

# Alliance Theatre

## *institute*

### Study Guide

#### *Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed: The Rock Experience*

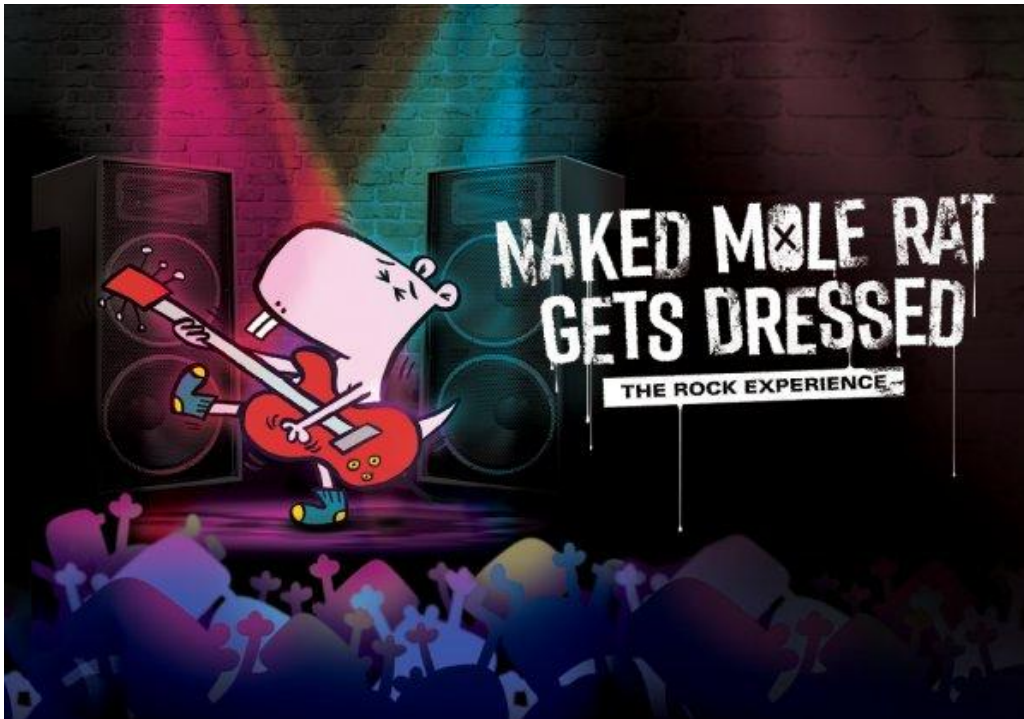
Created as part of the Alliance Theatre Institute Dramaturgy by Students program

By: Kim Bowers-Rheay Baran, Teaching Artist

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Emily Gardner and Robin Hollis' third-grade Junior Dramaturgs from The Museum School of Avondale Estates



Books and Lyrics by Mo Willems

Music by Deborah Wicks La Puma

Directed by Sam Provenzano

Based on the Book *Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed* by Mo Willems

Published by Hyperion Books for Children

February 21 – June 30, 2026

Goizueta Stage for Youth and Families

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Alexandria Joy, K.D. O’Hair, Lowrey Brown, Juan Carlos Unzueta, Erik Poger Abrahamsen, and Danielle Hopkins in the Alliance Theatre’s 2019/20 production of NAKED MOLE RAT GETS DRESSED: THE ROCK EXPERIENCE. Photo by Greg Mooney

# Georgia Standards of Excellence

Elementary School: Grades K-5

## English Language Arts:

- 1.T.T.1.b – Identify a simple plot with a problem and solution.
- 1.T.T.1.c – Describe traits of the main characters and explain how their words and actions support the central message, lesson, or moral of the story
- 1.T.T.1.d - With adult support, compare and contrast characters and their experiences in stories across diverse cultures.
- 3.T.T.1.a – Explain how narrative techniques are used to present ideas, design texts, and convey information about characters, setting, and plot.
- 3.T.T.1.b – Explain how characters, setting, problem, and solution function in the plot.
- 3.T.T.1.c – Describe characters’ traits, motivations, actions, thoughts, and feelings and explain their connection to the central message, lesson, or moral of the story.
- 3.T.T.1.d – Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, central messages, or events within texts across diverse cultures.
- 5.T.T.1.a – Analyze the use of narrative techniques to present ideas, design texts, and convey information about characters, setting, and plot.
- 5.T.T.1.b – Analyze how setting, events, conflict, and characterization contribute to the plot.
- 5.T.T.1.c – Explain how a theme is demonstrated through a character’s growth or conflict resolution.

## Science:

- S1L1. – Obtain, evaluate, and communicate information about the basic needs of plants and animals.
- S2E3. – Obtain, evaluate, and communicate information about how weather, plants, animals, and humans cause changes to the environment.

## Health:

- HE2.2.a – Discuss how the family, peers, and cultural factors influence personal health and well-being.
- HE4.2.b – Describe how the school and community can support personal health practices and behaviors.

## Theatre:

- TARE.1 – Engage actively and appropriately as an audience member.
- TARE.2 – Critique various aspects of theatre and other media using appropriate supporting evidence.
- TACN.1 – Explore how theatre connects to life experience, careers, and other content.
- TACN.2 – Examine the role of theatre in a societal, cultural, and historical context.

## Synopsis

*From the Alliance Theatre:*

Children's book author and artist Mo Willems (*Knuffle Bunny*, *Elephant and Piggie's We Are In a Play*) brings another loveable character to life in this exciting family musical. Watch as Wilbur, a clothes-loving mole rat with exceptional style, navigates the pressure to be just like everyone else. With tail-shaking tunes, empowering messages of individuality, and classic Mo Willems humor, this musical is sure to rock audiences of all ages.

