

WE TELL STORIES

Proud To Be Me

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:

Proud to Be Me is a multicultural storytelling experience exploring the concept of pride in oneself through three different stories from three different cultures. For elementary school students, the repertoire focuses on self-esteem and is chosen from Africa, "The Frog Who Wanted to Sing"; Mexico, "Cuties Cockroach" or "El Anciano"; and Japan, "The Two Stonecutters." For older students, especially middle school grades, the repertoire focuses on making choices in life and is from Japan, "Two Strong Women"; Eastern Europe, "The Rooster Prince"; and Native American traditions, "Jumping Mouse." A trio of actors uses the company's signature trunk full of costumes and props to create the magic and bring the stories to life.



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

Proud to Be Me uses a storytelling format to present folk tales 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:

- Are you proud of your ethnic heritage? Why or why not?
- Is it important to study the stories and cultures of people different from ourselves? Why?
- 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? Can you locate them on a map, atlas or globe?
- How did the actors use costumes or props in creative and imaginative ways?
- What does it mean to preserve one's culture? In what ways do you or your family preserve traditions from your heritage?
- What have you learned about other cultures from the stories included in today's performance? Cite specific examples.

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - SOCIAL STUDIES:

Introduce students to the history of New York's Ellis Island during its peak use at the turn of the 20th century. Research the following: immigration procedures for admittance into the U.S. during that time; about required documents; and the layout of the island's various buildings. Read the poem by Emma Lazarus located at the base of the Statue of Liberty on nearby Liberty Island; the most famous portion follows:

*"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.*

*Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

The "Lady" and the poem helped to greet newcomers. After finding out about immigration procedures during the early 1900s, investigate current procedures for passage into the U.S. How do present procedures compare to those 100 years ago? Do the sentiments in Emma Lazarus' poem accurately reflect public opinion today? Why? Why not? Use editorials and newspaper articles to support your position.

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. Suggest a subject or event such as: courtship, weddings, travels, holiday celebrations, 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 with the 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 fairy tale or folk tale from a culture of their ancestry. Share the story with the class using language or custom unique to the story's heritage.

⇒ Using the criteria found on Page 1 pertaining to the characteristics of a good story, have students evaluate the performance of *Proud to Be Me*.

- * Discuss ways that the lessons conveyed in the various stories make connections to experiences in students' lives. Give examples of situations focusing on issues of self-esteem or the necessity of making choices. Divide the class into groups to role-play selected scenarios.



BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Lee, Nancy and Oldham, Linda. *Hands on Heritage*. Hands On Publications, Long beach, CA: 1978.

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

Find the entire poem written by Emma Lazarus at: usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/democrac/63.htm