



TRICKSTERS TRUTH & CONSEQUENCES MAGIC CIRCUS

Teacher's Guide
Grades K -6

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Tricksters Truth & Consequences consists of three comic trickster stories introducing students to multi-cultural awareness with tales from West Africa, Mexico and Germany. It is part of a trilogy that will include stories from Hispanic, European, African-American, Asian, Middle Eastern and Pacific Islander traditions. These stories show the positive aspects of the "trickster" character and present students with lessons about telling the truth, friendship and responsibility. They show that intelligence, understanding and compassion are more important than physical strength.

During the performance students are selected from the audience to participate with the actors. Although no advance preparation is necessary on the students' part, their participation is integral to the performance. The production values are deliberately simple, encouraging students to use their imaginations as they actively become involved in creating the performance.

The first of the three tales is from West Africa, "Ananse and Warthog's Amazing Adventures" in which the popular spider-trickster teaches Warthog, a terrible liar, how bad lying really is by giving him a dose of his own medicine. In "Borreguita, or A Sheep in Sheep's Clothing" a clever Mexican sheep outsmarts Señor Coyote and proves that brains are more important than brawn. "Tyl Eulenspiegel's Just Judgment", the third play, shows how the classic German jester discovers the importance of justice for all.

At its heart, *Tricksters Truth & Consequences* demonstrates respect for the various cultures found in the diverse mosaic that makes up California. It shows the stories and morals we share and warmly illustrates our common humanity through humor.

OBJECTIVES

- To present students with "trickster" stories taken from the various cultural traditions found within California.
- To expose and involve students in a theatrical performance.
- To aid students in using their imaginations actively while viewing a work of art.
- To create awareness of and respect for different cultures.

PREPARATION FOR THE PROGRAM

- Using a map of the world, show students the various locations of the stories (Ethiopia, Japan, Western United States).
- Read other trickster stories to the students. (Stories of Ananse the Spider or Iktomi are excellent for elementary grades.) Discuss with students what a trickster is. Explain that a trickster is sometimes foolish, sometimes mean and sometimes helpful. Tell students that trickster stories were created by people all over the world for two main reasons: 1) to entertain and, 2) to teach a lesson.
- Ask students if they have ever seen a play. Explain that in some plays, unlike TV, the audience has to use its imagination to "see" the scenery. As an activity read a picture book to your students without showing them the pictures. Either have them draw or describe their visions of what the illustrations look like. Show the illustrations and have the students describe their versions. Finally, point out to students that they all have a different "answer" and a right one!

IDEAS AND ACTIVITIES

Visual Art Extensions

- Have your students draw pictures of their favorite moment from the play. Then have the students trim down their drawing to postcard size. Glue the drawing to cardboard cut to postcard size and have the students write something about the performance on the back. Mail them to the parents.

- Using large sheets of butcher paper, have the students make a mural of the performance.

Social Studies/Geography Extensions

- Have students locate the countries of the plays' origins on a world map. Students can then present reports on the countries. If you are studying Native American cultures, you can locate where various tribes live in the United States.
- The trickster occurs in many world cultures, although in different guises. Sometimes he is Reynard the Fox, sometimes he is a Turkish hodja, sometimes he is Brer Rabbit. Have students research the different trickster characters and write or tell about them.

Language Arts/Theater Extensions

- Have students create their own plays based on literature they are reading. Start with short scenes to illustrate important moments in the story. You can build up to this by having students re-tell an entire story in five (or more) frozen pictures, or tableaux. Divide the students into groups of five or six. Prompt them to decide on the five most important moments in the story. Prompt them to think of the beginning and then think of the end. They should then think of three middle pictures that get them from the beginning to the end. Prompt students to think of the important moments in the story, urge them to discuss the story, ask them what was important, what was dramatic.

Once each group has decided on its five tableaux, the students should pose them. Different groups may choose different tableaux. Every student should be in the tableaux, whether there are five characters or not. Students may have to be trees, chairs, houses or important inanimate objects. If props are available they may be used but they are not necessary.

Groups should work independently. The process to create the tableaux should take 15 - 20 minutes.

The students share their tableaux with the class. It is fun to have the audience cover their eyes while the performers transition from one pose to another, like watching a slide show. The teacher can count aloud to five during the transition period.

They should discuss if the poses told the story well, if more poses were needed, why a group choose which moments to illustrate, etc. This is a good way to teach sequencing and opens up literature for students who may not read as well as others. It helps create good collaboration skills.

Tableaux are also an excellent means to build your plays. When students are familiar with tableaux they can begin to create scenes thinking of a "who, what where, and why": who is the character, what does the character want in the scene, where is the scene and why does the character want what he or she wants? Tell students to break the scene into a beginning, a middle and an ending. Students will then be able to enact short scenes that solidify the intent of the story bit by bit.

- Practice storytelling in your classroom. Theater began with story telling. Students acquire strong verbal skills in learning storytelling, as well as improving their reading and listening skills. Although there are many fine storytellers there are simple guidelines for learning how to tell a story which anyone can learn.
 - 1) Select the story
 - 2) Learn the structure and sequence of events
 - 3) See the characters and settings in your mind's eye - know what they look like
 - 4) See the story in your head, like a silent movie
 - 5) Tell it aloud using your voice to project the images that you've visualized
 - 6) Learn it by "heart," not word for word
 - 7) Practice until you're comfortable and it feels natural

Paul Goble's Iktomi books (see bibliography) provide another way into storytelling that utilizes the entire class as part of the storytelling process.

