

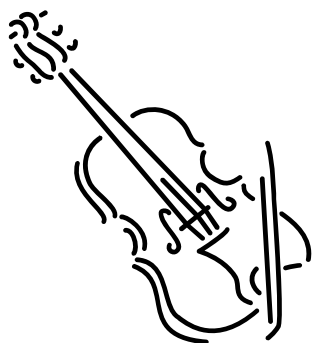
Pushcart Players

STUDY GUIDE

FIDDLER TALES

Stories Adapted
for the Stage
by Ruth Fost

Music by
Larry Hochman



FIDDLER TALES is a joyful mosaic of stories set to music and wrapped around many of life's most enduring themes - friendship, family, courage, love and trust. Imbued with the art of storytelling and in the tradition of Sholom Aleichem ("Fiddler on the Roof"), this collection of tales comes to life through the narration of a peddler who passes through the village of Zlodievka each week. In each house there is a story. Some of these he shares with us. Each is filled with wit and wisdom, a twinkle and a grin. The first story, *"It Could Always Be Worse,"* humorously offers new perspectives on solving a problem and seeing one's situation in a new light. *"Something From Nothing"* explores the value of family legacy and enables us to observe resourcefulness and creativity at work from generation to generation. In *"Gimpel From Chelm"* as well as *"On Account Of A Hat"* we witness illogical logic at its best - for every question there is an answer and conversely, for every answer, there is a question!

While much of the folklore in this treasury of stories dates back to the 1500's, the characters remain fresh and current in their needs and values. A mother wants to do what's best for her family. An heirloom is cherished from generation to generation. Earnest bumbling is as charming as it is funny - and in the end it is always ingenious.

But the universal appeal of each of these stories ultimately comes not only from the joy in the telling, but the optimism within, — the comfort in knowing that whatever is broken can be fixed, that hope can triumph over despair, that we will survive, no matter what the odds and somehow find the courage to go on! Perhaps even a bit wiser than before. So? Sing, dance, snap your fingers and enjoy!

A SUMMARY

Each week Zlotke, a peddler, journeys to the village of Zlodievka. The villagers look forward to his arrival not only for the wares in his cart, but also for the wisdom and interest he has in their lives. The play begins with Zlotke's usual arrival one typical morning. But as he approaches one of the houses the first story quickly unfolds. This story leads to another and another and before we know it, four stories have been told. A finale provides a review and assessment of the essence of each story.

THE STORIES

It Could Always Be Worse

Zienke, a housewife and mother, is struggling with the demands of her daily life - a crying baby, a whining child, and a nagging husband along with many household chores. Zlotke the Peddler suggests that if Zienke will do as he says, her problem will be solved. First he tells her to bring the rooster into the house. When he returns the following week, Zienke reports that things are worse, not better. Zlotke says this is good and tells her to now bring the goat in too. Each week it continues in this way until the house is filled with barnyard animals along with the crying, whining, nagging family and undone chores. Just as Zienke is about to cave in, Zlotke tells her to bring the animals back to the barn and barnyard, one by one. When she returns, her home seems like a haven. She has only to soothe her baby, tie her child's shoe and find her husband's boot. And now she can sit and have a cup of tea. Zlotke's brilliance is something to celebrate!

Discussion and Projects

- What, in your opinion, was Zienke's problem before Zlotke arrived?
- How did Zlotke help Zienke solve her problem?
- Did you ever have a problem that turned out to be less of a problem than you originally thought? What happened to make your problem seem smaller than it was? Share your story with a friend. With the class.
- Write a short story or poem with the title: "How I Solved My Problem."
- If you were Zienke's daughter, what do you think you could you have done to help her?
- If you were Zienke's husband, what do you think you could have done to help her?
- If you were Zienke, what do you think you could have done to help yourself?

