

Program Name: The Story of the Orphan Train

Artist: Pippa White

## Special Requirements:

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A well-lit gym or auditorium that can be darkened for parts of the presentation; sound system with microphone jack.

## Special Points of Interest:

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Kansas and Missouri each received thousands of Orphan Train Riders. A few are still alive today, as are many, many of their descendants.

## Performance Description

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How many? At least 200,000, but maybe as many as half a million. Fending for themselves on the streets of New York, homeless children were given a chance for a new life in America's heartland by riding the orphan train. Many were relocated here to Kansas City and the surrounding areas.

Using memoirs, letters, and interviews, Pippa White brings to life the orphans who want to share a heartrending and fascinating part of American history.

For 75 years, homeless children were sent out to the Midwest from the East Coast on "Orphan Trains". It was the beginning of the foster care program

in the United States, and it represented a new commitment to social work in our country. But how did it all come about, and who were these children? While this production does answer these questions, and includes the history behind this big social experiment, it also addresses the personal, human experience within the social, historical context. Eight young orphan train riders come alive in this production, and tell their poignant, true stories—the circumstances that led to their homelessness, the orphanages they lived in, the train ride, and their new lives in new homes in America's heartland.

## Educational Objectives & Standards

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Students will:

- learn about an important, but forgotten, chapter in American history
- experience "living history," and its inherent drama
- Realize they, too, can research and perform a character from history

Standards addressed:

- Knows how people depend on, adapt to, and change their physical settings
- Knows the ways that families long ago expressed and transmitted their beliefs and values through oral tradition, literature, songs, art, religion, community celebrations, mementos, food, and language

## Artist Bio: Pippa White

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Pippa White is in her 13th year as a solo performer. She calls her Ones's Company Productions "part theatre, part storytelling, part history". Audiences call them unique, captivating, and touching.

She has toured to 22 states including California, New York, Connecticut, Florida, and Alaska. She has performed at colleges, conferences, museums, libraries, festivals and performing arts centers. For six consecutive years she has

been featured at the Civic Center of Greater Des Moines in their Applause Program, the only artist with this distinction. Other venues include the University of Nebraska, Iowa State Center, Gallagher Bluedorn Performing Arts Center, the University of Colorado Hospital, the Connecticut Hospital Association, SUNY Orange, the Joslyn Art Museum, San Diego State University School of Nursing, and several storytelling festivals.

## List of Resources:

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### Books:

The Orphan Trains by Annette R. Fry, New York: New Discovery Books; ISBN: 002735721X

Train to Somewhere by Eve Bunting and Ronald Himler, Clarion Books, ISBN: 0618040315

Home At Last by David Devries, Yearling, ISBN: 0440406218

A Journey Home by Isabelle Holland, Apple, ISBN: 0590431110

### Videos:

Orphan Train (1979), Director: William A. Graham, ASIN: B00000902L

### Online Resources:

[www.orphantraindepot.com](http://www.orphantraindepot.com)

Contact KCYA for more information about this and other programs

816.531.4022  
KCYA.org

## Vocabulary

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**Charles Loring Brace:** a New York minister, and founder of the Children's Aid Society and the Orphan Train movement

**Social Work:** welfare work

**Destitute:** altogether lacking; impoverished

**Abandon:** to forsake, desert

**Convent:** a community of nuns

**Chaperone:** a person, usually older, who supervises a group of youngsters

**Grand Central Station:** the major train station in New York City

**Stigma:** a sign of infamy or disgrace

**Ridicule:** to deride, mock, or make fun of

## Post-Performance Activities

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1. Write a journal that would represent someone placed on the train.
2. Incorporate ideas about this person: how old are they, who is traveling with them, why are they on the train, what period in history is it?
3. Draw a map showing train routes, and include the states that received Orphan Train Riders (hint: it was 47 of the 48 states).
4. Dramatize an interview with an Orphan Train Rider, a chaperone, or a family that took a child.
5. Do research on Orphan Train Riders in your area.

