



**LET'S TALK ABOUT IT!**  
**STUDY GUIDE**



**THE PERFORMANCE**  
**LET'S TALK ABOUT IT!**

Through the vocabulary of dance, world folklore, real-life stories, and video interviews of everyday teens, **Let's Talk About IT!** is a performance that deftly and humorously explores intimacy, relationships and the choices many teens face in the turbulent twists of every day. **Lets Talk About IT!** intertwines artistic mediums with grace and subtlety; movement is sculpted with words; videos are projected through dance and story. The movement tells the physical story of the teen body as it transitions from childhood to adulthood through a unique blend of modern dance, and Bunning's personal spin on hip-hop. McEwin's writing weaves the retelling of traditional world folklore with real-life pre-teen and teen interviews from various genders, races and neighborhoods. This melding of old and new storytelling, develops the story of being a teen in a hyper-techno age, while still holding onto the conflicts, thoughts, hopes and dreams that have inflicted teens throughout the centuries.

## **BEFORE SEEING THE PERFORMANCE**

1. **Let's Talk About IT!** was created to help teens discuss, learn and understand their bodies. From physical to emotional changes teens experience new sexual feelings that are awakened in new ways because of the hormonal and physical changes of puberty. These changes involve both the body and the mind, and teens may wonder about new and often intense, sexual feelings. Create a discussion with your students regarding these changes. Begin by having them write words that describe their changing body. Then have them create a list describing how they feel emotionally, sexually. From these lists you can use them as starting points for free-writing, longer class discussions, or essay topics.
2. Teens are learning about relationships. Have them write about how they feel about some of their new relationships; both to the opposite sex, peers, close friends, and parents.
3. Teens often feel more comfortable talking to each other than adults. Have your students pair up and conduct interviews (either through investigative reporting, or with video cameras) with each other on what is different about the age they are now, than when they were younger. Who do they go to for support regarding sex, relationships, peer pressure, body issues? Do they feel pressure to look like celebrities? Is there media pressure to be a certain way? What does it mean to "fit in"? Afterwards, discuss with your students what their interviews revealed. Come up with helpful ideas and suggestions on mentors, avenues of outside information that these teens can turn to in times of need and discussion.
4. **Let's Talk About IT!** uses modern dance to help explore the transitioning body from child into adult. Introduce Modern dance to your students. Modern dance is a way for the body to express ideas and emotions. Modern dance is the combination and freedom of creativity/inventiveness, rhythm (reoccurring sound or action), and movement, including energy, shape, space, and locomotion. It is often practiced with bare feet so the dancer has a full range of foot movement and can be grounded to the floor. Discuss or watch modern dance. You could watch famous Modern dancers; Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Twyla Tharp, Alvin Ailey, and Merce Cunningham.

## **AFTER SEEING THE PERFORMANCE**

1. After seeing **Let's Talk About IT!** discuss it with your class.  
*Some Suggested Discussion Topics:*
  - How was dance used to tell the story?
  - How was the teen story of the body's transition into adulthood told through dance?
  - What do you think it means to "Fit In."

- Does the media influence who you are? If so, how?
2. When the performers were at “the wall” what did it make you think of? Why do you think the choreographer used this placement?
  3. The folklore of **The Little Red Riding Hood** is retold within **Let's Talk About IT!** Why do you think this story was used? Are there any other classic stories about coming of age that you know? Can your students change any of these stories into modern day “teen” tales?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Have students write their own **Little Red Riding Hood** Stories. As a group you can read the Charles Perrault or Brothers Grimm version, and then each student can make-up their own twist on the classic story. You can then have them act out their stories.
2. Make up your own coming of age stories. Write a short story, comic strip, opening chapter to a novel, or a poem about being a teen.
3. Create a writer's workshop setting in your classroom and have teens write and share as a group on topics related to **Let's Talk About IT!**; Body, Media Influence, Relationships, Peer Pressure. The writer's workshop should have free writes based on the topics, read alouds of the work, and no criticism, just listening and “what works in your writing” discussions afterwards.
4. Have each student create a media board of famous people that have had some influence in their lives. Once the media board has been created, have students create a “hero/heroine” board of real people in their lives and how they have been influenced them.
5. Have students write five body traits that they “like” and five traits they “dislike” about themselves. Read aloud and discuss. Does the media influence any of these likes and dislikes, if so how? Do the “real” people in their lives influence these traits, if so how?
6. Create your own film interviews. Students can film each other answering some of the questions the videoed teens were asked. Edit the questions together and send them to us. For a list of our questions e-mail us at [contactus@treehouseshakers.com](mailto:contactus@treehouseshakers.com)
7. Talk about the role of a choreographer. This is the person who makes up the gestures and movements and puts them together in space. They can practice being a choreographer by dividing into groups and having a leader who makes

four to eight movements and teaches them to their group. One way to begin is to use their name. Write the name in space with a finger, then the whole hand, both hands, just with their head, with a knee, etc. Teachers, ask different students to use different body parts or even write their names backwards.

