

STUDY GUIDE

'The Snow Dragon is Tall Stories at its finest' *The List*

**'If you are a kid, if you have kids, if you ever were a kid,
go and see *The Snow Dragon*' *Three Weeks***

**'Tall Stories sets the benchmark for children's theatre'
*Sunday Times***

**'Tall Stories cannot be commended enough for their spot-on
achievements' *The Scotsman* on *The Gruffalo***

**'Imaginative and beautifully crafted'
The List on *Mum and the Monster***

**'An engrossing, irreverently funny, melodic and
exceptionally well-acted pleasure'
New York Times on *Snow White***

**'A fantastic show by the amazing Tall Stories company'
Evening News on *Something Else***

Notes for Teachers

Tall Stories

Tall Stories Theatre Company is a not-for-profit organisation presenting old, new and timeless stories in fresh and exciting ways, always acknowledging the presence of the audience. We aim to create a lively theatrical experience, accessible to all. We tell stories in a physical, visual style and our performances link original music with movement and a lot of laughs. The company was founded in 1996 by directors Olivia Jacobs and Toby Mitchell.

- Current projects include: **The Snow Dragon** (North America tour and Xmas runs at Norden Farm Maidenhead and MacRobert Arts in Stirling), **Them with Tails** (UK tour, ages 5-8, until Dec 2006), **The Gruffalo's Child** (UK tour 2006 and Xmas runs at Gardner Arts in Brighton and Warwick Arts Centre), and **The Gruffalo** (touring UK 2006)
- Future projects include: **Cat And No Mouse** (for ages 4+, UK tour 2006-7) and **Night Train to the Milky Way** (age 5+)
- For more information, please contact us at the above address.

The Book

The Snow Dragon is based on an original story by Toby Mitchell. With his initial story in hand, Toby worked with six actors, a composer, a designer, a lighting designer and a puppeteer to develop the story and the characters that are now in the show. Very often, companies adapt classic or modern stories for the stage, but in this case, Tall Stories worked the other way round. Once we had developed the initial ideas in the rehearsal room, we created a book to accompany the stage show.

The Story and Themes

Billy is *the* kid. He has everything a young goat could need – and more besides. When New Year's Eve approaches, Billy's parents tell him about the legendary Snow Dragon, who will bring him even more goodies. All he has to do is to collect berries to leave out for the Snow Dragon when he visits.

On his way to collect berries, Billy bumps into his friends Spike the hedgehog (who is collecting mushrooms for the Snow Unicorn) and Rosie the piglet (who is collecting acorns for the Snow Goblin). Billy is almost certain that it's actually the Snow Dragon who visits, and that he likes berries – but he's not taking any chances where presents are concerned and so 'borrows' the mushrooms and acorns from his friends.

But Billy is spending too much time in the woods and it's getting dark. *There are wolves in the darkness, and every kid has to start growing up one day...*

The show is an adventure story, following the progress of naughty protagonist Billy on a New Year's adventure. The show examines a Santa Claus-type myth in a non culture-specific (and non season-specific) way, whilst asking the underlying question: is it more important to pay lip service to mythology and rituals or to behave well towards others?

Theatrical Style

The production combines Tall Stories' unique physical storytelling style with new songs, humour and a touch of magic. In addition, puppetry is used to depict the legendary Snow Dragon. Two narrators in the form of wolves lead us through the tale – and Billy also talks directly to the audience.

Follow-up activities (3-5 year olds)

This production of *The Snow Dragon* uses a variety of physical theatre techniques to create lots of different characters with three actors and a minimal set.

The following ideas aim to encourage children to think imaginatively about the story that they have seen.

Monster Pics

'The fire-breathing, wing-flapping, high-flying Snow Dragon...'

In *The Snow Dragon*, Billy imagines the Snow Dragon his parents told him about, Spike describes the Snow Unicorn and Rosie tells us about the Snow Goblin. Ask the children to draw pictures of their own invented monsters (with labels if applicable).

