

2011 > 2012 Learning Link

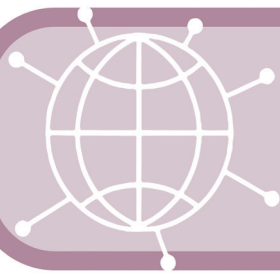
Twinkle Twonkle

Tall Stories of London

Monday, April 9, 2012, 11:30am

Tuesday, April 10, 2012, 9:30am & 11:30am

Recommended Grades: PreK-3



McCallum Theatre Institute
Field Trip Series

A WORLD OF MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE & PERFORMANCE

Learning Links presents

Tall Stories of London: Twinkle, Twonkle

Monday, April 9, 2012 at 11:30 a.m.

Tuesday April 10, 2012 at 9:30 a.m. & 11:30 a.m.

"All our productions are aimed to work on different levels so that the kids are enjoying the story pure and simple, and then there are other things there the grownups enjoy." — Toby Mitchell, director

Connecting to Curriculum and Students' Lives!

Science: Outer space, galaxies and stars, Big Bang theory, black holes, constellations

Arts: theater, music, Greek myths

Students' lives: adventures

What is it?

"Stories, silliness, and a splash of science."

Those are the ingredients which – says Tall Stories of London – are indispensable to the theatrical confections they routinely whip up and serve to an acclamatory public. Twinkle, Twonkle fits neatly into that paradigm. Part Mother Goose, part Big Bang Theory, this lively tale of two children who wander out into space provides a very merry assault on the generally staid domain of science. So strong is the science connection, in fact, that the United Kingdom's prestigious academy of science, the Royal Society, associates itself with this production on the event of its 350th anniversary. But getting back to those waifs in space – they are youngster Ryan and his sister Stella ("older" sister, she's quick to point out.) Of course, Stella is Italian for star, but who knows if that has anything to do with Ryan climbing the length of his telescope and up into the firmament above. It seems he's mislaid his teddy – and a boy will go to great lengths to retrieve his teddy. Stella, the scold, follows him up into the night sky. But what's this? Frisking and gamboling among the expected constellations – Pegasus the flying horse, for example – is a moonstruck cow! And lodged between Ursa Major and Ursa Minor (that's fancy talk for Big Bear and Little Bear) is, well, Ursa Medium – a third bear whose countenance bears a striking resemblance to a certain young man's bedtime companion. A fine how-do-ye-do!

Songs abound – and comic bits, as well. A capable team of actors, fewer in number than you might suppose, undertake all of the characters – including one very bug-eyed Man In The Moon. And as heretofore mentioned, laced throughout the entertainment are a number of science concepts ingeniously explained.

Who Does It?

You've met Stella and Ryan already. The actors who play them – among other characters – are skilled thespians from the country that brought you Thorndyke, Tree, and Terry. It's worth noting that they've tailored their style to their audiences, performing in primary hues with exaggerated characterizations and simplified language (yet witty enough to retain adult buy-in).

The director of this production, Toby Mitchell, and his co-writer Olivia Jacobs, are also the founders of Tall Stories of London. That was back in 1997. Prior to that, Mr. Mitchell had studied modern languages at Cambridge, and Ms. Jacobs English at the University of London, obtaining First Class Honors. Together, they've written the

script of the work under consideration here. Sometimes they create their own material from scratch, as in this case (if, that is, you allow for a bit of yeast from the redoubtable Mme. Goose!) - and other times they get a kick out of adapting well-loved classics like *The Gruffalo* for life upon the boards.

“The four year olds enjoy the nursery rhymes and the fun and adventure of the story. Then the kids five and up enjoy the story as well as understanding more of the science behind it.” — Toby Mitchell, director

What Are Its Contexts?

Tall Stories of London refers to Mother Goose as a source of inspiration. We thought it would be interesting to find out more about the bespectacled teller of children’s tales. But as with so much that is obscured in the mists of the distant past, La Mere l’Oye’s origins are hard to chase down. We refer to her by her French name since she makes her earliest appearance, as such, in Charles Perrault’s collection of ten fairy tales entitled (in French) *Tales from the Past with Morals*. In 1729, his book was translated into English as *Mother Goose’s Fairy Tales*.

But some centuries earlier, the mother of Charlemagne – one Bertrada II of Laon – was called Queen Goosefoot. Her role as patroness of children and the sole educator of her illustrious son may have led to a tradition in seveneenth century France of a grandmotherly goose who told instructive tales to small children. Somewhat later, a couple of Italians set these tales down in print. (One of them, Straparola by name, provided the source for some of Shakespeare’s plots, and in a subsequent era, Moliere’s.)

*Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are!
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky!
When the blazing sun is gone,
When he nothing shines upon,
Then you show your little light,
Twinkle, twinkle, all the night.*

The poem above, entitled *The Star*, was written by one Jane Taylor, a lady living in Britain. It first appeared in a book of poems she and her sister Ann published in 1806, *Rhymes For the Nursery*. It was their second such effort. Just when someone got the idea to set these words to the tune of a French folk song, however, who can say?