For further discussion:

- Relativity and perspectives

- Coping skills
- Problem solving skills
- Creative solutions
- Friendship, trust, support

Something From Nothing

Zlotke moves on to the home of Mendel, a tailor, who never buys anything and

claims if he needs something, he can make it. In fact he can make something from nothing. He goes on to tell Zlotke the story of a cloak, given to his great, great grandfather who wore it all the time until it grew so worn that he made from it a cape and gave it to his son. The son wore the cape so much that it grew worn and so he made from it a vest to give his son. The vest grew worn and so it became a scarf that grew worn and was made into a bow tie and buttons to be passed on to Mendel. Mendel wore the bow tie and buttons but over time the bow tie grew worn and the buttons were lost so now he had nothing. For a time he was sad, but then he realized that he in fact had something. He had a wonderful story to tell his children, who would tell their children and the legacy would indeed live on.

Discussion and Projects

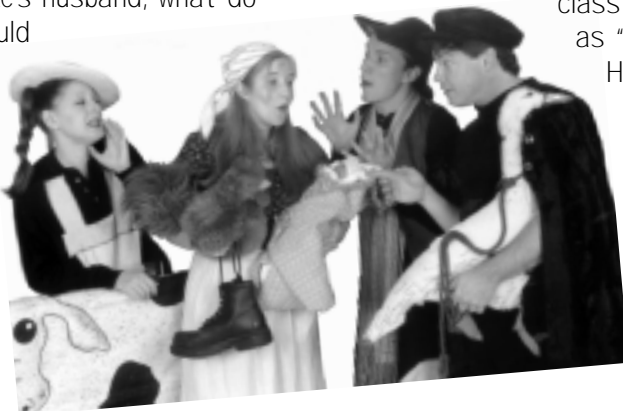
Vocabulary:

Generation Legacy Heirloom Heritage

- Why, in your opinion, was it important to each person in the story to hold on to something given by his parent and then to pass it on to his child?
- Do you have any heirlooms in your family that have been passed on from generation to generation? Share the story of your family heirloom with a friend or with your class. Write a story about that item.
- Ask your parents or grandparents about something special that belonged to their parents? Discover the history of that special something and what it tells you about your past. Write a poem or draw a picture about it.
- Do an "add a sentence" exercise about an heirloom. Have class sit in a circle. Start the story with a sentence such as "In my house we have a beautiful, old clock. It. . ."

Have each student add a sentence or thought and see where the story goes.

- Part 2 of this project is to have someone scribe the story as it is told and add illustrations so that story can be made into a book or booklet. Collect many stories and display them on a bulletin board or make a magazine with publications at regular intervals. Dramatize and act out some of the stories.



Gimpel From Chelm

As Gimpel's cottage comes into view, Zlotke tells us his story. It seems that each day as Gimpel wakes up to go to the fields to do his day's work, he is delayed by the search for his misplaced clothing. His friend suggests that he make a list as he undresses each night and in the morning he will know where everything is. That night he makes note of where he puts everything, including himself, as he goes to bed. He is delighted when he finds every item of clothing, as marked, the next morning, but becomes frantic when he can't find himself. The list says he is in the bed, but clearly he is not there. With a little help from his wife and his friend, he is eventually "found." Again, something to celebrate!

Discussion and Projects

Vocabulary:

Absent Minded	Conclusion	Fact	Focus
Logic	Organization Skills		Optimism
Rational thinking	Reasoning Skills		Responsibility

- Gimpel's absent mindedness causes him problems each morning, but his attempt at organization (a list) creates another problem. Can you think of a solution to either or both of his problems?
- Have you ever misplaced something very much needed to start or get on with your day? How did that make you feel? What did you do about it?
- Discuss the process of thinking things through.
- Discuss reasoning and rational thinking.
- Write or tell a story about searching for something and then finding (or not finding) it.
- Write or improvise a little play entitled "The Missing _____" (Any item, i.e. hat, pen shoe, etc.).

