

The Bluebird

An allegory presented by Fred Arnold's puppets

Based upon the 1911 Nobel Prize winning play by

Maurice Maeterlinck

Presented by Colleen Laliberte and Skwalking Heads Productions

Fred Arnold's adaptation of Maurice Maeterlinck's Nobel Prize winning play is magical and thought provoking. This beautifully crafted puppet theatre production presents an opportunity to introduce students to the literary work of Maurice Maeterlinck, to the Nobel Prize and the Alfred Nobel (the man behind the prize), and to experience puppetry as a synthesis of all of the arts. (Theatre, visual art, literature and music).

A brief synopsis of the play:

The story was written in 1908, originally in French, by Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck. The setting is an imaginary land where two children, Tytyl and his sister Mytyl, observe the festivities of the rich children's party, and ask their mother if Father Christmas will be coming. Their mother sings them a lullaby on Christmas Eve, telling them that their father, a poor woodcutter, has been so busy he has not had time to talk to Father Christmas this year. Undaunted the children get out of bed to watch the rich children's party. The fairy Berylune knocks at their door in the disguise of a poor beggar woman. She tells the children she must find the bluebird of happiness in order to cure her sick daughter. The children agree to help her, and she reveals herself as the magical fairy that she is, giving Tytyl a magic hat that allows him to see things "as they really are", and they set out on their adventure in search of the Bluebird of Happiness. The lamp in their room becomes their guide, "Light", and leads them through many lands on their search. They travel to the land of memory, to the land of the future, to the land of luxuries, to Mother Night's Castle, and we discover that the cat and Mother Night are trying to devise a plan to keep the children from finding the true bluebird of happiness, while the dog Tylo is a loyal and true "man's best friend".

Each of the characters in the story is symbolic of the universal search for meaning, and "happiness" in life, and students will be encouraged to discuss the characters, symbolism, and themes that emerge throughout the action of the play.

The lands the children travel to include:

- The land of memory, where they visit with their deceased grandparents, who tell them that they are always with them in their memory, but that they do not possess the bluebird.
- The land of luxuries, where they meet three gluttonous characters, who seem at first quite jolly, but then are revealed to be truly “ugly”.
- The land of the future, where the children meet Father Time, who chases them away as he is sending to earth the children who are waiting to be born.
- The land of Mother Night’s castle, (Mother Night guards the evil and dark things of the world : sicknesses, wars, ghosts)

(In addition they meet the “joys”, “Maternal Love”, and other characters, symbolic representations of universal human experiences.)

When the children manage to escape and make their way home again, they find themselves in their own beds, and decide to give the small sparrow they have caught to the sick little girl who is their neighbor.

They discover that the gift they offer selflessly to their friend is the real bluebird after all.

Following the performance:

Students have the opportunity to visit with the puppeteers and puppets, and will be engaged in a seminar style discussion concerning: (But not limited to)

- Who is Fred Arnold, artist, author and educator and designer of this production?
- Themes of the story “man’s search for happiness”
- Symbolism of the main characters in the story
- Were Tyltyl and Mytyl *changed* in the story? How?
- Who is Alfred Nobel?
- What is the Nobel Prize?
- This story was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1911. (100 years ago this year!) Does this story seem to you that it is 100 years old? Is it still relevant today? Why? (or why not?)
- Why do YOU think it was awarded this prize?
- Who are some other individuals who have won the Nobel Prize?

Concerning the production aspects:

- How is a puppet production different from live theatre?
- How is a puppet production the same as live theatre?
- How many different styles of puppets can you identify in this production?

Puppets are identified by the way they move:

1. Hand puppets: controlled by wearing them on your hand, like a mitten or glove
2. Rod puppets: controlled by sticks (rods) that are attached to parts of the puppet that move
3. Marionettes: puppets that are controlled by strings, usually from above the puppet
4. Body puppets: puppets that are worn, similar to wearing a costume, that may have hand controls for certain parts of the puppet.
5. Finger puppets: small puppets worn and controlled by your fingers of course!

Some of our puppets required more than one puppeteer to articulate them. Can you identify which ones were operated by more than one puppeteer?

Additional questions for discussion:

- How are production aspects of light and sound used to help tell the story?
- How did the scenic elements (the set) help the characters tell the story?
- Who provided the voices for the characters?
- What is a “soundtrack”?
- Why do puppeteers wear all black during their performances?

Additional follow up activities for your students in the classroom:

Pick a theme that can be used as the basis for a puppet play.

Create characters that can represent ideas such as:

- Freedom
- Justice
- Courage

Choose a story that you can adapt to a puppet production. Create “dialogue” and “narration”.

In addition we have directions for building some easy puppets and stages in your classroom!

