

LEARNING LINKS

**Visible  
Fictions:  
The Adventures  
of Robin Hood**

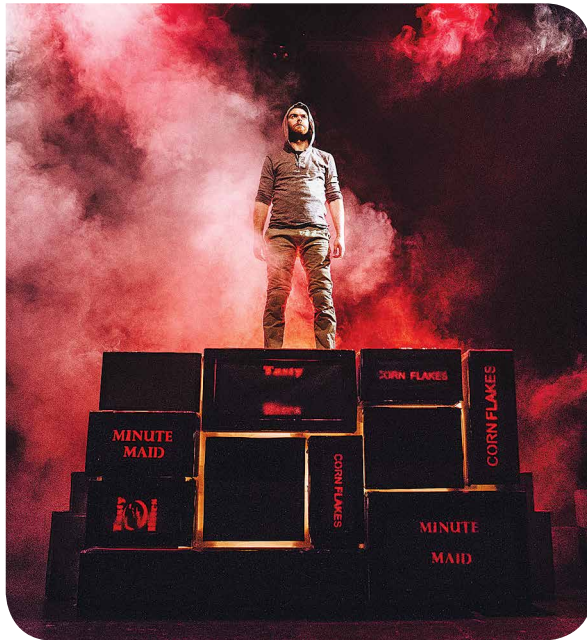
WEDNESDAY  
MAY 11 2016  
11 AM  
THURSDAY  
MAY 12 2016  
9:30 AM & 11:45 AM

2015 > 2016

BROADEN THE HORIZONS  
OF YOUR CLASSROOM.  
EXPERIENCE THE VIBRANT  
WORLD OF THE ARTS  
AT THE McCALLUM!



McCallum Theatre Institute  
**Field Trip Series**



McCALLUM THEATRE INSTITUTE  
PRESENTS

## Visible Fictions: The Adventures of Robin Hood

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“Sometimes it’s  
the simple things  
that are the  
most interesting.”

Director • Douglas Irvine

### Connecting to Curriculum and Students’ Lives!

**HISTORY & GEOGRAPHY** • Medieval era, England

**ARTS** • Theater, ballad, folktale

**IDEAS** • Helping the poor, resisting abusive authority, righting wrongs, living by a moral code

### Expanding the Concept of Literacy

What is a “text”? We invite you to consider the performances on McCallum’s Field Trip Series as non-print texts available for study and investigation by your students. Anyone who has shown a filmed version of a play in their classroom, used a website as companion to a textbook, or asked students to do online research already knows that “texts” don’t begin and end with textbooks, novels, and reading packets. They extend to videos, websites, games, plays, concerts, dances, radio programs, and a number of other non-print texts that students and teachers engage with on a regular basis.

We know that when we expand our definition of texts to the variety of media that we use in our everyday lives, we broaden the materials and concepts we have at our disposal in the classroom, increase student engagement, and enrich learning experiences.

Please consider how utilizing your McCallum performance as a text might align to standards established for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language.

How do we help students to use these texts as a way of shaping ideas and understanding the world?

Please use this material to help you on this journey.

**NON-PRINT TEXT** • any medium/text that creates meaning through sound or images or both, such as symbols, words, songs, speeches, pictures, and illustrations not in traditional print form including those seen on computers, films, and in the environment.

## The Work of Art

### A Non-print Text for Study

- What's it made of? How can this work serve as a *Common Core State Standards*-mandated "text" for student study in the classroom?

Two actors leap on stage. One munches on a bag of chips. Not a word is spoken. A twinkle in the eye and a bit of broad mummery suggest that the performers are perfectly okay with delaying the start of the story. In the hall, laughter begins to swell.

