



RAG & BONE PUPPET THEATRE

The Nightingale



TEACHER'S GUIDE

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A Note to Teachers



This Study Guide is intended to give you some ideas for preparation and follow-up activities relating to Rag & Bone's production of *The Nightingale*.

It includes a synopsis of the story, some notes about the production, a biography of H.C. Andersen, the author of the story, and a little background on Rag & Bone.

We've provided a list of questions for class discussion: both simple comprehension questions that teachers can use to check their student's grasp of the main ideas in the story, and discussion topics to initiate a deeper look at the play's themes, and at ancient China.

There are also several activity pages related to different characters in the play. These are intended to provide amusing ways to get the students thinking about the show, and about China.

Finally, there is a bibliography of books which teachers will find useful if they decide to follow *The Nightingale* with a unit on China.

Any work that you do with your class before or after the show will heighten their enjoyment of the show, and its potential as a learning experience.

Thank you again for having us in your school to present *The Nightingale*.



Zoom at Sea



The Light Princess



Felicity Falls



Tug of War

The Company

Founded in 1978 by John Nolan and Kathy MacLellan, Rag & Bone's shows produced include *The Snow Queen*, *The Nativity*, *The Cow Show*, *Tug of War*, *A Bauchan in the Family*, *A Promise is a Promise*, *The Weaving of a Dream*, *The Story of Holly & Ivy*, *Felicity Falls*, *Macbeth*, *The Light Princess* and *Zoom at Sea*. Rag & Bone has been awarded a Citation of Excellence in the Art of Puppetry from UNIMA-USA, the international puppetry association.

KATHY MACLELLAN is an award winning writer, performer and puppet-maker. She has written over fifty television scripts, including episodes of *Under the Umbrella Tree*, *Theodore Tugboat*, and *Mr. Dressup*.

Actor, puppeteer, and designer JOHN NOLAN has built sets, props and puppets for stage and television for many years, and has appeared on television and in many theatres, including the Guelph Spring Festival, Great Canadian Theatre company, The National Arts Centre and Opera Lyra. He plays Jackson on YTV's *Crazy Quilt*.

Kathy and John have also taught many puppet-making workshops in schools across Ontario.

Musician RUSSELL LEVIA is a popular Ottawa musician who appears frequently in clubs, folk festivals, and daycare centres. He plays a wide variety of instruments, from guitar and mandolin to accordion and hurdy-gurdy.



The Cow Show



About the Production

In our production of *The Nightingale* we appear in full view of the audience as we work the puppets, and freely move from being narrators to being puppeteers. This style of puppetry, in which the audience sees the puppeteers, is called *open manipulation*. It may seem unusual to people who expect a traditional puppet stage, but it is actually becoming quite a popular style around the world. The children have a chance to see “how everything works”, and the puppeteers have direct contact with the audience, combining puppetry with storytelling and acting.

The style is especially suited to the Oriental setting of *The Nightingale*. In Asia there are several well known puppet traditions which permit the audience to view the puppeteers. The most famous, the *Bunraku* puppet theatre of Japan, is a distinguished art form, usually reserved for high tragedy.

In the staging of *The Nightingale* simple props indicate scenery, and imagination fills in the details, in the best traditions of Chinese theatre, most notably Peking Opera.

The music was all written especially for the show. The lead instrument is a dulcimer—a four stringed instrument which is strummed, picked, and bowed. Although the dulcimer is a western instrument, it is reminiscent of the Chinese lute, or *ch'in*. The Nightingale's song is played on a tin whistle. The percussion instruments include a wide variety of authentic Chinese instruments: Chinese tom-toms, tiger cymbals, small cymbals, and an assortment of small and large gongs. The music is performed live, with the musician in full view of the audience.

Synopsis

ANCIENT CHINA was the most beautiful place in the world —and the most beautiful thing in it was the song of the little nightingale who sang in the forest by the sea.

When the Emperor heard the nightingale sing, her song was so beautiful that he cried. He ordered a gold cage for her, and told her she was to live at court from now on. The people at court were so impressed with her that soon the Nightingale was all they ever talked about.

One day, a present arrived for the Emperor, a gift from the Emperor of Japan. It was an artificial nightingale that turned around and even played a little tune. The people were so impressed with this that they hardly noticed when the real one flew away back to her green woods.

Everyone agreed that the artificial bird was better anyway. They played it over and over again until one day it broke. It was almost worn out, and from then on it could only be played once a year.

Years later, the Emperor was sick. He was dying. He lay in bed, all alone, haunted by all his good deeds and all his bad deeds. Death appeared, ready to take the Emperor. Suddenly, at the window, the real nightingale began to sing. Her song chased away the Emperor's fears, and brought him strength. Death was reminded of his home, and he wanted to see his home so much that he floated out the window.

