

LEARNING LINKS

Tall Stories: Room on the Broom

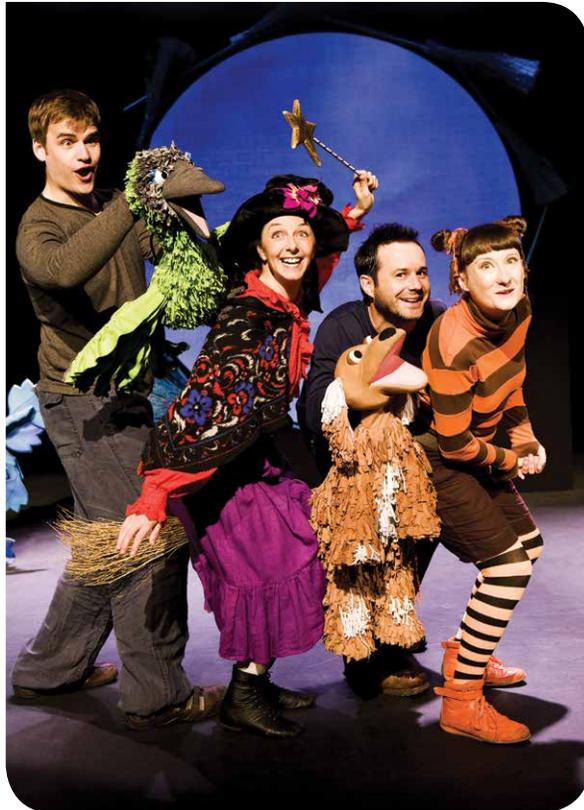
2015 > 2016

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



McCallum Theatre Institute
Field Trip Series

MONDAY
OCTOBER 26 2015
11 AM
TUESDAY
OCTOBER 27 2015
9:30 AM & 11:30 AM



PHOTOS: SIMON TURTLE

McCALLUM THEATRE INSTITUTE
PRESENTS

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“How the cat purred
and how the witch grinned,
as they sat on their broomstick
and flew through the wind.”

Opening line from *Room on the Broom*

Connecting to Curriculum and Students' Lives!

CULTURE & GEOGRAPHY • England

ARTS • Theater, children's literature, theater songs

THEMES • Inclusion, collaboration

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?



Imagine a witch. Oh, a friendly one, not one of those terrifying ladies out of Grimm or *The Wizard of Oz*! Dressed in black, to be sure, but who can take that floppy hat seriously – or the over-sized magenta flower that festoons it? No, this is no creature of one's nightmares, but a slightly befuddled, middle-aged witch out for an excursion on her broom. Alas, brooms being fashioned of wood and limited in their carrying capacities, this primitive conveyance comes to grief and thus springs up our musical tale. It all begins when an especially roguish wind whips up and snatches the witch's hats away and then in short order her bow and her wand! What's a witch without her wand? Wand-less, but not friendless! A big brown dog, a green shaggy bird, and a frog in huggable chartreuse velour and a simply enormous mouth (flies beware!) all bound to the rescue. Alas, five bodies (even stuffed ones) prove too much for the poor vehicle. Crack! It breaks in two and sends the friends tumbling. What do you suppose happens next? If you shouted out, "A hungry dragon appears!" we're going to guess you've read Julia Donaldson's well regarded children's classic *Room on the Broom*. We won't spoil the plot by revealing more than we already have, but will content ourselves with asking, "How much room on the broom is enough and who gets to ride on it?"

Fun stage sets in primary hues with a huge round moon in the dead center of the set hint at this work's storybook roots. The small, scrappy cast of players applies primary hues of vocal color and lively action to the task of animating characters both human and puppet. Simple songs with catchy lyrics (particularly fitting since Ms. Donaldson's original text is in verse) by Jon Fiber, Andy Shaw, and Robin Price round out the bill. So settle back and discover how the acting company Tall Stories brings a beloved story to theatrical life.



The Artists

Who has *produced* this text for study?



The London-based theater company Tall Stories has been around for well over a decade, delighting audiences with their breezy takes on works from the world of kid's literature. One of their earliest efforts, *The Happy Prince*, based on the children's story by Irish playwright Oscar Wilde, first emerged at the Fringe Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1997. Additionally, they've adapted *Alice in Wonderland*, *Rumpelstiltskin*, and *The Gruffalo*. This last one is another of Ms. Donaldson's opuses. Recently, they've begun to branch out into factually-based work such as *How the Giraffe Got Its Neck*. Well, it sounds a bit like a fable, doesn't it? It's actually based on the writings of Charles Darwin. There's a bit of beloved children's writer Rudyard Kipling (author of *The Jungle Book*) in this one, as well.

