Learning About Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias

A Resource for Teachers

September 2020

**What is this?**

A resource for teaching students in Grades 4-6 about Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. The Discussion Guide is used along with the script for *What Grandma Means to Say,* a one-act play written by author JC Sulzenko. The script can be read aloud or performed in the classroom, a live adaption of the script can be viewed on YouTube, or the storybook adaptation of *What My Grandma Means to Say* can be used in lieu of the script. The Discussion Guide contains: information about how to 'set the scene' for your class before reading/performing the script/book; discussion points for after the script/book; FAQs about Alzheimer's disease and other dementias; and activities for teachers and students.

**Why should I use this resource?**

To teach children about Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Learning the facts and learning tips to better communicate with people with Alzheimer's disease helps reduce the stigma and isolation that negatively impacts those who are living with this disease. With over 2,600 Islanders living with Alzheimer's disease or other dementias, and almost twice that number predicted for the year 2038, it's important to use this resource to educate our youth about the disease and to build effective interpersonal skills.

**Who are we?**

*The Alzheimer Society of Prince Edward Island.* Behind every person with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, there are hundreds of people dedicated to helping. The Alzheimer Society is the leading not-for-profit health organization working nationwide to improve the quality of life for Canadians affected by Alzheimer's disease and other dementias and advance the search for the cause and cure. We are located in every province across Canada and in over 150 local communities.

Since 1989, we've been dedicated to providing help for people living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias and their caregivers. That help comes in many ways. The Society is responsible for raising awareness, providing programs, education, and support services to all those affected by the disease.

Table of Contents

**Introduction**4

**Elephant Exercise (Updated Instructions)**8

**Curriculum Outcomes**9

**Letter to Family**............................................................................................................................12

**Discussion Guide**13

**The Script**23

# Introduction

With over 2,600 Islanders living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, more and more Islanders are feeling the impact of this disease, including children. At the Alzheimer Society of PEI, we believe it is important that all Islanders understand how Alzheimer's disease and other dementias impact the individual living with the disease. Knowing the facts and learning tips to better communicate helps to reduce the stigma which negatively impacts individuals living with dementia.

The Discussion Guide for *What My Grandma Means to Say* is a wonderful resource for teaching students in Grades 4-6 about dementia. The Discussion Guide is to be used along with the script for *What My Grandma Means to Say*, a one-act play written by author JC Sulzenko. The script can be read aloud or performed in the classroom (performance outside the classroom requires notice to and permission from the author). Alternatively, the Discussion Guide may be used in conjunction with the storybook adaption of *What* *My Grandma Means to Say*, with a recorded performance of the play available on YouTube (<http://youtu.be/WsaHth8bm0s)>, or it may be used to compliment an on-stage production of the play, performed by local high school students (please contact the Alzheimer Society of PEI for more information about this option).

In the Discussion Guide, you will find:

-Information about how to 'set the scene' for your class before the play  
-Discussion points for after the play  
-FAQs about Alzheimer's disease and other dementias  
-Activities for teachers and students

To enhance students' understanding, along with any exercises suggested in the Discussion Guide, the Alzheimer Society of PEI suggests participating in the Virtual Dementia Tour with students.

**Virtual Dementia Tour:** This activity simulates impairments that may be experienced by someone living with dementia. A variety of impairments are simulated a number of different ways, such as taping fingers together to mimic difficulties with fine motor control, and wearing vision-reducing goggles to mimic visual difficulties. With these impairments, students are asked to complete basic tasks such as reading and writing. Students experience some of the struggles that may be experienced by someone with dementia, as well as frustration and communication breakdown. The Alzheimer Society of PEI's Education Coordinator can offer the Virtual Dementia Tour in your classroom. Contact 902-370-3135 or education@alzpei.ca for more details.

**If you will be utilizing this resource in any capacity, please notify the Alzheimer Society of PEI by calling 902-628-2257 or emailing society@alzpei.ca. We also request that all teachers using the resource complete the following brief evaluation to provide feedback about the resource (it is also available electronically from the Alzheimer Society of PEI).**

**Resource Evaluation**

Teacher:                                                 School:

Grade:                                        Number of students:

Did you read the script, perform the play, read the book, or watch the video?  
(Choose one or several) SCRIPT PERFORMED BOOK VIDEO

Would you recommend this resource to other teachers? YES NO

Was the Discussion Guide helpful? YES NO

Would additional information be helpful? YES NO

If yes, what information or materials specifically would be helpful?  
                                                                                                                                   

