



CLASSIC TALES

Study Guide

Discussions - Background information - Classroom Activities

Revised and Designed by

Pat McCarthy, Education Consultant

Kira McCarthy, Teacher, TDSB

About the Performance

The "nearly world-famous" DuffleBag Theatre performs well-known classic stories but in a new and fun way. They take the stories and make them come alive through improvisation. In improvisation there is no script. The performers have a rough idea of the storyline and then they make up or adjust the story as they go along. During the show, they also invite audience members to come up and take part in the play. All of the students become involved by having to listen for certain 'cue words or phrases to which they must respond. (e.g. to "When the Narrator says "Peter Pan" the audience responds with "Grow Up!")

About the Guide

This guide will help teachers to prepare their students for the performance. It also provides pre and post discussion and activities related to the Junior Ontario Curriculum. Although this guide for DuffleBag Theatre's classic stories is intended for Junior, it includes content suitable for other grade divisions for those occasions where more than one level attends the performance.

About the Company

DuffleBag Theatre specializes in improvisational story theatre for young audiences. They formed in 1992 for the London International Children's Festival but are now based in Toronto. The theatre company performs extensively throughout Ontario, all across Canada, into the United States, and overseas in countries like Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia, and Vietnam. Because they travel so much that's why they call themselves the "nearly world-famous" DuffleBag Theatre.

Learning Goal

You will be able to create characters and improvise stories.

Success Criteria

- You will use simple props and costumes.
- You will create characters by changing body language and voice.
- You will explain how to create a character.
- You will improvise.
- You will retell familiar stories through characterization and improvisation.

PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

DISCUSSION

- What are some common elements that often appear in classic tales?
(heroes, villains, quest, obstacles to overcome)
- Who are some familiar characters?
(heroes, villains, side-kicks, comic relief)
- What are common the setting of some familiar classic tales?
(castles, forest, on the sea)
- What are some common challenges?
(lost, looking for home, journey to fulfill a promise, a rescue, quest, etc.)
- What are some common endings?
(a marriage, finding home, conquering evil etc.)

ACTIVITIES

PICTURE RELAY: Small groups

Step one:

- Each group sits around one large piece of art paper.
- The children are numbered from 1 to x.
- All of the #1's go to the teacher who gives them a word that relates to classic tales (perhaps taken from the charts made during the discussion above.)
- Each child runs back to the group and draws the picture. The rest of the group must guess what the #1 is drawing. The drawer must not speak, use hand signals or write numbers or letters.
- When the group guesses the correct answer, #2 goes to the teacher and is given a new word to draw.
- Continue until all the children have had a turn or until the list of words is finished.

Step two:

- Have them draw more complex elements of a story, such as plot, setting, the challenge or the ending in the drawing. Use ideas from the charts made during the discussion above (conquering evil, setting out on a quest).

PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

IMPROVISED STORY: Small groups

The groups create a story using the pictures that they have just drawn. The person who is #1 starts to tell a story using one of the elements on the sheet of paper. (e.g. "Once there was a knight ...")

Each child in turn continues the story, adding one of the pictures from the page. (e.g. #2 the knight set off on a quest ...) When all children have had a turn the group should decide how to end the story.



POST-SHOW DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

“Play”-ing with DuffleBag Theatre

DuffleBag Theatre adapts the story through improvisation, using their actors and members of the audience.

DISCUSSION

- What are some of the changes that were made to the story through improvisation?
- How did this adaptation differ from other versions?
(e.g. book, movie, musical, other theatre)
- Were there any extra characters added that were not in the original story?
- In what ways did they change or exaggerate the personalities of any of the characters?
- Why might the playwrights have members of the audience playing some of the parts?
- How did props or costumes help to create the characters and tell the story?
- What other ways did the audience get involved?
(e.g. Having the audience shout specific words or phrases when certain characters are mentioned)
- How did having a Narrator help to move the story along?
(e.g. Keeps the scenes short and to the point; the audience members, who take parts, don't have to worry about dialogue, or where to go, what to do.)

