

The Nightingale



Teacher's Study Guide

Grey Seal Puppets presents *The Nightingale*-- a unique retelling of the classic story by Hans Christian Andersen. *The Nightingale* proves again that the principles of Andersen's stories transcend the ages. A small grey bird metaphorically illustrates our need for artistic freedom as well as our inherent desire to do what is right.

ABOUT THE NIGHTINGALE

Receiving gifts every day of the year sounds like a dream come true. But for a mighty emperor, who can have anything he wants at the snap of his fingers, the dream turns into a nightmare. Too much of a good thing has made the emperor bored with life. Each night he hears the song of a simple gray bird outside his window. He must possess this amazing creature; it was the one thing he did not have, and the one thing he wanted the most.

The loyal court jester is ordered to bring the nightingale to the palace. Upon her arrival, the emperor orders her to sing again and again for his amusement. Everyone is enchanted by her lovely tune. But the nightingale grows tired and doesn't want to perform on command. She wants to leave, but the emperor ties her feet with ribbons and will not let her go. Now a prisoner, she no longer feels like singing.

Soon a strange gift arrives. Unlike all the other "fru frus," "do das," and "gobblely gook," this gift is a box with the picture of a nightingale inside. Best of all, it can reproduce the lovely tune over and over again without ever getting tired. The emperor, court jester, and all those in the palace are mesmerized. They can't stop watching the glowing box. They watch and watch and watch. The court jester stops doing his gymnastics, the emperor's body grows limp and soggy and his brain gets mushy. He does not even notice when his beloved nightingale escapes.

Then one day the box stops playing. Not even the emperor's royal repairman can fix it. The emperor becomes ill; without the song of the nightingale, he suffers from a broken heart. Lying in bed with a fever, he sees visions-- some good, some bad. Death is coming for the emperor, but at the last second, the nightingale returns to save him with her beautiful song. The emperor revives, but this time he has learned a lesson. He does not make the nightingale his prisoner but gives her freedom to come and go as she wishes.



ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE



Puppetry is a unique art form, thousands of years old. Incorporating both the visual and the performing arts, it combines music and dance, painting and sculpture, theater and mime. Over the years many countries have developed their own puppet tradition. Puppet shows in the United States are generally for children, but in some European countries and in Japan, puppet shows are sophisticated plays and operas for adults.

This production of *The Nightingale* is an innovative one-person performance. The puppeteer has several roles. He not only brings to life several large rod and shadow puppets, but he plays the parts of several characters himself. As storyteller, he provides a narrative that ties the entire performance together as well. The puppets range in style from simple shadow images to complex rod puppets. Some characters, such as the Nightingale, appear as both shadow and rod puppets. The mechanical nightingale that temporarily turns the emperor's brains to mush is a box that gives off a blue glow; even young audiences will recognize it as a television set. The spineless court jester is made of Slinky toys, and the stiff emperor has a broom for a backbone and a real human hand: the puppeteer's.

This version of "The Nightingale" is not set in China. Instead, the setting and design were inspired by the art of Dr. Seuss. But several Asian puppetry traditions are evoked. Shadow puppets, a Chinese tradition, represent the string of gifts the emperor receives. And, reminiscent of the Japanese Bunraku tradition, the puppeteer is visible to the audience.



The performance is accompanied by an original musical score.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Books of Puppetry for Students and Teachers

Baird, Bil. *The Art of the Puppet*. New York: Macmillan, 1973.

Allison, Drew, and Donald Devet. *The Foam Book, An Easy Guide to Building Polyfoam Puppets*, Charlotte, NC: Grey Seal Puppets, 1996

Engler, Larry, and Carol Fijan. *Making Puppets Come Alive: A Method of Learning and Teaching Hand Puppetry*. New York: Taplinger, 1973.

Flower, Cedric, and Alan Fortney *Puppets: Methods and Materials*. Worcester, Mass.: Davis Publications, 1983.

Henson, Cheryl. *The Muppets Make Puppets*. New York: Workman Publishing, 1995.

THEMATIC VOCABULARY

Amuse: To entertain or make laugh.

Compromise: An agreement between two points of view in which each side gives in a little.

Court Jester: A professional joke teller and clown, kept at court to amuse a king or emperor with his tricks.

Emperor: The ruler of an empire.

Gymnastics: A sport involving athletic exercises and tumbling, such as somersaults, cartwheels, and handstands.

Limp: Drooping, exhausted.

Mesmerized: To be totally spellbound, absorbed, hypnotized.