The story, of course, is well known. Who hasn't heard of Robin Hood, the altruistic thief skulking around Nottingham Forest with his band of Merry Men, stealing from the rich and giving to the poor – a one man social program! But where are his

Merry Men? Where's the villainous Sheriff of Nottingham? Love interest Maid Marian? Sidekicks Little John and Friar Tuck? Why, they're all embodied by these same two actors – a fact not the least bit surprising to anyone who's seen Visible Fictions' earlier efforts. The actors, in this case, are Martin McCormick – tall, in a gray hoodie and green trousers – and Billy Mack – not tall and in brown. Between them, they make a tasty meal of the familiar characters in this tale. McCormick plays Robin – impulsive, headstrong, and possibly just a bit vain. Why not? Those green tights of his are all the rage in medieval fashion. Mack plays, among the many roles, Little John – a Merry Man whose name belies his tall stature. Mack, who lags a bit in the altitude department, rectifies this by climbing onto a pile of boxes – just one of the many ways in which this madcap, freewheeling production strikes a blow for originality. The Sheriff, Friar Tuck, and Maid Marian fall to Mack, as well. McCormick, when not consumed with playing the titular character in his sundry disguises, enacts the Sheriff's pet wolf!

And what about those boxes? Well, they're part of a most original and stripped down production, whose minimalist approach demands of the observer full engagement of the imagination. The actors launch into the opening narrative surrounded by mountains of boxes, just as if a delivery truck had dumped the lot moments before. Over the course of an hour, these lowly cardboard items become river bank, castle, town, weaponry, poultry, gates, dungeon, and stately medieval forest. Brooms and mops are pressed into service, too. As well as flashlights, which help the actors to illustrate marksmanship in the absence of actual bows and arrows. Naturally, kids have no trouble connecting with this imaginative approach – and for the rest of us it can recall childhoods when there was nothing more absorbing under the heavens than turning a box into a fort, a cabin, a rocket ship, or...? This inventiveness of prop takes various forms. Need a duel? The actors thrust and parry mailing cylinders. Need Little John to look like he's being swallowed up in a watery vortex? Out comes a shopping cart, the actor spins round and round – and at once we feel caught up in the reality of his peril.

Fans of the troupe's work will not be surprised to learn that director Douglas Irvine has used the stage adeptly, even sending the players out into the house, to the delight of viewers. Some moments have an improvisatory feel. Other moments are simply wacky, as when, for example, food sprays out of the actors' mouths. (Maybe avoid sitting in the front row?) When not projecting food, they do an admirable job projecting the text, not a wee syllable lost to those lovely Scottish accents. They shift characters as swiftly as the storyline demands it. And by the time our hour with this crew of two is up, we may feel as if we have passed a breathless month or two with a colorful band of adventurers in a world apart.

## The Artists

Who has *produced* this text for study?

“The cardboard box that becomes a spaceship is far more exciting than the items inside.”

Director • Douglas Irvine

How do you tell a story so that it holds – genuinely holds – the attention of (and excites) both kids and adults? If anyone should know, it's Visible Fictions – the acting troupe from Glasgow, Scotland, whose theatrical riff on *Jason and the Argonauts* has held McCallum audiences in thrall over three seasons!

This play was co-commissioned by Visible Fictions and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and was first presented at the Kennedy Center with the North American premiere during the 2013-14 season. Playwright Oliver Emanuel created the text. Here's what he has to say for himself:

I was born in Kent, England in 1980. I studied English and Theatre at the University of Leeds before going on to do the MA in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia. In 2002, I set up Silver Tongue Theatre with Daniel Bye. Together we produced four of my plays. In 2006, I was Writer-On-Attachment at the West Yorkshire Playhouse during which I wrote *Maggie Park* which was produced there in 2007. At the same time, I received my first radio commission. I moved to Glasgow in 2007 and have been writing theatre and radio there ever since. I've written for the National Theatre of Scotland, BBC Radio, and Visible Fictions.

Director Douglas Irvine started Visible Fictions some 20 years ago, and the company has been winning awards ever since for its work in Europe, Australia, and the U.S. – inspiring young people and adults alike. Under his guidance, Visible Fictions has worked hand in hand with The Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, BBC Scotland, and Scottish Opera, as well as the Scottish Prison Service, where outreach programs have made a difference in the lives of young offenders.



## Contexts

- What *information* surrounds this text for study & could help make students' engagement with it more powerful?

