

2015–2016 Season

**CATCO IS  
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# PLAYGUIDE

## THE KIDS ON THE BLOCK

**Program on  
Spina Bifida**



### About the Kids on the Block:



The Kids on the Block Inc. originated in 1977 in direct response to US Public Law 94-142 (now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or I.D.E.A.), which required that children with disabilities be given the opportunity to be educated alongside their peers without disabilities. The Kids on the Block sought to fill the needs of children with disabilities by creating programming that helped their peers without disabilities understand and accept them. Since then, The Kids on the Block has received international acclaim for over 40 different programs and has troupes in all 50 states and in over 30 different countries. Topics of programs include educational differences, medical differences, and social concerns in addition to programs about disabilities.

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# BEFORE THE PUPPETS



## The Style of Puppetry



The Kids on the Block style of puppetry is based off of the Japanese puppet theatre form called Bunraku. In Bunraku, one puppet takes three puppeteers to operate it. Two of the puppeteers dress in black to appear like shadows or silhouettes. One of these puppeteers operates the puppet's legs, and the other controls the puppet's left arm. The third puppeteer may dress in black or in brightly-colored clothing and is responsible for controlling the right hand, head, and facial features of the puppet. Unlike Bunraku, The Kids on the Block puppets need only one puppeteer because they are hand and rod puppets. As in Japanese Bunraku puppet theatre, the puppeteers will seem to disappear when the program is performed.



## Meet the Kids

**Valerie Perkins** Valerie is a 14 year old who is a good student and very involved in cheerleading and other activities at school. She is also a peer tutor at her school and helps students with math homework.



Valerie is independent and very mature for her age. Valerie was born with spina bifida, and she doesn't mind talking with people about it. Because of the spina bifida, Valerie has minimal feeling in her hips and upper legs and no feeling in her lower legs. With the help of her physical therapist, Valerie learned to walk using braces and crutches. As Valerie often says, "Spina bifida is just one part of who I am. I'm not going to let it keep me from trying anything I want to try!"

**Joanne Spinoza** Joanne is a 14 year old student at Woodburn Jr. High. She is involved in a variety of activities like soccer, cheerleading, and the school newspaper. She also works at the local video store and loves to be part of the action. Sometimes, Joanne can be naïve, causing her to believe misinformation, but she is open and willing to doing the right thing and wants to learn as she grows.



## What is Spina Bifida?

Spina bifida means that a person's spinal cord did not form properly before he or she was born. The spinal cord is supposed to be a closed tube, but people with spina bifida are born with an open spinal cord. As Valerie says, "when I was born, I had a hole...a place in my back-well, my spine-where the nerves didn't come together quite right." As a result, the nerves have trouble sending messages from the brain through the spinal cord to the lower half of the body. This is why Valerie uses braces and crutches to help her walk. Not everyone with spina bifida needs braces or crutches. Some can walk without any difficulty while others have to use a wheelchair to get around.

Sometimes, people are curious or nervous when they meet someone with spina bifida. Although they may move a little differently, people with spina bifida have the same kinds of feelings and interests as anyone else. They may just do things in a slightly different way.

For more information about spina bifida, you can visit the Spina Bifida Association of America's website at <http://spinabifidaassociation.org/>



# AFTER THE PUPPETS—NOW WHAT?

## Classroom & Small Group Discussion

After students have participated in the puppet performance, there are a number of activities that can be led by the classroom teacher to stimulate discussion of the topic. Use some or all of the following questions to stimulate a discussion with small groups of children about what they saw during the program on spina bifida.

### Vignette 1—New Cheers



1. Joanne is very nervous. What is she nervous about?
2. When Joanne learns that Valerie is trying out for cheerleading, she is surprised. Why does she feel that way?
3. Valerie tells Joanne about her braces and crutches. What do these devices do for Valerie?
4. Why does Valerie need her braces and crutches?
5. For Valerie, spina bifida means that the nerves in her spinal cord didn't form the way they are supposed to. Where is the spinal cord located? How is Valerie's spinal cord different?
6. Joanne uses the word "handicapped." What does Valerie think of that word? What word does she prefer? Why does Valerie prefer the word "disability"?
7. Do you think Valerie should be a cheerleader? Why or why not?