*From Mac, Junior Dramaturg at The Museum School of Avondale Estates:*

*Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed: The Rock Experience* is a story of naked mole rats, but not all of them are naked! Clothes begin to fall into the tunnels of the naked mole rats' colony, and most of them don't like it, except for Wilbur. Ever since he tried on his first pair of clothes, he loves them. Most of the naked mole rats do not like him wearing clothes. Once the naked mole rats get tired of Wilbur's clothes, they take him to Grand-Pah. He says he will make a proclamation about mole rats wearing clothes. See the play to find out what Grand-Pah decides!

## About the Author & Playwright of *Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed*

By Andrzej, Emily H., James, and Omar

**Mo Willems** is an author and illustrator. He was born near Chicago in 1964. He previously wrote for the puppets on Sesame Street. He was inspired to write *Knuffle Bunny* by his child, who is funny, silly, artistic, and kind! He has written over 100 books, including *I Will Fly Today*, *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*, *Waiting Is Not Easy*, and *We Are In a Book!*

Mo Willems wrote the book *Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed* in 2009 and wrote the play *Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed: The Rock Experience* in 2018.

Fun Fact: Did you know that the Alliance Theatre helped create a show based on the book *Knuffle Bunny*?



AP Photo/Gary Gerard Hamilton 2025



"Mo Willems and the Pigeon" by Omar

## Interview with Director

by Emily H.



**Sam Provenzano** is a director, dramaturg, and teaching artist currently based in Atlanta, where she is a Resident Artist and Teen Programs Manager at the Alliance Theatre. She has more than a decade of experience making work as an educator and director with institutions across the globe. Recent directing credits include: *Knock Knock*, *The Sounds of Winter* (Alliance Theatre), *Gimme Please!* (Alliance Theater), *Anon(ymous)* (UT Austin), *Humans of the High* (High Museum), *Emma and the Suzies* (Austin Latino New Play Festival), and *al-halqa (is that how it's pronounced)* (UT Austin).

Sam has her MFA in Drama and Theatre for Youth and Communities from the University of Texas at Austin with a focus in Theater for Young Audiences, Museum Theater, and new play development.

Samantha Provenzano is the director of *Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed: The Rock Experience*. We asked her questions about the musical.

### 1. What is your favorite character and why?

This is a hard question! I love all the characters so much. But if I had to choose, my favorites are the trio of Tall, Venti, and Grande. They are so funny! They have such good intentions but maybe delivered in the wrong way. I love the journey they each experience and how they individually try to support Wilbur.

### 2. I like the part when Wilbur only wore socks. What is your favorite part of the play?

My favorite part of the play is the song "Scandal," because the music and choreography are so fun. I love that Wilbur is only focused on his love of clothes, but the trio of friends is so shocked by something so silly.

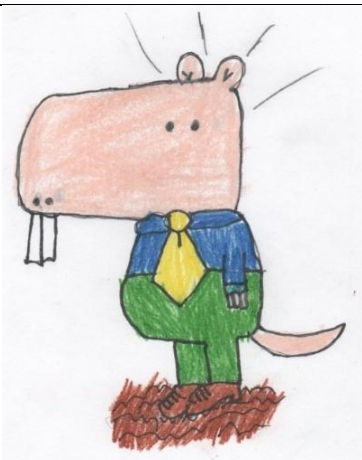
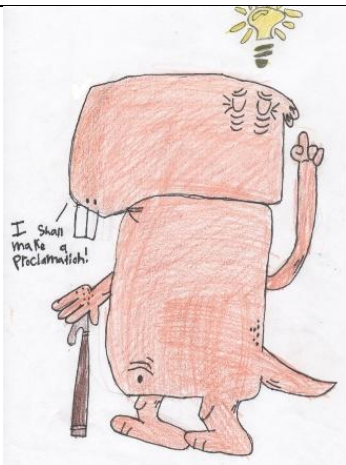
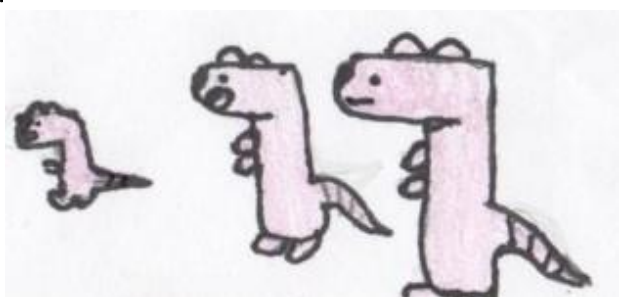
### 3. I relate to the book by being brave. How do you relate to the story?

I relate to the friendship aspect of the story. Sometimes, it is so difficult for our friends to understand us and vice versa. I love that this story shows a character that sticks to what he believes in even though his friends do not understand. Wilbur makes the choice to show up for himself, and by doing so, he makes space for his friends to show up as their full selves, clothes and all!



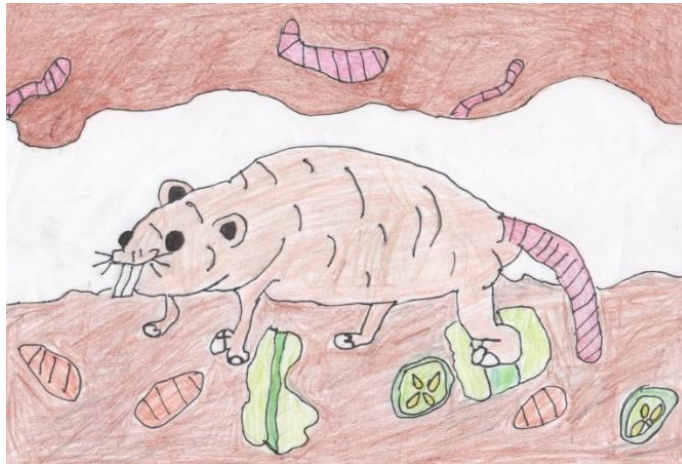
## Character Analysis

By Ashton, Charlie, Daisy, Ethan, and River

Name of Character	Character Description
 <p>Wilbur</p>	<p>A very bright naked mole rat who always sees the world in a different way... and likes to wear clothes</p> <p><i>Drawing by Mac in the style of Mo Willems</i></p>
 <p>Grand-Pah</p>	<p>The wise leader of all the naked mole rats in the colony</p> <p><i>Drawing by Felix in the style of Mo Willems</i></p>
 <p>Tall</p>	<p>A super sweet naked mole rat who has a great sense of humor</p> <p><i>"Tall, Grande, and Venti" by June</i></p>
Grande	A naked mole rat who worries about fitting in and doing the right thing and is sarcastic
Venti	A naked mole rat who likes to say 'dude' a lot
Secret Service Mole Rat	A naked mole rat who protects Grand-Pah
Weather Mole Rat	A naked mole rat that reports on the weather in the tunnels
Stark Naked	A naked mole rat reporter for CNN (Completely Naked Network)

