AESOP’S FANTABULOUS FABLES!

Distance Learning Study Guide
K-2nd Grade
AESOP’S FANTABULOUS FABLES

Distance Learning Study Guide
Center for Puppetry Arts

ABOUT AESOP

AESOP was a fabulist and storyteller in Ancient Greece.

He is said to have been born in 620 B.C., and to have lived his life as a slave. An ancient literary work called The Aesop Romance suggests many details about his life, but these are mostly thought to be fictional. Although no actual writings by him survive, he is said to be the author of hundreds of famous fables, which are still told and reprinted in many languages today. Many of these tales feature a moral at the end, with animals & inanimate objects that speak, solve problems, and have human characteristics. Aesop died in 564 B.C.
ABOUT THE STORY

*Aesop’s Fantastical Fables* is a participatory puppet performance featuring popular fables written by the Greek storyteller Aesop. The stories present different lessons, or *morals*, through wise sayings that can be applied in real life.

Our story introduces us to Aesop, who is busy doing many chores, as he is a servant. To pass the time he acts out life lessons with puppets he has made from materials he has found around the palace, including a lovable sidekick lion named Cecil.

With animal puppets made from baskets, vases, articles of clothing, straw, rope, and other household materials, Aesop entertains his audience, and himself, with portrayals of well-known fables *The Boy Who Cried Wolf, The Tortoise and the Hare, and The Lion and the Mouse.*

STYLE OF PUPPETRY

*Aesop’s Fantabulous Fables* is performed with *Found Object* puppets. Object puppetry (or object theatre) uses found objects to create a story with characters. Instead of puppets specifically designed for a narrative, everyday objects are deliberately used and transformed with the skill of the performer and the imagination of the audience. Unlike other puppet shows where the puppeteer tries to remain hidden, in this show the actor portraying Aesop remains seen at all times, working the puppets on top of a flat surface—this is known as *table top puppetry.*

The character of Cecil the Lion is a simple moving mouth hand puppet, like the kind you can make from a sock. The puppeteer performs all of the puppets’ voices live.
PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES / DISCUSSIONS

What Is A Puppet?

A “puppet” is an inanimate (non-living) object that is brought to life by an outside force (usually a human being working as a performer) in order to tell a story. Found object and moving mouth hand puppets are used in Aesop’s Fantabulous Fables.

DISCUSSION: Ask the children what puppets are. Have they seen them before? Are they real or pretend? What can be used as a puppet? Out of what materials can puppets be made, and why would you choose some materials over others for certain projects? Have you ever made your own rod puppets or body puppets?

What Is A Puppeteer?

A performer who uses a puppet or puppets to tell a story is called a “puppeteer.” There is one pupperteer in Aesop’s Fantabulous Fables. The puppeteer brings to life many different characters. All the dialogue and songs are performed live.

DISCUSSION: What skills does it take to be a puppeteer? The puppeteer plays multiple roles in the show. How is the puppeteer able to make each character distinct and unique? Puppeteers can maneuver their bodies to make their puppet characters move in unique and interesting ways, and can modify their voices to make those characters sound different from one another. Can you change your bodies and/or voices and play different “roles”?

What Is An Audience?

Being a good audience member is as important as being a good puppeteer! It takes teamwork between the audience and puppeteer/actor to make a show successful. There are “rules of etiquette” that need to be followed, such as:

- A LIVE VIDEOCONFERENCING SHOW IS DIFFERENT THAN TV OR MOVIES. It’s okay to have fun, but do remember that the people on-stage (and in the audience) can hear you—be polite!

- MAKE SURE EVERYONE CAN SEE. Stay seated so the audience members behind you can see the show.

- BE SUPPORTIVE. The way audience members show that they like something is to applaud. Make sure to applaud if you appreciate what you see and hear. Between songs or scenes, after the show, and after the post-show demonstration are appropriate places/times to show your appreciation.

- LISTEN CLOSELY. It’s important that you hear all the details of the story so that you can enjoy it fully. The puppeteer will ask YOU to PARTICIPATE throughout the program!

DISCUSSION: Review the “rules” of being a good audience member. Role play what is appropriate and what is not.

3.
A fable is a story that uses made-up characters, humor and wit to teach a moral lesson. The goal of a good fable is to improve human conduct without the reader being aware that they are being instructed in such a manner. Fables are constructed of narration, the moral lesson and the individual attributes of the characters involved. Fables are most often simple and to the point without a lot of unnecessary detail.

**DISCUSSION:** Different types of stories are also called different “genres.” Discuss what the similarities and differences are between genres of literature; i.e. the characteristics of fables, folklore, and fairy tales. Use stories of the Brothers Grimm and Aesop as examples. Which type(s) of stories contain lessons to be learned? Which contain elements of fantasy or magic? Talking animals? Can you create your own fables, folktales, and fairytales?
VOCABULARY

Below are some words you may have heard in the show. What are other words that you noticed or come to mind as you think about the stories?