Did you perform the Elephant Exercise with your class? YES NO

If yes, please provide any feedback you may have:

Did ASPEI perform the Virtual Dementia Tour with your class? YES NO

If yes, please provide any feedback you may have:

Did you perform any exercises suggested in the Discussion Guide? YES NO

If yes, please provide any feedback you may have:

Any other comments:

**Thank you for your feedback and for providing young Islanders with the opportunity to learn more about Alzeimer's disease and other dementias!**

**Sample Introduction for Students:**

*Today we're going to (*watch a play / read a play/book*) called* What Grandma Means to Say*. The play is about an eleven-year-old boy named Jake, who is going to visit his grandmother. His Grandmother is around seventy years old and she is living with something called Alzheimer's disease. Alzheimer's disease makes it more difficult for people to remember things and causes changes in how people think. Alzheimer's disease is not a normal part of growing old and children cannot get it. Now, let's find out about Jake and his visit with his grandmother!*

Reminder for teachers: The heart symbol  is used to identify outcomes that should be addressed with sensitivity. It is important to know your students and to consider what outcomes/issues should be handled with care.

Additional information about risk reduction and brain health can be found in the *Heads Up for Healthier Brains* brochure provided in this package.

If you have any additional questions, or would simply like to discuss this resource further or the topic of Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias, please do not hesitate to contact the Alzheimer Society at 902-628-2257 or [society@alzpei.ca](mailto:education@alzpei.ca). We are here to help in whatever way we can to ensure that students have the opportunity to receive this important information.

# Elephant Exercise (Updated Instructions)

While this activity appears in the Discussion Guide, we have provided updated instructions below. The Elephant Exercise has children complete a drawing of an elephant with difficult step-by-step verbal instructions from the teacher. Students are meant to experience the frustration and breakdown in communication which is often experienced by individuals living with dementia.

Before starting this exercise, the instructor will need to draw the visual so that it can be shown to students at the end. DO NOT SHARE THE NAME OF THE EXERCISE WITH THE STUDENTS. No further explanations should be shared with students while the exercise is underway. Here are the instructions to read aloud to the students:

1. Please take out a blank sheet of paper and a pencil and follow the instructions I give you. I will not respond to any questions during the exercise. I will read the instructions only once. Here they are:
2. Near the bottom of the page draw two squares about 8 cm apart.
3. At the bottom of these squares draw a series of half circles.
4. At the top of, and joining both squares, draw a rectangle.
5. At the top right corner of the rectangle, draw a circle about the size of an Oreo cookie.
6. Now, imagine that circle is the face of a clock, and at the five o'clock position, draw an "S" half in and half out of the circle.
7. Now draw a second "S" that looks the same, very close to the first one.
8. On the top left part of the circle, draw a smaller circle that is half in and half out of the larger circle.
9. Draw an "S" attached to the top left corner of the rectangle.
10. Now within the larger circle, draw two ovals, one inside the other, the smaller one being in the lower part of the larger one.
11. By now, you each should have something that looks like this (instructor shows the visual).
12. Does your drawing look like this one? If not:

What went wrong? How did you feel?

Were you angry or embarrassed?

Did anyone give up?

Explain to the students that this exercise demonstrates:

* The difficulty a person with Alzheimer's disease might have with understanding instructions.
* The feelings of frustration, giving up, anger, etc., a person with Alzheimer's disease might feel when we are communicating with them.
* The importance of good communication skills; for example, keeping instructions short, simple, and slow.

# Curriculum Outcomes

The Discussion Guide and accompanying activities can be used to meet the following Prince Edward Island curriculum outcomes:

**Health**

Grade 4,5, and 6 General Curriculum Outcome (Relationship Choices):

Students will develop effective interpersonal skills that demonstrate responsibility, respect, and caring in order to establish and maintain healthy interactions.

Grade 4 Specific Curriculum Outcomes:

* Recognize that individuals can have positive and negative influence on the feelings of others 
* Describe and demonstrate communication skills and behaviours that show respect for the feelings of others
* Identify and describe ways to provide support to others 

Grade 5 Specific Curriculum Outcomes:

* Recognize that certain behaviours may mask underlying feelings
* Practise effective communication skills
* Identify possible changes in family relationships, and explore strategies for dealing with change 

Grade 6 Specific Curriculum Outcomes:

* Establish personal guidelines for expressing feelings
* Identify, analyse, and develop strategies to overcome barriers to communication
* Develop strategies to maintain and enhance appropriate cross-age relationships

**Language Arts**

Grade 4, 5, and 6 General Curriculum Outcomes:

Students will be expected to listen to explore, extend, clarify, and reflect on their thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experiences.

