Das Puppenspiel  Puppet Theater Inc.

Study Guide for Teachers

Through The Looking Glass
**Purpose**

The purpose of this guide is to help familiarize students with the story, concepts, and types of puppetry they will be seeing on the day of Das Puppenspiel's performance. It may also be helpful after a performance in incorporating aspects of the production into various subject matter. Topics for discussion and ideas for various related activities are also suggested which may help to achieve this purpose. Individual creativity and expansion upon these suggestions by teachers is not only encouraged, but highly effective in meeting the needs of individual classroom situations.

**Background**

On a “golden afternoon” in 1862, a shy Oxford professor whose speciality was Mathematics and logic took the three little daughters of his college dean on a boat trip on the river Isis. As he rowed, he began to fancifully tell a story of a white rabbit and a young girl who followed him down a hole and become immersed in a “wonderland”. The story might have evaporated into thin air had it not been for the persistence of Alice Liddell, the professor’s favorite of the 3 girls, to write it down the next day. Although it eventually took over 2 1/2 years, the professor kept his promise to the 10 year old Alice, and in 1865 “ALICE’S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND” was published. The professor’s name was Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, better known as the author Lewis Carroll, and young Alice’s insistence that the story be written was to enable a classic tale of childhood fantasy, political allegory, and linguistic satire to come into being.

“THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS” was subsequently published in 1871 as a sequel to Lewis Carroll’s enormously popular “ALICE’S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND, and was an immediate success. Building upon the humor, twists of logic, and satire of the first book, “Looking Glass” placed Alice as a Pawn in a “huge game of chess being played all over the world”, and introduced and interwove such immortal characters as the mercurial Red Queen, the mischievous twins Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum, the dry witted and acerbic Humpty Dumpty, the battling Lion and the Unicorn and, of course, the ferocious “Jabberwock”. Poetry is found throughout the story including some of his best known work, such as “The Walrus and the Carpenter” and “Jabberwocky”. Dodgson’s background in logic is found throughout the “Alice” stories, and his playfulness in inventing words has also been a source of great interest among linguists. While many adaptations and dramatizations of these stories have combines elements of both “Alice in Wonderland” and “Through the Looking Glass”, Das Puppenspiel has remained faithful to the text of the original in its adaptation of “Through the Looking Glass”
Story Synopsis

As the show opens, playful music is heard and the silhouette of Alice behind her parlor mirror is seen. She pauses for a moment and then leaves, still holding her kitten. In semi-darkness, the figures of Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum (who live 'behind the mirror' and in the realm of a child's imagination) are seen briefly. They quarrel as to whether Alice can actually see them, and why she never 'passes through' to visit. The clock strikes twelve and they disappear as Alice once again is seen in silhouette behind the mirror. She strokes and talks to her kitten about playing chess and what it would be like in “Looking Glass Land”. Suddenly, to her amazement, she finds she is able to 'pass through' the mirror. She finds herself in a mirrored replica of her parlor, except now the White King and Queen who have fallen on the floor are able to speak! After a moment of astonishment, she finds the door and stairs which lead to the garden, and ‘floats’ out into the Garden.