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

“Play”-ing with the Setting

One of the elements of story that DuffleBag Theatre plays with in their re-telling, is the Setting or where the story takes place. DuffleBag also adds things from our time period that are out of place with the Setting.

ACTIVITIES

TABLEAU CHALLENGE

Step One: whole group

The teacher gives an instruction such as: “Show me the supermarket in 20 seconds”. All the children must immediately create a tableau or frozen picture of people in a supermarket: some at cash desk, some in the aisles, some customers, some employees. Each person must find a way to fit into the picture. (other suggestions, the fair, the forest, the castle)

Step Two: 2 groups

Each group is given a different setting to portray. Each group rehearses the scene and then performs it for the other group. The audience guesses the setting and points out some of the individual activities they recognize. (They’re in a castle. He is a guard; she is playing the flute, etc.)

Step Three: small groups

Groups challenge each other to perform a scene and bid on how fast they can do it. (We can do that scene in 10 seconds.) The team who wins the bid, then quickly get into place while the others count down the seconds.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

“Play”-ing with Props and costumes

The DuffleBag Theatre performers often use props and costumes to help them create the characters and to tell the story (e.g. a crown, a bowl, a shoe). The prop/costume helps the imagination of the audience as well as the actor to create the character and the action on stage. Sometimes the same prop/costume can be used to represent more than one object. (e.g. a saucepan can be for cooking, but then placed on a head for a helmet. This is part of the magic of theatre. Things are not always what they seem.

DISCUSSION

- What are some of the objects that were used in the play to help create a character or an action?
- What objects were used to represent more than one item in the story?
- How did you know what the prop was supposed to be?
(e.g. by the way it was used, by who was using it, etc.)

ACTIVITIES

PASS THE OBJECT: whole group

- The class sits in a circle.
- The Teacher begins by using an object, such as a marker, as something completely different. (e.g. uses it as if it is a toothbrush.)
- The class guesses what the teacher is miming.
- The teacher then passes the marker to the student on the left, who uses the marker as if it is something else. Each time the class guesses what it is.
- The second time around the circle, change the original object (a scarf, a pot, a pointer) and use it to represent the items in a folk/fairy tale.

Hint: *Tell children that it is okay to do the same object as some else, since they might do it differently. Also tell them it is okay to pass if they are stuck for an idea-this way the game doesn't get bogged down by the shy or reluctant child.*

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

PASS THE OBJECT CHALLENGE: small groups

- Each group is given a different object/costume and asked to use in as many different ways as possible in one minute. This can be done by children taking turns in order, or by anyone on the team running to centre to demonstrate an object.
- One team at a time takes the challenge while the other teams watch and listen.

OBJECTS TELL A STORY: in pairs, small groups

- A set of non-related objects/costume pieces is placed in the middle of the children's circle.
- One student selects an object and starts a story, using it as a jumping-off point.
- Each student adds to the story, by continuing the storyline and including another of the objects from the pile (e.g. a slipper, a hat, a pail and shovel, magic beans, scissors, teddy bear, etc).
- The teacher may want to give the students a topic or theme for the story.

AN OBJECT LESSON: in pairs

- Objects used in a particular setting are placed on a table. (e.g. kitchen objects, beauty parlour items)
- One person narrates the activity, such as baking a cake, or giving a shampoo.
- The other person must listen to the narrator and perform the action and use any items mentioned by the narrator. As in 'Pass The Object', items may be used for other than their real purpose (e.g. a blanket can be a table; a pot can be a hat etc.)

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

“Play”-ing with the Characters

Characters are a major part of a classic tales. They always have reasons for doing what they do, but don't always get to explain themselves.