Students will be expected to interact with sensitivity and respect, considering the situation, audience, and purpose.

Students will be expected to select, read, and view with understanding a range of literature, information, media, and visual texts.

Students will be expected to respond personally to a range of texts.

Grade 4 Specific Curriculum Outcomes:

* Explore and discuss their thoughts, ideas, and experiences and consider those of their peers
* Contribute to conversations, small-group and whole-group discussion, showing an awareness of when to speak and when to listen
* Give and follow instructions and respond to questions and directions
* Engage in and respond to oral presentations (e.g., retell a story, sing a song)
* Describe, share, and discuss their personal reactions to texts
* Respond critically to texts by asking questions and formulating understandings
* Respond critically to texts by discussing texts from the perspective of their own experiences

Grade 5 Specific Curriculum Outcomes:

* Contribute thoughts, ideas, and experiences to discussions, and ask questions to clarify their ideas and those of their peers
* Ask and respond to questions to seek clarification or explanation of ideas and concepts
* Contribute to and respond constructively in conversation, small-group and whole-group discussion, recognizing their roles and responsibilities as speakers and listeners
* Give and follow precise instructions and respond to questions and directions
* Engage in, respond to, and evaluate oral presentations
* Describe, share, and discuss their personal reactions to a range of texts across genres, topics, and subjects
* Respond critically to texts by demonstrating awareness that all texts reflect a purpose and a point of view

Grade 6 Specific Curriculum Outcomes:

* Contribute thoughts, ideas, and questions to discussion and compare their own ideas with those of peers and others
* Ask and respond to questions to seek clarification or explanation of ideas and concepts
* Contribute to and respond constructively in conversation, small-group and whole-group discussion
* Give and follow instructions and respond to a variety of questions and instructions
* Engage in, respond to, and evaluate a variety of oral presentations and other texts
* Explain why a particular text matters to them and demonstrate an increasing ability to make connections among texts
* Respond critically to texts by demonstrating growing awareness that all texts reflect a purpose and a perspective

**Science**

Grade 5 General Curriculum Outcome:

Students will construct knowledge and understandings of concepts in life science, physical science, and Earth and space science, and apply these understandings to interpret, integrate, and extend their knowledge.

Grade 5 Specific Curriculum Outcome:

* Describe the structure and function of the major organs or the nervous system

**Physical Education**

Grade 4 Specific Curriculum Outcome (4.11 Safety and First Aid - Skilful Movement, Relationships):

* Incorporate safe practices (e.g., warm-up, cool-down, safe stretching, protective responses, proper attire, well-maintained equipment) for the prevention of injury, and investigate basic first aid associated with care of illness and injury resulting from participation in movement activities both in and out of physical education class.

Grade 5 Specific Curriculum Outcome (5.9 Safety and First Aid - Relationships):

* Make decisions about how to prevent and care for common movement activity-related discomforts and injuries (e.g., stiffness, nose bleeds, sprains).

# Sample Letter to Family

dd/mm/yyyy

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Your child's class will be learning about Alzheimer's disease through a (*play/book)* called *What Grandma Means to Say* by author JC Sulzenko. The (*play/book*) follows a young boy named Jake who visits with his grandmother, who has Alzheimer's disease. The (*play/book*), along with a following discussion and activities, will teach the children about expressing and understanding feelings, along with building communication skills.

