

WE TELL STORIES

Let Them Eat Books

Art Form: Theatre
Style: Contemporary
Culture: Multicultural

MEET THE ARTIST:

We Tell Stories is a multi-ethnic storytelling troupe founded by Artistic Director *Carl Weintraub*. The company has a threefold purpose: to entertain and educate children through the literature, folklore, and mythology of all times and cultures; to expose them to the processes of language and acting as art forms; and to inspire them to plumb the depths and reach the heights of their own creativity. To this end, the group diligently seeks fresh material and performs it with an extemporaneous flavor, encouraging children to participate from their seats, in their minds, and on the stage. In this way, the children see themselves as an integral part of the process, not only witnessing, but also experiencing the stories' morals, the art, and the fun. An old trunk filled with props and costumes is the solitary set, and it is the group's hope that the audiences go away saying to themselves, "I could do that!"

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

Let Them Eat Books celebrates the language and ideas of great poets and storytellers. The authors and literature featured in the performance include: A.A. Milne, "The King's Breakfast"; Lewis Carroll, "Jabberwocky"; Mark Twain, "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County"; Carl Sandburg, "The Two Skyscrapers Who Decided to Have a Child"; J.R.R. Tolkien, "The Story Troll"; and e.e. cummings, "The Old Man Who Said, "Why"? One poem and two stories comprise a typical program. A trio of actors and the company's signature trunk create the magic, encouraging students to read the books by the author represented in the performance.



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

Let Them Eat Books uses a storytelling format to present literature to children. The purposes and values of storytelling are many.

- ✓ Telling a story is a gift - a shared experience that should bring people closer together.
- ✓ Storytelling introduces books and hopefully motivates the audience to read and explore literature.
- ✓ Storytelling can help teach language skills.
- ✓ Through storytelling, the audience can gain insight into motives and patterns of human behavior.
- ✓ Storytelling is a way to keep cultural heritage alive.
- ✓ Hearing stories gives the listeners practice in visualization, the basis of creative imagination.
- ✓ Storytelling brings dramatic joy to the teller and the listener alike.

Characteristics of a good story are:

- a single theme, clearly defined
- a well-developed plot
- style (vivid word pictures, pleasing sounds, rhythm)
- believable characterizations
- faithfulness to source material
- dramatic appeal
- appropriateness for the listener.

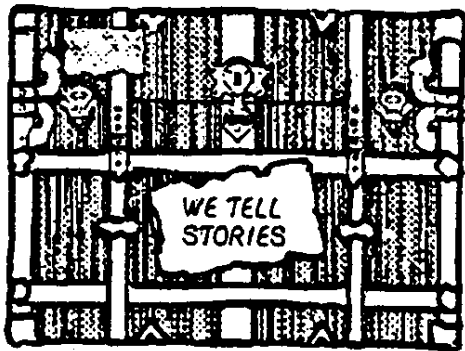
A good story for telling is one that, like a good book, has something to say and says it in the best possible way.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Which story or poem from the performance did you like the best? Why?
- What countries, cities, towns, or countryside were the settings for the stories?
- Did you notice anything unique about the language of the stories?
- How did the actors use costumes or props in creative and imaginative ways?
- Would you like to hear or read more books by the authors represented in *Let Them Eat Books*?

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - LANGUAGE ARTS:

Put a theatrical twist on the traditional book report assignment. Ask students to each select a favorite book for an oral book report. Then ask them to choose a character from the story and present the book report from that character's point of view. Costumes (hats, scarves, coats, vests, jewelry) and makeup can help them make their transformations. Simple props can also be created from household objects (mops, cardboard boxes, yarn, packing peanuts and baskets, etc.) to help them convey the actions or plots of their stories. Students may also wish to add "story sounds," using whistles, clanging pots and pans, wood blocks or bells. Your class' cast of characters will represent a treasury of children's literature and make the books come alive!



Legend:

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

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- ☉ Tell a homespun tale based on the oral tradition. Interview a family member about a personal history story on subjects like: courtship, weddings, travels, holiday celebrations, etc.
- ❖ Reciting poetry out loud as a group is a fun way to experience the joy of poetry. It can also be confidence building for children who are reluctant to read out loud alone, but feel comfortable in a collective situation. There are many ways to practice choral reading:

1. Select a poem and divide it into different parts. Assign the parts to groups within the class. The poem can be orchestrated as solos, small groups, and in unison. Authors whose poems work well for choral reading: A.A. Milne, Shel Silverstein and Dr. Seuss.

2. Divide the class into two, three or four groups for doing rounds. Give each group a poetic phrase or musical jingle. Introduce signals for START, STOP, LOUD, and SOFT. Conduct the class like an orchestra. Perform their "poetry symphony" for another class.

- ❖ 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, and rehearse the story improvising dialogue and action. Suggestions for word combinations:

toothbrush - horse - earring
paper clip - telephone - baked potato
balloon - paintbrush - door knob
candle - compass - deck of cards
toaster - teddy bear - hammer

- ▶ Have students read a fairytale or folktale from a culture of their ancestry. Share the story with the class using any language or custom unique to the story's heritage.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Martignoni, Margaret E. *The Illustrated Treasury of Children's Literature*. Grossett and Dunlap Publishers, New York, NY: 1955.

Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theatre*. Northwestern University Press, Evanston, IL: 1963.