In the morning the servants tip-toed in, expecting to see their dead Emperor's body, but there he was, all better, and he said to them: "Good Morning!"

Hans Christian Andersen



H.C. ANDERSEN was born in Odense, Denmark, in 1805. He was the son of a poor shoemaker who died when Hans was 11. After attending the Odense city school for poor children, he left home at the age of 14 and moved to Copenhagen. He nearly starved there while trying to earn a living as an actor, singer and dancer. A royal scholarship enabled him to study from 1822 to 1828.

After writing plays and adult novels, Andersen published the first of his 168 fairy tales in 1835. By 1840, they had made him famous. He became friends with kings, queens, and famous artists. He never married: he fell in love, but he was sensitive, and considered himself ugly. *The Ugly Duckling* is based on his life. *The Nightingale* is said to have been written out of love for the singer Jenny Lind, “The Swedish Nightingale”.

The Nightingale shows Andersen’s wisdom, sly humour, and deliberate simplicity at work in a story with serious moral overtones which can be considered literature for both children and adults.

Vocabulary



PRIMARY

China

Emperor

nightingale

Chief Councillor

kitchen maid

expert

fisherman

fragile

corridors

court (room and people)

imperial

JUNIOR

porcelain

pages

prostrate

pagoda

probe

permanent

position

permission

parallel

plumage

puny

plain

tomb

mourning

detail

courtiers

official

artificial

“in tune”

attractive

awesome

banish

ruby

attendants

footman

sensation

Comprehension Questions

- How did the Emperor find out about the Nightingale? Why was he angry?
- Where did the Chief Councillor go first when he was looking for the Nightingale?
- How did the Kitchen Maid know where the Nightingale lived?
- What did the Nightingale's song remind the Kitchen Maid of? The Chief Councillor? The Grand Master? The Emperor? Why did the Emperor cry?
- Where did the artificial nightingale come from?
- Why did the real Nightingale fly out the window? Where did she go?
- Who broke the artificial nightingale? Who had to tell the Emperor about it?
- Who did the Grand Master say wore out the artificial nightingale? Was that true? Why did he say that?
- Was the bird really fixed?
- Who saved the Emperor's life? How?
- Does the Nightingale want to live in the palace? Where does she want to live? Why? In what way did the artificial nightingale help the real Nightingale?
- We use six fans in the play. Can you remember what they are used to represent?

Discussion Topics



☞ WAS THE EMPEROR A GOOD LEADER?

Did the Fisherman have an easy life?

Did the Emperor know about the Fisherman's life? Before

the Nightingale came to court, how did the Emperor learn about his kingdom?

☞ RULERS NEED WISE AND HONEST ADVISORS.

Were the Chief Councillor and the Grand Master wise and honest?

How do you know?

☞ RULERS NEED ACCURATE INFORMATION.

At the end of the play, the Nightingale says: "I will fly everywhere and tell you about your kingdom."

How will this help the Emperor be a better ruler?

☞ FADS

The Nightingale was a great success at court. Everyone talked about her. She became a fad.

Can you name some things which are fads today, things which everyone talks about, everyone wants, but that everyone could forget about tomorrow?

Why do people value these things?

☞ THE NIGHTINGALE'S STATUE

At the beginning of the play we're told: "one Emperor even had a statue of a little bird—a nightingale—buried with him; and this story will tell you why."

Does the story tell you why? How does it tell you?

🔗 ANCIENT CHINA

We know about ancient China because of the work of archeologists, historians, and linguists. Find out what each of these does.

🔗 CHINESE DISCOVERIES

“The Emperor read that China was the most beautiful place in the world.”

—At that time, Ancient China was the most civilized place in the world. Discuss the importance of the following Chinese inventions and discoveries:

Gunpowder, compass, seismograph, silk, abacus, distilled alcohol, mechanical clock, coal, fireworks, porcelain, paper, printing and paper money.

🔗 ADAPTING A STORY

Read H.C. Andersen’s story *The Nightingale*.

Discuss how our production was different from the original story.

Why do you think we made those changes?

Read other H.C. Andersen stories.

Discuss what problems you might have if you were going to tell those stories with puppets.

What solutions can you find?

What changes might you consider?

Making The Nightingale

THE STORY

The first step was to select the story. We looked for a story with a good plot, interesting design possibilities, and a strong theme. Then we spent a lot of time developing ideas about the plot, the characters and the setting. Kathy wrote the script.

