



The Smithsonian Associates

Discovery Theater

presents

Tigers, Dragons, and other *Wise Tails!*

an adaptation of four fairy tales by Soo-Jin Lee

directed by Michael J. Bobbitt

choreographed by Dana Tai Soon Burgess

A REPRODUCIBLE LEARNING GUIDE FOR TEACHERS. *This learning guide is designed to help you and your students prepare for, enjoy, and discuss **Tigers, Dragons & Other Wise Tails!** It contains background information, questions and activities. Appropriate for ages 4–10.*

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Guenther and Siewchen Yong Sommer

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How Do We Tell Stories?

When was the last time you told someone a story? **How did you do it?** Did you open your mouth and talk? What other ways could you have 'told' your story?

Some stories are **written down** in books, or **acted out** on stage (like at Discovery Theater!). You can make a **song** out of a story. A tale can even be **mimed**, or acted out without speaking. We save stories about our families and friends by **taking photos**.

The Hmong people of Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam make **storycloths** to preserve events, family milestones, and favorite tales. They **embroider** several **scenes** from the the story on fabric, using colorful stitches to make pictures that 'tell' the whole story on one piece of cloth. Often these storycloths are sent to relatives who have moved away to the United States.

Dancing can tell stories, too. (Hawaiian hula and classical ballet are just two kinds of dance where the performers use hand gestures, posture, and other motions to tell stories while also moving to the music.) **Chinese dancers use objects such as swords or long silk ribbons** to create a story. A ribbon can be swirled through the air to imitate a dragon—or lots of other animals! Traditional Chinese ribbon dancing is so graceful and beautiful to watch that it has inspired part of an Olympic sport—rhythmic gymnastics.

Why Do We Tell Stories?

The reasons can be simple—and they can also be very complex! One storyteller says,

“So many things happen to us every day that it is sometimes hard to make sense of them. Storytelling lets us do that. Storytelling helps us give order and meaning to our lives. It helps us organize our past and plan our future. Stories help us identify actions and behavior so we can avoid repeating mistakes. That’s why some stories teach us lessons, which are called morals. We tell stories because they make us laugh and cry. We tell stories because they help us understand ourselves and others. They entertain us and teach us.

“Storytelling is as old as humanity and common to all races and cultures. In early times, storytelling was used to explain the forces of nature that humans did not understand and found frightening, such as storms, tidal waves and lightning. Stories also told about gods and heroes and reminded people about behavior they should imitate. Some stories were told just for fun. Through stories, one generation passes its culture, religion and values to the next generation.” (from **Cue Sheet for Students: Dylan Pritchett, Storyteller**, published by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, 1994.)

Animal Stories

Since storytelling began, humans have been telling stories about animals. That makes sense, because **animals have always been important in people's lives**. Animals were a big help to humans. Cats caught mice and rats, horses pulled plows or could be ridden to market, **dogs helped hunt for food. Other animals were food!** And still other animals were dangerous—if you didn't watch out, you might become *their* food. Plus, animals were good companions. Some were beautiful to watch. They might not think like a human, but they **did things amazing things that humans couldn't**—like fly, spin webs, run as fast as the wind, or swim underwater without running out of air.

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Just as there are all kinds of animals, there are all kinds of animal stories. Some animal heroes are imaginary beasts, or real beasts with magical powers. Many American Indian stories take place in a time long ago, when, according to tales, animals were much larger than they are now and could talk and do many things that humans do.

Coyote is one of the chief animal characters. In some Native American traditions, Coyote is a creator who made the world's first people. In other legends, he is a **trickster** figure who loves to outsmart others. Another animal trickster is **Anansi**, the spider in African folklore. In a European tale, **Puss-in-Boots**, a cat dressed in human clothes, outsmarts the king and wins fame and fortune for his human friend.

Activities: You Try It!

Make Your Own Storycloth

(Materials required: Large pieces of fabric, plus scraps, notions, trims, buttons, etc.; pens or markers; glue.)

Pick a story you want to tell. **Think:**

- What are the most important happenings in the story?
- Where do they take place?
- Who are the important people or animals in the story?

Divide the story into **3 or 4 scenes**. On a large piece of fabric, draw the scenes. Decorate them with scraps that you glue on.

Hang up your storycloth for everyone to see (or send it to a relative who lives far away)!

Ribbon Dancing

Make a 'ribbon stick' by tying the end of a crepe-paper streamer to a pencil. (You can also use a long, thin piece of light fabric, or even a strip cut from a big plastic garbage bag.)