### THE LEGEND

As far as we can tell, the heroic outlaw called Robyn Hode lived only in English folklore. An ace archer, he was also not too shabby when it came to wielding a sword. But it really has only been since the 1800s that Robin Hood, as he has come to be spelled, took on a reputation for robbing from the rich and giving to the poor. He has, however, been a potent folk hero going all the way back to the Middle-Ages. He and his stealthy band of Merry

Men are usually portrayed wearing green; we can assume to blend in with their environment as denizens of Sherwood Forest. (Sherwood Forest dates back to the end of the Ice Age, which makes it a good deal older than most of us! It is designated a Royal Forest, and is located in Nottinghamshire, roughly in the middle of England.) There is some suggestion that this legend was based on the exploits of actual medieval outlaws – or in any case on the ballads and tales circulating about them.

### BALLADS

Ballads are said to be the oldest form of verse. The earliest examples emerged somewhere in mist-enshrouded prehistory and were transmitted orally in a kind of English we would not recognize today. Traditionally the stanzas of ballads were made up of four lines, alternating between four iambic beats (da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM), and three beats (da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM). Here's an example:

In Scarlet Town, where I was born,  
There was a fair maid dwellin'  
Made every lad cry wellaway  
And her name was Barbara Allen.

The ballad, written in Middle English, on which the legend of Robin Hood is based, is called *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, printed sometime between 1492 and 1534. Scholars think it was put together from several already existing tales. Other examples of the ballad form include Lewis Carroll's *The Walrus and the Carpenter* and Samuel Coleridge's *The Ancient Mariner*.

### THE MOVIES

Among more than 50 films based on the legend are four by the name of *Robin Hood* (1912, 1973, 1991, 2010); a couple of feature-length cartoons, *Robin Hood Daffy and Rabbit Hood*; the Mel Brooks spoof, *Robin Hood: Men in Tights*; and *Robin and Marian*, which featured Sean Connery and Audrey Hepburn as mature versions of the eponymous characters. Of course, where Hollywood is concerned, the gold standard remains 1938's Warner Brothers classic, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, featuring swashbuckler Errol Flynn and pre-*Gone With the Wind* heroine Olivia De Havilland. Directed by Michael Curtiz (*Casablanca*), it boasted Basil Rathbone as an especially charismatic villain – and a dazzling Technicolor palette.

### OPEN THEATRICALITY

A new term, Open Theatricality, has been coined in just the last couple of years to describe the kind of stage work that Visible Fictions specializes in. Though references on the Internet – and certainly in print – are scant, the form is characterized by minimalist production elements and a style of presentation in which no attempt is made to disguise the artificiality of these elements. Think: action figures as heroes, sticks as swords, and forced-air tubing as dragon's tail in Visible Fiction's version of Jason and the Argonauts, for example.

## To get ready for the performance, students could research these:

- The tales of Robin Hood
- Medieval English history
- Forests



## Here's a 60 minute lesson in collaboration & problem-solving you could teach to help prepare students for this work:

**Line of Inquiry\*** How does Visible Fictions build an effective theatricalization of the tale Robin Hood by interspersing narration and dialogue – and by using simple items to represent objects within the story?

Introduce the story of Robin Hood by letting students know that, rather than one particular story, many different stories tell the exploits of the good-hearted outlaw who robbed from the rich and gave to the poor. You can find a synopsis of Howard Pyle's well-regarded children's classic *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood* at: <http://www.penguin.com/static/pdf/teachersguides/robinhood091813b.pdf>

Here is an excerpt from the synopsis at that site:

Robin, being bored, decides that he (in some of the stories, together with his merry men) will seek adventure. Setting off, Robin meets a fellow traveler. Either he offends the traveler or is offended by the traveler. Robin and the new character engage in battle. After the battle, Robin recruits his new ally to join the Merry Band in Sherwood Forest. In the Prologue, his encounter is with a tall stranger at a bridge. After an exchange of taunts and challenges, Robin and the stranger begin to battle with staffs. During the battle, both combatants prove their expertise by unleashing powerful blows and parrying the same. However, when Robin grows angry and lashes out at the stranger, the loss of his composure costs him the contest; the stranger "thwacks" Robin and sends him into the stream. Chagrined, Robin laughs and seeks the stranger's assistance in regaining the shore where he then summons his men who set upon the tall stranger. Robin ends the assault and asks the stranger to join his band. The stranger, John Little, accepts the offer after Robin demonstrates his prowess with a bow. Because of his remarkable height and build, the men laughingly call him "Little John."