On Account Of A Hat

Gimpel's celebration is put on hold for a day, since the next day is the wedding of his brother, Shlomo, to Gittel who lives in the next cottage. As Gittel is putting some final touches on her bridal veil, Shlomo runs in to tell her that he has just made his first business deal and must go to Minsk but promises to be back in time for the wedding. While waiting for his train to return home, he falls asleep. The porter awakens him and Shlomo runs for the train, but by mistake he has picked up and put on the hat of the person sitting next to him. This causes a series of mishaps, mistaken identities and he ultimately misses the train. And his wedding day. But, whatever is broken can be fixed. The wedding is held the following week and once again, we celebrate!

Discussion and Projects

Strange as it may sound, "On Account of A Hat" is filled with many of life's lessons. Here are some topics you might discuss in relation to this little story:

- Priorities, Perspectives & Planning
- Adapting
- Taking Responsibility
- Making the Best of a Situation
- Keeping a Sense of Humor
- Moving On
- Have you ever missed an important date or appointment? Do you remember what went through your mind when you knew you were late or not going to make it at all? Share your story with someone in the class or with a small group of students.
- Write a story with the title "The Day I Missed The _____" Have students each write a riddle describing where someone was supposed to be without saying the event (i.e. I was supposed to be in the church or synagogue, dressed in a tuxedo. I was to have a ring in my pocket and I was going to say, "I do." Where was I going? (ans: My wedding).

Finale

As Zlotke prepares to move on through the village to sell his wares all the villagers join him in a musical number that celebrates some of life's lessons witnessed in the stories told in Fiddler Tales. Perhaps these are best summed up in the final verse:

Our spirit's alive when selling our wares

Making life sweeter for our heirs.

*A story and soon, a glimpse of the moon,
Come celebrate life to the Fiddler's tune.*

Within the play there are many circles or cycles of events - what comes 'round goes 'round; passing on a legacy; caring deeply about the welfare of the next generation. Much of the feeling in viewing the play is circular or geometric, using circles as a metaphor.

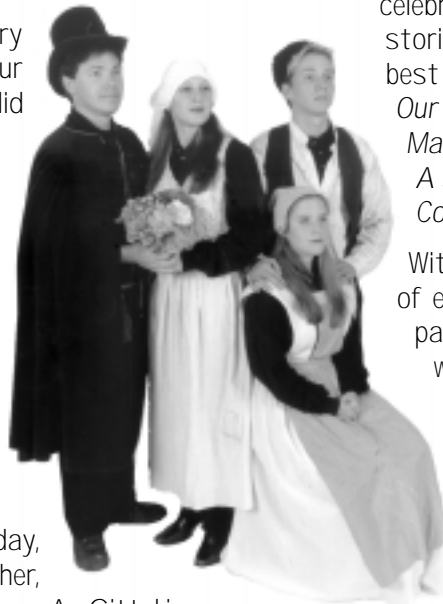
Discuss metaphors and symbols in artistic expression.

Have students write a short poem using a metaphor.

Teachers' Guide to Creative Drama Introduction

One of the most exciting ways to prepare students of all ages to view live theatre or bring an academic concept or lesson to life is to give them the experience of what it feels like to be an actor or in a given situation or circumstance. Creative Drama provides an excellent vehicle toward fulfilling this objective. There are many exercises that are easy to implement and encourage using the students' whole instrument, including imagination, voice, movement, senses and emotions. The entire class participates at the same time so there is little opportunity for self-consciousness to inhibit creativity.

Following are some simple exercises, suitable for all age groups. No prior drama experience is required of students (or teachers!) Exercises can be done in the classroom if desks can be moved to the side. This can be accomplished



quietly and efficiently by making a game of it.

A sample scenario might be to encourage students to imagine an earthquake fault line under the room. It is the students' responsibility to move the desks to the side of the room to reinforce the walls. This must be done silently so the fault line will not be disturbed. [Note: If it is not possible to move the desks, however, most exercises can be done with students standing behind or near their desks.]

