



Singable Stories From Around the World

A Study Guide for Grades K-6

©2007 Bierko Productions LLC

BIERKO PRODUCTIONS LLC

999 Cliff Avenue

Yorktown Heights, NY 10598

(800) 364-5381

www.bethandscott.net

info@bethandscott.net

THE COMPANY

At Beth & Scott and Friends, we strive to educate and entertain children and adults through the writing and performance of original songs, shows and workshops. Beth and Scott Bierko, the owners and principal performers, are a husband and wife team of singer/songwriters and arts-in-education specialists. Since 1993, Beth & Scott have performed thousands of school assemblies and workshops for children. They are parents of two daughters, Helen and Stephanie.

THE PROGRAM

Beth and Scott present "**Singable Stories From Around The World**", a forty-five minute, interactive concert of children's stories turned into songs. The material used in the program is based upon books of well-known children's folktales, myths and legends from diverse world cultures. All of the stories are available in libraries or bookstores. (However, it is not necessary for the teacher and students to be familiar with the stories prior to the program.)

Throughout the program, students are encouraged to participate. In most of the songs, students are invited to become actors in the stories on-stage and in others they sing and clap from their seats. Volunteers also locate countries on a 6'x12' world map backdrop. We have found that the children's active involvement helps them to absorb the material as well as have fun.

To help classes prepare for the assembly, we have prepared the following study guide. We have included our ideas for discussion questions and activities based upon the stories in the program. Of course, this guide can be used before or after the event. Please feel free to choose from our ideas or use your own. Have fun!

THE SONGS

(Generally, 5-6 of those listed are selected.)

"Munika's Surprise" - India

Adapted from "The Best Food", a story in Jataka Tales: Fables From The Buddha by Nancy DeRoin Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1975.

Synopsis

Little Red and Big Red are two hard-working oxen brothers. They work in the fields on a farm in India. Little Red is jealous of Munika, the pig, who does no work and yet is fed the best and sweetest foods. When the farmer's daughter decides to marry, Munika is served as the main course at the wedding banquet. Seeing this, Little Red realizes how foolish he was to be jealous of poor Munika.

Questions for Discussion:

What is envy? Have you ever been envious of someone? Has anyone ever been envious of you? What are some ways to deal with envy?

"Woodhoopoe Willie" - Africa / U.S.A.

Adapted from Woodhoopoe Willie by Virginia Kroll. Watertown, Mass.: Charlesbridge Publishing, 1992.

Synopsis:

Willie, a young African-American boy, loves to tap out rhythms on anything he can find. Everyone around him considers this a nuisance, except his grandfather, who realizes Willie has a special musical talent, descended from the rich musical traditions of his African ancestors. Thus, Willie's grandfather nicknames him "Woodhoopoe Willie", after the African woodhoopoe bird that taps on trees. One night at a Kwanzaa party, the conga player gets sick and Willie replaces him, allowing the party to successfully continue with music and dancing. Willie is a hero.

Questions for Discussion:

Everyone in Willie's life except his grandfather misunderstands him. Do you ever feel like no one understands you and what 's important to you? How does that make you feel? Do you have someone who does understand you, like Willie's grandfather? Why is that important? What different talents do members of your class have?

"Flor De La Noche Buena" - Mexico

Adapted from The Legend of The Poinsettia by Tomie DePaola, New York: Putnam, 1994.

Synopsis:

A young Mexican girl named Lucida has a problem when her mother becomes too sick to finish making their Christmas gift for the big celebration at the local church. So instead, Lucida brings some weeds she picks from the side of the road. The congregation makes fun of her offering until the weeds mysteriously change to beautiful red flowers both inside the church and all along the roads outside. The people call it a miracle and realize that it is the thought behind the gift that counts.

Questions for Discussion

Have you ever given or received a homemade gift? What makes a homemade gift special? Can you name some simple gifts you can make to give to someone? We've all heard the expression "It's the thought that counts." What does that mean? Is it true? Why or why not?

"The Crowded House" - A Yiddish folktale from The Ukraine

Adapted from It Could Always Be Worse by Margot Zemach. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1976.

Synopsis:

A man frustrated by his noisy and overcrowded home asks his rabbi for advise. The rabbi tells the man, "Bring the animals from your barn into the house with you". When this makes life even more impossible, the rabbi instructs him to remove the animals and the man is delighted by how big and quiet his house is with only his wife and six children living there.

Questions for Discussion:

There are different ways to look at almost every situation. What is the difference between an optimist and a pessimist? (For young children the cliché of a glass half full or half empty may be helpful in explaining the difference.) What are the advantages of being an optimist? How might a pessimist be able to change? Pick a scenario (i.e. a rainy day) and discuss how that can be seen as a good thing or a bad thing, depending on your point of view.

"Rainbow Fish" - Switzerland

Adapted from The Rainbow Fish by Marcus Pfister. New York: North -South Books, 1992.