A simpler version for younger grades: [http://www.kidsgen.com/stories/classic\\_stories/robin\\_hood.htm](http://www.kidsgen.com/stories/classic_stories/robin_hood.htm)

\*A Line of Inquiry is an Essential Question that generates a lesson

Have students read aloud as much of the synopsis as you want – to get a feel for the characters and to acquaint themselves with enough scenes for the following project.

Next, lead students, through discussion, to a clear understanding of narration and dialogue.

Then, have students in table groups select one of the scenes from the synopsis. They rewrite the scene collaboratively\*\*, including some narration to establish setting, time, characters etc. – and some dialogue, as well.

## PROBLEM-SOLVING

In the form of theater called Open Theatricality, instead of fancy props that look like the thing they're meant to represent, simple items are used that might share the same shape as the object in the story – or in some other way seem suitable for representing it. In table groups, students select – on paper – the simple props they would add in to their scene.

These scenes are read aloud in the class. Groups tell which props they would use and why those in particular would work well. This will be a great opportunity to have students do a "close read" of these "texts." Ask questions of the listeners after each presentation that requires them to return in their minds to the text they've just heard in order to provide answers. A liberal sprinkling of open-ended questions – always connecting back to the heard text – can take the dialogue into higher level thinking.

**After coming to the theater, students could research these:**

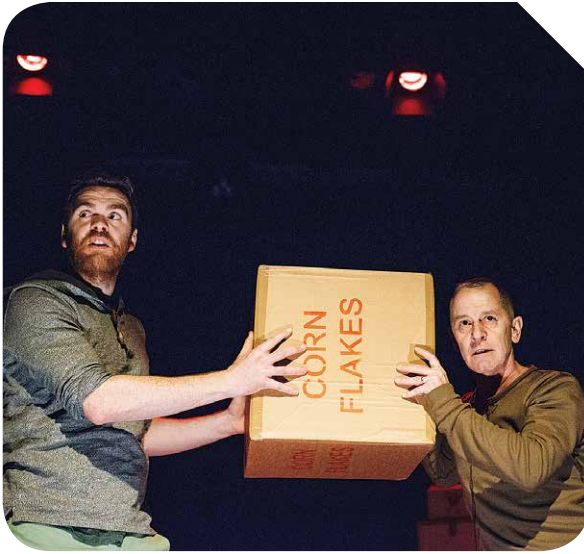
- Dress, architecture, and weaponry in Medieval England
- Altruism

*\*\*In the case of Kindergarten and 1st Grade, perhaps writing becomes drawing and group work becomes the whole class?*

**"I am enjoying experimenting with where our imaginations can take us, and this version of The Adventures of Robin Hood invites the audience to come on that journey with us."**

**Director • Douglas Irvine**





## Here's a 45-60 minute lesson you could teach after students have experienced the work:

Lead a discussion, asking students to describe details of the production. Focus in particular on props, sets, and what the actors did to make the scenes come to life.

Students individually choose one scene from the show. On one piece of paper they draw the actual set and the actors using the actual props. On a second sheet of paper, they draw the same scene as they

imagined in their minds the scene in the actual story might have looked like. (Access to Internet images of English castles, Medieval garb, etc. might be helpful here?)

Students rotate around their own table, having a good look at each pair of images.

Then, lead students in a discussion about a particular pair of images (you choose which?). What are the connections – differences, similarities – between these two versions of the same scene? What role does imagination play when we go to this kind of theater? What choices did the director and actors of *Visible Fictions* make to help us *imagine* the characters, the setting, and the situations?

## What's *your* read of this non-print text?

How would you answer these questions – and how could they be adapted as Guiding Questions to spark student discussion?