## Naked Mole Rat Facts

By Alex, Beckman, Betty, Davi, Ellis, Emily C., Eleanor, Henry, Joshua, Lukas, Mac, and Nora

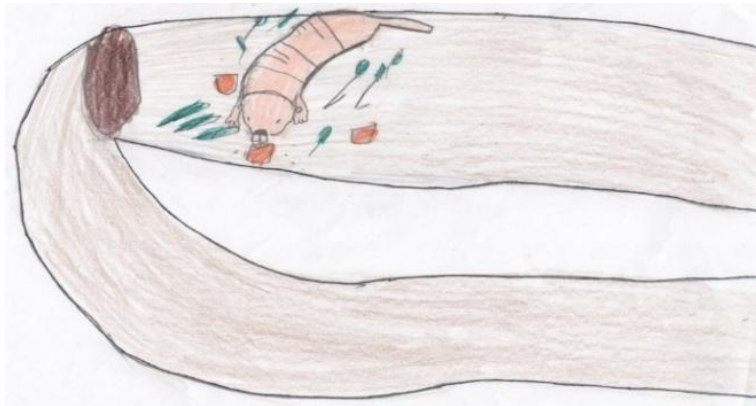


by Davi

Naked mole rats are the characters in the play. Here are some facts about real naked mole rats:

### Habitat/Region:

- They live in Africa in places like Ethiopia and Kenya.
- They live in tunnels in the grassy region.
- They spend their entire life underground.



by Emily C.

### Size and Body:

- Naked mole rats weigh less than a penny when they are born.
- Naked mole rats are about three (3) inches long.
- The queen is the biggest mole rat.
- Most of their muscle strength is in their jaws.
- They can make their teeth move independently.
- They actually have some hair and long whiskers.
- They are mostly blind from living underground.

### Diet:

- The naked mole rat is an herbivore.
- In the wild, they eat tubers, yams, sweet potatoes, and other underground roots and plants. In zoos, they eat apples, carrots, corn, green beans, kale, and sweet potatoes!
- They may eat their own feces or others if they don't have food.
- They get water from the food they eat and do not drink water.
- They get their nutrients from their food.



by Mac

### Predators/Prey:

- The tunnels make it hard for predators to reach the naked mole rats. However, some snakes, honey badgers, and birds can get them.

### Characteristics:

- Mole rats can survive for 18 min without oxygen.
- They live over 37 years. That's the longest life span of any rodent!
- They nap a lot and sleep in big piles to keep warm. They can even sleep belly up.
- They can make over 17 different kinds of sounds.
- They spend their day digging, eating, sleeping and taking care of the young.

### Queen Mole Rat:

- The queen mole rat patrols the tunnels. She will push other rats out of her way and step on them to show that she is in charge.
- The queen is the biggest, and she oversees the colony.
- The queen is the only one that has babies.
- The queen can have 10-15 babies at a time.

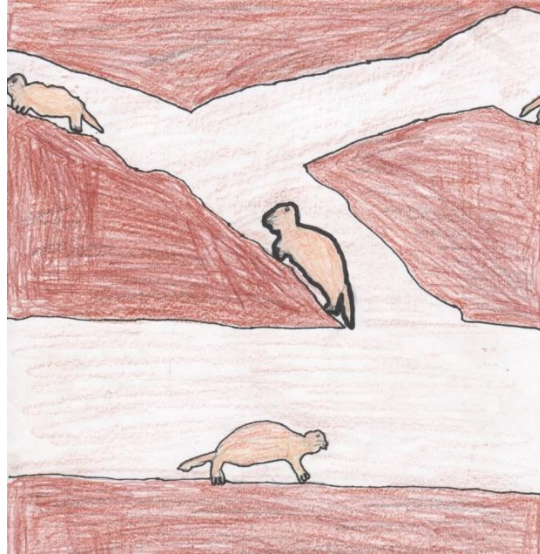
*In "Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed: The Rock Experience," who is the leader of the colony?  
How does that differ from what you have just learned about naked mole rats?  
Why do you think the playwright made that change?*



## Setting Study

By Ellis, Emily C., Joshua, June, and Thomas

The setting of the play is in an underground tunnel.



“Mole Rats in Tunnels” by Henry

A tunnel is an underground or undersea passageway.

Tunnels connect the chambers or rooms where the naked mole rats live. Each room has a purpose:

- Nesting chamber
- Food storage
- Nursery
- Bedroom
- Feeding chamber
- Bathroom
- Flood room

To create their tunnels, naked mole rats dig into the ground. They create giant piles of the excavated soil, resembling a volcano. These “volcanos” serve as a surface marker for the entrance to the tunnel.

The group of naked mole rats that lives in a tunnel is called a “colony.” Colonies average 75-80 naked mole rats but could contain more than 300. A colony’s tunnel system could stretch 2-3 miles in length!

*If you were a naked mole rat, what would be your favorite part of living in a tunnel with your colony?*

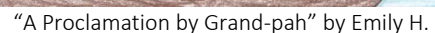
By Alex and Jane

A **theme** is an important idea that is woven throughout a story or a literary work. A theme often links the main idea into actions that can be seen throughout the play. As you watch *Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed: The Rock Experience*, see if you can find the following themes throughout the play.

