

BOXTALES

Leyendas de Duende

Art Form: Theatre

Style: contemporary

Culture: Mexican and Puerto Rican

MEET THE ARTIST:

Boxtales is a storytelling theatre company which uses masks, movement, storytelling and live music to present myths and folklore from around the world. Performers Matt Tavianini, David Guerra and Michael Andrews combine their diverse talents to create a professional, high energy, interactive theatrical experience for young audiences. The Spanish term *Duende*, like art itself, has faces that are both appealing and dangerous. The Spanish poet, Federico Garcia Lorca, says, " *These dark sounds are the mystery, the roots thrusting into the fertile loam known to all of us, ignored by all of us, but from which we get what is real in art...*" The Boxtales philosophy is that *Duende* is there to challenge us to keep our ears open to the 'dark sounds,' to keep our touch with the earth and with the ghosts of those who have come before, to never refuse the struggle which is needed to keep the spirits working on the side of truth.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

- This production, directed by renowned Mexican theatre artist Sigfrido Aguilar, explores the rich indigenous and Hispanic folklore and mythology of Latin America. The stories include *La Calavera*, from Mexico, and *Paco and the Witch*, from Puerto Rico. The program also includes an Afro/Cuban rhythmic composition and song, sung during ceremonies of *Santeria*. Masks, designed by Ann Chevrefils, are worn by the actors to enhance the qualities and expressions of the characters they portray. The production, created in Guanajuato, Mexico, is performed in both English and Spanish.



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

Myths help us better understand the values and references of a specific culture. These stories, found in civilizations throughout the world, have been passed from one generation to the next through the oral tradition. Many are older than the art of theatre and have themes that are universal.

Summary of the featured stories:

***La Calavera* - Mexican folk tale**

This wonderfully scary ghost story from Mexico is a classically eclectic mix of themes, motifs and characters from Spanish and indigenous traditions. In keeping with the *Dia de los Muertos** celebrations, this story follows a young healer who tries to outsmart his godmother - Death. Death gives him great healing power, but always lets him know who's boss. The moral of the story is that one should never try to fool Death because Death will eventually get the upper hand. Some very interesting characters, including God and El Diablo, cross paths with the healer's father as he tries to choose a god-parent for his young son. The three choices include: *Tezcatlipoca* - the Aztec god of night, all material things, lord of the world and natural forces; *Coatlicue* - the Aztec goddess of earth and fire, mother of the gods and of the stars in the southern sky; and *Chaac* - the Mayan god of rain who is associated with creation and life.

***Paco and the Witch* - Puerto Rican folk tale**

Paco is a good boy who likes to help his mom; however, when he goes to town to run an errand for her, he has to pass through the dark forest where a *bruja* (witch) is waiting to snatch him. He is taken prisoner, but is helped by some talking animals who betray the witch and set Paco free.

*A traditional Mexican celebration, held on November 1-2, when the dead are remembered.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- If you were to describe the story of *La Calavera* or *Paco and the Witch* in two or three sentences, what would you say?
- Who are the characters who helped the lead character in *Paco and the Witch*? How did each help? What might have happened without their support?
- If you had 15 minutes to spend with one of the characters in either of the stories, which character would you choose? Why? What would you talk about?
- Name one of the stories and then name the character you identified with most. State why. What character did you find the scariest? Why?
- What were some of the obstacles that Paco faced on his journey?
- Can you identify any lessons being taught or learned in *La Calavera*? Discuss what you thought was important.
- Discuss *Dia de los Muertos* and its traditional meaning. Ask if any students celebrate this important holiday; if so, share family traditions.

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - SOCIAL STUDIES:

A Message in a Bottle Project: Students will write a tale about an imaginary adventure that leaves them stranded on an island off the coast of Mexico, South America or the Caribbean. Students can work alone, in pairs or small groups. Direct them as you do for creative writing assignments, incorporating research.

What you Need:

- Maps of Mexico, Central and South America
- Plastic bottles with caps (one per story)
- A basin or glass tank of water or basket/box.

Write the Story:

- Study the maps; then select a starting place and destination. Locate an island where they will be stranded. Using place names, create a journey map.
- Decide who they are, the type of transportation they use and the events that lead to being stranded. Describe the island in terms of size, weather, plants, animals, etc. Make a map of the location; draw the island. Write the story.
- **Share:** All tales will be placed in bottles; then place bottles in the water or basket. Different students select a bottle, other than their own, and read the tale. Discuss the story. Design a rescue plan.

Legend:

- Artistic Perception
- Creative Expression
- Historical & Cultural Context
- Aesthetic Valuing
- Connections, Relationships,

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

• Review the key elements of a story, *Who? What? Where? When? and How?*. Select one of the stories from the performance and answer each of the above questions. Did this process help you better comprehend the story and its meaning? If so, explain how or why. What new understanding did you gain?

• In order to fully enjoy a story, a person must be able to imagine the characters, places, time period and actions. The better the imagination, the more vibrant and interesting the story. Here is an exercise to sharpen your ability to see the details of specific images. Using this description of the Puerto Rican parrot, draw your impression: *The parrot is a large, bright green bird with a red forehead, blue primary wing feathers, and flesh-colored bill and feet. It feeds on wild fruits, flowers and tender shoots.*

• Most cultural stories were passed on orally. As they were told over and over, sometimes they also changed in different ways. Although many of these stories are now written down, students can learn to tell one of these stories in the oral tradition. It is also all right to add a few new ideas in the telling. Divide students into storytelling teams. Using books or the internet, have students research stories and then select one to learn and tell. The story should say something important about the culture from which it comes. Students should think of the beginning, middle and end, as well as the key characters, main problem, resolution and sequence.

• Write the title of each story on the board with two large, overlapping circles (Venn Diagram). Ask the class to compare and contrast each one. Write the things unique to each in the open part of each circle and the similarities in the overlapping space. Discuss these.

• In the story, *La Calavera*, there are symbols that represent ideas or objects. For example, when *La Calavera* appeared at the foot of a sick person's bed, it meant that the person would get better. At the end of the story, the candles in the cave represent people's lives. Working in pairs, select three ideas from the story and select an object, symbol or person as a representation for each one. Give your reasons. Share with class

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- *La Calavera - Theatre of the Imagination, Vol. I*, by Clarissa Pinkola Estes. Sounds True; ISBN: 1564553515. December 1995. Audio cassette.
- *Paco and the Witch: A Puerto Rican Folktale* by Feliz Pitre, Lodestar Books. 1995.
- *Latin American Folk Tales* by John Bierhorst. Pantheon Books. 2002.