MAKING THE PUPPETS

The longest part of the process was making the puppets. Before a puppet can be built, it must be designed. How big should it be? How should the puppeteer hold the puppet? We looked at lots of books about China for ideas on what the puppets should look like. Should they have beards? What sort of clothes should they wear?

*Terra-cotta soldier
from Xian, China*



In the end, the puppets were largely based on life size terra-cotta statues found in the tomb of the First Emperor of China. Our puppets are over three feet high, and have costumes and hairstyles derived from these funereal figures.

Once the general style of the puppets was determined, we thought about the appearance of each character, and what special actions each character must perform. After the design work was done, we started making the puppets. John made the heads, while Kathy made the costumes. Costume ideas came from the statues, and from other Chinese art. To make the costumes, Kathy used a process called draping. The general shape of the costume is cut out in inexpensive fabric and these pieces

are pinned on the body and altered until the desired result is achieved. Then these pieces are used as a pattern in the final fabric.

The puppet heads for *The Nightingale* were modelled in clay, and then cast in plaster. Plaster was poured over the clay face, and then left to dry, forming a sort of plaster bowl. Once the plaster was dry, the clay was removed, leaving a backward, or negative, impression of the face inside the plaster bowl, or mould. We then carefully built up layers of *pâpier maché* inside this negative mould: first glue and tissue paper, then glue and heavier paper, and finally glue with strips of cotton. The *pâpier maché* was left to dry and then removed from the mould. Finally, the heads were given handles, and painted.



*The Chief Councillor
from The Nightingale*

Incidentally, the fact that we used a negative mould allowed us to make Death's face the same as the Emperor's—we simply used the mould twice.

REHEARSAL

The third stage was to rehearse the show, and add the music. In rehearsal, we had to decide how the puppets should talk, and what actions they should perform. We blocked the play: that is, we planned all the movements. Of course, we also had to learn our lines.

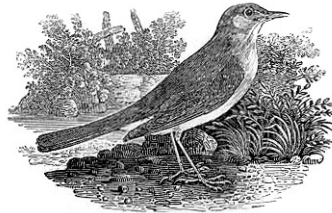
Music for *The Nightingale* was written by Brian Searson. After talking to us about musical ideas, Brian arrived with a variety of musical instruments, and worked with us for

a week, so that musical ideas could be developed. Then we rehearsed with the puppets for two weeks, while Brain worked on the music. He came back for the fourth week of rehearsal, to fit the music and the puppetry together. When Russell Levia joined our company, Brain taught him the music.

More ideas developed and grew once the show got on the road, but most of the music and movement was decided in rehearsal.

PLANNING THE TOUR

The fourth job, which actually had to be done at the same time as the other steps, was the administration: writing this study guide, planning a brochure to send out to schools, and planning other pr material. We then mailed brochures, contacted potential sponsors by phone, and arranged the tour!



A European Nightingale

Read Chinese

Every Chinese letter is a picture of a word. Can you match these Chinese letters to the English words, using the hints provided?

birdsong
(open mouths of birds
singing in the trees)

stream
(lines of water)

forest
(two trees)

man
(two legs)

Chinese Writing

Chinese writing is not based on an alphabet representing sounds; instead each character represents a word. The characters in their archaic form were often recognizable pictographs of concrete objects. Over the centuries, the pictographs were stylized, and the characters meanings extended to include abstract concepts derived from their original concrete sense. Finally, several characters may be combined to form a new character with a new meaning.

人

This is the modern character for man. The archaic form had a dot to indicate the head.

大

This character is derived from man. A male adult with outstretched arms, in its extended meaning it represents “largeness, greatness”.

天

Now man with arms outstretched, and a thick line on top, comes to mean “sky, Heaven”.

女

Present day woman. Originally the pictograph outline was the same as for man, but later it was altered by emphasizing the belly.

家

Home, family. Two concrete images make up this character: a pig, which was a family precious possession, placed under the sign meaning “roof” or “enclosure”.

—Derived from *China, the Land and the People*, Buchanan, FitzGerald & Ronan, Crown Publishers, New York, 1980.

Grand Master Math

The Grand Master is very exact. He loves to add. Can you add in Chinese?



