



Teacher Resource Guide

“The Lion’s Whiskers”

Catskill Puppet Theater

Since 1979, John Potocnik and Carol Mandigo, co-founders of the Catskill Puppet Theater, have been touring internationally, enchanting young and old with their delightful musical productions! Combining backgrounds in art, music, drama and American folk culture they are one of the nation's finest touring companies, receiving accolades from such premiere venues as the Calgary, Winnipeg and Ottawa International Children's Festivals, The New England Puppetry and Family Theater Series, the New York State Museum's Kid's Series and hundreds more schools, libraries, fairs and festivals.

Able to set up indoors or out, the Catskill Puppet Theater shines equally on a big stage or a festival lawn. Their full sets, colorful scenery and large, beautiful puppets transform even the simplest environment into a fantasy world rich with wonder and excitement!

The Catskill Puppet Theater takes great pride in carrying on in the living tradition of the old traveling puppet troupes, bringing high quality children's theater to over 75,000 people each year!

Let's explore "The Lion's Whisker"

Folktale Variants and Characters

When a writer publishes a version of a folktale we tend to say it is "retold by" rather than written by that author. This is because traditional literature originated orally and has no identifiable author. Storytellers often changed the details in spoken literature to fit the audience or suit the context of the telling. Folktales vary from culture to culture, but many have the same basic literary elements known as motifs – you will often see the motif of two older brothers or sisters who are unkind to their youngest sibling. And, though the youngest is sometimes portrayed as a fool, he or she often gets the girl/guy or wins the prize.

Characters in traditional tales tend to be archetypes – symbolic personages - a king, queen, wise old woman, handsome prince, beautiful but oppressed girl, rabbi or wise man, stepparent, fool - rather than well-developed characters with eye color or other specific traits. Characters are peculiarly flat, not having the detailed traits we normally associate with characters in literature. They do not grow and develop over the course of the narrative. Yet, the person who *hears* the narrative, the audience, grows as a result of hearing the story.

Archetypal characters don't usually have motivations the way characters in a novel or play do. Villains are villainous, not because they have been wronged in the past and hold a grudge. Heroes are not terribly heroic and can lie, cheat and steal. A hero might outwit thieves arguing over the division of the spoils and get the items over which they argue and later use them as magic agents. Archetypes might also have conflicting aspects. The witch is usually villainous, but *can* provide the hero or heroine with knowledge or magic items like horses.

Psychologist Carl Jung proposed that archetypes are not separate characters at all, not individuals, but part of the self. Marie-Louise von Franz, Jung's student, wrote at length about this in *Archetypal Dimensions of the Psyche*. The person *outside* the narrative develops, Franz says. The listener or audience, through the tale, gets to explore aspects of the self and thus grow as a person. These aspects of the self, Jung believed, are there when you are born, are part of a collective memory, a memory of the human race. Jung called this the collective unconscious.

Archetypes are amorphous and flexible, because they are in the unconscious and you are only partially aware of them. Villain, a *dramatis personae* term, is like the archetype Jung calls the shadow, or the negative aspects of the self: destructive, anti-social, devouring

and frightening. If the shadow is a part of the self, then you can understand why the villain can be helpful as well as harmful and why encounters with the villain yield wisdom. The shadow contains negative aspects of the self, so there is reluctance to explore the negative.

Two **archetypal characters** from Russian literature who represent the shadow or villain who can also be of help: Koshchei and Baba Yaga.

Koshchei *by George Hager* <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/k/koshchei.html>

A symbol of death and magic in Russian mythology, Koshchei the Deathless (also Kashchej), is a powerful wizard or demigod who gains immortality by keeping his fiery soul hidden inside an egg. The egg is inside a duck, which is inside a hare, which is inside an iron chest, which is buried under a green oak tree, which is located on the island of Bujan on the wide ocean.

Koshchei is probably symbolic of the reluctance to loosen ones grip on life and pass gracefully into death. As such, he is a tragic villain with vexations analogous to [Hades](#) or even Dracula. He is sometimes completely obliterated by powerful forces, yet his dry, bony body reconstitutes over and over again until the soul-bearing egg is crushed. At the moment of destruction, a cleansing fire from the egg envelopes the Earth, wiping it clean of all its old evil.

Koshchei is notorious for kidnapping mothers, wives and maidens, and for holding them prisoner in his various palaces. He even kidnaps Marena (Mara, Marya Morevna), the Russian goddess of death, with whom he has a love-hate relationship. She is his undoing, as she coaxes the location of his soul from him and passes the information to the hero of the story (usually a son or husband going by various names: Dazhdbog, Prince Ivan, Prince Astrach).

Koshchei's dwelling is beyond thrice-nine countries, in the thirtieth kingdom, where he is entertained by his captive women and the legendary self-playing harp. He is credited as the son of Vij (Lord of the Underground), and is also known for repaying a debt threefold. Koshchei travels on a war-horse who aids its master with clairvoyance, or else he journeys alone in the form of a whirlwind.