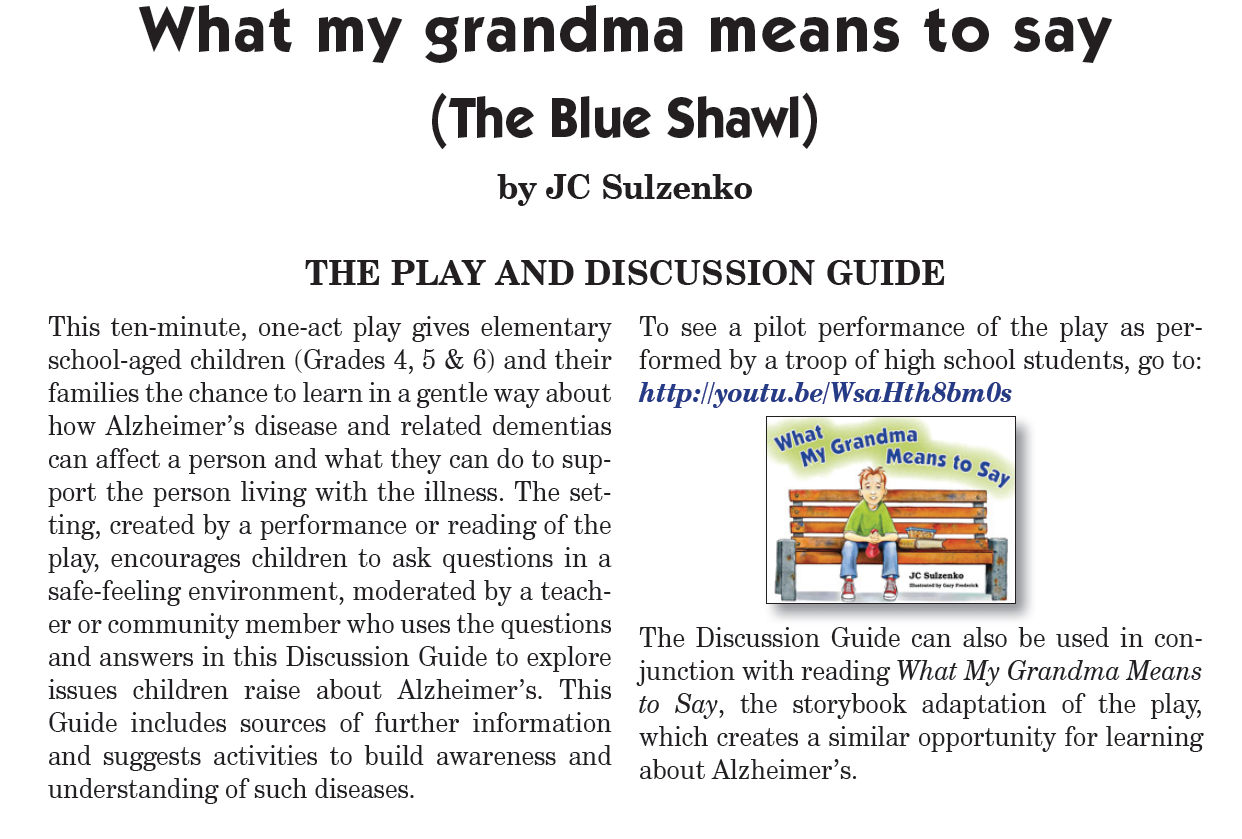
This may be a sensitive subject for some children whose lives have been touched by the effects of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me.

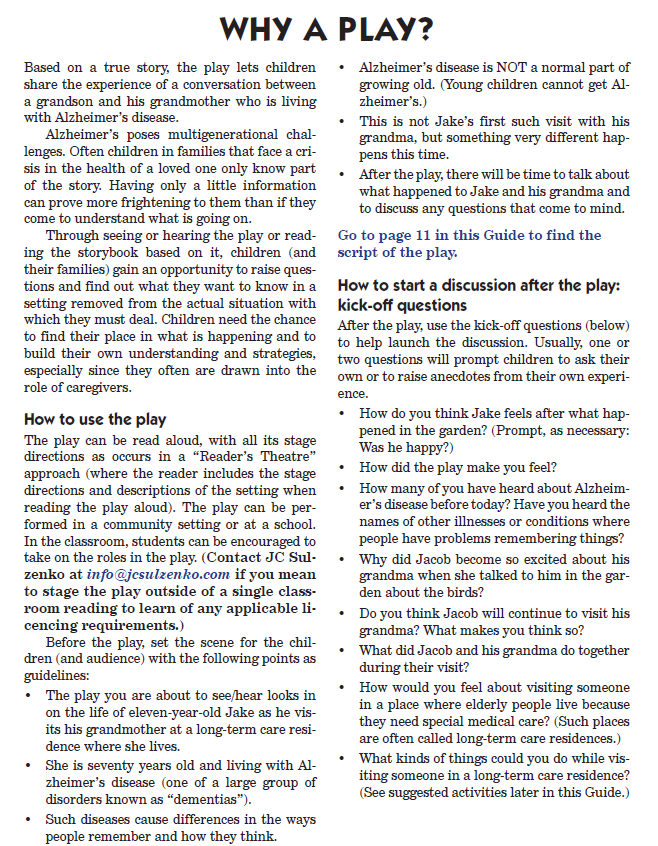
More information on this topic is available from the Alzheimer Society of PEI at 902-628-2257 or society@alzpei.ca

(Teacher’s name)