The musical *Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed: The Rock Experience* has many lessons but remembering to **be yourself** is the most important. If everyone was the same, we would have a very dull world. Be unique! Be yourself! Be you! We need a unique person like you in our world!



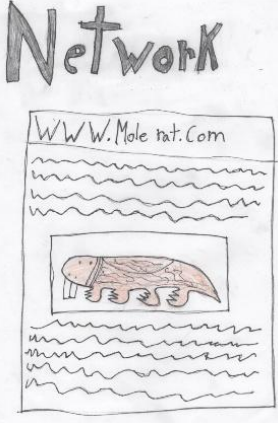



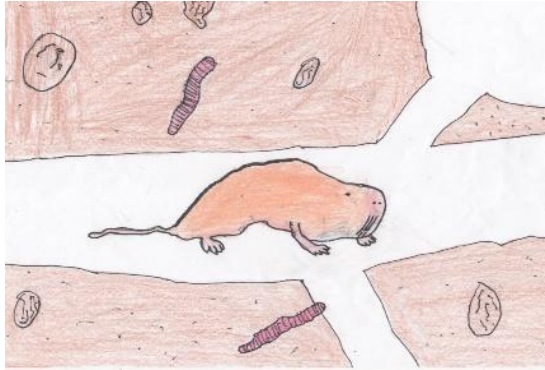
At the end of the musical, Grand-Pah shares in his proclamation, “Why not? If it hurts someone, don’t do it. But if it doesn’t, go to it!” This theme of the play teaches us to take chances and try something new, as long as it’s safe!



# Vocabulary

By Eli, Felix, and Pierce

Word (Part of Speech)	Definition	In Context
<b>Apparel (n)</b>  by Pierce	Clothes, like a hoodie	"I will sell this apparel!"  by June
<b>Colony (n)</b>	A big group that lives and stays together	"Our colony is located in a tunnel!"
<b>Network (n)</b>  by Felix	A group of TV, internet or radio stations owned and run by a company.	"This is CNN - Constantly Naked Network."
<b>Proclamation (n)</b>	A big announcement	"Grand-Pah's going to make a very very important proclamation to the colony!"
<b>Panic button (n)</b>  by Pierce	A button to press for an emergency	"It's time to press the panic button for Grand-Pah!"
<b>Sarcasm (n)</b>	To say something that is the opposite of what you mean to be funny or tease	"I've been taking classes at Sarcasm University. I'm a sarcasm machine!"

<b>Tailor (n) (v)</b>	<p>Noun - Someone who makes clothes that fit your specific measurements.</p> <p>Verb - The work required to make the clothes fit</p>	<p>Noun – “A tailor dresses the whole body, not just the tail.”</p> <p>Verb – “My life could use some tailoring!”</p>
<b>Tunnel (n)</b>	An underground or undersea passageway	<p>The naked mole rats live in tunnels that they dig.</p>  <p>By Alex</p>

Source: [Oxford Online Dictionary https://kids.wordsmyth.net/we/](https://kids.wordsmyth.net/we/) and student-written definitions



Erik Poger Abrahamsen, Alexandria Joy, Danielle Hopkins, and Juan Carlos Unzueta in the Alliance Theatre’s 2019/20 production of NAKED MOLE RAT GETS DRESSED: THE ROCK EXPERIENCE. Photo by Greg Mooney.



## Types of Humor

By Atlas, Lila, Max, and Preston

This play is very funny. The playwright uses puns, alliteration, sarcasm, and cultural references to make the audience laugh.

### Play on Words/Puns:

A pun is a humorous phrase that uses words that can have more than one meaning. There are many puns in the script. Here are two examples:

*Pun:* "We have to restore your tunnel vision before it's too late."

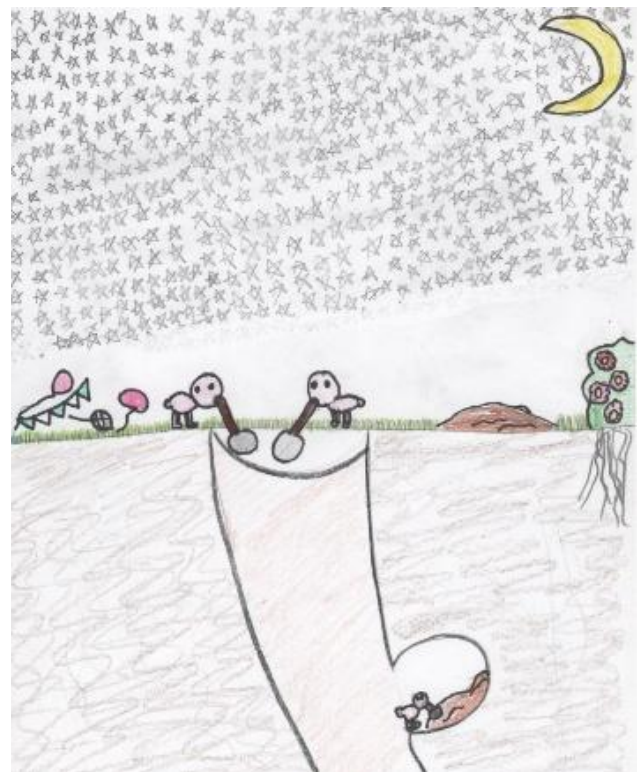
*Meaning:* "Tunnel vision" means to have a narrow focus, either losing peripheral sight or metaphorically not taking others' opinions into consideration. This pun is funny because the naked mole rats live in a tunnel!

*Pun:* "Let's have a party underground; let's dig it!"