Synopsis:

The Rainbow Fish is the most glamorous fish in the ocean but he refuses to share his colorful scales with the other fish. When they ignore him because of his stingy attitude, Rainbow wonders why he has no friends. The wise octopus advises Rainbow to try giving away just one scale. When he does, Rainbow makes a friend, so he happily gives away scales to more of the fish. The Rainbow Fish realizes that his life is better having less scales and more friends.

Questions for Discussion

How do you make friends? How can we be generous even if we don't have beautiful "things" to give away? What happens in life if we don't share? Which is more important: how someone looks or how they treat others? Do TV shows and commercials encourage us to become more concerned with friendship or glamour?

"Mama, Do You Love Me?" - Inuit Tale from Alaska/Canada

Adapted from Mama, Do You Love Me? by Barbara Joose. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1991.

Synopsis:

A young child questions the depth of his mother's love by asking his mother if she would still love him if he did things that were wrong. She assures him that she will love him forever.

Questions For Discussion

Do you ever feel that you have to be perfect? Is it okay to make mistakes? Why is it important to forgive people when they do something wrong or make a mistake? Can a parent or teacher be angry with you and still love or care for you at the same time? If the class has read the book, discuss how the author uses details to strengthen her story. Discuss the mother's poetic answer to her child's question, and encourage students to write their own creative answers using vivid imagery.

“Strong Wind, The Invisible”

A Native American tale from the Algonquin and MicMac Tribes of North America

Adapted from *The Rough-faced Girl* by Rafe Martin. New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1992

Synopsis:

In this Indian Cinderella Story, all the maidens in the land wish to marry the great invisible warrior, Strong Wind. To do so, they must be able to prove they can see him. by passing a. Many maidens try to pass test Strong Wind and his sister have devised by lying but they are caught in their lies and fail the test. Little Scarred One, the youngest of three daughters and the laughing stock of the village because of her shabby outward appearance, is the only girl to answer the test honestly. She is then able to see Strong Wind and wins the honor of becoming his wife.

Questions For Discussion

In what way is this story similar to the Cinderella story we all know? How is it different? Why is it important to be honest? How do you feel when you’re caught in a lie? How does it feel to be lied to? Have you ever lied to get ahead or be included in something? If you could be invisible like Strong Wind, when would you use that power? Which is more important, who someone is on the outside or who they are on the inside? Why? How do you suppose Little Scarred One felt when people made fun of her appearance?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. The stories in this program come from many different parts of the world. Have students find the countries they come from on a map of the world.
2. Read the books from which the songs have been adapted as a way to familiarize children with the stories before the show or as a follow-up afterwards. Discuss how the corresponding songs and books are similar and how they are different. Which did the students enjoy more? Why?
3. Children often like to repeat things they have seen. Have them act out one of the stories from the show. They can do it exactly as they remember it or feel free to make changes. They may want to add a new character or change the ending.
4. Pick a story that was not performed and have students act it out or turn it into a song. See if they can write a repeated "chorus " that describes the central theme.
5. Have students draw a picture of their favorite scene from the show or write a short essay about which story they liked best and why.
6. Have small groups of students write their own fairy tales based upon a real experience and then act it out for the class. Make sure the story has multiple characters, conflict and resolution and teaches an important lesson. Stress that legends and myths are created this way.
7. Encourage students to write letters to Beth and Scott. They can practice their letter- writing skills and tell us which stories they liked and why. Be sure they include their name, age and school. Alternatively, they can email us at info@bethandscott.net.
8. What themes appear repeatedly in our stories or in most stories, legends and myths. Why?
9. Use any of the discussion questions listed as the subject for an essay or an art project. (For example, students could design their own Rainbow Fish or make a poster split in half depicting an optimistic and pessimistic viewpoint as in "Crowded House.")

ADDITIONAL MULTI-CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

1. Melting Pot - Have children find out where their ancestors are from originally. On a map of the world have them place thumbtacks, stars or dots on their ancestors' country of origin. When each child has made his or her mark, display the map to show how many cultures have become part of the "melting pot" of America. Use this as a springboard to discuss immigration.
2. Play tapes or display books from other world cultures. Discuss them and their historical or cultural significance. If you are able, teach them songs or dances from other cultures.
3. Have students talk to their parents, grandparents, or other relatives to find out about their family history. Where did your ancestors live? What did they do in their old country? When did they come to America? Why did they come? How did they get here? What made them choose to settle where they did? Present the findings to the class or in an oral or written report. Another alternative is to invite someone from another culture to speak to the students about his or her homeland and reasons why they came to America.
4. Have a "multi-cultural" snack or a pot-luck meal with your class. (Include parents as well if you want.) Bring in a food from a different culture and have everyone share this treat from another part of the world. If possible, plan an international pot luck lunch or dinner (with the help of other teachers or parents) so children can experience tastes from all around the world.