STUDY GUIDE

BACKWOODS RAMBLIN’

A WOOD & STRINGS THEATRE PRODUCTION



Dear Teachers:

**"Backwoods Ramblin"** is a marionette show lovingly created to catch the passing spirit of the area known as the Hill Country. The folk, who have quietly populated this area, have left a heritage that belongs too many of the children of today. Sadly enough, many aren't even aware of it, or worse, think of it as unimportant. Technology and the fast paced lives we live are quickly erasing some very valuable experiences.

Men and women living in the Appalachian Mountains and the surrounding areas less than a century ago had little schooling. However their knowledge of the woods and uses of local natural resources for their daily needs could fill a university library. Very few of us could survive a year without our technological advances right at hand. Their ingenuity, intelligence and hard work made life livable in this beautiful, wild country.

This guide offers ideas to bring the children an insight to different times and suggestions that will help them find new connections.

**WOOD & STRINGS THEATRE**

Under the direction of Clarissa Lega, producer and Leon Fuller, director, this professional touring company is involved in all aspects of production. Collaborating with four highly trained puppeteers and many other talented artists, they create works of puppetry for performance. Their attention to detail from story line through puppet and set construction and on to original music and choreography, becomes a complete interplay of the arts in their final works.

**BACKWOODS RAMBLIN'**

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| Adaptation by Leon Fuller |
| From: **The Jack Tales** by Richard Chase |
| Produced originally and touring nationally since1982 |

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| **CAST OF CHARACTERS** |
| **Lightnin’:** the dog **Butterfly:** herself |
| **Grandpa Will:** an old timey storyteller |
| **Louella Mae:** grandpa’s wife |
| **Durwood D. Dingle:** a young fiddle player |

**SYNOPSIS**

This main stage marionette production is a heartwarming and humorous show that takes the imagination to a sunny morning in the Hill Country. From the front porch of his cabin, a country storyteller named Grandpa Will spins his tall tales of adventure and excitement. The lively antics of Grandpa Will's family, friends and hound dog enthrall all those who "happen by".

**Backwoods Ramblin'** is a wonderful opportunity to relive the past and experience our American cultural heritage. Through the entrancing art of puppetry, the rich folklore and toe tapping tunes of the Appalachian Mountains, this folklore springs to life in laughter and song.

The script of this marionette show is derived from " The Jack Tales" which are authentic Appalachian tall tales compiled by Richard Chase. Grandpa Will’s stories center on Jack who is as poor as they come but gets by on his wits to everyone’s amazement. The character Jack, descends from the fairy tales of Europe but takes a distinct American slat in these Hill County tales. His highly unusual, unlikely and humorous escapades reflect the ingenuity of the individual our culture celebrates so highly. Mr. Chase traveled the Appalachian Mountains gathering stories from anyone who would tell them and was able to capture a priceless oral literary tradition before its disappearance. It's in these tall tales that **WOOD AND STRINGS PUPPET THEATRE** has found a view of the lifestyle and times of these mountain folk, their hopes and fears, their dreams and aspirations.

**TEACHING ACTIVITIES**

Once the students have been "transported" to the "ole timey days" through the performance, they are primed to explore many interesting topics.

Historically the Hill Country offers a view of people descended from English, Irish and German stock that wove their European folklore into very American traditions. Survival depended heavily on resources available in the environment. All food, shelter, water, and tools had to be procured directly from local natural resources. Leisure time and the pursuit of the arts were tied in to practical living as well, such as wood carving and basket weaving. The tall tale, a type of storytelling indigenous to this area, is an outstanding example of a unique oral literary style.

Life in the hills remained relatively unchanged from 1600’s until 1930’s, when the Tennessee Valley Authority introduced electricity into these rural areas.

**GLOSSARY**

People's ways of saying things change quite often. There are expressions you use today that were not heard of 15 years ago. Here are some very curious terms that appear in the **WOOD & STRINGS THEATRE’S** performance of **Backwoods Ramblin'** andwere used in the Hill Country over 60 years ago. Many are still used in some parts of the country and most give you a glimpse of how these folks lived. The roots for some of these terms can be traced to old English and Irish or German expressions.