*Meaning:* "Dig it" is an informal slang that means to appreciate, understand, or enjoy something. However, the naked mole rats also like to dig their tunnels. The double meaning makes this line particularly funny!



by Preston



by Lila

*Listen for another pun example in "Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed: The Rock Experience," or can you create your own pun?*



## Alliteration:

Alliteration is a sequence of words that all start with the same letter. Here is an example from the play:



by Atlas

“Well, Stark: There is an isolated high-fashion front that features a flash flood of falling footwear, florals, fleece, flannel, and full figure fashion! But fortunately, only at Hats and More, Wilbur’s (YUCK) clothing store!”

*Can you create your own astounding, amazing, and awesome alliteration?*

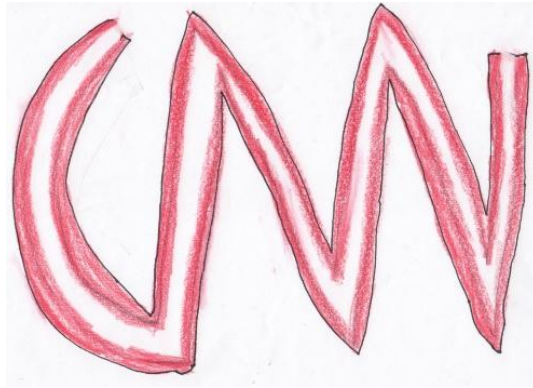
## Sarcasm

Sarcasm is saying a word or a phrase that is the opposite of what you mean when you are trying to be funny.

An example of sarcasm from the play is when Grande says, “If you like clothes so much, Wilbur, then why don’t you just OPEN A STORE OF SOMETHING!” However, they were being sarcastic and do not really want Wilbur to open the store. They were just trying to tease him.

## Cultural References

There are some funny cultural references in the play *Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed: The Rock Experience*. Here are a few of our favorites:



by Jane



by Max



by Max

**CNN** - In real life, CNN stands for "Cable News Network." In the play, it means "Constantly Naked Network."

**H&M** – In the real world, H&M stands for Hennes & Mauritz, a popular clothing store. In the play, Wilbur opens up his own store with the same initials – "Hats and More!"

**Starbucks** - In the play, the characters never say "Starbucks," but three of the characters are named after the cup sizes – Tall, Grande, and Venti.

# Deep Dive Into Rock Music

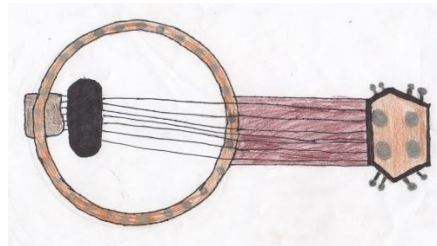
By Ashton, Charlie, Daisy, Ethan, and River

*Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed: The Rock Experience* features many versions of rock music. Below are some of the types (or genres) of rock music that you might hear during the performance.

Rock music began as Rock and Roll in the 1950s. Rock is known for its strong rhythm or beat. It often includes electric guitars, drums, electric bass, and sometimes piano, organ, saxophone. Rock music most always has a lead singer or singers.

There are many styles (or genres) of rock:

**Folk Rock** combines folk music (traditional music from around the world) with rock music and has a good rhythm. Folk rock artists often play the banjo, fiddle, accordion, harmonica, acoustic guitar, and drums. Popular music acts that play folk rock include Simon and Garfunkel, Bob Dylan, Mumford and Sons, Cat Stevens, Joni Mitchell, and the Lumineers.



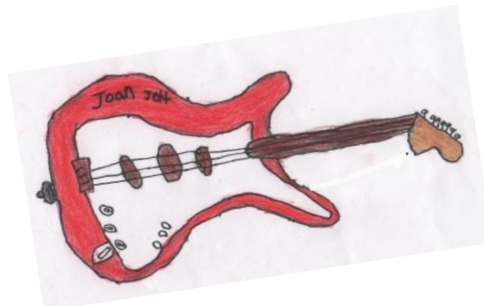
by Ashton

**Classic Rock** is a type of rock music that includes music from the 1960s to the 1990s. Typically, classic rock has a lead singer combined with a lead guitar, lead bass player, and a drummer. Some examples of classic rock bands are Led Zeppelin, Queen, Rolling Stones, Rush, AC/DC, The Beatles, and The Doors.



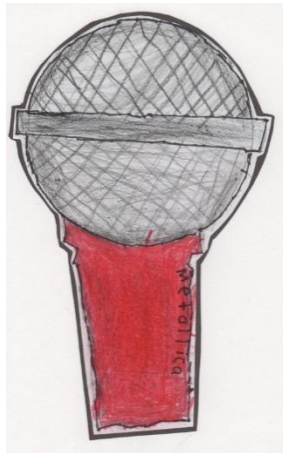
by River

**Female-led rock** is when a woman writes, plays, or sings the song. Popular bands led by women are Blondie, Garbage, Florence and the Machine, Fleetwood Mac, Joan Jett, Alabama Shakes, and No Doubt.



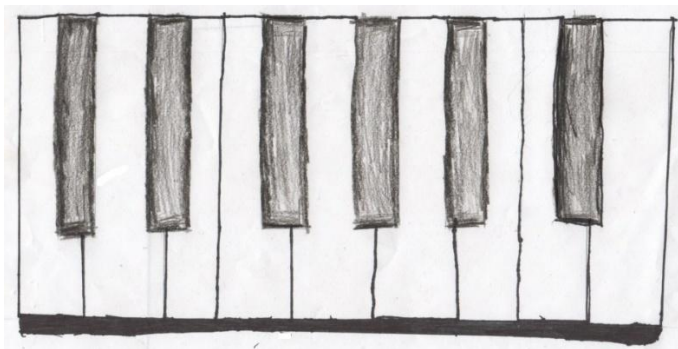
by Charlie

**Heavy metal** started in the 1960s and is really loud. It has loud drumming and bass guitars, and the singers sound like they are yelling. Some heavy metal bands are Metallica, Black Sabbath, Iron Maiden.



by Daisy

**Soft rock** (also known as yacht rock) is a light form of rock that was popular in the 1970s through 1990s. It is calm and easy to listen to. The key instruments are guitars, keyboards, and drums. Popular soft rock artists include The Carpenters, Carole King, Sting, Toto, Bee Gee's, Bread, and REO Speedwagon.



by Ethan



Lowrey Brown, Alexandria Joy, K.D. O'Hair, Juan Carlos Unzueta, Danielle Hopkins, and Erik Poger Abrahamsen in the Alliance Theatre's 2019/20 production of NAKED MOLE RAT GETS DRESSED: THE ROCK EXPERIENCE. Photo by Greg Mooney.