1 = 一

2 = 二

3 = 三

4 = 四

5 = 五

6 = 六

7 = 七

8 = 八

9 = 九

0 = 十

$6 + 1 =$

$6 + 7 =$

$2 + 8 =$

$8 + 6 =$

$7 + 5 =$

$7 + 3 =$

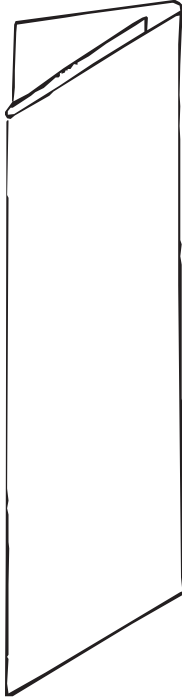
$5 + 3 =$

$0 + 4 =$

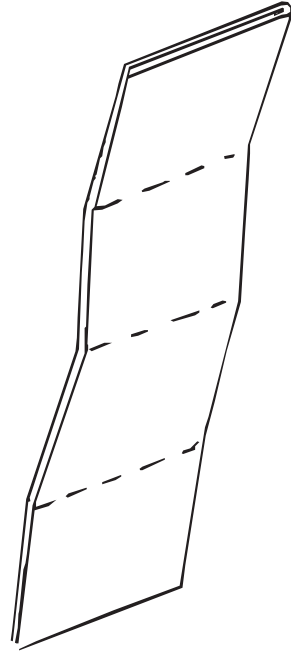
The Emperor's Dragon

The Emperor was the most important person in China. He was so important that his symbol was the mighty dragon.

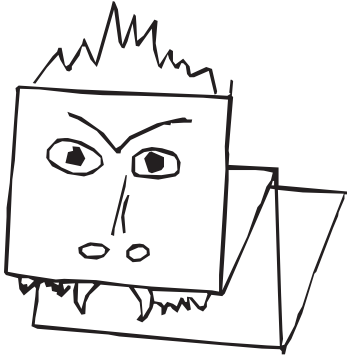
MAKE A PAPER DRAGON PUPPET:



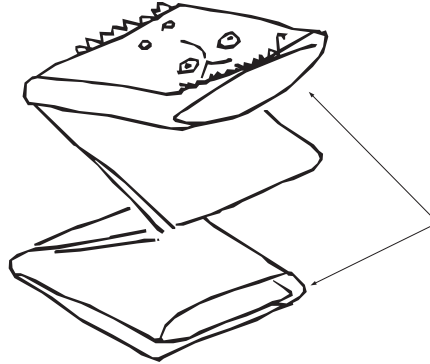
Fold a piece of green construction paper in thirds the long way.



Fold in half (3).
Fold at 4 & 5.



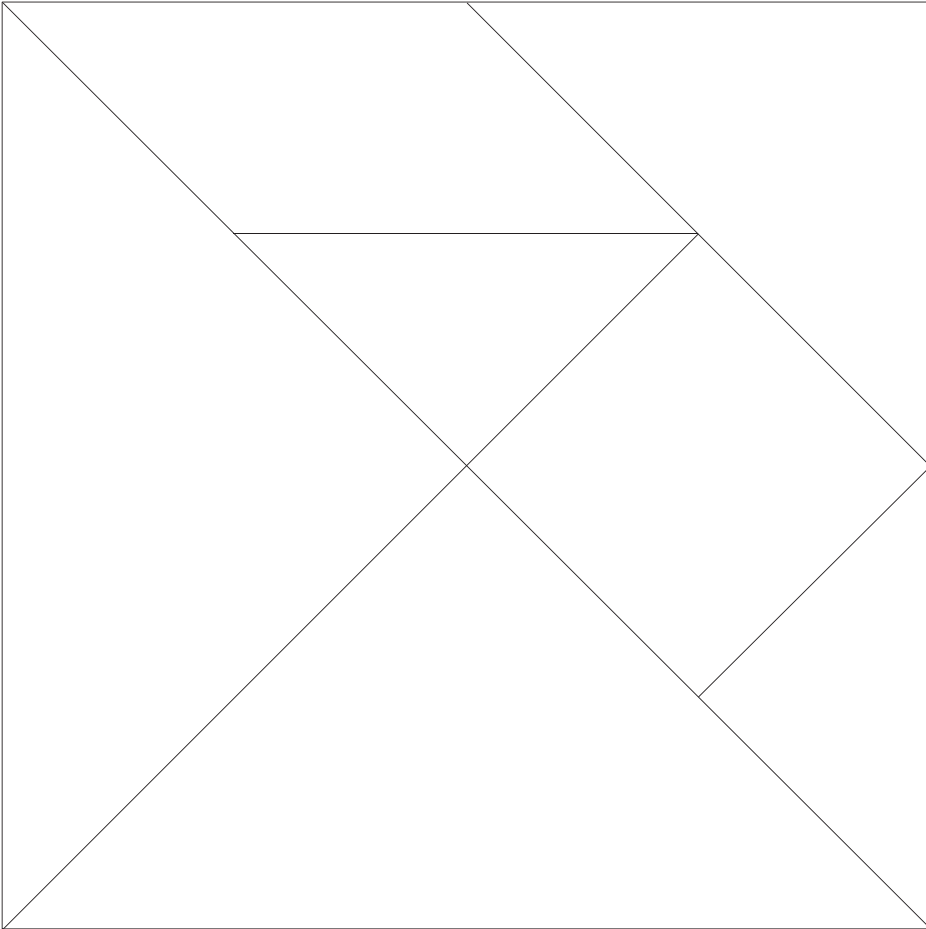
Make a face on top. Put fingers in the opening.