Make sure there's lots of room around you. Holding the pencil, swish your ribbon through the air. Try making big zig-zags or writing your name. **Try not to let your ribbon touch the floor!**

Can you use your ribbon to show a **friendly fish**? An angry dragon? An excited bird? A sad pet puppy?

Make up a story and **'tell' it with your ribbon**. If you like, add music!

Ask Your Favorite Grown-Up...

...to tell you an animal story! The animal could be a long-ago pet, a wild animal, or an imaginary beast. The story can be true, made-up, or a fairy tale.

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Ask:

- Did this story happen to you? If so, how old were you? If not, who told it to you?
- Why do you think you remembered this story?

Make a poster to illustrate the story. Share it with your friends!

Animal-ize It!

We often think of animals as having certain kinds of personalities. We often say '**wise as an owl**' or '**brave as a lion**.' What other animals sayings have you heard?

Think of a story you know well that has a **human main character**—like *Cinderella*.

What if Cinderella had been **an earthworm? A skunk? A dolphin?** How would the story change?

Re-tell the story! Then pick another animal. **Take turns** 'animalizing' stories with your friends!

Resources

Folk Stories of the Hmong Peoples of Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam, by Norma J. Livo & Dia Cha. To read aloud or retell. Interesting color section with photos of Hmong storycloths.

AesopFables.com – over 650 fables with morals, links to lesson plans, and more.

Kids.nypl.org/holidays/asian.cfm – The New York Public Library's annotated list of kids' books for Asian-Pacific Heritage Month. Includes a folk & fairy tale section.

Keepers of the Animals: Native American Stories and Wildlife Activities for Children, by Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac. Great for ages 4 & up, with field-tested activities that involve children in art, theater, reading, writing, science, social studies, mathematics, ecology, and more. The separate teachers' guide and the recording of the stories told by Bruchac are also highly recommended.

About the Creators of *Wise Tails*

Michael J. Bobbitt (Director), one of Discovery Theater's favorite Associate Artists, has appeared in a number of DT's original Black History Heritage productions, including *Black Diamond: Satchel Page and the Negro Leagues*; *How Old is a Hero? The Ruby Bridges Story*; and *Nat Love of the Wild, Wild West*. Michael is now directing a number of these shows on tour. An all-around theater talent, he has worked as choreographer, director, and/or actor at area institutions from Arena Stage to the Kennedy Center to the Washington Shakespeare Company. He also teaches, with credits that include the Washington Ballet and the University of Maryland. Nationally, Michael has choreographed productions for Coca Cola, Pepsi Cola, Mel Tillis 2001, and the *Washington Post* Music and Dance Scholarship Awards.

Born in Korea and raised in Virginia, **Soo-Jin Lee (Playwright)** graduated from George Mason University. *Peaches*, her first play, was staged in April as part of the University of Houston School of Theatre Edward Albee New Playwrights Workshop. *Tigers, Dragons, and Other Wise Tails!* is her first children's production. She is currently at work on a family drama, *Ummah*.

Award-winning **choreographer Dana Tai Soon Burgess** grew up in New Mex with his Irish-Scottish-American father and his Korean-American mother. He holds an MFA from George Washington University, where he now teaches dance, and has also taught in Germany, China, Korea, and Latvia. Dance from many traditions, the martial arts, the visual arts, and personal journeys to Asia, Latin America, South America, the Middle East, and Europe have all inspired his work. Burgess established his contemporary dance company in 1990 with the goal of originating works from pan-Asian-American perspectives. An American Cultural Specialist for the State Department in 2000, 2003, and 2004, Burgess, with his company, commemorated the 100th anniversary of Korean immigration to the US by creating *Tracings*, an evening of dance commissioned by the Smithsonian and the Kennedy Center in 2003. *Tracings* is now on tour, as is *The Nightingale*, a production based on a Hans Christian Andersen tale, which was chosen as the Kennedy Center's 2002 holiday show for young people.

Discovery Theater is On the Move!

The Smithsonian's Arts and Industries Building, home to Discovery Theater since 1979, has been closed for renovation. DT has a sparkling new specially-designed space just across the garden in the S. Dillon Ripley Center—the Smithsonian's underground learning center with classrooms, lecture halls, artists' studios and more.

Several Discovery Theater favorite programs are also going on tour, and new partnerships with Arena Stage in Washington, DC and Round House Theater in Silver Spring mean that DT's special brand of educational entertainment for kids is available at more venues than ever before. Call 202-357-1500 or see www.DiscoveryTheater.org for all the details.

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