Nightingale: A small brown bird known for its beautiful song.

Palace: The huge mansion in which an emperor lives.

Precaution: Steps to prevent something you don't want to happen from happening.

Repair: To fix something that is broken.

Routine: The commonplace or ordinary; something you do every day.

Vision: A scene you see with your mind's eye but that is not really there; something you imagine.

PUPPET VOCABULARY

Bunraku: A type of puppet performance which comes from Japan in which the puppeteer dresses totally in black, including a hood and gloves, and works in front of a black curtain, manipulating full-figure puppets by short rods attached to the puppet's body and arms and legs

Hand puppet: A puppet that fits over the puppeteers' hand like a glove, with the fingers operating the puppet's head and arms.

Puppet: A figure that is carved or constructed of fabric or other material (Grey Seal's puppets are made of polyfoam) and operated by a puppeteer to perform a story.

Puppeteer: A performer who manipulates puppets and makes them come alive.

Rod puppet: A puppet that is manipulated by a series of rods attached to the puppet's body, head, hands, and legs.

Shadow puppet: A flat silhouette made from heavy paper or leather that is operated with thin rods or wires and placed against a back-lit screen or sheet so that the audience, on the other side of the screen, sees only its shadow.



Themes to Discuss and Develop

BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

Before the performance, introduce your students to the theater experience and to theater etiquette.

LIVE THEATRE VERSUS TV AND THE MOVIES

Attending live theatre is very different from attending a movie or watching TV. Many people think nothing of eating or drinking or even talking while a movie or a TV show is playing. After all, the actors aren't really there in front of us. They're on film or tape, and even if they are "live," they are thousands of miles away. But in the theatre, the puppeteer is working very hard and they are only a few feet away. Eating or talking distracts the puppeteer and prevents other members of the audience from hearing and enjoying as well. And of course, such behavior is considered inappropriate and impolite for the theatre. Attending the theatre should be considered a very formal but fun occasion, like going to a wedding or a fancy restaurant. You may even want to wear something special that day.

AUDIENCE GUIDELINES

- Eating and drinking should not be permitted.
- Talking should not be permitted. Even whispering should be limited.
- Restroom trips should be limited to before and after the performance if at all possible.
- Taking photographs during the performance is extremely distracting to the puppeteer and to the rest of the audience. The puppeteer will be glad to pose for photos after the performance.
- Please turn off all cel phones and pagers during the performance.

Explain to your students that in *The Nightingale* they will see stories performed by puppets. Describe the play the students will see as "puppet theatre." Explain that the puppeteer will tell stories using hand, rod, and string puppets.

A performance by Grey Seal Puppets provides an opportunity to explore first-hand the magic of the stage. For a short time we enter another world, a world of fantasy and exaggeration. We hope you enjoy taking this journey into the imagination with us.



After the Performance

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the meaning of the nightingale. How did the emperor feel when he heard the nightingale sing? Why did the emperor want to have the nightingale in his palace? Why did the nightingale fly away? Why did the nightingale decide to come back?
2. Discuss gifts. Ask the students to name some of the gifts the emperor received. After receiving so many, how did he feel? Do you think you could ever receive so many presents that you'd get bored?
3. Discuss boredom. Why was the emperor bored? Why was the emperor fascinated with the mechanical nightingale? What did the mechanical nightingale remind you of? When you're watching television, have you ever found it hard to become "unglued," to pull yourself away?
4. Discuss freedom. How did the nightingale feel about living in the palace? How did she feel when her feet were tied with ribbons? Why do you think she didn't want to sing? Why do you think she flew away? Why do you think that only the real nightingale could save him? At the end of the play the puppeteer says, "She could come and go whenever she wished, for the emperor had learned an important lesson." What lesson do you think the emperor learned?
5. Discuss the importance of character in a story. Tell the students that Grey Seal Puppets takes great care to make each of the characters in its stories distinctive. Open discussion by asking the students to name the main characters in the story. Ask what the emperor was like. Name as many qualities as you can. What actions reveal his character to you? Why did he act the way he did? Was he able to change by the end of the play? What made him change? Ask similar questions about the court jester. Continue discussion by asking how these characters' appearances were related to their actions and nature. What was the nightingale like? What were her actions? What motivated her? After the students have compared and contrasted the three characters and explored the ways in which actions reveal character, conclude discussion by asking the students to consider ways in which the puppeteer-narrator was a character in the story. If the students agree he was a character, ask them to describe his qualities, appearance, emotions, and actions.
6. Discuss puppets and puppetry. Consider questions such as: How did you like seeing puppets as actors in a story? What kinds of puppets did you see? How did they work? What do you think they were made of? Were you aware, while you were watching the performance, that the characters were puppets operated by the puppeteer's hands?