Before the viewing

Research projects might focus on these subjects:

outer space
the constellations
black holes
telescopes

Here's a 60 minute lesson you could teach to help prepare students for this work:

*Line of Inquiry** How does *Tall Stories of London* employ theatrical elements – including vibrant characterizations, suspenseful plotting, and comedic business – to communicate science concepts engagingly?

(*A line of inquiry is a question that generates a lesson.)

Ask: What do we know about outer space and the stars? Assemble a list on the board.

Share a bit of context: One of the concepts in *Tall Stories'* *Twinkle, Twonkle* is black holes. What's a black hole? (A black hole is an area of space from which nothing, not even light, can escape. The theory of relativity predicts that a mass when it's compact enough will deform spacetime to form a black hole. Around a black hole there is what's called an event horizon that marks the point of no return. It is called "black" because it absorbs all the light that hits the horizon, reflecting nothing.)

Ask: What are other space facts that a play could teach you about? (Create a separate list of these.)

Table groups: Select one teachable space fact from the posted list. Together, make up (and then write down) an adventure story in which 2 -4 characters have an adventure in space and learn about the space fact. 1page only.

Read these aloud. What do we notice about language choices? Plot? Element of suspense? What contributes to a sense of suspense? How has humor been used? What makes this an adventure? How would you describe the characters? If you were going to turn your story into a play, how would you do it?

After coming to the theater, students could research these:

Big Bang theory
Children's theater
Mother Goose

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

Discussion: Have students take a look back at the performance. What stood out, and why? Describe the characters. How did they move? How did they use their voices? What were the different events in the plot? How was music used? How did the performers interrelate? What emotions were conveyed – and how? What surprised you? What do you want to know more about?

Table groups: Revisit your story. How could you turn this into theater? How would you divide up the roles? How might you add in singing or sound effects to help tell the story? How could you use humor? Brainstorm some ideas – and then try these out. Be inspired by what *Tall Stories* did, but make your own choices.

Perform these. Ask open-ended questions about characterizations, plot, humor, music, voices, etc.

Individuals: Take a few quiet minutes to write: How can theater be a good way to teach science ideas?

"Tall Stories is very much an ensemble theatre company, so we like having small casts." — Toby Mitchell, director

What do YOU think?

How would you answer these questions --- and how could these questions be adapted for student use?

How did the director use the stage space?

How were levels in space used?

What stood out to you about the costumes? What did you notice about the colors?

How did the actors define their roles through physicality, posture & stance?

How else did they create characters?

How were conflict and resolution used?

What role did humor play in this presentation?

What did you notice about pacing?

How was music used?

How would you describe the vocal qualities?

What did lighting contribute?

What are some of the big themes in this work?

How were props used?

How is a work like this an effective vehicle for conveying information (like science facts)?

Internet

Big Bang theory:

<http://big-bang-theory.com/>

Big Bang theory for kids website:

http://www.esa.int/esaKIDSen/SEMSZ5WJD1E_OurUniverse_0.html

<http://www.historyforkids.org/scienceforkids/physics/space/bigbang.html>

Astronomy for kids:

<http://www.astronomy-for-kids-online.com/bigbangtheory.html>

http://kids.lovetoknow.com/wiki/Free_Constellation_Activities_for_Children

Black holes:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_hole

Acrobatics history:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acrobatics>

Short History of Theater for children:

<http://library.thinkquest.org/5291/history.html>

Books

Basher Astronomy: Out of this World!

By Dan Green

Reading level: Ages 9-12

Publisher: Kingfisher (May 12, 2009)

ISBN-10: 0753462907

A portrait gallery of personified planets, comets, space probes, galaxies, several kinds of stars, and an array of other celestial bodies in a pastel cartoon style.

A Child's Introduction to the Night Sky: The Story of the Stars, Planets, and Constellations--and How You Can Find Them in the Sky

By: Michael Driscoll

Reading level: Ages 9-12

Publisher: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers (May 1, 2004)

ISBN-10: 9781579123666

Supported by a mix of cartoon vignettes, elaborately detailed illustrations of constellations, sky maps, and small but dramatic space photos, this tour of the universe takes readers through the solar system and well beyond--introducing along the way a handful of astronomers, space probes, myths, and principles of physics.

Zoo in the Sky: A Book of Animal Constellations

By: Jacqueline Mitton

Reading level: Ages 4-8

Publisher: National Geographic Children's Books (October 24, 2006)

ISBN-10: 0792259351

Introduces children to the constellations that are named for animals--Leo the Lion, the Great Bear and Little Bear, and many *more*.

The Real Mother Goose Treasury

By: Grace Maccarone

Reading level: Ages 4-8

Publisher: Cartwheel Books (April 1, 2006)

ISBN-10: 0439858755

"The main thing we hope [audiences] take away from it is a great story because that's what we're all about."—Toby Mitchell, director