## ABOUT TREEHOUSE SHAKERS

Treehouse Shakers, Inc., a non-profit dance and theater company, was co-founded in 1997 by collaborators and childhood friends, Emily Bunning, choreographer/dancer, and Mara McEwin, writer/actor. Treehouse Shakers has created and performed thirteen original dance-plays for young audiences and adults in many established performance venues, including theaters, festivals and schools across the nation. Treehouse Shakers creates work that experiments with narrative styles and explores the story's elements through the abstractions of modern dance. With each new piece, we challenge ourselves as artists to not only create the highest caliber of work, but also to create work that will stimulate, connect and entertain our audience members. Our young audience programming is unique in its offering young audiences a guided look at modern dance through powerful and meaningful theater. Our work is sometimes the first performance, specifically in viewing dance, which many young people experience. We want to sharpen their aesthetics as they are entertained, challenged, and engaged, while at the same time expanding their knowledge of various art forms. We have built our repertory to carefully address every age level within youth programming, and can proudly say we serve babies to teens. We are building audiences who are creative-thinkers and hopefully life-long performance enthusiasts.

Currently, Treehouse Shakers has six original performances for young audiences on a rotating tour across the nation as well as an annual New York City Season. Our touring repertoire includes; **Animal Rhythms**, **Desert Travels**, **Coyote's Dance**, **Hatched**, **Let's Talk About IT!**, and **Under The Tangle**. **Animal Rhythms** introduces audiences to rhythm, modern dance and theater through the power and culture of West African folklore. **Desert Travels** gives young audiences a mesmerizing taste of life in the Middle East by portraying the sights, sounds and stories of the culture. **Coyote's Dance** follows Coyote, who is both clown and teacher, on a humorous journey of deceit and adventure. **Hatched** for babies, toddlers and preschoolers, is performed through movement, handcrafted puppets, and very little human dialogue. Set amidst an American family farm, young audience members are encouraged and narrated to interact and play with the characters onstage; they give the chicks their feed, milk bottles to the lamb, and worms to the baby birds. It is a beautiful and delicate tale, told through exquisite visuals, live music, and the exploration of newborn animals. We want this experience to begin their relationship to the dance, helping to build future audience members, as well as lovers of imagination and artistic expression. Treehouse Shakers is currently the only American company which has an extensively touring "baby drama" **Hatched**, that allows for a guided look at movement for the youngest of audiences. **Let's Talk About IT!** is a coming of age dance-play for teens that deftly and humorously explores peer pressure, bullying, relationships, and the challenges teens face in the twists of every day.

Treehouse Shakers  
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Our newest piece, **Under the Tangle**, is the dance-mystery about an adolescent girl who becomes ensnared in an intriguing labyrinth after the sudden loss of her parents. Throughout her journey, she twists along the maze being confronted with obstacles, finding numerous clues revealing life lessons and meeting many unusual characters: a flock of black birds, the daunting labyrinth guards, and the Queen of the Lost perched upon a grim tower. It is this journey of obstacles, relationships, and discoveries, which strengthen the young girl's character, and eventually set her free from the labyrinth.

Treehouse Shakers' young audience work has been praised by Laurel Graeber in the *New York Times*, and featured in *New York Magazine*, *Time Out Kids*, *New York 1's Parenting Report*, *CBS-TV's Morning Show*, *Mommy Poppins*, *Village Voice*, *New York Post*, and *The Daily News*, among others. Our young audience work has received funding from the New York City's Department of Cultural Affairs, New York State Council on the Arts, Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Fund, Lower Manhattan Cultural Community's Fund for Creative Communities and Manhattan Community Arts Fund, The Nancy Quinn Fund, Puffin Foundation, Ltd., Meet the Composers, BOCES, Rosenthal Family Foundation and the Wyoming Arts Council. Some highlighted performance venues for all of our dance-plays include: *United Nations (NYC)*, *The Peter Jay Sharp Theater (NYC)*, *The Ailey Citigroup Theater (NYC)*, *Manhattan Movement and Arts Center (NYC)*, *Victoria Theater Associations (Dayton, OH)*, *Alden Theater (McLean, VA)*, *Aronoff Center (Cincinnati, OH)*, *Paramount Theater (Peekskill, NY)*, *Westhampton Beach Playhouse (L.I., NY)*, *Tribeca Film Festival (NYC)*, and *Jacob's Pillow's Community Day (Becket, MA)* *Two Rivers Theater (Red Bank, NJ)*, *Black Rock Theater (Germantown, MD)*, *Bucks County Playhouse (New Hope, PA)*.

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