Activities

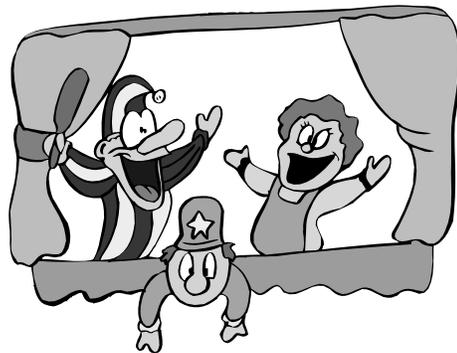
Puppetry

Puppetry is perhaps the most unique of all art forms. It incorporates aspects of both the visual and performing arts--from music and dance, to painting and sculpture, to theatre and mime--yet it remains a distinct art form unto itself. Making and using puppets is an excellent way to acquaint students with the medium and to provide them with tools to use in the post-performance discussions.

There are many different types of puppets. Explain to the classroom that when we say a “type” of puppet, we don’t mean a dog or a cat, or other character that a puppet can be. The type of puppet is determined by how the puppeteer controls, or manipulates, the puppet. Here are just a few of the types of puppets:

HAND PUPPETS

A hand puppet is a puppet that fits over the performer’s hand. The performer’s first finger goes into the head, while the performer’s thumb and little finger go into the arms to control the hands. Two of the most famous puppet characters in history, Punch and Judy, are hand puppets (pictured here).



ROD PUPPETS

A rod puppet is controlled by a stick (or rod) that is attached to the puppet. The rods are usually made of wood or metal. The puppet can be made of any kind of material, including fabric, wood, foam, or papier mache.

MARIONETTES

Marionettes are puppets that are controlled by strings from above. The strings are attached to the puppet’s head, hands, and feet, and are controlled by the puppeteer using a wooden control at the top called an “airplane control.”



CREATE A PUPPET

Language and dramatic arts objectives:

- To describe the good character traits depicted in the play
- To recognize puppetry as a way to illustrate good character traits to children
- To create a puppet that represents a good character trait, strength, or virtue
- To analyze the action of the character through a puppet

Grade level:

Two sets of instructions are included for making puppets. Finger puppets will have more appeal for kindergartners and children in lower grades. Bag puppets are fun for all levels. Both require little preparation and few materials. Time required: 3 class sessions of 45 minutes each.

Materials:

Parents are a valuable resource for puppet-making supplies. Felt scraps, buttons, sequins, yarn, cotton balls and sewing trim are transformed into features with the help of scissors and paste. You will notice that all of the characters in *The Nightingale* have distinct appearances and personalities. Stress to your students to be imaginative in creating unique and individual characters as they construct their puppets.

Procedure:

1. Discuss good character traits, virtues, and morals. Why is it important to practice them? How does it help others? How does it help you? Discuss the benefits of practicing good character traits.
2. Discuss the puppets in the performance. What types of puppets were used? (Hand puppets and rod puppets) How did each work? How did they display emotions? Was each puppet effective?
3. Have the students make finger puppets or bag puppets and use them act out scenes where good character traits are illustrated. These could be scenes that illustrate the benefits of practicing a good character trait, or the consequences of bad actions. Make these shows an ongoing class event to reinforce the importance of knowing and practicing good character traits.

Finger Puppet



To make little animal finger puppets, use pinking shears to cut off the top three inches from the fingers of old brown, black or tan gloves. Attach eyes and felt noses and mouths, and appropriate ears to make different types of animal finger puppets.

Paper Bag Puppet



For hand puppets, choose bags just large enough that the bottom fold can be easily moved up and down with fingers inserted. Indicate the tiny button placement of facial features on the bottom of the bag.

THE STORY OF THE NIGHTINGALE

Language arts objectives:

- To propose a motivation for a songbird.
- To compose a poem about a songbird.
- To prepare a book of songbirds.

Science objectives:

- To recall names of familiar songbirds.
- To recognize familiar songbirds.
- To observe familiar songbirds.
- To illustrate songbirds for a book.

Visual arts objectives:

- To make a book.
- To draw songbirds.

Grade level: Pre-kindergarten through second.

Time required: Two one-hour sessions.