- Theater works well as a tool to teach decision making skills. The basic skills of decision making are simple and can be introduced at any grade level. Once Decision-Making Skills are part of your classroom vocabulary, they are also

wonderful tools for looking at literature and social studies and an asset to classroom management. You can begin with a discussion about decisions the characters faced in the plays. Point out to students that these are important moments for the characters.

You can then introduce the three simple components of good decision making. These components can be illustrated by using stories or literature currently in use in your classroom or by using examples from your students' lives.

- **STEP ONE** - In order to make a good decision, it is necessary to **DEFINE THE PROBLEM**. Define what it is you are trying to decide.

For grades K-2, stories work well to illustrate your point. You could use Marcus Pfister's *Rainbow Fish* as an example. Rainbow Fish has two opportunities to make a decision about whether or not to share her shiny scales. What if she had thought it through before she spoke? Did Rainbow Fish define her problem? Would the story be different?

For grades 3-8, it is best to use examples relevant to your students' lives. For instance, a student is invited to go to the local arcade to play video games with his or her friends. Does he or she remember he or she was supposed to go home and help his or her mother? What exactly is the student deciding? Is the student aware that he or she has to make a choice or does he or she just go along with the crowd?

- **STEP TWO** - Once you have defined the problem, you have to **DEFINE THE OPTIONS**.

For grades K-2. Rainbow Fish can either share her shiny scales or not.

For grades 3-8. The student can go home and help his or her mother or he or she can go to the mall with his or her friends.

- STEP THREE** - Once you have determined the options, **DETERMINE THE PROBABLE CONSEQUENCES OF YOUR ACTIONS**

For grades K-2. If Rainbow Fish does not share her shiny scales, she will be beautiful but she will not have anyone to play with. If she shares her shiny scales, she will have lots of friends and still be beautiful in a different way.

For grades 3-8. If the student goes to the mall, he or she will probably have fun with his or her friends but will most likely spend a lot of money and will almost certainly be grounded by his or her parent/s.

Once students have gone through these steps, they have the information to make a decision. However, it is important that students be given opportunities to rehearse these skills. There are many ways this can be worked into your classroom.

The most direct way is to set-up role-plays with your students. Take a scenario from your students' lives. Let the students play it out. Then give them a chance to discuss it. Could there be different endings? How can a student say "no?" How can a student withstand peer pressure? And then, give the students the opportunity to rehearse saying "no."

Not all scenarios have to be about real life situations, they can come from stories you are reading or history you are studying. What is important, is that the students be given several opportunities over time to practice their decision-making skills.

VOCABULARY AND KEY CONCEPTS

- **Trickster** - A character found in cultures throughout the world. Sometimes smart, sometimes not-so-smart, in folktales he serves the dual purpose of teaching us to behave and opening the road to possible new worlds.
- **Audience Interaction** - In A Live Act performances, selected students come from the audience and join the actors on stage to perform the play.

Magic Circus: Magic Circus is an educational theater company based in Marin County dedicated to promoting the use of the performing arts in classrooms across northern California. Through tours, performances and workshops with teachers and students Magic Circus demonstrates how theater can be used to improve the quality of education.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Bebe Conrad: (director, performer) Bebe is the co-founder of Magic Circus, with more than 15 years professional experience. She directs "Tricksters, Truth & Consequences". Bebe has directed several Magic Circus productions, as well as other productions in New York and San Francisco. She is a member of the Screen Actors Guild and has appeared in "Dr. Dolittle" and several other international film and TV productions. Bebe works professionally as an actress, magician, clown and mime.

Benny Buettner: (Performer) Benny is the co-founder of Magic Circus with more than 20 years of professional experience. He has performed in Europe and America and is featured in several films including Eddie Murphy's *Dr. Dolittle* and *The Princess Diaries* as well as numerous television programs. Benny has appeared on stages in Sweden, Germany, New York, Chicago and San Francisco as a magician, clown and actor. He trained at the Actor's Studio and Herbert Berghoff Studio in New York, the Dell'Arte School of Physical Theater in Blue Lake and Kulturverkstaden in Stockholm, Sweden. He is a member of the Screen Actors Guild

Randal Lee Wung: (Performer) Randal is a lead actor/facilitator with the Lawrence Hall of Science and spent many years as a company member of the Honolulu Youth Theater. He has appeared with the San Francisco Shakespeare Company, California Shakespeare Festival, Western Stage, and the Pacific Repertory Theater. He received his training at the New Actors Workshop in New York City and has studied extensively with Paul Sills (founder of Story Theater) and the classical actor Randall Duk Kim.

Eric Engdahl, Tess Giannotti:

Tricksters, Truth & Consequences was written by Eric Engdahl, (Ph.D., M.F.A.) and Tess Giannotti, (M.A.) Tess is a writer, an Equity/SAG actor, director and drama therapist. Eric is an educator, writer, actor and director. They each have over 20 years professional experience in Los Angeles and regional theater including artistic directorship of several companies such as A Live Act.

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