

The Selfish Giant

Presented by

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YOU AND ME PUPPETS

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THE SELFISH GIANT is a puppet production adapted from a short story by Oscar Wilde. It is about a giant who has been away from his castle and garden for 7 long years and during that time the children have come to enjoy his garden and its trees and flowers. As the story opens two children talk about the possibility of his returning and one child says, "I've wanted to climb that tree for a long time, but I guess I'm just too small." As they are talking they hear a loud noise and fearing the giant they run away.

When the giant returns he "kicks" the children out of his garden and hangs up a sign that says, NO TRESSPASSING. When he does this the sunshine goes away and the "things" of winter come to his garden. FROST, WIND, HAIL AND SNOWFLAKES are personified through rod puppets and marionettes which are manipulated by children from the audience. They take over the garden and refuse to leave until the giant confronts them and asks them why they won't leave his garden. The children who are playing the "things of winter" become immersed in the story and they react to the giant and tell him that he is MEAN and SELFISH. The Giant, played by puppeteer Judith O'Hare, asks they why they think he is MEAN etc. The children react from their hearts because they have seen him hang up his sign and banish the children and they have seen the flowers and birds leave the garden. The reaction of the children is powerful and genuine.

When the giant agrees to change and open his garden to the children, the sunshine comes back and in a gesture of good faith he offers to help the little boy climb the tree. The giant and the little boy create a bond of friendship and trust and the story ends with the children playing in the Giant's garden and welcoming everyone to join in their song.

Before the play begins, the puppeteer introduces the audience to the various types of puppets they will get to use in the story. If there are young children in the audience she also brings out the GIANT; to dispel their fears, she asks them who they think will make him move and talk. When they point to her, she says, "You're not afraid of me, are you? It is only me who makes him talk." She then asks everyone in the audience to take part in the show by singing "The Selfish Giant" song which she quickly teaches to them. It is a song sung in four parts and as each part joins in they create a magnificent "chord". Thus everyone becomes part of the "YOU AND ME PUPPETS" production.

While this is a simple story it contains wonderful characters and the opportunity to do what puppetry can do best, bring to life characters and things which are not REAL. The symbols of FROST, WIND, HAIL AND SNOW, which are rod puppets and marionettes are manipulated by children who interact with the giant. As the children make the puppets come alive, they become important forces in the plot.

This production has been described as "an inventive delight". Lowell Sun.

For the Teacher: Questions for further study

1. Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) was an Irish playwright, novelist, poet and short story writer. He is best known for his plays, "The Importance of Being Ernest" and "Lady Windermere's Fan" and his novel "The Picture of Dorian Gray"; however, he also wrote a collection of fairy tales, "The Happy Prince and Other Tales" in 1888. Many of these tales have a serious theme and are excellent reading for older children.
2. The song "Selfish Giant" emphasizes the theme and the symbols of the play. The giant's heart is as cold as the "things" of winter. They agree to leave when his heart is softened.
Ask the children why they think the "things" of winter stay in the giant's garden and what makes them leave.
3. One definition of a good play is that the main character grows and changes during the story. Who are the characters who change? How do they change? What causes them to change?
4. What else changes in the story? The tree changes from summer, to winter, to summer. What does the tree symbolize?
5. How does the puppeteer make the tree change? This is called a transformation.
6. This production has many things that are not "Real to life" such as FROST, WIND, HAIL, SNOW. They cannot talk or think or do things in a human way, but they do come alive in this story. The poetic term for giving non human things human qualities is PERSONIFICATION. The "Things" of winter personify the mean and hard heart of the giant. The puppets make concrete an often difficult concept for children.
6. The personality of the GIANT is universal. Ask the children if they have ever been like the giant or know any people who are like him. This can open up a discussion about the way people relate to one another, sharing, ownership, a "hard heart" etc.
7. To further explore symbols, read a few poems which have clear easy to recognize symbols such as "Fog" by Carl Sandburg.
8. Ask the children to try to write a poem or story using a symbol.
9. Read other GIANT stories from many cultures, discuss the character of "giant"
Read Pete Seeger's Storysong "Abiyoyo" and sing along
10. This play includes hand puppets, large and small rod puppets and marionettes. Make available materials for the children to construct a puppet and encourage them to create their own puppet stories. Make a large rod "Giant" puppet.