### Vignette 2 The Right Words



1. Joanne is writing an article for the school newspaper. What is it about?
2. At first, Valerie is very flattered to have an article written about her. After hearing Joanne's story, does she still feel that way? Why or why not?
3. Valerie doesn't like some of the words in Joanne's story. Can you name some of the words Valerie dislikes? Why do you think Valerie feels strongly about those words?
4. Valerie tells Joanne, "Spina bifida is a part of my life. It's not who I am." What do you think Valerie means by that?
5. Words can be used to make someone feel good or bad. What are some words you would like a person to use when they describe you?

### Vignette 3—Pretty on the Outside and In



1. Joanne was reading a magazine. What kind of magazine was it?
2. Joanne got upset when she learned Philip would be at Valerie's basketball game. Why does Joanne feel that way?
3. Joanne believes Philip would notice her if she looked like what? Why does Joanne think she must look like a fashion model for Philip to notice her?
4. According to Valerie, why do fashion models look the way they do? Do you agree with her? Why or why not?
5. What does Valerie do with Joanne's magazine? Why?
6. Valerie accuses Joanne of feeling sorry for herself. Is Valerie right? Why or why not?
7. What does Valerie say she does when she "hears that negative voice" in her head? Do you think Valerie's idea can work? Why or why not?
8. What do you do to make yourself feel better when you are feeling badly?

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITY



## Just Like a Tomato...Sort of

### Objective:

Children will gain a better understanding of Valerie's tomato analogy by creating a tomato plant and supporting it to make it stand.

### Materials:

- Red and green construction paper
- Pencils or pens and scissors for each participant
- Ruler, dowel rods, or popsicle sticks for each participant
- String
- Glue or tape

### Procedure:

1. Discuss how tomatoes grow on a vine.
2. Reiterate Valerie's tomato analogy, how her braces are designed to support her legs in the same manner that a stick is used to support a tomato plant as it grows.
3. Have students use the green construction paper to draw a vine.
4. Use the red construction paper to draw tomatoes.
5. Have the students cut out their drawings and glue or tape the tomatoes to their vine.
6. Instruct students to tie their "plant" to the stick.

### Discussion:

Have the students discuss the following:

- How well would your plant stand without the support of the stick?
- Do you think Valerie's idea about her braces and crutches working "like tomatoes" was a good way to explain what they do? Why or why not?
- What other ideas could Valerie use to explain how her braces and crutches help her balance while standing or walking?



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

## Positively Positive

### Objective:

Students will enhance their own self esteem by making a list of positive things about themselves.

### Materials:

A pen or pencil and paper for each participant

### Procedure:

1. As a group, have students brainstorm the qualities of a person who would make a good friend. (i.e. funny, shares his or her time, helpful, etc.). List the suggestions on the board.
2. Using the list on the board as a starting point, instruct students to make their own list of positive things about themselves.

### Discussion:

After completing their lists, have the students discuss the following:

- Was it difficult to make a list of positive things about yourself?
- Were some of the things on your list the same as the list on the board?
- Were some things different?
- How could your list be helpful during times when you feel badly?



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITY



## The “I Can” Poster

### Objective:

Student will create a visual reminder of their own accomplishments and goals.

### Materials:

A pen or pencil and paper for each participant

### Procedure:

1. Have students fold their paper lengthwise in the center to make two columns: one on the left titled “What I Can Do” and one on the right titled “What I Could Try.”
2. In the left column, have students write down things they have accomplished and put a star next to the things that were difficult or scary to try (i.e. swimming, riding a bicycle, talking in front of the class, etc.)
3. In the right column, have students list things they would like to accomplish and put a star next to the ones that would be difficult or scary.
4. Have students choose one starred activity from each column and draw themselves accomplishing the activity.



### Discussion:

Have the students discuss the following:

- Were you surprised at the number of things in the “What I can Do” column with stars next to them?
- Did drawing a picture of yourself doing the activity from the “What I could Try” column make it easier to think about doing that difficult thing? Why or why not?



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

## Dramatic Role Play

### Directions:

1. Divide students into groups of two to five people.
2. Distribute one of the following scenarios to each group.
3. Discuss the story and the potential conflict or choices involved.
4. Each group should assign parts and come up with a realistic ending. Tell the groups that they can add characters, create more than one scene and expand on what has been presented. Encourage them not to use one word endings.
5. Have the students practice the vignette at least two times, complete with the ending and props if they choose. They do not need to memorize their parts, they can read from their notes.
6. Have the students perform their vignette for the whole group and tell them to be prepared to discuss their reasons for ending the story in the way they did.