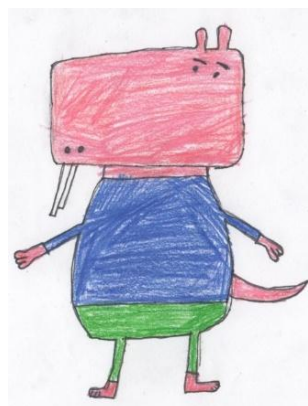
## Pre-Show Discussion Questions

1. Make a prediction: Based on the title, *Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed: The Rock Experience*, what do you think this musical will be about?
2. Have you ever been to a rock concert? How would you describe that experience?
3. Do you believe that it is easy to be yourself?
4. In this play, Wilbur is brave and decides to wear clothes, even though the other naked mole rats refuse to wear an outfit. Describe a time when you stood up for yourself, even if others might have disagreed with you.
5. Wilbur uses his clothes to embrace his individuality. How do you like to express your emotions and attitude?
6. What is the role of an audience member during a play? How do they show their appreciation for the actors?
7. Review the elements of theater (set, costumes, props, lighting, sound). How do these elements help to share the story on the stage?

## Post-Show Discussion Questions

*Engage in a discussion as a class or use these questions as journal prompts.*

1. In what ways could you relate to Wilbur?
2. What was the problem that Wilbur encountered, and how did he solve the problem?
3. What is the central message of the play? What did the playwright want audiences to learn?
4. What was your favorite moment in the play? Why?
5. If you were Wilbur, would you have encouraged your fellow naked mole rats to wear clothes? Why or why not?
6. Grand-pah, the leader of the colony, ultimately says, "Why not?" in response to Wilbur's desire to wear clothes. Describe a time in your life in which you said, "Why not?" to an idea.
7. How did the technical elements of the play (costumes, lighting, sound, etc.) help tell the story?
8. The play used spoken word/poetry to entertain the audience. What was your favorite rhyme, and why?
9. How did the actors transform into the characters? How did they use the Tools of the Actor (body, voice, imagination, concentration)?
10. How did you know when the setting of the play changed? How did the sound or lighting change?
11. How was puppetry used in the performance?
12. Make a prediction: What outfit will Wilbur wear next?



"Tall" by Lukas



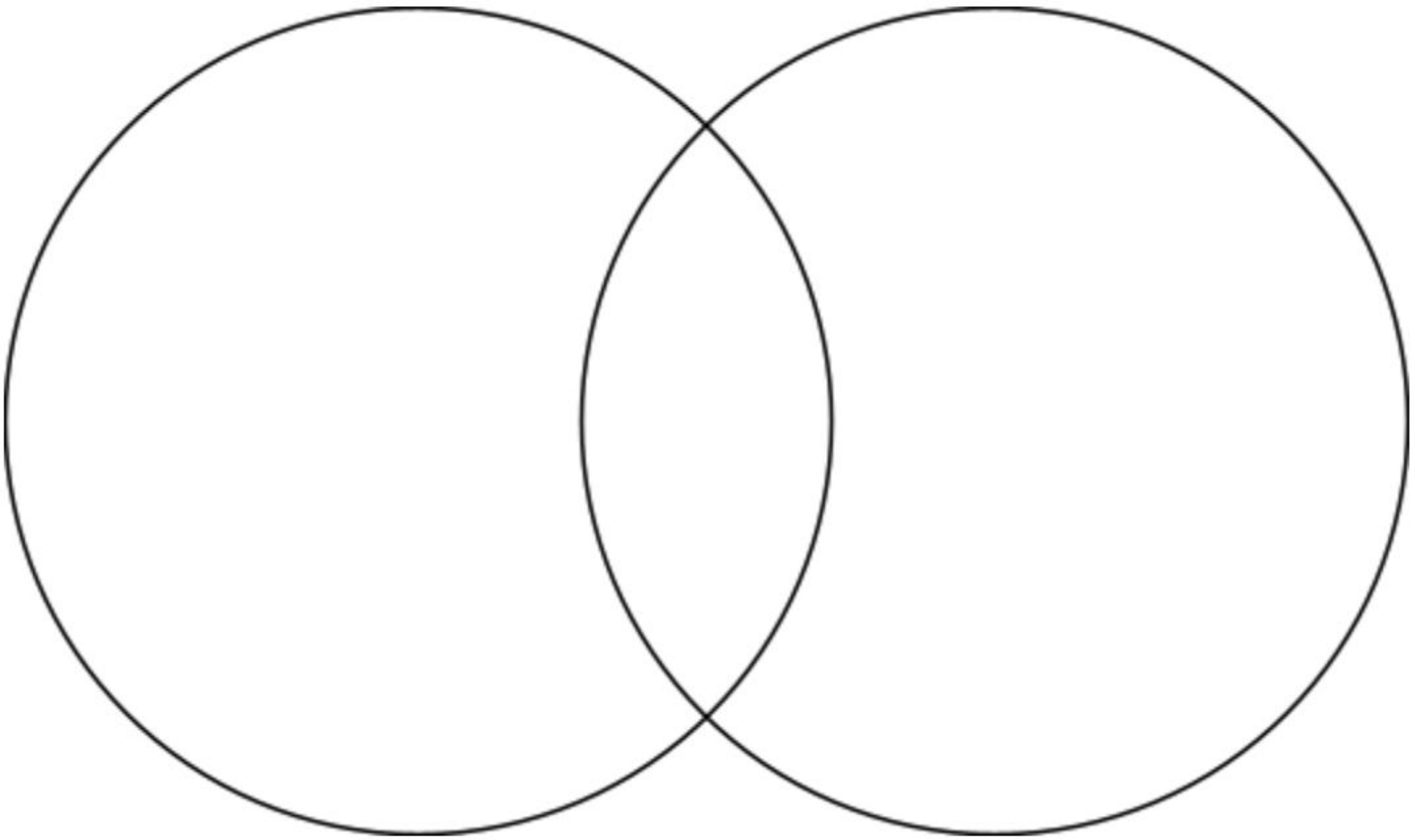
## Post-Show Extension Activities

### Venn Diagram

In what ways were the Alliance Theatre's production, *NAKED MOLE RAT GETS DRESSED: THE ROCK EXPERIENCE*, and the book by Mo Willems similar? How were they different?