In the ‘Looking Glass’ garden, Alice encounters huge, somewhat taunting flowers and meets the Red Queen, who is now as tall as Alice. Alice expresses her wish to play with the Red and White Queens, and the Red queen informs her, both with charm and curtness, that Alice is now a White Pawn in a huge game of chess. In order to play with the Queens, Alice must progress through the 'chess board' to the eighth square where (as in real chess) she can become a Queen herself. The Red Queen tells Alice what she can expect to find along the way, and then disappears, leaving Alice to make her ‘first move’. She suddenly finds herself on a train, with a goat, a man in a paper coat, and a gnat who whispers in her ears as fellow passengers. After the train ‘leaps’ across a brook, Alice is left alone near the edge of a forest with the gnat, who now introduces her to such “Looking Glass Insects” as the Rocking Horsefly and the Snap Dragonfly. Alice then passes through the woods where “things have no name” and finds herself at the home of Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum (or the fourth square). She dances and laughs with them, and they recite “The Walrus and the Carpenter” for her entertainment. Suddenly, everything becomes darker and Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum run away in their fear of the imaginary ‘Crow’. Through the wind, a white shawl falls on the ground, and Alice picks it up. The White Queen enters quickly and asks Alice to pin it back on her. Alice is now on the fifth square and she is given a quick lecture on the ‘logic’ (or logical illogic) of Looking Glass land by the White Queen. Suddenly, the Queen turns into a sheep who runs a shop and asks Alice what she wishes to buy. After looking, Alice picks up a book entitled “Jabberwocky” and begins to read. The poem ‘comes to life’ as it is read, and the fearsome Jabberwock is slain by the brave, ‘beamish’ boy. At its conclusion, Alice is back at the shop, and the sheep asks Alice again what she wishes to buy. Alice replies she wishes to buy an egg, and is told to go find it herself. As she approaches the back of the shop, the ‘wall’ drops and she is face to face with a very large Humpty Dumpty.
Now on the sixth square, Alice is treated to the tentative expertise and dry wit of Humpty Dumpty. He explains the meaning of some of the words of “Jabberwocky” as well as a variety of other rules of grammar and life to Alice, and then recites a poem of his own, which concludes abruptly. Suddenly, Humpty Dumpty disappears, and “all the Kings horses and all the King’s men” come barreling by Alice, followed by the White King. The King, after first suspecting Alice as an enemy pawn, befriends her. They are interrupted by the sound of an impending presift, and suddenly the Lion and the Unicorn enter for the “daily bout for the crown”. The King assures her that “the winner never gets it, of course, what an idea!”, and they watch with amusement as Lion and the Unicorn alternatively waltz and spar with each other. Near the end of the ‘fight’, the Unicorn is fascinated by Alice (believing that the idea of real children was unbelievable), and the Lion and Unicorn eventually escort the White King back to his castle.

Alice takes a step forward, where she is now on the seventh square, and is met by a threatening, but incompetent Red Knight. A White Knight appears, and after a brief, comically futile battle, the Red Knight concedes to Alice’s ‘rescue’ by the White Knight. After explaining to Alice a number of his ‘inventions of his own’ (which are largely useless), the White Knight escorts Alice to the edge of the forest and serenades her as he leaves.

Alice steps forward onto the eighth square, where a crown appears on her head and she becomes a Queen. Immediately, she is surrounded by the Red and White Queen, who proceed to give Alice an impossible and ridiculous “examination” to see if she is worthy of being a Queen. Despite ‘failing’ most questions, Alice is pronounced a Queen and a celebration is planned. Almost immediately, however, things begin to go haywire as the White Queen announces with some anxiety that “something’s about to happen!”. She disappears and suddenly many of the characters that Alice has met appear again briefly and bizarrely. The White Queen is now an oyster admired by the Lion, the White Knight moves through still singing his serenade etc. The White King springs through announcing his pleasure that the ‘end of the game is his favorite part’, and tosses Alice a smaller version of the Red Queen. Now in her hands, the Red Queen begins repeatedly admonishing Alice to “Pay attention, pay attention”. As the madness builds, Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum appear and begin laughing and teasing Alice. Alice stamps her feet, declaring they are nothing but silly little children, and that she has had enough. As she stamps, she ‘falls’ backward through her mirror, and all is silent. After a moment, the silhouette of Alice is again seen behind the mirror. Instead of the Red Queen, she now holds her kitten. Alice thinks out loud for a moment over whether everything was a part of her dream, or whether (as Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum have told her earlier) that she is only a part of the Red King’s dream. She poses her question to her kitten, and then disappears. Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum enter for a moment in silence, and then pose the question “Which do you think it was?” as the story ends.
**Suggested Activities/Topics for Discussion**

1. As mentioned earlier, a helpful activity to prepare students for a Performance is to read and discuss the story of *Through The Looking Glass* in class. While creating familiarity and enthusiasm for the performance, an added benefit of enthusiasm for literature in general is attained.

2. Another interesting activity is to have students compose their own 'nonsense' poems similar to "Jabberwocky". The exercise of defining spelling, pronunciation, meaning, and syntax helps explore and develop language skills in a fun and creative way.

3. Another helpful activity is to have students discuss and draw what they think various scenes and characters might look like. While encouraging creative thinking and art skills, this activity is also invaluable in peaking interest and enthusiasm for the performance.

4. The concepts of storytelling, legends, parables, and fables could be discussed. What is their purpose, and what makes them unique? Why is it often so effective to attribute human qualities to animals in making a point? Other forms of legends and fables could be explored, from Aesop's to tales of other cultures.

5. Puppets make effective learning tools. They offer children the opportunity to structure thoughts and to express themselves through a "disguise". In addition, manipulation of puppets is highly effective in developing fine motor skills. Creating a puppet production, from concept to final performance, develops creative, writing, construction, expression, and confidence levels.

