dream.

When everyone has had a chance, reflect with your group about what you all observed. What are the similarities you saw? Did any gestures stand out? What emotions did you feel while making your own gestures, or watching the gestures of others?

INSPIRE: Take a Stand

This activity will encourage you to examine your stance on any given topic, and works best in an open area with a group of friends or family members.

Create a line through the center of the space using either Painter’s tape or other distinguishers. One side of the line represents “agree” and the other side represents “disagree.” However, the space itself represents a spectrum, with your line representing “neutral.”

Pose a question to the group and ask them to stand on the point in the agree/disagree spectrum that describes their feelings. After everyone has found their spot, ask your friends and family why they stood where they did. You could try to persuade someone to your side if it is different, but be sure to hear them out as to why they chose the side they did. Anyone can move to different points as their outlook shifts or perspective changes, too!

Below are a few prompts to get you started. We encourage starting at questions with low stakes and moving to higher stakes as students become comfortable with the activity. Spend time unpacking after the activity concludes.

Example prompts:

- Pizza is the best food ever created.
- I can be friends with someone who has different opinions from me.
- I stand by and fight for the same things my parents believe in.
- I am willing to stand up for what I believe in.
- I am willing to stand up for what I believe in, even if it means sacrificing my own time or paycheck.
- I am willing to stand up for what I believe in, even if it means sacrificing the time and money of my family who rely on me.
- I would rather pay more for a product in order to ensure that the workers who made it were being treated fairly.
**INSPIRE: Where I’m From**

This activity uses the poem *Where I’m From* by George Ella Lyon to build community and explore belonging. Students will practice writing skills by creating their own versions of the poem.

Gather a group of friends into a circle. One person begins by standing in the center of the circle and saying “Where I’m from everyone...” and completes the sentence with a fact about where they are from. If that statement rings true for anyone in the circle, that person also takes a step into the circle. If they feel it is very true for them, they step closer to the center of the circle than if it is only somewhat true for them. It’s ok to only share statements you’re comfortable sharing; remember, YOU get to decide if something is true for you or not.

After everyone has a chance to observe the commonalities, everyone re-joins the circle and another person has a turn being in the center.

Allow everyone to have a chance to complete the prompt, then select another prompt, like the examples below:

**Example Prompts:**
- Where I’m from everyone says...
- Where I’m from everyone knows...
- Where I’m from everyone believes in...
- Where I’m from everyone smells like...
- Where I’m from everyone feels...

After the activity, ask questions: how did you feel? Were there any moments that surprised you? What connections did you make with others in the group?

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**Where I'm From**

By George Ella Lyon

I am from clothespins, from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride. I am from the dirt under the back porch. (Black, glistening, it tasted like beets.) I am from the forsythia bush the Dutch elm whose long-gone limbs I remember as if they were my own. I’m from fudge and eyeglasses, from Imogene and Alafair. I’m from the know-it-alls and the pass-it-ons, from Perk up! and Pipe down! I’m from He restoreth my soul with a cottonball lamb and ten verses I can say myself. I’m from Artemus and Billie’s Branch, fried corn and strong coffee. From the finger my grandfather lost to the auger, the eye my father shut to keep his sight. Under my bed was a dress box spilling old pictures, a sift of lost faces to drift beneath my dreams. I am from those moments--snapped before I budded --leaf-fall from the family tree.

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Read or listen to the poem “Where I’m From” by George Ella Lyon. Using the poem and activity as inspiration, you can write your own version of “Where I’m From” - use the template at this link, or free write: [https://bit.ly/2kj8XYO](https://bit.ly/2kj8XYO)
Cork Board Conversations

Use the sticky notes below to think critically about Spamtown, USA.

Three adjectives that describe this play are...
1.
2.
3.

This play made me feel...

This play made me think about...

A question I still have is...

A status I would post on my social media after seeing the show is...

This play taught me...

My Rating of Spamtown, USA at Children’s Theatre Company