ACTIVITIES

INTERVIEWS: whole group

The teacher takes the role of one of the characters, (e.g. Dracula, Captain Hook, the Sheriff of Nottingham, Scrooge). The children interview the evil character to hear the other side of the story.

Or

The teacher takes the role of the interviewer and each student takes on the role of a character from any story. The teacher can go around the circle and ask them questions. The teacher models asking open-ended questions. (i.e. those that require more than a yes or no answer)

INTERVIEWS: in pairs

One student is the interviewer; the other is a character from a story. The interviewer asks open-ended questions. At the end, the interviewer can summarize the answers for the class. The rehearsed interview can be presented to the class or written up as a newspaper article.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

WRITING IN ROLE: (individually)

Students choose a character from the DuffleBag story they have just seen and write in role as the character.

- Write a letter from one character to another.
- Write a letter to the editor, explaining the main problem of the story from the character's point of view. (e.g. Captain Hook complains about the teenage gang vandalizing his boat, or Wendy complains about the boys not cleaning up after themselves, the Inn-Keeper from the Three Musketeers complains about too much fighting in the inn.)
- Write a day in the life of the character.
- Write a Dear Diary entry from the point of view of the character.

MEETING IN THE WOODS: small group or whole group

Improvise a scene where characters from many stories meet together in a familiar classic tale setting. (e.g. Dracula meets with Captain Hook to discuss being misunderstood)



POST-SHOW DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES



“Play”-ing with the Story

DuffleBag Theatre plays with all aspects of the story. Physicality is very important to convey what is going on in the story. Sometimes the audience sees what's happening before they hear it from the Narrator.

ACTIVITIES

ILLUSTRATING THE STORY

Step One: individually

The children move around the room. On a signal, all freeze in a pose suggested by teacher. (Show me a hero, a villain.) Repeat with half the group watching and commenting while the other group performs.

Step Two: small groups

Each group chooses a classic tale and decides on a picture that would best illustrate the story. They create a tableau of the picture. Each group rehearses the tableau and then performs for the other groups, who guess the story being illustrated.

Step Three: small groups

The students decide on a sequence of four pictures that could fit before or after the original picture. They practice performing these tableaux in sequence, so that they tell the story. They may add some dialogue by having a narrator or by having one character speak during each tableau. The groups perform the tableau stories for each other.

Step Four: individually or in pairs

Students create picture books that tell the whole story. They share these books with younger students.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

Changing the Genre

Set the story in a different setting, or change the story to a different genre. (e.g. make it a Western, or a Soap Opera). Students can improvise, make a storyboard, or make a comic book)



POST-SHOW DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

“Play”-ing for an Audience

Performing for an audience is the best way to see if you can convey the images and ideas from a classic story. It's also a lot of fun!

STAGING THE TABLEAU ACTIVITIES

- Have the students sit or stand in a neutral position.
- On a signal, such as a tambourine, they take their positions for the first picture.
- While they are frozen, one of the members narrates that part of the story, or the characters speak in role, from their frozen positions.
- After each tableau, the students go into neutral position, wait for the signal and form the next tableau.
- Lower the overhead lights and add some music and some light from an overhead projector or an iPhone flashlight and you have instant theatre.

STAGING THE INTERVIEWS

- You could use a Person-on-the-Street or a Talk Show format. Have an announcer, the interviewers and the “guests”. The audience could even be invited to ask questions of the characters.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

STAGING AN IMPROVISED STORY: (SMALL GROUPS OR AS A WHOLE GROUP)

- Decide on a familiar story and choose a scene to retell.
- Make a list of the characters in the scene.
- Outline the plot of the scene. (Perhaps using a story map or a story board.)
- Decide who will play which characters.
- Decide on how to create the character using exaggeration or opposite character traits.
- Choose props and costumes for each of the characters.
- Decide on audience's catch phrase for the main characters.
- Rehearse and present to the class or to a younger class.

(To begin, you might want to tell the scene in mime, or tableau, with a narrator to move the scene along).