



Dear Parent,

We hope you and your child enjoy and learn from “The Magnificent Red Button”.

**In “The Magnificent Red Button” we use the conceit of the “aside”. The action of the play is suspended and a character speaks directly to the audience, giving the audience an insight into the thoughts and feelings of the character. In our play these asides are marked by the sound of a bell. You might have fun with your child by playing a game where his/her/ your thoughts are said as asides.**

### Themes:

- Decision Making
- Conflict resolution
- Anger management
- Standing up for personal convictions
- Personal and community cooperation
- Respect for the individual

### Synopsis

**NOTE: Characters may be played by female or male actors since gender is not important to the story so the pronouns reflect both.**

The play opens in the town square of Wood’s End, inhabited by animals who share traits not unlike our own. They’re proud of themselves, their town and the animals in it. However some of the animals are more proud than others. And some of the animals feel that they work harder than other animals for less return. It is late afternoon, the end of a busy day.

A stranger enters. It’s Reynard T. Fox, a crafty animal who blends with the shadows to watch and learn about this place. Mrs. Windowsill, a prosperous and proper cat, yells at Needle Whiskers, a student squirrel at the University of Wood’s End, for lying in the road. Needle Whiskers doesn’t care. S/he is studying the wind in the clouds for her Windology class. Surefoot, the speedy rabbit, comes blasting into town, followed by Chaser, the hound, who is forever in competition with Surefoot. As they argue about who won their race, Mr. Thistle, a wealthy but stingy hedgehog, comes out of his store to complain about all of the noise. Brickdust, the rat, comes out of Mr. Thistle’s store and asks permission to quit for the day. When Mr. Thistle derides Brickdust for trying to get out of work early, Brickdust points out Digger, the dependable mole, who is slowly on his/her way home from his/her construction work. Digger is worn and dirty from the day’s labor. Mrs. Windowsill loudly insults Digger’s appearance, but Digger doesn’t get angry. Digger tells Needle Whiskers, “Words don’t sting unless you let them have stingers.”

Digger has poor vision but a remarkable nose, and s/he senses someone with them in the town square. Reynard steps out of the shadows, startling everyone. The fox quickly tells them that s/he’s a lone traveler searching for something very valuable, and that s/he was being cautious to make certain that this was a good town filled with good animals.

S/he tells them about his/her many adventures, impressing them all with her/his travels. Digger is not taken in by the charm of the fox. Reynard flatters them and hints that the valuable thing that s/he is looking for might be near their town square. Without taking the time to actually discover exactly what the valuable thing is, all of the animals but Digger frantically race around the town trying to find it.

While this pandemonium is taking place, Reynard hides a red button behind Digger’s shovel which is leaning against a tree. The animals slowly come back tired and frustrated that they’ve not found anything valuable. Reynard reveals that s/he’s been searching for years for a magnificent red button, once worn by the highest rank of the Mandarins in ancient China. Not only is it very valuable, s/he tells them, but any animal that wears it will be the most important animal for miles around.

The fox *amazingly* discovers the treasure that s/he’s been looking for, right behind Digger’s shovel. All of the animals are irritated with Digger because his shovel blocked their chances of finding this most precious object. Reynard now subtly lures them into considering the possibility that they might buy the magnificent red button from her/him before s/he takes it to the royal court where so many important animals would want it. The animals argue and become angry. Their anger starts to escalate. Digger advises the animals to cool down, take a couple of deep breaths, and get a good night’s sleep so they can talk about this tomorrow in a clam manner. The animals won’t listen.

Mrs. Windowsill, Chaser, and Mr. Thistle vie for ownership of the magnificent red button until it’s time to actually make an offer. Reynard discovers that Mrs. Windowsill is as cunning as s/he is, Chaser has no money, and Mr. Thistle is a skinflint. The fox tries to persuade the rest of the animals to pool their resources to buy the magnificent red button, only to discover that they have nothing to offer, that they have less money than s/he does.

Angry with the animals for wasting her/his time and efforts, the fox turns them against each other through false accusations and name-calling. Like hornets, (The song “Swat” uses bees/hornets and stinging as an analogy for the hurt of name calling) their hurtful words begin to sting, and the animals flee. Digger asks Reynard why s/he’s doing these things. Reynard laughs at the mole, telling him/her that s/he’s blind and a fool, saying that the animals care little for the mole; that they haven’t listened to her/him at all; and have often insulted her/him. Digger wards off Reynard’s words, telling her/him that words can’t sting her/him. S/He tells the fox that the animals of Wood’s End are good creatures, each with their own strengths and weaknesses and despite the occasional lapse in civility they will always be good friends and neighbors. The animals hear Digger and return.