*Mo Willems' book*

*Alliance Theatre's Production*



## "Grand-Pah is Coming!"

### Instructions:

- Captain's Coming is a commonly used theatre game that resembles "Simon Says" and helps young actors learn the parts of the stage. We have adapted it to be named "Grand-Pah is Coming!"
- The facilitator gives a prompt, and the students must follow with the corresponding movement.
- When the director/teacher gives the command, "Grand-Pah is Coming," they must freeze in a salute pose and stay there until the facilitator gives the prompt, "All Clear." Then, they can move again based on the facilitator's prompts. If they move before the director/teacher says, "All Clear," then, they are out.
- Practice creating the statues and moving from "Grand-Pah is Coming" into "All Clear," and then, play a few rounds.
- This game can be played for fun or for outs, depending on the group.

### Prompts:

- **Wilbur:** the hero of our story. The dreamer. Sees the best in everyone. *Create a statue of Wilbur dreaming about the future.*
- **Grande:** The popular kid. They don't want anything to change, including wearing clothes. *Create a statue of a stubborn mole rat stuck in their ways.*
- **Venti:** Grande's right-hand mole-rat. They're tough and ready to enforce the rules. Think, hall monitor. *Create a statue of a strong mole rat enforcing mole rat law.*
- **Tall:** A sweet, rule-follower. Curious about Wilbur's clothes. *Create a statue of a curious mole rat.*
- **Grand-Pah:** The old leader of the naked mole-rats' colony. He is in charge, and his opinion matters most. *Create a statue of an old, wise mole rat.*
- **"Grand-Pah is Coming!":** When you hear, "Grand-Pah is Coming!," give Grand-Pah a salute. He will tell us if wearing clothes is in or out!
- **"All Clear!":** Grand-Pah is gone; you can relax back into Actor Neutral.



Lowrey Brown, Danielle Hopkins, Erik Poger Abrahamsen, and Alexandria Joy in the Alliance Theatre's 2019/20 production of NAKED MOLE RAT GETS DRESSED: THE ROCK EXPERIENCE. Photo by Greg Mooney.

## Persuasive Writing

Imagine that you are a naked mole rat who lives in Wilbur's colony, and Grand-Pah has not made his proclamation yet. Like Wilbur, you want to wear clothes, but Grande, Venti, Tall, and the other naked mole rats think it's silly!

Using the template below, write a persuasive letter to Grand-Pah, convincing him to allow naked mole rats to wear clothes, if they want to.

Dear Grand-Pah,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ (name), and I am a \_\_\_\_\_ (age) year-old naked mole rat in the colony. I am writing to you because I believe you should allow the naked mole rats to wear clothes, if they want to. I feel this way because....

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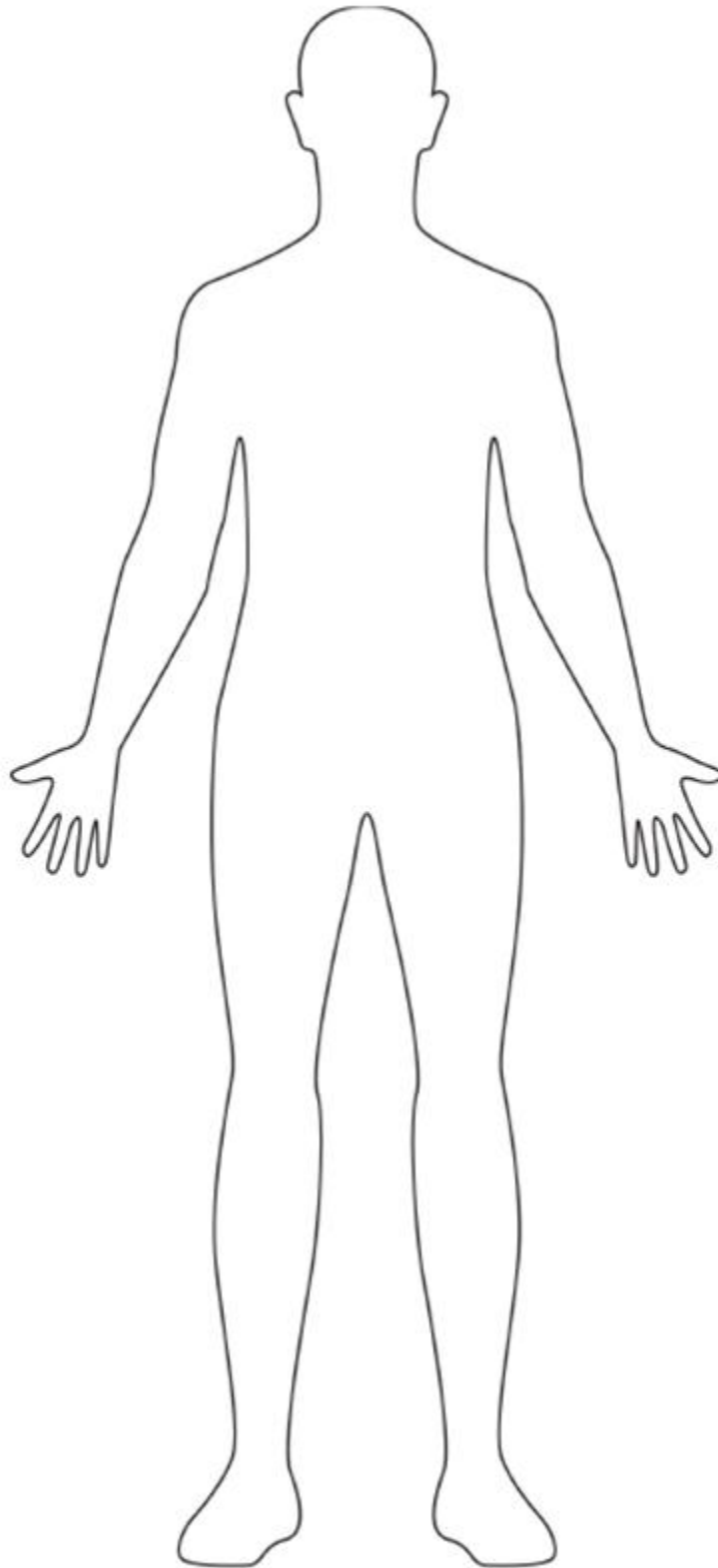
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Sincerely,