6. Puppetry is the world's oldest form of theatre, dating back to prehistoric Shamans who manipulated bones and trinkets as part of religious rites. The art of puppetry and its expressions could be studied from ancient times to the present, using the library as a resource. Das Puppenspiel's production of *The Puppet Tree (A cross cultural tour of puppetry)* also explores the art of puppetry as it is found in the various cultures of the world in greater detail.

7. One of the styles of puppetry used in *Through the Looking Glass* is a variation of "bunraku" (boon-rah-koo) that originated in Japan. As in many European countries, puppetry in Japan is considered a high form of theatre. It is directly related to the "Kabuki", or mime, theatre and dates back over 400 years. At one time in Japan, Bunraku was considered the highest form of theatre, with the greatest writers and actors of the day creating exclusively for the Bunraku theatre. Many plays were written that are similar to the Shakespearean dramas of the west, with detailed language and complex plot structures. These plays are still performed today in Japan, where a master puppeteer spends a lifetime perfecting manipulation of his puppet. A study of 'bunraku' and its relation to the Japanese culture could be made.
8. The puppeteers of Das Puppenspiel are full-time professionals who make their living at their craft. This fact can be used to stimulate a discussion of various occupations and promote a degree of career awareness.

9. Everything the students saw at the performance was developed, designed, written, constructed, and performed by the members of Das Puppenspiel. Each production is researched carefully and mounted with great attention to detail in visuals, concept, pacing, and story to achieve the Company's goal of quality theater. All staging must then be designed to fit into a touring maxi-van. A study could be made of puppeteers in general, both in the present and in the past, which may reveal some surprising facts. Mozart, Beethoven, and Shakespeare are but three famous people who either wrote for or performed with puppets.

10. Puppetry is a shared experience where the puppet's elements of form, movement, and sound can only truly live in the minds of the audience. The performance itself is only one example of this, and the puppeteers of Das Puppenspiel are also available, upon advance request, to come forward after the performance to discuss the show and answer a few questions from the audience. For extended residencies, special teacher workshops are also available that discuss the most successful methods of conducting "hands-on" puppet construction workshops with students. Shop tours of Das Puppenspiel's studio in Westfield, New York are also available free of charge with advance appointment, which includes many of the Company's puppets on display.

11. If students and/or teachers are ‘online’ at either school or home, they can visit Das Puppenspiel’s web site at www.puppets.org which contains photos, a guestbook to sign, reviews, program information, and even links to lots of other interesting puppetry sites. The music for “Through the Looking Glass” was composed and performed by professional musician John Kirk, who also has a web site at “www.johnandtrish.com”
**Frequently asked Questions**

**How do you make your puppets?**
Most Puppets are made from an instant paper mache called "Cell-U-Clay", and then molded, filled, and sanded with wood filler. Hands and feet are frequently carved from Basswood, internal joints and mechanisms are added, and the puppet is then costumed.

**How do you get to each show?**
Das Puppenspiel travels in a "Maxi-Van" (the largest Van available) that holds all the puppets, staging, and light/sound equipment, as well as 3 or 4 puppeteers.

**Where do you travel?**
The Company travels in over 24 states each year throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico. On average, this means approximately 30,000 miles of travel annually.

**How many shows do you do?**
Each year, Das Puppenspiel performs approximately 120 shows for over 70,000 children and adults at schools, theatres, arts councils, special events, and with "live" orchestras.

**Why do you wear black?**
The puppeteers wear black so that they blend into the background and place full focus on the puppet. The puppeteer wants to be as 'invisible' as possible so that the puppet seems alive.

**Can you see with your hoods on?**
Although vision is lessened, the puppeteers can still see through their hoods. The effect is similar to placing a thin cotton bed sheet over your head; you can still see, although not as well.

**How long does it take to make a puppet?**
A simple sock puppet or styrofoam ball and scarf can be made in less than half an hour. A typical puppet made by Das Puppenspiel for use in a show can take anywhere from 75-125 hours of work, depending on size, costume, and special mechanisms.

**How long does it take to build a show?**
Many things affect how long it can take to build a show. These include number of puppets, size and design of set, lighting and sound needs, length of story and many other factors. By spending as little as 2 hours per week every week, students can build a simple cardboard stage, write a script, construct simple puppets, and put on a performance in as little as 6-8 sessions or weeks. On average, from initial concept to research and design to building to final rehearsal, it takes about 18 months to 2 years for Das Puppenspiel to produce a new show.