Reynard starts to leave, but trips over Digger's shovel. As s/he stumbles, the "magnificent" red button falls from her/his vest and rolls to Mrs. Windowsill, who, for the first time, closely inspects it. Mrs. Windowsill realizes that it's only a common brown button, covered with cheap red paint.

Reynard, ever clever, thanks Mrs. Windowsill for discovering that the button was not the real thing, saving her/him from embarrassment at the royal court. The fox immediately offers to sell them another "genuine" item that s/he's found. The animals are almost duped again by Reynard's persuasive skills until Digger snaps them out of it. Reynard runs off, and the animals realize that Reynard was pushing their buttons to get them angry. They ask Digger how s/he managed to see through all of Reynard's tricks. Digger says that, when someone is trying to make a person do something that doesn't feel right, or is name-calling, it's best to: listen calmly, take deep breaths, and step away to let time pass before acting on feelings. The animals agree that is a good strategy.

### THEMATIC QUESTIONS

To help you start talking with your child about the "The Magnificent Red Button", ask your child the following questions. It's a great idea to answer the questions yourself also and talk about the similarities or differences between your answers and your child's. This conversation is a very good way of sharing your point of view and values with your child. There are no right or wrong answers to most of these questions.

1. Why do you think Reynard hides from the animals in the beginning of the play? Where do you think s/he might have been before this? What might have happened there? Draw a picture of the scene that preceded the opening scene of this play.
2. As Reynard watches, we get a sense of the feelings that the animals have towards each other. What does Mrs. Windowsill think of Needle Whiskers, Brickdust, and Digger? Why does s/he feel this way? What is Mr. Thistle's attitude toward all of the animals? How do you think he made all of his money? Why do Surefoot & Chaser argue?
3. Digger doesn't get angry when Mrs. Windowsill makes loud comments about her/him. How come? What does Digger do for a living? Does s/he enjoy it? Which of Digger's senses seems the most sensitive? Which is the weakest?
4. Reynard stirs up the animals to run all over Wood's End looking for something valuable, without even knowing what they're looking for. Why do you think s/he does this? Have you ever taken off too fast to do something without getting all of the necessary information first? What happened?
5. Reynard hides the button behind Digger's shovel while Digger is trying unsuccessfully to get the animals to calm down. Of all places, why do you think Reynard chose this particular spot to hide the button?
6. Why did the animals believe Reynard's story about the magnificent red button and her/his dramatic discovery of it? Have you ever been fooled to think that something was more important or more valuable than it was? What was it? How were you fooled?
7. Why do Mrs. Windowsill & Mr. Thistle want the magnificent red button? Why don't they listen to Digger's suggestion to cool down, take a couple of deep breaths, and step away from all this so they can make a wise decision tomorrow? Do they ever offer Reynard something for the magnificent red button? If not, why not?
8. Do the other animals make an offer for the magnificent red button? What exactly do Needle Whiskers, Surefoot, Chaser, and Brickdust do for a living? How do they spend their money?
9. As the evening begins, Reynard becomes angry. Why? S/he decides to make the animals "pay." How does s/he make them "pay?" Why does s/he do this?
10. Why are the animals so easily pulled into Reynard's accusations and name-calling? As their anger grows, there is the sound of hornets or bees. Why? What are the physical feelings that you have when you're angry? Draw a picture of your own anger. How else might the anger of the animals been shown on the stage?
11. Digger is not stung by the hornets of anger of the animals. Why? Reynard laughs at Digger and calls her/him blind and a fool. How come? What do Digger's words and feelings about the animals of Wood's End do to the hornets? Have you ever tried to calm others when they were angry? Did it work? If so, what did you do?
12. Mrs. Windowsill finally gets to see the magnificent red button up close. What does she discover? Have you ever discovered that something you really wanted, wasn't what you'd thought it'd be when you finally received it?
13. Reynard offers the animals two genuine objects at the end of the play. What are they? What do you think they really are?
14. The animals realize that Reynard was "pushing their buttons" throughout the play. How was s/he doing this? Why didn't Digger fall for Reynard's tricks? What was his formula for not being influenced by someone?

**If you enjoyed the play and the discussion opportunity it has given you, please tell someone else about your experience. Visit our web pages at [www.stagesofimagination.org](http://www.stagesofimagination.org).**