

WE TELL STORIES

On Our Feet in Open Court

Art Form: Theatre
Style: Contemporary
Culture: Multicultural

MEET THE ARTIST:

We Tell Stories is a multi-ethnic storytelling troupe founded by Artistic Director *Carl Weintraub*. The company has a threefold purpose: to entertain and educate children through the literature, folklore, and mythology of all times and cultures; to expose them to the processes of language and acting as art forms; and to inspire them to plumb the depths and reach the heights of their own creativity. To this end, the group diligently seeks fresh material and performs it with an extemporaneous flavor, encouraging children to participate from their seats, in their minds, and on the stage. In this way, the children see themselves as an integral part of the process, not only witnessing, but also experiencing the stories' morals, the art, and the fun. An old trunk filled with props and costumes is the solitary set, and it is the group's hope that the audiences go away saying to themselves, "I could do that!"

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

On Our Feet In Open Court is a storytelling experience that supports and expands the national reading program.

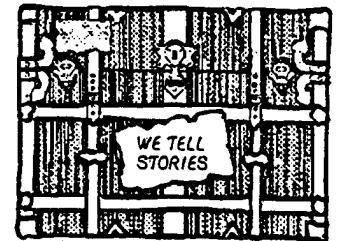
Students are given the chance to see stories they have read come to life onstage as a trio of actors uses the We Tell Stories signature trunk full of costumes and props to create magic. The company offers performances based on either the 2000 edition or 2002 edition of the Open Court program: For the 2000 edition, stories for K - 2nd grade are "The Wind Says Goodnight"; "The Tortoise and the Hare" and "Dragons and Giants." Grades 3 - 5 experience retellings of "The Cat Who Became a Poet," "The King's Fountain"; and "Jumping Mouse." For the 2002 edition, stories for K-2nd grade are "The Lonely Prince", "The Kite" and "The Empty Pot". For Grades 3-5, students enjoy "Cobbler's Song", "Salt" and "McBroom the Rainmaker". Both performances use audience participation and the talents of this gifted company to encourage students to see and approach familiar stories in theatrical ways.



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

On Our Feet In Open Court uses a storytelling format to present tales the students have read or will read in their regular classroom curriculum. The purpose behind this approach is geared towards inspiring and encouraging students to think beyond the printed word. The values of linking reading to storytelling are many:

- ◆ Telling a story is a gift - a shared experience that should bring people closer together.
- ◆ Storytelling enlivens written material and motivates the audience to read and explore literature in new ways.
- ◆ Storytelling can help teach language skills.
- ◆ Through storytelling, the audience can gain insight into motives and patterns of literary characters that may be missed in reading. It also links character behavior to human behavior in a substantial way.
- ◆ Hearing stories gives the listeners practice in visualization, the basis of creative imagination.



- ◆ Storytelling brings dramatic joy to the teller and the listener alike.

Students will be able to see and experience the stories they are reading in class in new ways, and will learn to recognize the characteristics that make a good story:

- ◆ a single theme, clearly defined
- ◆ a well-developed plot
- ◆ style (vivid words, pleasing sounds and rhythm)
- ◆ believable characterizations
- ◆ faithfulness to source material
- ◆ dramatic appeal

Best of all, students will be able to connect their reading experiences with fun, joy, inspiration and excitement.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What was your favorite story in the performance? Was your favorite story one of the stories you read in class?
- How were the stories you saw onstage different from the stories you read in class? What new ideas did you get from watching the performance?
- Did any parts of your favorite story make more sense to you after you saw them acted out? Could you understand the characters and their actions more clearly afterwards? Why?
- What countries, cities, towns or countryside were the settings for the stories? Can you locate them on a map, atlas or globe?
- How did the actors use costumes or props in creative and imaginative ways?
- Do you think you could act out a favorite story you have read? What kinds of skills would you need to do to be able to act it out or present it to an audience?

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - LANGUAGE ARTS:

Introduce students to the world of storytelling by encouraging them to illustrate and retell classroom stories. Read a story with your class. As the story is read, ask students to picture what the characters look like and how the actions and events of the story look as they occur. When you have finished, ask students to select their favorite moment. Using their own words, have them write their version of that event, using descriptive words and realistic dialogue. Beginning with the "beginning" events, ask students to stand in front of the class and "retell" the story through their writings, making sure that they pay careful attention to which "beginning" events should be read first. Then read the "middle" and "ending" selections. Discuss with the class how their stories were different from the original.

(Younger students may illustrate their favorite moment of the story; those drawings may be used instead of written material for the following activity by posting the drawings in sequential order and allowing the students to "retell" the story using the drawings as prompts.)

- Legend:
- ☉ Artistic perception
 - ❖ Creative expression
 - ▶ Historical & cultural context
 - ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
 - * Connections, Relations, Applications

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

☉ Help students realize the importance of story settings by asking them to collect pictures of scenic beauty and urban and rural settings without people in them. Travel magazines and nature magazines are good sources, as well as picture postcards. Divide the class into small groups and let each group choose a picture to work from. Ask the groups to imagine a story that could only happen in the picture setting they have chosen. Give the groups 30 minutes to plan and draft a written version of their stories. Allow each group to share them with the class.

❖ Divide the class into small groups and give each group three unrelated words to incorporate as an integral part of an original scene. Use of classroom vocabulary words is encouraged. Give the groups 30 minutes to plan the scene, assign the roles, and rehearse the story, improvising dialogue and action. Examples of word combinations include:

toothbrush - horse - earring
paper clip - telephone - baked potato
balloon - paintbrush - door knob
candle - compass - deck of cards
toaster - teddy bear - hammer

▶ Have students read a classroom story separately or together. Afterwards, discuss where and when the story takes place. Is the story set in modern times? Long ago? In a distant land, or here in California? Discuss with students how the story would change if the characters were from a different time period and different countries or even different "worlds!"

⇒ Using the criteria found on Page 1 pertaining to the characteristics of a good story, have students evaluate the performance of *On Our Feet In Open Court*.

* Have students read a classroom story and ask them to select and describe the moment from the story when the main character shows their courage. Ask students to remember a moment when they needed, and found, their courage, and to share that moment with the class.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Bruchac, Joseph. *Tell Me A Tale: A Book About Storytelling*. Harcourt, 1997.

On the Web:

www.musiccenter.org/educators/opencourt.html
www.wetellstories.org