Tall Stories, who describe their brand as "physical story theater," have toured all over the world including Asia. Founded in 1997 by Olivia Jacobs and Toby Mitchell, Tall Stories is a non-profit organization. With an English degree from the University of London, Olivia Jacobs has directed many shows in the company's canon — among them today's offering, *Room On the Broom*. Trained at Cambridge, Toby Mitchell also directs many of the company's shows, including a German language edition of *The Gruffalo*. A former French teacher, he's keen on mounting the show in Paris, so spread the word!

Now, about author Julia Donaldson:

I grew up in a tall Victorian London house with my parents, grandmother, aunt, uncle, younger sister Mary and cat Geoffrey — who was really a prince in disguise. Mary and I would argue about which of us would marry him. Mary and I were always creating imaginary characters and mimicking real ones, and I used to write shows and choreograph ballets for us. A wind-up gramophone wafted out Chopin waltzes. I studied drama and French at Bristol University, where I met Malcolm, a guitar-playing medic to whom I'm now married. Before Malcolm and I had our three sons we used to go busking* together and I would write special songs for each country; the best one was in Italian about pasta. The busking led to a career in singing and songwriting, mainly for children's television. I became an expert at writing to order on such subjects as guinea pigs, window-cleaning and horrible smells. 'We want a song about throwing crumpled-up wrapping paper into the bin' was a typical request from the BBC."

Her breakout work was the ever popular *The Gruffalo*. She'd like you to know, however, that she has written a slew of other books, many of them with their own ardent band of adherents. In addition to writing, she also maintains a schedule of performing her own stories at book fairs and the like, and leads the madding throngs through her own lilting songs.

Finally, let's mention Axel Scheffler. Mr. Scheffler first took Ms. Donaldson's characters and gave them a visual fleshing-out. A very busy illustrator, he is fully half of the team behind the original book.

*playing music or otherwise performing for voluntary donations on the street or in subways.

Contexts

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



"Double, double toil and trouble; fire burn, and cauldron bubble."

Witches and magic have always been with us – in literature. Witness the quotation above, courtesy of Master Will – Shakespeare, that is. His three witches in the play *Macbeth* are among the most celebrated in all of literature, but they are by no means the only ones. For many years, the film version of L. Frank Baum's beloved classic *The Wizard of Oz* was a television staple. The MGM release featured the chilling Wicked Witch of the West, replete with skin the color of a lime and the deathless line, "I'll get you, my pretty, and your little dog, too." Beautiful – like her sister Glinda the Good Witch – she was not, but her antics, fueled by a desire for revenge and power, were largely what drove the drama. Speaking of beauty, the three weird sisters of *MacBeth* were no pin-ups either! We may wonder how it is that witches have come to be portrayed as almost unbelievably unattractive. Beyond the warts and unhealthy complexion, we may wonder, too, at the cauldron, the conical hat, the black robes and the broom – all comprising the standard-issue witches' paraphernalia. Was it always thus? Some of the earliest witches in literature are referred to as sorceresses. For example: Morgan Le Fay of Arthurian legend; Circe of whom we read in Homer's *Odyssey* that she turned men into beasts; and Medea who had a hand in Jason's securing the Golden Fleece. None of these, however, dressed in what has since come to be regarded as standard witch couture.

Images of witches during the Middle Ages featured conical hats without brims. There was nothing to distinguish these from those worn by men in the same trade, i.e. wizards. It's only when we come to the Victorian era that we discern the addition of wide brims to these cones in illustrations of that time period. Broomsticks, on the other hand, are associated with witches at a much earlier date. In the mid-1400s, a fellow by the name of Guillaume Edelin was tortured by the authorities into "confessing" a pact with the devil and riding around the skies of his native France on his broom. From this point on, brooms took an increasing role in the evil arts. As for the cauldron, well, the best guess is that this association stems from those three crones stooped over their stew of "Eye of newt, and toe of frog, wool of bat, and tongue of dog, adder's fork, and blind-worm's sting, lizard's leg, and howlet's wing" on the wind-whipped moors of Scotland.

"Most children love acting.
It's a tremendous way to improve their reading."

Julia Donaldson

Beyond these early prototypes, we might just mention the Grimm Brothers' tale Hansel and Gretel, in which the denizen of a certain Gingerbread House ("Nibble, nibble, little mousekin; who is nibbling at my housekin?") attempts to bake those two youngsters in her oven. And then we all recall, as well, that beautiful but insecure queen in Disney's *Snow White* who presents herself as a witch with an apple. More recent additions to the sisterhood include the quite benign Samantha in the 60s sitcom *Bewitched* – and *Sabrina the Teen-aged Witch*.