- Fables
- Morals
- Servant
- Fabulist
- Aesopica — the name given to the collection of Aesop’s fables
- Ancient Greece (800 B.C. – 500 B.C.)
- Lanolin — why is this a funny name to give to a sheep?
- Constable
- Marathon (an actual marathon race is 26.2 miles!)
- Gymnasium — this & “Marathon” are terms that originally come from Ancient Greece!
- Hare
- Tortuga (en Español!) — do you know what this word means in English?
- Tapestries
- Litter — a group of young born to an animal one at a time
- Toga — a distinctive Ancient garment draped over the shoulders and around the body

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Acting & Drama

How do performers tell stories? Just as carpenters use hammers and doctors use stethoscopes, performers use tools: voice, body, and movement. Talk about how we use our voice, our body, and our movement to pretend to be things, other people, animals, etc. Have the children explore the tools (body, movement, voice) one at a time:

1. BODY: pose as different things (i.e. an elephant, using an arm as trunk and expanding to be as big as possible; a grandmother/grandfather, bending your back and leaning over a bit; a Ferris wheel, placing both arms over your head in a circle and clasping your hands together)

2. MOVEMENT: add movement to the above

3. VOICE: how would they sound?

CURRICULUM CONNECTION: Theatre Arts
Fitness

Have students do exercises such as hopping, crawling, slow-motion running in place -- these activities improve muscular strength and cardiovascular endurance. Allow them to tiptoe around the room with their arms up. What other movements can the students do to imitate the animals in Aesop’s Fables?

*CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS: Physical Education, Science*

Math Fun

There are many ways to explore math using the performance as an inspiration. Count how many characters you can recall from the play. Talk about the animals and organize them in terms of size, guessing which animal might be tallest, which might be shortest, and which might be similar in size (encourage students to use the vocabulary greater than, less than, equal to). What other math games can you create using the show and/or its characters as a jumping-off point?

*CURRICULUM CONNECTION: Mathematics*

Music & Sound Effects

Explore how music can help tell a story. Music is often a big part of a theatrical experience. How does music help you understand the actions of the play and the feelings of the characters? What are some musical instruments that come from the same time period and place as Aesop (Ancient Greece)?

Make your own music: play drums you make out of coffee cans, create lyrics and sing along! What mood or emotion do different instruments suggest, and how can you and your class identify what instruments you hear being played? Discuss what “sound effects” are, and recall any sound effects that you heard in the show that helped create the world of the puppet play.

*CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS: Fine Arts/Music, Fine Arts/Visual Art*

Places & People

What parts of the story made you think/know it was set in Ancient Greece? Find out more about the time period with which we associate Ancient & Classical Greece, which was from 800 B.C. – 400 B.C. Other well-known figures from this time and culture, who also wrote some accounts about Aesop, are Aristotle, Herodotus, and Plutarch. Classical Greek culture also had a powerful influence on Ancient Rome. In addition to storytelling and the Arts, Greek culture gave much importance to knowledge, science, and mathematics.

*CURRICULUM CONNECTION: Social Studies*
**Puppetry & Science**

How are puppets brought to life? How are puppet shows created? Have the students create a puppet show using objects they can find in the classroom and/or in their desks. Have them each bring in one kitchen utensil from home (marked with their name on masking tape!) and brainstorm how to re-create a favorite fairytale using these utensils. Puppets designed for this show and for all puppet shows use scientific applications in their designs.

Can you figure out how simple machines (levers, pulleys, wedges, screws, wheels/axles, inclines) might have been used in the puppets, set, props or stage for this puppet show? What other ways can you see that science would have been used in the research for or creation of this show?

**CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS: Theatre Arts, Science (Engineering and Technology)**

**Spelling**

What fun can you have with the letters of the words **AESOP’S FABLES**?

Give each student the letters cut out or on cards (or write them on the SMARTBoard or whiteboard) and ask them to create new words.

Examples: **PEEL**  **SOAP**  **SLEEP**  **FOAL**  **PLEASES**  **FLEAS**

What other words can you and your students make using those letters?

**CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS: English Language Arts & Reading (Spelling)**

**Storytelling**

How are stories written? How can a story be told? Have the children draw a series of pictures to illustrate what happened in the story. Add simple captions. This is called a “storyboard” and is often the way a play or a movie is created! Have the children act out what they remember, allowing different children to take on different roles (including scenery so all have a part to play!).

**CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS: Theatre Arts, English Language Arts & Reading,**
**OTHER RESOURCES**

**Books to Read**


Gibbs, Laura (Translator). *Aesop’s Fables*. 3002, Oxford University Press


**Websites to Explore**

[http://www.puppet.org](http://www.puppet.org)
Visit the Center for Puppetry Arts’ webpage.

[http://read.gov/aesop](http://read.gov/aesop)
The Library of Congress’ selection of stories from *The Aesop for Children* with original pictures by Milo Winter.

[http://mythfolklore.net/aesopica](http://mythfolklore.net/aesopica)
The Aesopica Website: Fables in English, Latin, and Greek.

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