

MICHAEL "BADHAIR" WILLIAMS

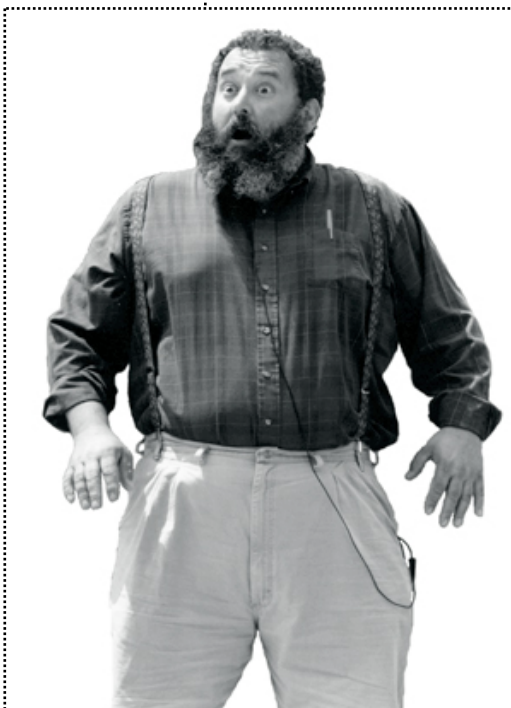
Art Form: Storytelling
Style: Traditional
Culture: Appalachian

MEET THE ARTIST:

Though children take to storytelling like Jack takes to the beanstalk, **Michael "Badhair" Williams** reminds us that storytelling is an adult tradition passed down from one generation to the next through long sessions around the kitchen table and front porch rocker. Born in the heart of Appalachia in the mountains of North Carolina, Michael is a consummate artist who has been delighting audiences for three decades. From Los Angeles to rural Appalachia, in schools and festivals across the country and museums such as the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., Badhair enchants audiences with tales that once entertained his grandparents. In continuing the tradition of the storyteller, he shares with his audiences the richness of Appalachian culture and a passion and deep appreciation for his roots, often compelling others to explore their own cultural heritage.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

The internet, television and rock videos may have pushed the tradition of storytelling into a dark, cobwebbed corner, but Michael "Badhair" Williams' vivid storytelling sweeps it out again into the light of day. In this engaging show, Badhair performs a medley of Appalachian folk tales and songs from the tradition of the "Jack and the Beanstalk" stories. Nourished by an oral tradition as old as the mountains of his home, Michael "Badhair" Williams' retelling of these tales and songs transports his audience to the heart of Appalachia. Listeners hear about the daily lives of people of that region, and about the intermingling of African, English, Irish, Native American, Scottish and Welsh cultures that comprise their heritage. Just as stories vary with each telling, so do these dynamic performances, which are geared for the age of the audience.



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

Telling stories and listening to them is one of the oldest forms of art and entertainment. Stories can make us laugh, cry and dream; they can also teach us how to cope with life's difficulties, using ingenuity, humor and wisdom. Storytelling is an oral tradition found in cultures all over the world; it teaches us to share and understand the human experience. Film, television, video and the internet have to a large part taken over the role of transmitting our stories; but there is nothing quite like the immediacy of live storytelling, where there is dynamic interaction between the teller and listener.

Appalachia is a region that extends through the core of 13 states from south central New York southward to Alabama. The region contains many large urban centers but is known more for its beautiful, rugged mountains, rich natural resources and rural populations. The central Appalachian area is a melting pot of cultures, first settled by Native Americans, especially the Cherokee, and later the English, Irish, Welsh, Scottish and Africans, the latter originally brought to this country as slaves. These cultures and their traditions mixed together in day-to-day life and as they did, the folk tales and folk ways they brought with them also meshed.

The Jack Tales told at kitchen tables in the heart of Appalachia are similar in essence to the Jack Tales told hundreds of years ago in the British Isles. Brought here by early British settlers and centered around the adventures of a young boy, Jack's stories were sometimes magical, funny and insightful. The tales, popular with children and adults, varied in content depending on who was telling and listening to them. Some folklorists believe that the themes of the Jack Tales may date as far back as the first century A.D., illustrating the resiliency and power of the oral tradition.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Which story or song did you enjoy the most? Why?
- What did you think or feel as you listened to the stories and songs?
- After hearing some of the Jack Tales, what kinds of conclusions can you draw about Jack?
- Do you see a recurring theme in "Badhair's" stories? If so, what is it?
- Did the stories "Badhair" told provide any lessons that would help you make good choices in your life?
- Are there specific songs or stories that are sung or told in your family? Share one of these stories or songs.

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - LANGUAGE ARTS:

The origins of storytelling are ancient, and the tradition of passing down stories orally from one generation to the next is common to most, if not all, of the world's cultures. Have your students engage in this rich tradition by participating in a class storytelling session.

Divide students into storytelling groups of 4-6 students. Have each group select a story from a specific culture. Challenge students to select a story that tells the origin of a custom, the reporting of an event, or an explanation about the physical world. Have the groups organize their stories so that each student tells a part. Encourage students to be creative by adding music or simple instruments, costumes or movement. Have students practice and then perform for their peers. After the stories have been told, have students discuss the following:

1. Do the stories have any similarities?
2. Did any of the stories have lessons or morals to teach?

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

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- ❖ Hold a Round Robin storytelling session in your class. The teacher begins the story, and each student adds a few sentences. Set the following rules: First, use only proper names instead of pronouns. This discourages confusion about whom the storyteller is speaking. Second, the story must be told in a logical sequence. Third, the story should have a beginning, middle and end.
- 🌀 Have students simultaneously practice saying this sentence (or another of your choosing): "Once upon a time there was a boy and his goat." Repeat the sentence using different emotions. To reflect the emotions, have students use the expressive tools of the storyteller -- their face, hands, body and voice.
- ▶ Appalachian dialects can be traced back to the British Isles and Africa. Colloquialisms include "gully washer" (hard rain); "cuttin' up" (acting foolish); "lollygag" (to loaf or go slow); "skittish" (jumpy, nervous); and "vittles" (food). What special terms or slang are used in popular culture today? Discuss why people use slang.
- * Locate the Appalachian region on a map. Then pinpoint each student's geographical heritage. Briefly discuss the different regions represented by the class.



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