- What props were used? How would you describe what they actually looked like? Were there moments when you imagined the things they were meant to represent? How would you describe those items?
- What was the costuming?
- How did scenes transition from one to the next?
- What set pieces were used – and how would you describe the details?
- How would you describe the actors' physicality? How did it convey shifts from one character to another?
- What kinds of music were used – and what are the different things that music told us in this production?
- How was stage space used by the actors?
- What were some of the key moments when levels of the actors' bodies (high, medium, low) conveyed information?
- In what ways was lighting effective? Can you provide a couple of instances?
- What emotions were expressed – and how?





- If humor was used, in which moments was it most evident and what do you think the underlying purpose was?
- What are the different strategies the director and actors used to represent all the characters on stage in any given scene? When was this most effective?
- If there was a climactic moment greater than any other, which was it? What made it so? How did the director and actors build toward that climax? What were the different elements that made it climactic?
- What are the advantages to doing theater in this way? What are the limitations?
- How is this particular approach effective for telling the tale of Robin Hood?
- What are the primary themes?
- What are your personal responses to this work?

## Internet

### Who Was Robin Hood?

<http://www.history.com/topics/british-history/robin-hood>

Is the legend of Robin Hood and his merry men just a myth, or did the outlaw of Nottingham really exist? An interesting documentary from the History Channel. (30 second shaving ad comes first!)

### Want Robin Hood images?

<http://www.boldoutlaw.com/robpics/index.html#rhages>

Scads of pictures, plus lots of information on other pages at same site.

### Looking for Robin Hood texts?

<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/robin-hood/authors>

Texts from 1553 through the present day!

### Robin Hood on audio?

<http://www.storynory.com/category/educational-and-entertaining-stories/robin-hood/>

Adapted for all grade levels.

### Kid-friendly synopsis?

[http://www.kidsgen.com/stories/classic\\_stories/robin\\_hood.htm](http://www.kidsgen.com/stories/classic_stories/robin_hood.htm)

Simpler text than other sites.

## Books

### ***The Adventures of Robin Hood***

By: Roger Lancelyn Green, Arthur Hall (Illustrator)  
Age Range: 8 – 12 years  
Publisher: Puffin (2010)  
ISBN-10: 0141329386

### ***The Adventures of Robin Hood***

By: J. Walker McSpadden  
Age Range: 8 – 14 years  
Publisher: Dover Publications (2000)  
ISBN-10: 0486410218

### ***The Adventures of Robin Hood: An English Legend***

By: Paul Creswick, N.C. Wyeth (Illustrator)  
Age Range: 8 – 12 years  
Publisher: Atheneum Books for Young Readers  
(2003)  
ISBN-10: 0689854676

### ***The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood***

By: Howard Pyle  
Age Range: 7 – 9 years  
Publisher: Sterling (2005)  
ISBN-10: 140271257X

### ***Robin Hood***

By: Deanna McFadden  
Age Range: 3 – 6 years  
Publisher: Sterling Children's Books (2013)  
ISBN-10: 1402783396

## DVDs

### ***Robin Hood -40th Anniversary Edition***

Actors: Brian Bedford, Pat Buttram, Andy Devine,  
Monica Evans, Phil Harris  
Rated: G (General Audience)  
Studio: Walt Disney Home Video  
DVD Release Date: 2013  
ASIN: B00CTNYLQA  
The beloved Disney feature-length cartoon.

### ***The Adventures of Robin Hood (1938)***

Actors: Errol Flynn, Basil Rathbone, Claude Rains,  
Olivia De Havilland  
Directors: Michael Curtiz  
Rated: PG (Parental Guidance Suggested)  
Studio: Warner Home Video  
DVD Release Date: 2010  
ASIN: B00407PNWO  
The swashbuckling classic from the Golden Era  
of Hollywood!

### ***Robin Hood (1922)* – Silent Film**

Actors: Douglas Fairbanks, Wallace Beery  
Directors: Allan Dwan  
Format: Black & White, Silent  
Studio: Kino Video  
DVD Release Date: 2004  
ASIN: B00014NF52  
Silent films can be powerful. Douglas Fairbanks  
was the go-to hero of the cinematic 1920s  
and 30s.

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“Underneath this little stone  
Lies Robert Earl of Huntington;  
No other archer was so good —  
And people called him Robin Hood.”

Roger Lancelyn Green • *The Adventures of Robin Hood*