Sounds Good

Using the pictures that the children have created, ask the class to create a monster noise for each picture. Can they create very different sounds or do all monsters sound the same?

Do the same for other characters in the story – what noises do wolves and pigs and goats make? Do hedgehogs make any noise?

In the play, the characters each have vocal traits – Spike is quite precise with his language and Rosie has a non-urban accent. Billy's mum and dad also have specific accents depending on their upbringing and where they are from. Take this exercise one step further – if animals could speak English, how would they talk?

Where did you get that hat?

In the play, the animals are suggested by different costumes, Spike wears a bobble hat, glasses and a tank top, Rosie a very dirty pink dress and the wolves are suggested with capes. To simplify this, ask the children what kind of hats specific animals would wear. Can they make them out of card and felt tip pens?

Follow-up activities (5-7 year olds)

This production of *The Snow Dragon* uses a variety of theatre techniques to create lots of different characters with three actors and a minimal set. The following ideas aim to encourage children to think imaginatively about the story. The exercises are very similar to the ones we use when creating a show!

Thinking in pictures

To get things moving, split the students into two groups and, as a team game, give them a variety of 'situations' that they have to portray in a 'photograph'. The teams have 5 seconds to create each picture and the best picture wins a point. Sample situations are: climbing, swimming, tea party, space, the zoo.

Picturing the story

Split the students into groups of between 3 and 5. Print out several nursery rhymes (e.g. Jack and Jill, Humpty Dumpty, etc.), put them in a hat and ask each group to pick one. They need to make 4 or 5 still pictures (as before) which will show their story. Encourage them to find interesting and visually pleasing ways to move from one picture to another. Then each group can perform their rhyme whilst the other groups see if they can guess the nursery rhyme. This exercise allows students to think about how to create a 'story' visually, on the stage.

Telling tales

We created the story of *The Snow Dragon* from an idea that one person had begun to form. Sometimes, we use an existing story as our starting point – but sometimes we start with nothing. Try coming up with your own story to act out. Going round the class ask each student to tell one word of a story. For example:

Student 1: **There**
Student 4: **big**
Student 7: **who**
Student 10: **buy**

Student 2: **was**
Student 5: **green**
Student 8: **went**
Student 11: **a hundred**

Student 3: **a**
Student 6: **giant**
Student 9: **to**
Student 12: **sausages...**

... and so on. Once everyone has added a word, split the class into groups of five or six and tell them that they have five minutes to show the other group their version of the story. See what they come up with! It will be interesting to see how different their renditions of the same story may be.

This time, they can use sound and words in their story.

Looking good

We may be able to get our story across, but how believable are the characters we have created. How can we make a character come alive on stage? How do you determine the way that a character stands, moves and speaks? Ask two students (A and B) to stand in front of the class. Ask a third and fourth student to manipulate their arms and legs and faces, moving them from a neutral position into a character. Perhaps these characters stoop, or lean back, or have their head held high. Ask Student A and B to try to create a voice to match their new positions. Would the character have a squeaky or a low voice? How fast or slow would they speak? Do they have an accent? Try different things. Does a big character need a big voice? What happens if you give a small character a booming voice? Ask the rest of the class to vote on which voice best matches the character.

Using this idea, ask the students to work in pairs to create two characters from pre-prepared character names. Students can create characters based on animals (Mr Hippo, Ms Snail, Mr Rat...) or create from emotions (Ms Cool, Miss Miserable, Terrified Tom etc). Encourage the students to try to use more than their faces to create the character, thinking about how heavy they are, how fast they can move, how straight/bent their legs are, etc. Allow the students to create their own characters in this way and then introduce them to the group.

Whose story is it anyway?

Taking the story of *The Snow Dragon* (or perhaps another pre-selected tale) discuss what happens if you tell a story from different points of view. For example – what would the story be like if told from the point of view of Spike the hedgehog? Or from the Snow Dragon's point of view? Ask different students

to tell the story using the first person from different perspectives. Do all the characters have the same version? Are there things that a particular character doesn't know?

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