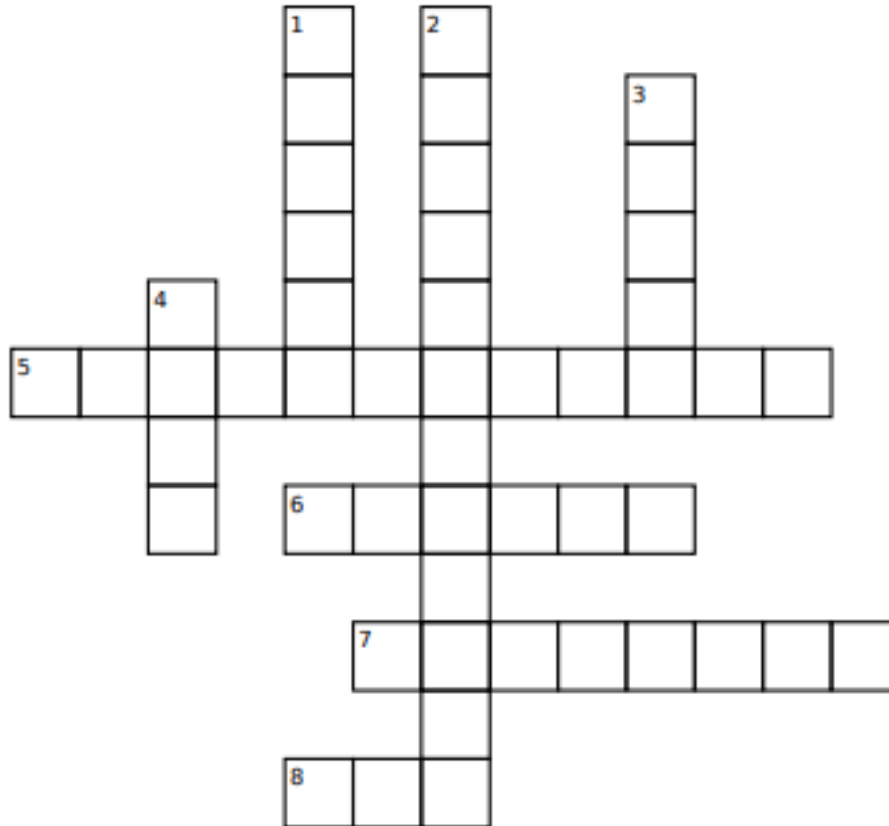
\_\_\_\_\_(your name)

## Costume Design

Brainstorm an outfit for Wilbur to wear!



# Crossword Puzzle



Down:

1. similar to a cave but smaller
2. a small rodent that lives in the tunnels of Africa
3. the naked mole rat who says, "DUDE" a lot
4. a type of music

Across:

5. a big speech or announcement
6. the main character who wants to get dressed
7. the oldest and most regal naked mole rat
8. the first piece of clothing that falls



## Word Search

G R A N D P A H R M A E L L S  
P X T D N G B V G R A N D E N  
R O X U Y D Y N F L B H H P A  
C O U O N A L I J Z J V M E K  
O T C D I N J V X J X L M L E  
L R C K S B E R H A G C H L D  
O C L V M B E L P K O V J W M  
N X O E I U T H K F N N L I O  
Y M T N W S S C B T X T R L L  
Z O H T Y C N I T G X H T B E  
T J E I L T W T C J G O U U R  
A J S T O R I Y J D T G X R A  
L I E T G M N W H Y N O T B T  
L W W P R O C L A M A T I O N  
T S T B R Z O X V Z U W H U L

naked mole rat

Grandpah

tunnel

colony

proclamation

Wilbur

Grande

Venti

rock music

clothes

why not

Tall

## Sources and More Information

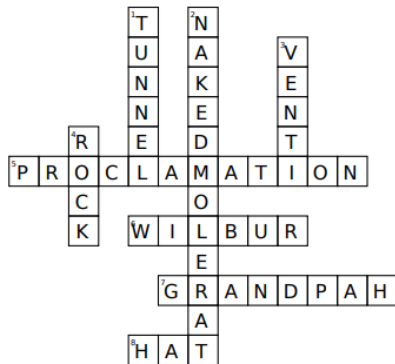
### Research Sites:

<https://nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/naked-mole-rat>

<https://www.saczoo.org/naked-mole-rat>

### Answer Key:

#### Crossword Puzzle



#### Down:

1. similar to a cave but smaller
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#### Word Search



naked mole rat

proclamation

rock music

Tail

Grandpah

Wilbur

clothes

tunnel

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Venti

### Costume Design Examples:



"Wilbur" by Lila



"Grand-Pah" by Emily H.