* **peaked** (pe ' ked) - having a pale, sick appearance; tired.
* **no account** - won't amount to anything; useless.
* **takes a mind to** - makes up his/her mind to do something.
* **show out** - show off.
* **jawin’** - chatting, talking needlessly.
* **start a fire** - cooking all year round and heating the house in the winter was done with a wood burning stove. Wood was plentiful in the mountains but chopping and splitting it to size with an ax was a hard job done year round by both men and women.
* **soap to make** - soap had to be made from animal fat and lye which was made by running water through wood ashes left over from the cooking fires.
* **sheets to boil** - laundry had to be washed by hand and large items like sheets were placed in a large kettle over an outdoor fire and the water was heated to a boil to get them really clean.
* **wash board** - a small wooden board with glass or metal ridges was used to scrub the medium and small laundry items (these boards were also used as musical instruments and played with thimbles).
* **hand hewn logs -** people built their homes and work spaces from the trees on their land. They would chop them down , shave the bark off with a blade-like tool an let them “season” or let the sap dry out of the logs. When the logs were ready they would be notched on the ends and fitted together to form walls, rafters, etc. Split pieces of oak and other hard woods were used to cover the roofs and were called “shakes” or “shingles”. Since people didn’t have money to pay for carpenters and other helpers, family members or neighbors would gather for barn or house raisin’s and the women would make food. Quite often these work gatherings became festive occasions as well.
* **smokehouse** - In these times the food you raised or hunted was the food you ate. They grew or collected from the woods, all their vegetables and fruit, hunted for some of their meat and raised a few chickens and pigs for the rest. The meat was very often preserved by "smoking" it. They had a special shed with a floor off the ground in which they hung the meat from hooks and kept a fire smoldering for several days with lots of smoke surrounding the salted meat. This discouraged insects and bacteria from spoiling the meat that needed to last them a whole year until the next winter when it was time to kill the fatted pigs. We still smoke meats commercially and find the taste in cold cuts, bacon, sausage and many others. The kind of wood that gives the best flavor is hickory, which is a hardwood tree native to the deciduous forest of this part of the country.
* **food preservation** - became an art in the hands of these country women, canning and drying methods were developed to keep their families fed through the long winters. They wanted to preserve foods that came in great abundance once a year such as fruit, vegetables.
* **root cellars** - small rooms dug into the ground under or near the house where things like potatoes, carrots, cabbages, canned goods, cheeses etc. were stored at the ever constant 45 - 60 degrees ground temperature. This also protected their stores of food from animals or vandals.
* **spring houses** - . little houses built over the springs to take advantage of the coolness of the water coming from deep in the earth used to cool food and milk. Not only did these rooms keep things cool in the summer it kept them cool but not frozen in the winter.
* **windalite** - a window.
* **checking the weather with Weeb's big toe**  - Some folks "feel" damp weather in their bones if they have a little rheumatism or arthritis in them. Some folks had the feeling just before a rain storm and could predict the weather by it.
* **didn't differ**  - it made no difference.
* **saplings** - very young trees.
* **crook** - to bend; to turn from a straight line to make a curve or hook in.
* **wide swag** - a tract of low land usually marshy.
* **peach rock** - peach seed or pits. Most fruit trees grown were of a native variety and grew from their seeds. Nowadays we have hybrids that only grow through grafting.
* **bee tree** - bees in the wild make their hives in the hollows of tree trunks or places opened up by lightning.
* **branches** - very small streams that flow into creeks.
* **fritters** - small cakes fried on a griddle sometimes made from corn, similar to pancakes.
* **foundered** - bloated; a condition that happens to horses and other livestock from overeating rich foods.
* **gettin’ into a fix** - getting into trouble.
* **clear a patch of new ground** - farmers would grow their crops on a particular spot for years until it seemed to be out of nutrients. They would then go to the woods where years of dead leaves and bark had created rich topsoil. They'd cut the trees, pull out the stumps and roots and farm on new ground.
* **bean tree** - bean stalk; (remember Jack and the Beanstalk? These hill folks' ancestors brought many of the old European folk tales to this country but slowly local flavor and language were added to them.)
* **slew** - bunch; group.
* **gumption** - energy; determination; enthusiasm.
* **piggin of water** - a wooden bucket with one of its slats extended to form a handle, used to scoop water from the springs. People cleared out the places where water came out of the ground and made a small pool from which to collect their drinking water. They'd also build a small house over the pool to keep animals and ground water from polluting it and for refrigeration.

Lesson #1 **History, Geography, Social Studies, Science**

**Objectives:**

1. Locate in time and place the setting for the production and have students compare them to their own time and place.
2. Identify a family member of each student who lived during this point in history and if possible, collect a story from them about their youth.
3. Invite one or several senior citizens who could be interviewed by students for articles that appear in a class “newspaper”.

**Vocabulary:**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| electricity | radio | industrial | hill country | Appalachian Mountains | communication |
| urban | rural | agriculture | self -reliance | transportation | coal mining |

Lesson #2 **Practical Living, Architecture, Humanities, Arts & Crafts**

**Objectives:**

1. Investigate how people dependent on their environment procured food, water, shelter, and tools.
2. Find examples of how people spent their leisure time with crafts, music, storytelling, and family gatherings.
3. Reproduce some of these processes in class; i.e. plant vegetables from seed to harvest, weave a basket, or make cigar box banjos.
4. Louella Mae is quite a country cook. She fixes many wonderful dishes for Willard. Some of his favorites are pan gravy with eggs, biscuits, fried back strip, peach butter, collard and turnip greens. See if you know of any other dishes that are native to the Hill Country, and discuss where the ingredients come from.
5. Identify things we eat today that have been "processed" in order to keep them from spoiling.