The dragon is also the symbol of the Chinese New Year, the most important day of the year in China. Why not celebrate Chinese New Year with a parade? The whole class can be a giant dragon if everyone lines up, heads down, holding on to the person in front of them. Wish your friends “Gung Ho Sung Hee!”

The Herald's Puzzle

The Tanagram is an ancient Chinese puzzle—over 4000 years old. A scholar named Tan had a package for the Emperor —just like the Herald in *The Nightingale*. Tan's gift was a ceramic tile. On the way he dropped it and it broke into seven pieces. He tried to reassemble it, and discovered many fascinating shapes and patterns. Cut these shapes apart. Make a picture with the pieces—animals, flowers, birds, boat...



The Kitchen Maid's Food

Try some of the food the Kitchen Maid might help prepare: water chestnuts, snow peas, bean sprouts, Chinese tea, and rice—with chopsticks!

CHICKEN FLOWER SOUP

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup minced chicken
- 2 cans chicken broth
- 2 cups of water
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup chopped water chestnuts
- 2 eggs, beaten
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup diced tofu

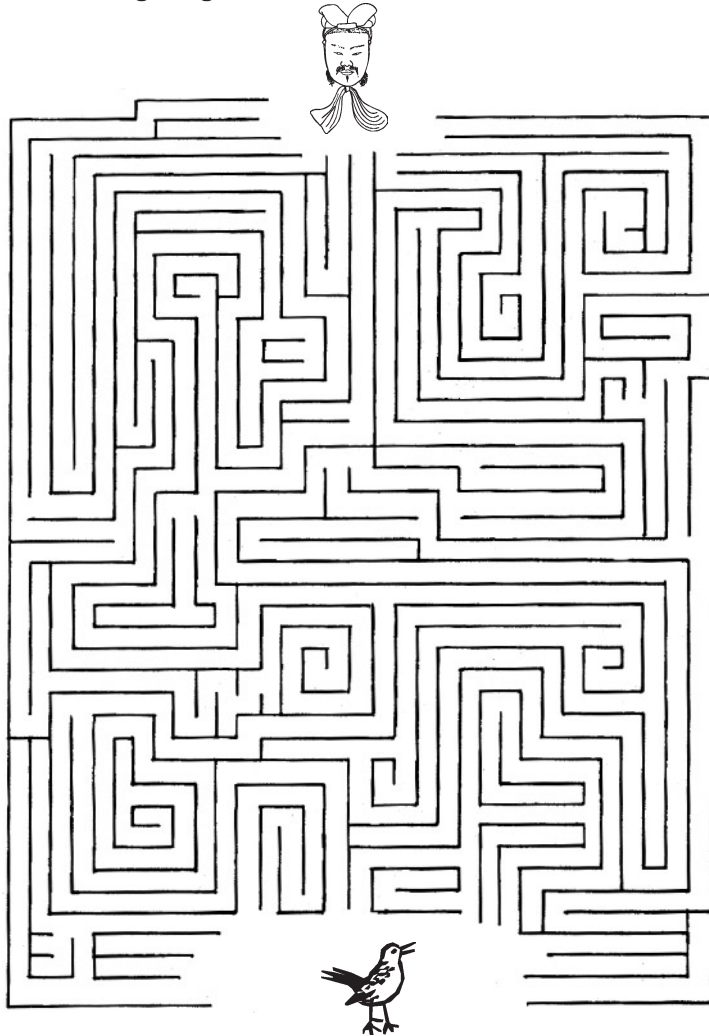
Combine:

- chicken, broth, water and water chestnuts.
- Bring to a boil, then simmer for several minutes.
- Return to a boil, and stir in eggs.
- Add tofu, heat for one minute.
- Serves 4–6.



The Chief Councillor's Probe

The Chief Councillor looked upstairs, downstairs, and in and out of all the rooms and corridors. Can you help him find the Nightingale?



The Fisherman

The Fisherman was poor, but he had something that was better than all the Emperor's riches. What was that? How did it make him happy?

In China, the fish is a symbol of prosperity. What is a symbol? Can you match these symbols to their meanings?

poison



fishing



Canada



pedestrian



flammable



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