

Chinese Shadow Puppet Play

Provided by: Connie McKinley
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Country/Region: China

Purpose:

Students will experience through role-play the art of shadow puppetry and will appreciate the role of oral traditions in Chinese history.

Theme:

Aesthetic, Celebrations, and Values

Theme Statement:

All people need things of beauty, times of leisure and celebration, and a sense of values and service in their lives.

Related Themes:

PPE, CCC, USGC

Values:

Cooperation, understanding and tolerance of differences, appreciation of cultural aesthetics, appreciation of traditions

Skills:

Organizing, constructing, performing, speaking, using the writing process

Concepts:

Elements of Story: Plot, Characterization, Conflict, Sequencing, Comprehension, Vocabulary, Spelling, and Writing Process

Suggested Time:

2-5 One hour sessions

Subject Area Integration:

Social Studies, Art, Geography, Math

Adaptable Levels:

Grades four and up

Teacher Background:

According to legend, shadow theater originated in China in 121 B.C. when Wu Di, an emperor of the Han Dynasty, was grieving over the death of his favorite concubine. A Taoist priest, wishing to ease the Emperor's grief, used a shadow to evoke a likeness of the woman. The Emperor was so taken with the moving image that he thought his love had come back to life.

A performing troupe normally consisted of puppeteers, blind musicians who played stringed instruments and bamboo flutes, singers and percussion musicians with a variety of drums, cymbals, and gongs. Musical accompaniment and sound effects highlighted the action of a play. A troupe traveling from village to village might be comprised of a family whose different members doubled up in the roles.

In the 19th century, people such as Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm recorded many European folktales. The pioneer in collecting Chinese folklore is Wolfram Eberhard, who collected and analyzed thousands of stories. Some of them, such as Cinderella or Yeh Shen, appear in both western and Chinese versions. The parallel Chinese story of Yeh Shen was first recorded during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 a.d.) while the earliest known western version of the Cinderella story is an Italian tale dating to 1634. There is also a Native American version of the Cinderella story in William Bennett's Children's Book of Virtues that could be used to provide students with another cultural comparison.

During the Chinese civil war in 1949 and the era of establishing a Communist government, the Communist leaders made extensive use of folklore in the form of puppetry and songs to introduce their message into the largely illiterate populace of China.

Materials Needed:

1. Several copies of different Chinese folktales to read to children (see reference section).
2. Patterns for puppets (included).
3. Materials for making puppets:
 - Tracing paper
 - Heavy paper or cardboard
 - Pencil
 - Scissors
 - Paper Punch
 - Tape
 - Paper Fasteners, 1/4" long
 - Crayons
 - Markers, Colored Pencils
 - Chopsticks
4. Materials for making puppet stage:
 - Two chairs of equal height
 - One white cloth or sheet
 - 2 Clamp-On reading or work lights with 100 watt bulbs.As an alternative, use overhead projector.
5. List of Chinese proverbs
6. Video entitled "To Live" (optional)
7. Chinese flute music (for background sound)

Extension/Enrichment:

This lesson could be used as a whole class activity, a choice for project work, or as a learning center activity. The characters used are characters from the Chinese calendar.

Initiation:

If possible, bring in a puppet troupe to present a shadow puppet show for the students. If not available, then show clips of previewed video entitled "To Live," which demonstrate an authentic version of the Chinese puppet show.

Data Collection:

1. Have students research the origins and history of puppetry as a part of a unit on China. If Internet access is available, have students conduct a search for possible resources and ideas.
2. Read as many Chinese folktales aloud to the class as possible to familiarize students with the popular Chinese characters and their personalities.
3. Have students discover what Chinese animal sign they were born under and relate to them what personality traits correspond with their animal. (Chinese calendar included) (These traits will be used later when writing dialogue.)

Procedure:

1. Group students into groups of six to twelve students. Students will choose which animal(s) from the calendar to portray in a shadow puppet play. Parts will be needed for puppet manipulation, sounds, voices, and a music coordinator.
2. Hand out a list of Chinese Proverbs. Have students choose the one they like the best.
3. Using the storyboard (included), have students work cooperatively to write a shadow puppet script using at least three characters from the Chinese calendar that incorporate the following elements:
 - a. dialogue
 - b. a portrayal of the Proverb that was chosen
 - c. script includes the elements of sequence, plot, conflict, and resolution
4. Students will construct puppets using materials provided.
5. Students will practice and refine their performances, adding sounds, voices, and music.

Extension:

Students will perform the puppet show for the class and/or other classes.

Assessment of Achievement

Develop a rubric with students for assessment. For example:

Neatness	5 pts
Group cooperation	25 pts
Writing process (Includes idea map, rough draft, final copy of script)	30 pts
Script teaches the Chinese proverb	20 pts
Performance	20 pts
Total Possible Points	100 pts
Total Points Received	-----

Alternatives

Have students perform a folktale already broken down into dialogue, such as The Rooster's Horns by Ed Young and Hilary Beckett, adapted for Reader's Theater by Janet B. Graves.

References & Recommended Resources

1. Adventures of the Monkey King, adapted by Tang Cheng. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1979. Based on the cartoon "Havoc in Heaven."
2. China, A Book of Activities, Olympia, Washington: Superintendent of Public Instruction
3. China Mosaic: Multidisciplinary Units for the Middle Grades, by Judith Billings, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Old Capital Building, P.O. Box 47200, Olympia, WA 98504-7200
4. Favorite Children's Stories from China, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1983. Chapter entitled "Pigsy Learns a Lesson."
5. Folktales of China, edited by Wolfram Eberhard. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965.
6. Lon Po Po: A Red Riding Story from China, by Ed Young
7. Old Tales of China, by Li Nianpei. Beijing: China Travel and Tourism Press, 1985
8. Reader's Theater: Story Dramatization in the Classroom, by Shirlee Sloyer, New Hampshire Council of Teachers of English, 1982.
9. The Dragon Kite, by Nancy Luenn
10. The Emperor and the Kite, by Jane Yolen with Ed Young
11. The Foolish Old Man Who Moved Mountains, by Maire-Louise Gebhardt, New York: Friendship Press, 1969.
12. The Rooster's Horns, by Ed Young with Hilary Beckett
13. Yeh Shen: A Cinderella Story from China, by Ai-Lang Louie

STORYBOARD

Chinese Proverb: _____

Members of Group: _____

<i>Plot (sequence)</i>	<i>Conflict happenings</i>	<i>Characters</i>	<i>Props needed</i>	<i>Sounds needed</i>