**Vocabulary:**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| hoe | seeds | harvest | hunting | fishing | wood stove |
| canning pond | spring (water  source) | meats: smoking  drying, salting | well  woods | creek  clearing land | log cabin  river |

Lesson #3 **Language Arts, Reading, Creative Writing, Oral Expression**

**Objectives:**

1. Explore the tall tale as a literary style of storytelling and have students compose some of their own for oral, written, or acted out presentations. A tall tale begins with ordinary occurrences taken out of ordinary proportions.
2. Create a basic tale for the entire class to learn, then retell the story several months later and record the variations on tape. The tape can be enhanced with vocal reinforcements, sound effects, or music with spoons, hand made instruments, or singing.
3. Write, read, and perform a story orally and note the differences in the manner of expression. Discuss and apply accents, character voices and rhythmical overtones by each student.
4. Reinterpret a story in written, oral, visual, musical and movement forms.

**Vocabulary:**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Introduction: status quo | folk tales | script | music | dialogue | action |
| Change: climax | fantasy | visual arts | poetry | rhythm | foreshadowing |
| Resolution: moral | play | arts | rime | narrative | symbolism |

**ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES**

The following resources can be used to explore any of the lesson objectives suggested and can be made age appropriate by grade.

1. **Research:** classroom sources, libraries, newspapers, television, Internet, interviews, historical and cultural societies, museums
2. **Oral Communication:** discussion in classroom before and after performances, presentation of researched information or original creations,
3. **Writing:** opinions, reports, fan letters, reviews, fictional stories, scripts, skits, international and/or local email
4. **Visual Arts:** drawing, coloring, modeling in paper mache or clay, sculpting, collage in paper or found objects, making puppets from socks, plastic jugs, cardboard, foam rubber, and craft items.
5. **Physical Communication:** movement, dance, mime, theatre, puppetry
6. **Music:** traditional folk songs, sung , played on classroom made instruments

**RESOURCES BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Public Library Foxfire books

School Library The Jack Tales, by Richard Chase

Historical Society Jack Always Seeks His Fortune by Donald Davis

The Children's Families Mules and Men by Zora Neale Hurston

The Mennonite Community The Craftsman in America by National Geographic Society

Local Senior Citizen Groups The Appalachian Trail by National Geographic Society

**RESIDENCIES AND WORKSHOPS**

**WOOD & STRINGS THEATRE** provides artist in residence workshops in puppet construction and production closely integrated to curriculum. Instructions and material are also available.

For further information contact our representatives at:

907 Shady Circle,

Centerville, TN 37033

TEL (931)729-9911

FAX (931)729-9595

www.woodandstrings.net

**ENJOY THE MAGIC!**

**EVALUATION FORM**

**WOOD & STRINGS THEATRE** has an ongoing mission to enhance the educational process with our productions and workshops. To do so, it is vital we hear from you, the teachers and administrators. We would greatly appreciate your taking a moment to fill out this form, and send it on to us. Thank you!

School/Group City/State

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Name Grade Level

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Number in group Date of performance

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**AUDIENCE**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Did this performance sustain your students’ interest? | | | |  | | | **YES** |  | | | **NO** |
| 1. Was the material and length of the performance age appropriate? | | | |  | | | **YES** |  | | | **NO** |
| 1. Did the performance capture your interest? | | | |  | | | **YES** |  | | | **NO** |
| 1. Did the experience generate interest? Do the children want to learn more about this subject/art form? | | | |  | | | **YES** |  | | | **NO** |
| 1. Did the performance improve the children’s knowledge and/or perception of the subject/art form? | | | |  | | | **YES** |  | | | **NO** |
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| **STUDY GUIDE** | | | |  | | |  |  | | |  |
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| 1. Study Guides were sent to the coordinators of the event to pass on to you. Did you find them useful? | | | |  | | | **YES** |  | | | **NO** |
| 1. Did you have any activities sparked by the event and/or the study guide? 2. Was the length and coverage of the study guide adequate for use? | | | |  | | | **YES**  **YES** |  | | | **NO**  **NO** |
| 1. Did the study guide heighten your awareness of the subject/art form? | | | |  | | | **YES** |  | | | **NO** |
|  | | | |  | | |  |  | | |  |
| **PERFORMANCE** | | | |  | | |  |  | | |  |
|  | | | |  | | |  |  | | |  |
| 1. What performance did you see? | | **Out of the Mist**  **…a Dragon** | | | | **Ananse! Early in the Day** | | | | **Backwoods Ramblin’** | |
| 1. Please grade this performance overall. 2. Please grade the Informance that follows the performance. 3. Was there a charge to the students? 4. Was the charge appropriate for the program? | **POOR**  **POOR** | | **GOOD**  **GOOD** | | | **GREAT**  **GREAT**  **YES**  **YES** | | | **OUTSTANDING**  **OUTSTANDING**  **NO**  **NO** | | | |
| 1. Would you like to have this company perform with another production for your group in the near future? | | | |  |  | | **YES** | | | | **NO** |

COMMENTS:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_