### Discussion:

After students have performed their scenarios, discuss what happened during the presentation by asking the following questions:

1. How did your character feel?
2. Did you like playing your character? Why or why not?
3. Do you think your character's reaction was realistic?
4. What are some of the other ways this scenario could have been resolved?

Be sure to make a comparison for the students between their own ideas and those that have been presented. Reinforce the information presented during the puppet performance.

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITY



## Dramatic Role Play

### Vignette A—The Cheer Squad

**The Setting:** The list for the cheer squad has been posted. All are hopeful and searching for their names.

**The Characters:** **Chris** – a boy or girl at Woodburn Jr. High  
**Ronnie** – another boy or girl from Woodburn Jr. High  
**Joanne** – Valerie's friend

**The Scene:** *(Everyone is crowded around a list posted on the wall.)*

**Joanne:** *(Frantically searching then finding her name.)* Oh! I can't believe it! Yeah! *(She cheers.)*

**Ronnie:** We made it! We all made it! What a great squad we're gonna have, Jo. You, me, Chris, Valerie, John...*(Cheering.)* Yeah!

**Chris:** Valerie? Did you say Valerie made the squad?

**Joanne:** Yeah! I can't wait to tell her. Her name's right here *(Pointing.)* Valerie Perkins.

**Chris:** Well, Valerie doesn't really cheer. It's like...it's sort of like cheating.

**Ronnie:** It is not!

**Chris:** She attaches a pom pom to her crutch and shakes it a bit. That's all! What about the splits or jumps and things? The coach probably felt sorry for her. That's all.

**Joanne:** Hold it, Chris. Just because Valerie has spina bifida, it doesn't mean she can't do the things everybody else does.

*(Finish the vignette by adding a detailed ending. Practice with your group.)*



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITY



## Dramatic Role Play

### Vignette B—The Dance

**The Setting:** Valerie and Thomas are at the junior high dance. Thomas has some questions about spina bifida.

**The Characters:** Valerie – a girl who has spina bifida  
Thomas – Valerie's date at the dance

**The Scene:** *(Valerie and Thomas arrive at the school dance in the gym.)*

**Valerie:** *(Looking around as she enters the room.)* Wow! The gym looks so pretty. The dance committee did a great job, huh?

**Thomas:** Yeah, it looks really nice.

**Valerie:** Should we get something to drink?

**Thomas:** Yeah, in a minute. Val? Remember how you said you'd tell me a little more about your legs?

**Valerie:** Right. I was going to tell you about spina bifida. What do you want to know?

**Thomas:** How long have you been like that?

**Valerie:** Spina bifida is something I was born with so...all my life!

**Thomas:** Will it ever go away? And what kinds of things can you do with your braces on your legs?

*(Finish the vignette by adding a detailed ending. Practice with your group.)*

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITY



## Dramatic Role Play

### Vignette C—The Substitute Babysitter

**The Setting:** Joanne had agreed to babysit for the Andersons. When she has to fill in at the video store, she asks Valerie to take her babysitting job.

**The Characters:** **Valerie** – a girl with spina bifida  
**Mr. or Mrs. Anderson** – a concerned parent

**The Scene:** *(Valerie is seated or holding herself upright with one crutch. She is on the phone.)*

**Valerie:** Gee, I hope the Andersons won't be too upset that Joanne can't babysit.

**Mr(s). Anderson:** *(Answering the phone.)* Hello?

**Valerie:** Hi! Is this Mr(s). Anderson?

**Mr(s). Anderson:** Yes?

**Valerie:** I'm calling on behalf of Joanne Spinoza. She was supposed to babysit for you, but she was called into work at the video store.

**Mr(s). Anderson:** Oh, no.

**Valerie:** Joanne wanted me to tell you how sorry she is.

**Mr(s). Anderson:** Where am I going to find a babysitter on such short notice?

**Valerie:** Well, actually...Joanne asked me to fill in for her.

**Mr(s). Anderson:** You? But aren't you...I mean, don't you have...?

**Valerie:** Are you concerned about my spina bifida?

**Mr(s). Anderson:** Well, yes. How can you care for a small child with your disability?

*(Finish the vignette by adding a detailed ending. Practice with your group.)*