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

- *Room On the Broom*
- Julia Donaldson
- Children's literature — especially works written in verse
- Children's theater
- Archetypes in children's literature, especially witches and dragons

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 *Tall Stories* use humor, music, and characterization to theatricalize a children's story?

Begin with a story in which fantasy characters (witches, dragons, etc.) figure.

Question: Which characters seem like they come from fantasy? What makes this so? How would you describe one of the fantasy characters? What is his/her basic nature? How does he/she behave? In which other stories have you encountered this kind of character? In those instances, was the basic nature and behavior different from this character's? Can there be more than one kind of witch or more than one kind of dragon?

Pairs: Choose a character from the story. Decide on three different ways you could play it. (For example: a witch could be gentle and kind; angry and scary; or sly and sneaky) Excerpt a line this character says and try delivering it aloud in three different ways, based on your three interpretations of the character. Keep in mind that, for the purpose of this exploration, these interpretations can be quite different from what seems to be the author's intent.

Volunteer pair shares: What do we notice about the "voices" used? How is each of the three versions different? What does each of these three versions reveal about the character? Which choice fits your particular take on the character – and why?

Teach: Here is how playwrights organize their words on the page. What do we notice about this organization? Each student gets a sheet similar to the sample on the next page:

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

DORA

Pick your poison.

(WADE saddles up to a stool at the counter a few down from her. She pushes the menu towards him. He glances at it.)

WADE

Can I get a grape pop? And fries.

DORA

Sure.

(DORA rings the order bell at the pass-through behind her.)

Order up! French fries.

(She turns back to WADE.)

Zat it?

Small groups: Each group gets a different part of the story. Together, its members craft a version of that part of the story rewritten along the lines of the hand-out – for presentation on stage.

Each group's finished scene gets passed to another group for reading.

Question: What do we discover in the other group's scene? Which words stand out? What adaptations have they made?

Language Arts: Each student writes a paragraph. What are some ideas you have about performing the scene your group has written today?



After coming to the theater, students could research these:

- Music theater
- Physical theater
- Animal movement
- Tall Stories



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

Group: Discuss how Tall Stories used their voices & movement.

Question: Which of the things Tall Stories did might be useful in acting out our own scenes?

Small groups: Act out your written scene from last time, choosing who will play what. How can you make exciting choices in the use of your voice and movement?

Teach: The role that stories play in various cultures.

**"I really enjoy writing verse,
even though it can be fiendishly difficult."**

Julia Donaldson



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?

- How were the roles divided up?
- What did you notice about how the puppets were manipulated?
- How was music used to advance the story?
- Which songs seemed to propel the action and which ones slowed things down and allowed for reflection?
- How would you describe the sets and their use?
- What role did color play?
- How did the actors use their voices to convey character?
- If this was an example of ensemble playing, which aspects made it so?
- What can you say about pace & tempo in this work?
- Which moments were funniest to you – and why?
- Which elements surprised you?

Internet

Author Julia Donaldson

www.juliadonaldson.co.uk

Julia Donaldson in a clip from Seoul, Korea

www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIGx0-ldqcg

Tall Stories homepage

<http://tallstories.org.uk/>

A short history of children's theatre in the United States

<http://faculty-web.at.northwestern.edu/theater/tya/history.html>

Physical theatre

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Physical_theatre

Vandergriff's children's literature page

<http://comminfo.rutgers.edu/professional-development/childlit/ChildrenLit/>

The joy of children's literature

http://college.cengage.com/education/johnson/joy_of_literature/1e/prepare/lwr1.html

Books

Room on the Broom

By: Julia Donaldson

Paperback: 16 pages

Publisher: MacMillan UK (October 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0230708609

Room on the Broom And Other Songs

By: Julia Donaldson

Hardcover: 32 pages

Publisher: Macmillan Children's Books

(December 1, 2006)

ISBN-10: 1405053666

ISBN-13: 978-1405053662

This volume includes nine of her best-loved songs and each score includes piano accompaniment and guitar chords.

"I used to memorize poems as a child, and it means a lot to me when parents tell me their child can recite one of my books."

Julia Donaldson

Books

On Stage: Theater Games and Activities for Kids

By: Lisa Bany-Winters

Reading level: Ages 9-12

Paperback: 171 pages

Publisher: Chicago Review Press (November 1, 1997)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1556523246

Bany-Winters, who has taught children's theater, has compiled a varied and interesting assortment of theater games that will stimulate the imagination and get young thespians ready to perform on stage.

Kids Take the Stage: Helping Young People Discover the Creative Outlet of Theater

By: Lenka Peterson, Dan O'Connor

Paperback: 208 pages

Publisher: Back Stage Books (May 1, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0823077462

An indispensable guide to getting young people on stage and helping them create their own shows.

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