BabaYaga <http://www.pantheon.org/areas/featured/witchcraft/chapter-8.html>

Considered the greatest, most powerful, malevolent Russian witch. Once caught, man, woman or child would be her slave, and eventually, her dinner. Baba Yaga's favorite food was human flesh. True, sometimes a person could trick her, or perhaps even gain her affection, and be released. Sometimes she had a favorite, and became the person's Godmother. This was great honor. But generally, it was best to avoid her. Her house lifted one leg, shook, and started turning around. A door now faced the

traveler. It opened and out came Baba Yaga. She looked like an ordinary old woman, wearing a simple peasant dress and a red scarf around her head. Her black, beady eyes darted around, and she sniffed; very likely she smelled the traveler. But she must have been in a hurry, and didn't want to bother with him for the moment. She whistled. From around the house came a giant wooden mortar and a bronze pestle, walking and tumbling clumsily. Baba Yaga jumped into the mortar and grabbed the pestle. She moved it through the air like an oar, murmuring a magic charm to herself in a singsong voice. The mortar leapt into the air, and sailed off with a rush of wind, high into the tree tops.

The traveler wiped his brow and went in the opposite direction. He made good speed, and in a few hours came across some woodcutters. He said nothing of his encounter and followed their directions out of the cursed forest. It was better not to talk of Baba Yaga.

But people did talk of her. There is a huge body of folktales about Baba Yaga in Russia, and many similar tales in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. German folklore called her Brechta, Bertha, Holde, or simply, The Witch. You probably know her from the old tale of Hansel and Gretel, the two children who visit her in the famous gingerbread house. Strangely, this monstrous figure sometimes took on endearing qualities. She was very wise, demanded justice, and sometimes protected abused children or young maidens. The Cinderella story, where the Fairy Godmother helps the young girl marry Prince Charming, is originally based on this fearsome witch.

A Word on “Motifs”

A scholar named Stith Thompson is generally credited with the idea of cataloguing or number motifs and tale types. His system of categorization provides an excellent resource for anyone interested in locating and studying the development and elaboration of plots or plot elements (which are known as "motifs") throughout the folklore tradition. Thompson collected and classified thousands of different tales based upon categories which he identified by a letter of the alphabet. These groups are:

A. Mythological Motifs, B. Animals, C. Taboos, D. Magic, E. The Dead, F. Marvels, G. Ogres, H. Tests, J. The Wise and the Foolish, K. Deceptions, L. Reversals of Fortune, M. Ordaining the Future, N. Chance and Fate, P. Society, Q. Rewards and Punishments, R. Captives and Fugitives, S. Unnatural Cruelty, T. Sex, U. The Nature of Life, V. Religion, W. Traits of Character, X. Humor, Z. Miscellaneous Motifs

These groups are further divided using a decimal system much like that used by the Library of Congress' call number system. Thompson's idea was such a good one that scholars have continued to employ this system in their own specialized indices.

Reference: Thompson, Stith. *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*. Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1955-58.

WEBLINKS/BOOKS for variants or versions of “The Lion’s Whisker” or for more African tales:

At MrDonn.org - search for “The Lion’s Whisker” to find an “unhappy husband” variant. On the www.MrDonn.org home page, hit “Eastern Hemisphere” and then “Africa” for more African stories to tell and dramatize.

At www.story-lovers.com you can find many stories about PATIENCE such as Ashley Bryan’s “The Foolish Boy” in *African Tales, Un-Huh* published by Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 1998.

www.wisdomtales.com lists learning-tales from many cultures.

More sources for “The Lion’s Whisker” or its variants:

- *Peace Tales: World Folktales to Talk About*, by Margaret Read MacDonald, Linnet Books, 1992.
- *Doorways to the Soul: 52 Wisdom Tales from Around the World*, edited by Elisa Pearmain, Pilgrim Press, 1999.
- *Pulling the Lion’s Tale*, Simon & Schuster, 1995, illustrated by Floyd Cooper. (In this version a stepdaughter wants to gain her stepmother's love and is encouraged by her wise grandfather.
- *Ready-to-Tell Tales*, edited by David Holt & Bill Mooney, August House, 1995, by Len Cabral, a storyteller raised in the Cape Verde Islands (and now lives in New England).
- *The Lion's Whisker: Tales of High Africa* by Brent Ashabranner and Russell Davis, Little Brown, 1959
- *African Village Folktales*, by Edna Mason Kaula, World, 1968. *The Tiger's Whisker* by Harold Courlander (Harcourt, 1957).

In working with “The Lion’s Whisker,” you might talk about elements of drama:

Plot : an arrangement of incidents.

Character: the sociological and psychological make-up of the persons in the play.

Themes: ideas and possibilities in the form of speech, action, music and spectacle.

Language: The expression of the meaning in words.

Melody: The aural elements including music and sound.

Spectacle: The visual elements such as sets, costumes, props, lighting, stage picture.

