

CARL WEINTRAUB

Breadcrumbs Along the Trail

Art Form: Storytelling

Style: Contemporary

Culture: Multicultural

MEET THE ARTIST:

Carl Weintraub is well-known in the storytelling community as founder of the popular troupe We Tell Stories. This talented artist works as a producer, director, writer and actor, but thinks of himself first, in his own words, as "a father and storyteller." He has amassed a fascinating library of rare and antique children's books of folk tales, fables and fantasies from all over the world. His love of the art led him to perform several storytelling concerts for adult audiences. Later he developed this program of stories for young audiences. A charismatic and versatile performer, Carl's stage credits include the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego, the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, and many starring roles in prime-time television series and movies. He was one of the first artists to receive the prestigious Professional Artist in the Schools (PASA) Lifetime Achievement Award.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

In *Breadcrumbs Along the Trail*, Carl Weintraub chooses from his vast repertoire of fables, Russian folk tales, fairy tales, personal stories and theatre games to entertain and enlighten his audience. In some ways, stories are like breadcrumbs scattered along the paths we choose in life, and along the roads we accidentally stumble upon. Breadcrumbs are there to help us find our way -- our way home, and our way to new, unknown destinations. Stories, like breadcrumbs, are made up of grains: grains of ideas, words, wisdom and insight. We know men, women, cultures and societies by the bread they bake, the paths they walk, the stories they tell. Audiences will find kernels of knowledge, inspiration and nourishment as they listen to some of Carl Weintraub's favorite stories -- tales which have shaped his character and guided him along life's journey.



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

The storyteller of today is a link in the long chain of storytellers that stretches back to the past and into the future. Before the days of writing, when the spoken word was the only means of communication, stories were an essential and enjoyable part of life. Without written records, the history and laws of a people had to be remembered and passed on orally, often in the form of stories. From the early days, storytelling has had an importance and value for everyone in the community.

Stories can serve a variety of different purposes, including oral histories, entertainment, education and enlightenment. Two common types of stories in the early days of storytelling were the "Warning Example" and the "Embroidered Exploit." "Warning Example" stories used examples of dangerous or inappropriate behavior to show children and other members of a community how to stay safe or follow established rules. The "Embroidered Exploit" told of an actual event, such as a hunter's encounter with a wild animal, that became more and more exaggerated each time it was retold. The beast became wilder and more dangerous; the hunter grew more courageous. Stories also developed as a means of explaining natural events such as thunder and lightning, earthquakes or floods, phases of the moon and changing seasons. The stories often involved supernatural beings that people invented to explain how the world functioned, and even how life and their world was created.

In the beginning, everyone told stories, but eventually there was one person in each tribe whose knowledge, skill and talent raised him above all others. Whether a *griot* (Africa), a *Scald* (Scandinavia), a *Bard* (Wales), a *Seanachie* (Ireland), a *Gleeman* or *minstrel* (England), the storyteller dedicated his life to remembering and retelling the stories of his people.

The onset of the Industrial Revolution altered our style of living. The widespread use of newspapers and books diminished the need for storytelling. But the joy of hearing a story, especially if the experience is shared with others, will never disappear. Stories teach us, entertain us and enlighten us in a way that never fails to amuse and amaze.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What do you think the title *Breadcrumbs Along the Trail* means? Can you name some stories you know that taught you something or changed you in some way?
- Which story from the performance did you like best? Why?
- What countries, cities, towns or countryside were the settings for the stories? Can you locate them on a map, atlas or globe?
- On a world map, locate the homeland of your ancestors. Place pins or flags to mark the various locales. Can you share any stories that come from your home or ancestral country?
- What did you learn from the stories today? Is there any information you feel you would like to pass on to someone else by telling the story? Cite specific examples.



FRAMEWORK FOCUS - LITERATURE:

Introduce students to the idea that poetry can tell a story. Read some "story" poems as a class. Suggestions for primary grades include: Nursery Rhymes, "The Nonsense Alphabet" by Edward Lear, the "Brownie Year Book" or the poems of A.A. Milne. Upper elementary could try "The Walrus and the Carpenter" by Lewis Carroll, "The Village Blacksmith" or "Paul Revere's Ride" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Duel" by Eugene Field, "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" by Robert Browning or the poems of Robert Lewis Stevenson.

Read the selected story poem as a class and discuss how the use of rhyming words altered the story. Imagine the story told in a narrative style. How would it change?

Ask students to create their own story using rhyme. Begin with a simple opening line, such as:

"Once upon a time there was a boy named _____, who tried to _____"

Decide on a rhyme scheme to use: AAAA, ABAB, ABABCC, etc. Make up additional lines to finish the verse. Recite the story poem as a class.

Legend:

- 🌀 Artistic perception
- ❖ Creative expression
- ▶ Historical & cultural context
- 👁️ Aesthetic valuing
- * Connections, Relations, Applications

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- 🌀 Tell a favorite story that you heard around your dinner table or at a family event. To make it fun, pretend to be the family member or friend who told the story, and try to use their gestures, vocal pitch and phrasing. Allow the class to try and guess something about the storyteller, such as age, relationship, etc.
 - ❖ Collect pictures of scenic beauty and urban and rural settings without people in them. Travel magazines and nature magazines are good sources, as well as picture postcards. Divide the class into small groups and let each group choose a picture to work from. Ask the group to devise a story specific to the picture they have chosen. Give each group 30 minutes to plan and rehearse their stories and then share them.
 - ❖ Divide the class into small groups and give each group three unrelated words to incorporate as an integral part of an original scene. Give the groups 30 minutes to plan the scene, assign the roles, rehearse the story and improvise dialogue and action. Suggestions for word combinations include:
 - toothbrush - horse - earring
 - hair clip - telephone - hammer
 - balloon - paintbrush - door knob
 - candle - compass - deck of cards
 - toaster - teddy bear - baked potato
- ▶ Have students select and read a story from a culture different from their own. Does the story remind them of any tales told in their own culture? Using the board, chart the differences and similarities in the stories, watching for universal themes or values.
- 👁️ Have students evaluate the performance of *Breadcrumbs Along the Trail* by writing a paragraph describing what they liked about the performance, the stories and the lessons given to the audience, the way the actor used his voice and body, etc. Then ask them to include a sentence that tells what they would add or change in the performance.
- * Discuss how the lessons conveyed in the stories connect to students' lives. Discuss moments in the stories that seemed familiar or taught something to the students. Divide into groups to role-play selected scenarios.

BIBLIOGRAPHY/WEBLINKS:

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