# WMGMTS 1.png

# WMGMTS 2.png

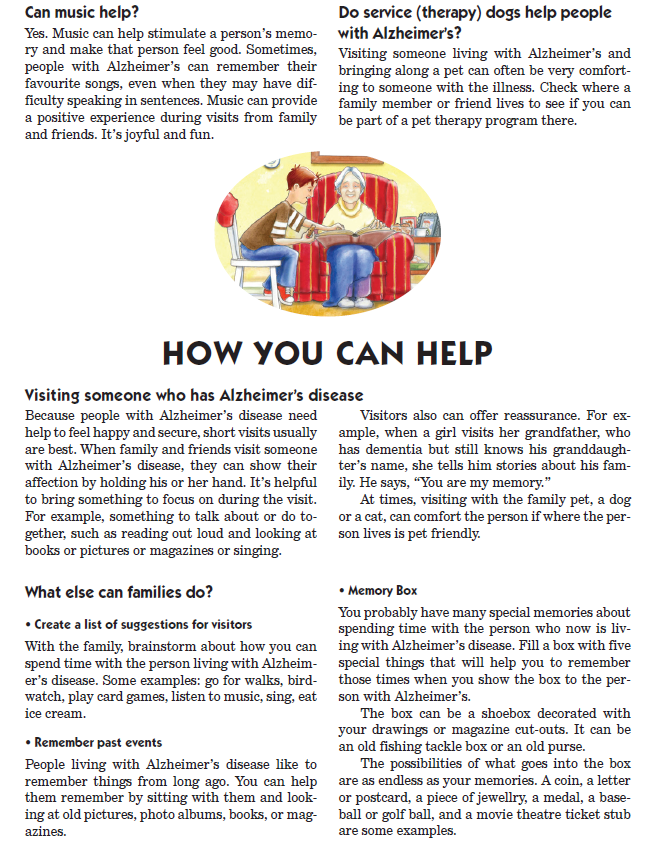


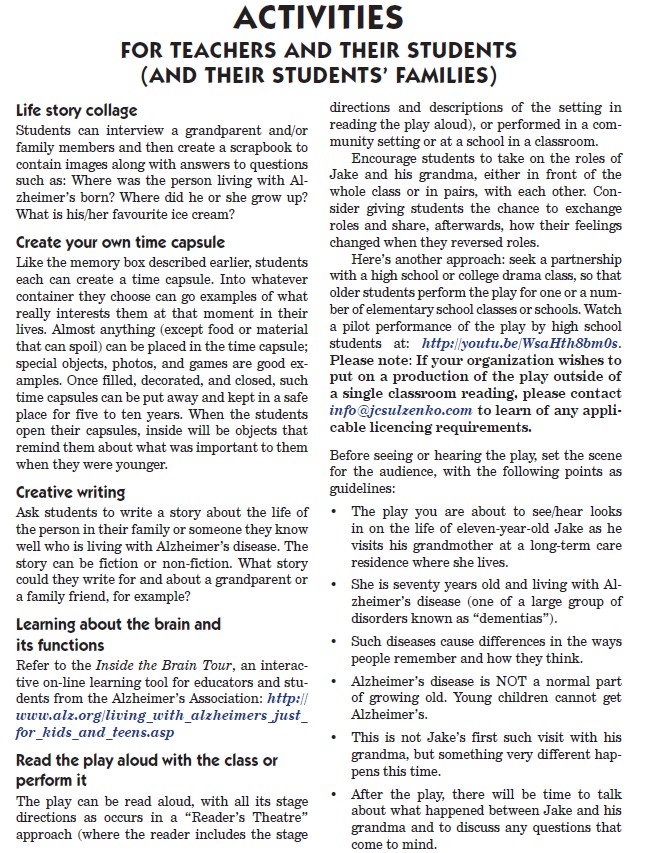


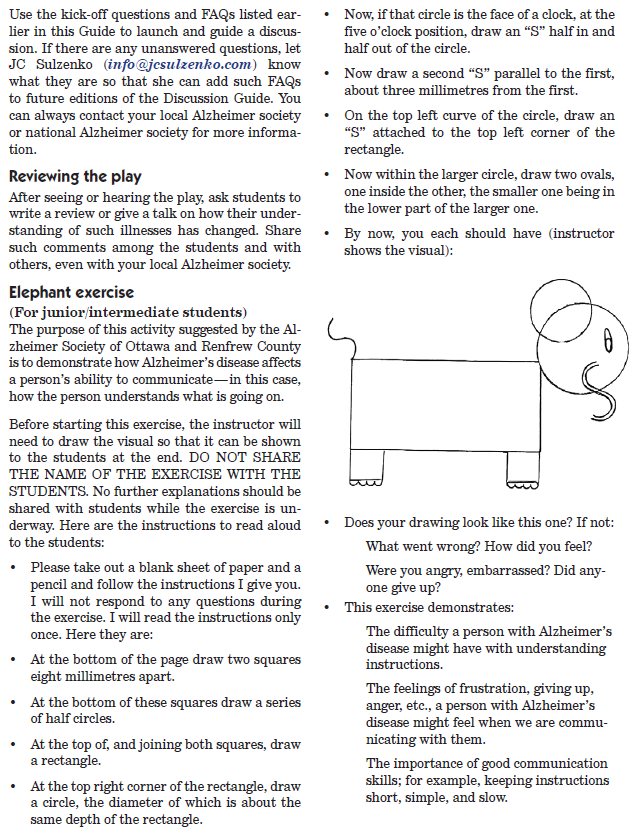