Materials: Books about birds; pictures of songbirds; writing and drawing materials; student books (instructions follow).

Procedure:

1. Conduct a bookmaking workshop for the students (instructions follow). You may be able to visit a school "print shop" or ask aides or parents to set one up so the students can have a one-on-one publishing experience. If it is not possible to engage in a bookmaking session with the students, prepare one book ahead of time with enough pages for a contribution from each student.

2. Introduce songbirds. Describe the nightingale, and ask the students what other songbirds they know or can recognize. Present pictures of birds. Have the students name the birds. Share stories about birds.

3. Distribute the class books and remind the students that each will make a bird book. Assist the students in selecting and writing a title on the title page. Be sure to include the author's and illustrator's name!

4. Have the students begin by drawing a bird. Ask them to identify it. Then have them assign a motivation to it. Ask them: Does the bird have a character that can be defined by one of the following motivations?

honesty
independence
ingenuity

loyalty
creativity
curiosity

greediness
conceit
jealousy

5. Discuss the qualities of the nightingale in Hans Christian Andersen's story. Ask the students to describe the feelings and motivations the nightingale had and how they made it possible for her to survive.

6. Using writing paper, have the students express in a poem the feelings and motivations they have assigned to the bird they have drawn. Allow the poems to take a form appropriate to your class. They need not be rigid, and for some classes may be short prose statements or paragraphs. Encourage the

students to take chances. Allow them to talk about the birds as beautiful and interesting creatures. Ask them to make the bird someone they know: a neighbor, friend, or family member. Repetition may come naturally in their poetic writing, as young children often speak in repetitions.

7. For classes of younger students, rewrite or copy the poetry onto appropriate pages in the book. Older students may copy their poems neatly into their books themselves.

8. Have the students design covers for their books. They may add additional drawings and poems or stories as they like. Use the books to create class stories and tales about birds.

Make a book:

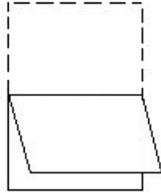
Material needed:

1 piece of construction paper
several pieces plain 8 ½" x 11" paper
yarn

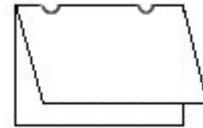
hole punch

Directions:

1. Fold construction paper in half

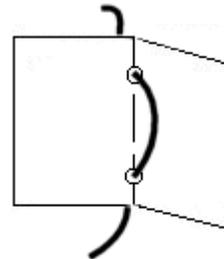


2. Using a hole punch, punch two half holes along the crease of the paper. Unfold the paper to see two holes in the center of the paper.

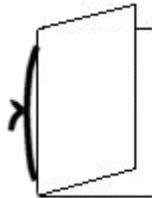


3. Repeat this procedure with the plain 8 ½" x 11" papers, taking special care to make sure that the holes are in the same places on each piece of paper.

4. When all the papers have been punched, stack them with the piece of construction paper on the bottom and the plain papers on top so that the holes all line up. Using a piece of yarn, tie the papers together through the holes.



5. Fold the book together. You're done!



Meet Grey Seal Puppets

Founded in 1976, Grey Seal Puppets is well known nationwide. The company performs over 250 shows a year from New York to Hawaii, from Canada to Mexico. Their repertoire consists of familiar fairy tales (*The Emperor's New Clothes*), classic folk tales (*Tangle of Tales*) and original stories (*Bathtub Pirates*). Grey Seal travels to theatres such as The Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta, The Detroit Museum of Art and The Philadelphia Museum of Art.

In addition to live performing, Grey Seal also performs regularly on television, with clients such as The Reimler Agency (Bojangles), WTVI-Channel 42 (local PBS affiliate), the Muppets, Silver Burdett Ginn, and the International Mission Board. Grey Seal Puppets also custom designs and creates mascot characters for sports teams and corporations such as Blimpie Subs and Salads, New Orleans Hornets, Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines, and Lowe's Motor Speedway.

The company has garnered a number of awards including a "Citation of Excellence" for their adaptation of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and their original story called *Bathtub Pirates*. They were also awarded the North Carolina Theatre Conference's Award for leadership in theatre arts and The Puppeteers of America President's Award for outstanding accomplishment in the art of puppetry. Their television work also has been honored with several awards in the industrial and broadcast categories including a prestigious Beacon Award and the ITVA Silver Reel of Excellence.

Grey Seal puppeteer Drew Allison has co-authored two books on polyfoam puppet construction, *The Wit and Wisdom of Polyfoam Puppet Construction* and *The Foam Book*.

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