

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

**The following ideas are suggestions for classroom activities which relate directly to this seasons pantomime of ROBINSON CRUSOE. Owen Money Theatre Company hopes that you can use them before and after enjoying the production.**

**All Key Stages:** Let your class experience live theatre and then use the activities in the classroom for your pupils to review and respond to.

**Key Stages 1+2:** Experience the retelling of a traditional story, such as Robinson Crusoe, to encourage group discussion and interaction.

**Key Stages 3+4:** Explore the structure and organization of scenes and how that changes or supports the understanding your class already had of this well-known tale.

### History of Pantomime

Pantomime originated in Ancient Greece and became popular in ancient Rome. It grew as a type of theatre in Italy in the Middle Ages and reached England in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. It takes many of its ideas from pagan festivals still celebrated in Medieval England, where the world was turned topsy turvy – like men playing women's parts in pantomime.

As it became more popular, panto became funnier and included lots of references to current events. As theatres became more sophisticated, they used bigger and bigger effects in panto to make them more magical. There was a drop in popularity and at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century pantomime had practically vanished from theatre.

Today pantomimes are performed at Christmastime by local amateur theatres and professional theatres alike. They are written using familiar stories and fairy tales for family and school audiences, using lots of song and dance, slapstick and jokes.

### Look out for

- The hero is often played by a young woman – the 'pantomime boy'. In our production the hero is a man!
- The pantomime dame is played by a man in women's costumes and make up.
- The audience is invited to participate in the action with things to call out.
- The audience call out "He's behind you!" when they see the baddie arrive at the back of the stage.
- Sweets and tokens are often thrown into the crowd.
- There is usually an animal, like a horse or cow, played by two actors in one costume. What animal is the star in the performance that you have seen?
- A celebrity usually plays one of the main characters.

## **Pantomime Around The World**

Pantomime is mainly a British tradition, but some other countries where lots of British people have emigrated to also perform panto.

- **Australia** Pantomime is performed at Christmas in Oz too with celebrity stars and lots of gags. They also do panto on the radio.
- **USA** In America Pantomime is generally understood to be traditional mime, very different from British Panto! A few states do have panto's though, just like the UK.
- **Canada** There is a real Panto held in British Columbia every year, using lots of local gossip and jokes.

## **Panto Stories**

Pantomimes can be based on many different stories. Here are a few of them. Can you think of other stories that might work?

- Cinderella
- Aladdin
- Sleeping Beauty
- Beauty and the Beast
- Dick Whittington
- Peter Pan

## **Themes & Topics**

Robinson Crusoe is a novel by Daniel Defoe. First published in 1719, the book is a fictional autobiography of the title character—a castaway who spends 28 years on a remote tropical before being rescued.

### **Travel:**

The sea and the 'HMS Venture' feature in this pantomime; discuss travel on a boat or ferry – the pro's and con's. Did they like it? How do they usually travel? By bike, car, bus, train, plane.

### **The Future:**

Ask the pupils what they would like to do when they are older. Do they want to travel or live in another country? Do they want to be famous? Would they like to act, dance, and sing? Make a list of the sort of things they want to do. Get pupils to pretend that they are one of the characters in the Panto. Write a diary, describing what happens to you when you meet Robinson Crusoe. Do you like him? What are your hopes and fears for the future? How do you feel at the end of the story?

### **Pets:**

The real Robinson was alone on the island for a long time apart from a cat and a dog rescued from the wreck of the ship. Do you think that the animals were a comfort to Robinson? Do any of the children have a pet? Are they close to their animals? What sort of animal is it? Who cares

for the animal? Do they treat their pet as one of the family? This could lead to a discussion about family life.

**Fairy tales:**

Captain Bluebeard the Pirate is a bad character in this story. Was it right that he wanted to steal the map of Treasure Island from Robinson? Why do you think he was bad? The Mermaid kept a close eye on Captain Bluebeard to make sure he didn't get up to too much mischief. A mermaid is an imaginary character how many other imaginary characters can the children think of - fairies, goblins, elves etc.

**Magic:**

This story would encourage pupils to think about wishes that we sometimes make e.g. wishing on our birthday cake candles; throwing money into a fountain and wishing; wishing on a rainbow; wishing on a new moon etc. Ask the pupils to tell you some of the times when they wish and make a list on the board of what these are. Take a straw poll of these and find out which one is the most popular.

**Discussion:**

If the pupils were to be shipwrecked – how would they go about setting up camp? Finding and cooking food would be a priority. Let children talk about this in pairs or groups and then come together and you could ask individual pupils to tell the rest of the class. Take a few lessons and let all the pupils eventually tell the class what their solutions would be and why. Make a class list. You may need to give them the English vocabulary here.

**English / Literacy:**

Write a story from the following titles pretending that you are Robinson Crusoe

- I wish to be a sailor
- I make my first voyage by sea
- I am shipwrecked alone
- I keep myself busy on my island by ....?
- I make a new friend named Man Friday
- Pretend you are one of the characters in the Panto. Write a diary, describing what happens to you when you meet Robinson Crusoe. Do you like him? What are your hopes and fears for the future? How do you feel at the end of the story?