

Young Audiences of Massachusetts

Educational Materials

Please forward to teachers

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

Behind The Mask Theatre: *The Three Cats of Venice*

Grade levels: 1-5

Through the use of Mask Theater, the story of *The Three Cats of Venice* is brought to life, introducing simple musical terminology, Italian words and phrases, and the music of the classical Italian composer Tomaso Albinoni and others. Set in the splendor of Venice, three cats and one mouse, joined by their love of music, come together to save a young musical prodigy. These unlikely friends learn how a love of art can transcend class, appearance, and even species! This delightful story, adapted from the short story *The Cat Who Lived in a Drainpipe* by Joan Aiken, is presented with original masks and music.

LEARNING GOALS:

1. To bring to life the story of *The Three Cats of Venice* through the use of Mask Theater.
2. To explore the lessons of traditional folklore in modern society.

PRE-ACTIVITY SUMMARY: *Bringing Stories to Life with Masks*

Wearing masks helps us to understand the characters in a story. When we put on the mask, we look at the world through the character's eyes and find new voices, movements, and points of view. As a group, study different stories and imagine you looked, spoke, and moved like a character very different from yourself. Are you more easily able to see their unique perspective?

POST-ACTIVITY SUMMARY: *Perspective-taking*

Using the *The Three Cats of Venice* story as a reference, have children tell their individual view of events in the story from the perspective of different characters. Without necessarily using lines from the play, speak as the character and try to express thoughts, emotional reactions, and goals. (This is what actors call "internal dialogue.")

CURRICULUM LINKS: Visual Arts, Theater, Music, History and Social Science, Foreign Languages

PRE-ACTIVITY: *Bringing Stories to Life with Masks*

LEARNING GOAL:

To understand different points of view by portraying a character through wearing a mask.

MATERIALS/PREPARATION:

Plain white paper and drawing supplies.

TIME: 1 hour

STEP 1: Ask every student to name a favorite book, folk tale, and fairy tale. **Name** their favorite character in each of the three forms. (ie. Goldilocks - baby bear)

STEP 2: Ask every student to share *one* story and character from their list with the class.

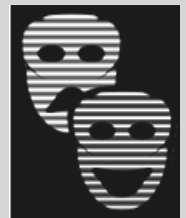
STEP 3: Children will **choose** their favorite character from one the three categories, then, **draw** the face of that character on plain white paper and cut it out.

STEP 4: Divide the class into groups of four. Have children hold up the masks they made, then **walk, talk, and act**, like the character they chose within their groups.

STEP 5: Discuss with students how they felt when they were pretending they were somebody else. Was it easy or difficult for them to feel like a different person? Did they feel as though they were "walking in someone else's shoes?"

EXTENSIONS:

Use a variety of arts materials in making the mask. Find out if the art teacher is willing to extend "mask- making" into his or her activities.



POST-ACTIVITY: *Perspective-taking*

LEARNING GOAL:

To examine what can be learned by taking different perspective on a problem.

MATERIALS/PREPARATION:

None

TIME:

30-45 minutes

GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION OF PERFORMANCE

1. What did you notice in the performance? Tell me what you saw / heard / noticed.
2. What questions do you have after viewing the performance? What are you wondering about?
3. Tell me about the masks that you saw. What did the mask tell you about the character?

STEP 1: Ask the students to choose a character from *The Three Cats of Venice* that they found interesting.

Discuss in small groups the personal experiences of that character during different events both in the story and in the character's past that you imagine.

STEP 2: Ask students to think about feelings and events that shape a person's hopes, dreams, expectations, and goals. How might differing experiences shape who a person becomes over time? Discuss how class differences, life circumstances, age, or gender affect how different people experience the same events.

STEP 3: Ask the students to tell their character's story either to the whole class or in small groups. Include elements from the story and events that students imagine.

STEP 4: Discuss how looking at events from other's viewpoints helps us to understand their perspective, even if we do not share it. Would you think longer about another person's viewpoint before making decisions in the future?

EXTENSIONS:

- 1) Extend this storytelling activity to writing or drama. Have students write the story from their character's perspective, or act out a scene from the story with students switching roles to take on multiple perspectives of the same event.
- 2) Try this activity with other stories or books that the class studies. Students can take the perspective of various characters in a text through storytelling, drama, writing, or visual art. Ask students why the author may have chosen to tell the story from a particular perspective.



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Grade Levels: 1-5

RESOURCES:

Bany-Winters, Lisa. *On Stage: Theater Games and Activities for Kids*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1997.

Caras, Roger. *Roger Caras' Treasury of Great Cat Stories*. Edison, NJ: BBS Publishing Corporation, 1992.

Schwarz, Renee. *Making Masks (Kids Can Do It)*. Tonawanda, NY: Kids Can Press, Ltd., 2002.

ABOUT THE PERFORMERS:

Founded in 1990 by Eric Bornstein, Behind the Mask Theatre brings diverse international folklore to life through the magic of Mask Theater, original music, and dance. Based in New England, the performers each bring unique skills to the troupe. Mr. Bornstein has studied mask making with prominent masters in Bali and Italy. His masks have appeared at The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, The Fuller Craft Museum, Boston Lyric Opera, and Boston Ballet II; the troupe has performed at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, King Richard's Faire, and Christmas/Summer Revels. This show also highlights actor Hanna Barth, stilter/clown Barbara Michaels, and ritual artist Katja Esser. For more information on Behind the Mask Theatre, please consult the web site: www.behindthemask.org.

ABOUT YOUNG AUDIENCES:

Young Audiences of Massachusetts (YA) is the oldest, largest and most utilized arts-in-education organization in the state and one of the largest in a national network of 33 chapters. For over 45 years, YA has distinguished itself as the vital link between Massachusetts schoolchildren (K-12) and more than 95 of the region's most accomplished actors, dancers, singers, musicians, and storytellers. Its 36 ensembles offer 57 interactive arts programs that represent a range of cultures, historical periods and artistic disciplines. YA is unique in its flexibility to offer interactive performances, tailor-made residencies, workshops, teacher-training, curriculum planning and multi-year projects. All programs include educational materials and satisfy local, state and/or federal arts education standards.



Young Audiences of Massachusetts

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MASSACHUSETTS CURRICULUM FRAMEWORKS CONNECTIONS

Behind the Mask Theatre: *The Three Cats of Venice*

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| <i>Language Arts 10</i> | Students will identify, analyze, and apply knowledge of the characteristics of different genres. |
| <i>Language Arts 16</i> | Students will identify, analyze, and apply knowledge of the themes, structure, and elements of myths, traditional narratives, and classical literature and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. |
| <i>Arts-Theatre 2</i> | ...read, analyze, and write dramatic material. |
| <i>Arts- Theatre 5</i> | Critical Response...describe and analyze their own theatrical work and the work of others using appropriate vocabulary. |
| <i>Arts- Theatre 6</i> | Purpose and Meanings in the arts...describe the purposes for which works of dance, theatre, music, visual arts, and architecture were and are created. |
| <i>Arts-Theatre 8</i> | Concepts of Style, Stylistic Influence, and Stylistic Change...demonstrate understanding of styles, influence, change. |
| <i>Arts-Theatre 10</i> | Interdisciplinary Connections...apply knowledge of the arts to the study of English language arts, foreign languages, health, history, and social science, mathematics, and science and technology/engineering. |