# WMGMTS 6.png

# WMGMTS 7.png

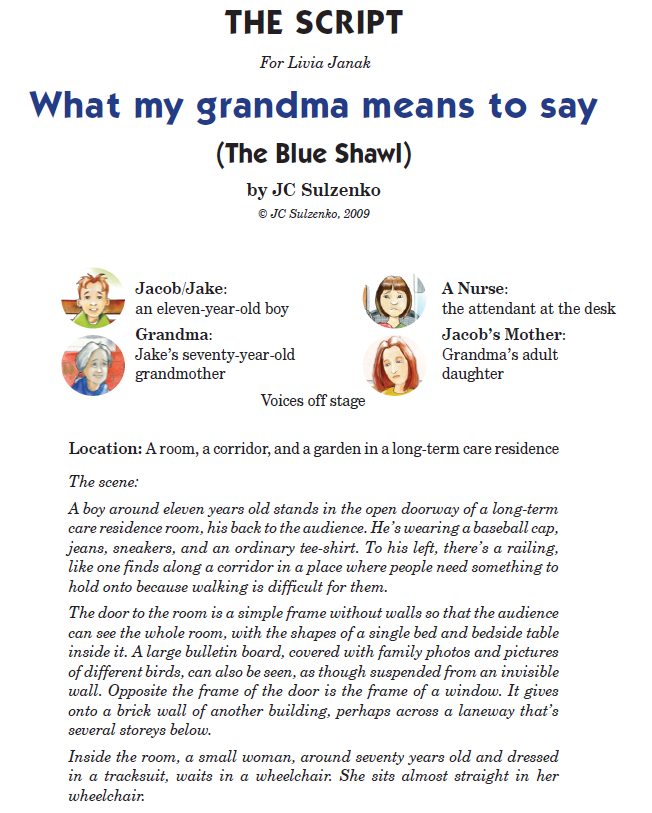




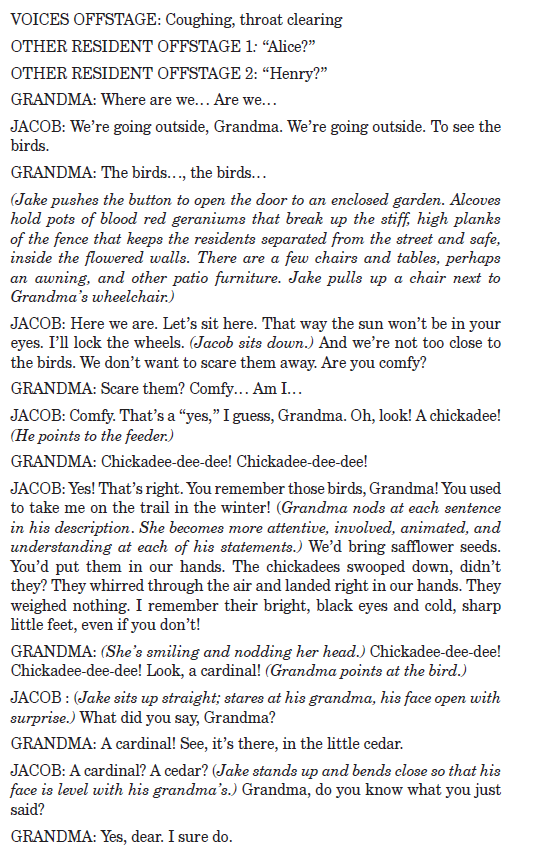




# edit 4.pngedit 3.png



# WMGMTS 14.png



# WMGMTS 16.png