Warm-Up Exercises

Freeze and Move

Using a percussion instrument (small drum or tambourine) or a piece of lively music, ask students to move while the music plays and freeze when it stops. Ask students to move isolated parts of their body (i.e. "now just move your leg, now your head, etc.") If you are using a drum, it can be exciting to vary the speed of the movement by changing the tempo of the beat.

Simple Stretches

Lead students in stretching their bodies. The use of visual images or characters helps make stretching fun. For example, tell students to reach for a silver thread hanging from an imaginary cloud above their head. Tell them to hold on tight and imagine they are swinging high above the neighborhood. Sometimes the strings might disappear. Students should then drop, loosely. Repeat this several times. Students can then stretch out wide like a big tree, swivel like a snake, stretch their necks long like a giraffe's, make their bodies small, like a tiny mouse, etc.

Grooming The Senses

In place, encourage students to isolate each sense and focus on it. For example, tell them to close their eyes and listen attentively, first to sounds in the room, then sounds in the hallway. Finally have them send their hearing out as far as it will go. Ask them to share what they have heard. A similar exercise can be done with sight. Ask them to look around the room, noticing colors and shapes. Ask them to see each object and then have each object see them. Turn to a partner and see the partner and have each partner

see them. Ask students if they can tell the difference between being the see-er and the seen and what each feels like. To practice heightening the sense of touch you can pass around a paper bag with an object in it. Have each student feel and describe it without the sense of sight. Students can be encouraged to experiment with smell and taste in the lunchroom and at home.

Movement

A Mirror Exercise

To help students focus, lead the class in a simple "follow the movement" exercise to slow, pleasant music. Make simple movements with your arms, head, face and legs. Encourage students to mirror these movements at the same time you are making them. Then, if you can arrange students in a circle, choose one student to leave the room and one student to lead the class in simple slow movements. The student chosen to leave is now invited back to try to guess who is the leader. A more advanced version of this exercise involves grouping students in pairs and having them mirror each other in turn. Music is helpful here. Remind students that the face moves too and that laughter and giggling can be mirrored also.

Sound

Sound Effects Story

Pick a simple story that has many opportunities for added sound effects (i.e. stories in cities, bad weather, haunted houses, etc.). This story can be made up in advance, improvised on the spot or read from a book. Practice with the group, encouraging students to make the sound of the wind using their voices, doors slamming using their feet, etc. Then control the volume of the sound using a wand, a pencil or any conductor like object. When your hand is high, the sound is loud, when your hand is lowered the sound diminishes and then stops. Use this volume control tool throughout the story. For added excitement, tape the story and play it back for students - they love to hear their voices. And knowing that they will be taped will heighten motivation and focus.

RESOURCES

- Development through Drama** by Brian Way. Humanities Press 1967
Games for Actors & Non-Actors by Augusto Boal. Routledge, 1992
Impro by Keith Johnstone. Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1981
Improvisation for the Theater - a Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques by Viola Spolin. Northwestern University Press, 1963
Playmaking-Children Writing and Performing their own Plays by Daniel Juda Sklar. Teachers and Writers Collaborative, 1991
Structuring Drama Works: A Handbook of Available Forms in Theater and Drama by Jonathan Neelands. Cambridge University Press, 1990

- Creative Dramatics in the Library** by Nancy Pereira. New Plays for Children, 1976
Multiple Intelligences by Howard Gardner. Harper Collins, 1993
Creative Drama Resource Book (Grades K-3 & 4-6) by Ruth Beall Heing. Prentice-Hall, 1987
200 + Ideas for Drama by Anna Scher/ Charles Verall. Heinemann, 1992
Drama Anytime by Jill Charters and Anne Gately. Primary English Teaching Association, 1986
Teaching Drama to Young Children by Mem Fox. Heinemann, 1987



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The Prudential 

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