In addition to the Elements of Drama you might consider:

Style: a combination of distinctive features of literary or artistic expression characterizing an era or school of learning; a style of performance: realistic, abstract, melodrama.

Directorial choices: decisions made interpreting the script influencing the final production.

Transformation: to change markedly in appearance, to change the nature condition or function.

Transition: the process of changing or passing from one state, subject or place to another.

Stage picture: the view of the stage in its entirety, including set, actors in and out of focus and all visual effects.

Antagonist: the character most in opposition to the main character (protagonist) in the play.

Protagonist: the leading character in the play.

Exposition: the background information necessary for the audience to understand the developing action - often presented as news passed from one character to another or by a narrator.

Motivation: the reasons for a character's behavior; that which causes a character to act. Simply put, what a character wants.

Other terms, compiled and defined by storyteller Ruth Stotter:

MYTHS are stories from pre-history, sacred to the people who told them. They are traditional stories exploring the unity of man through history, usually explaining some phenomenon of nature, the origin of man or the customs, institutions, religions or rites of people. There are often supernatural heroes, gods, and goddesses. Typical themes include good vs. evil, man vs. nature, and man vs. gods. Myths have been called "public dreams" by Joseph Campbell and "day dreaming of the human race" by Sigmund Freud.

LEGENDS, usually told in a reminiscent manner as true happenings, are often associated with a geographic landmark, person or event. "...the legends of a given period...reflect the main concerns and values, tensions and anxieties, goals and drives of that period." - Richard Dorson.

FOLKTALES - stories that were told, reflecting the culture--foods, clothing, customs, beliefs. "Folktales are the prose fiction of oral literature." – Jan Brunvard.

FAIRYTALES, according to J.R.R. Tolkien, are stories from the land of Faerie: "the Perilous Realm itself, and the air that blows in the country." **Fairytales were originally created for adult audiences.** The elements contained in them include mythical creatures (witches, goblins, dragons), magic and enchantment, protagonists defeating overwhelming odds, and oppositions (good vs. evil, rich vs. poor, old vs. young, tall vs. short, fat vs. thin, beautiful vs. ugly). Common numbers in tales are three and seven (three belly goats gruff, seven dwarfs, three wishes, etc.) Fairy tales were the popular literature of the German Romantic Period (Goethe). These often violent, moralistic tales were popular among the aristocracy. During the Victorian era, with its strict moral codes, many tales were transformed to be "appropriate" for children. Disney has continued to change many traditional tales to appeal to modern audiences.

For more folktales based on “feelings” see

<http://www.civprod.com/storylady/articles/Bibliography.htm>

For more on fairytale types see <http://www.sacred-texts.com/etc/sft/sft08.htm>

and <http://www.sacred-texts.com/etc/sft/sft09.htm>

You might also enjoy **The Not So Wicked Stepmother, A Book for Children and**

Adults by Leslie Allgood Venable and Julie M. Harrison. Or how the myth of the “wicked stepmother” affects our thinking today at <http://ohioline.osu.edu/flm01/FS04.html>

Puppetry <http://www.sagecraft.com/puppetry/definitions/historical/index.html>

Puppetry is closely related to feats of magic and conjuring. All through history, magicians entertained in the public streets, and later, on the stage. The first magician recorded in history was named Dedi in ancient Egypt and is mentioned on the Westcar Papyrus of 1700 BC located at the East Berlin State Museum. There also exists a wall painting in Beni Hasan, Egypt, (unfortunately now submerged underwater during excavations in 1966), showing a conjurer performing for another person the famous cups and balls trick. This is dated 2500 BC. Milbourne Christopher, author of *The Illustrated History of Magic*, mentions: "While Dedi's name is the only one that has survived from this period, it is probable that contemporary conjurers were performing in Babylonia, India, and China." These tricks possibly first originated in prehistoric times when tribal shamans (witch doctors) performed them in order to display their prowess and to retain their position of power against all those desirous of replacing them as their respective tribe's spiritual leader. In Indonesia today the *dalang* (shadow player) functions as a kind of shaman performing magic (*wayang kulit*, or shadow play) for healing and exorcism of evil influences.

Puppets, then, can be seen as a magician's trick, where the mode of the movement of the figures is hidden from the audience. It may be that puppets were derived from folk artists watching the spectacular public presentations of automata--presented sometimes by official players--where all techniques used to impart motion to the figures were concealed or secret. In their attempts to imitate the automata, these folk artists may have hit upon the means whereby puppets are manipulated.

A **puppet** is an inanimate object, usually (but not necessarily) a character, used in play or a presentation. A puppet may be operated directly by a puppeteer, or indirectly - by the use of strings, for example, or by other mechanical contrivance or even remotely by electronic guidance. Puppets moved by strings are also known as *marionettes* from the medieval Passion play figure known as Marion or the young Mary, the mother of Jesus.

For more on puppets see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puppet>

For simple puppet-making check out:

<http://www.nwt.literacy.ca/familit/howtokit/puppet/puppet.pdf> and <http://www.legendsandlore.com/puppet-resource.html>