



John Lithgow Stories by Heart

Featuring the work of P.G. Wodehouse

January 4 – February 13, 2011 • Mark Taper Forum

Welcome

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Center Theatre Group is excited to have you and your students join us at *Stories by Heart*, created and performed by John Lithgow.

A great play raises questions about the human condition and a great educational experience allows students an opportunity to reflect upon those questions and begin to discover their own answers. To that end the material in Center Theatre Group's student Discovery Guide and Educator Resources raise questions. Questions about the power of stories; why humans tell stories and why we want to listen to them, questions about the healing power of stories and laughter, questions about families and what is handed down from generation to generation. Our goal is to provide you with a variety of entry points into *Stories by Heart* so that you can choose what best suits you and your students.

The Educator Resources and student Discovery Guide are companion pieces, designed to help you prepare your students to see the play and to follow-up the performance with options for discussion, reflection and creativity.

We have organized the Educator Resources into the following sections:

Student Discovery Guide

The student Discovery Guide provides students with background information about the play and the subject matter, as well as questions for individual reflection. Written to be student-driven, the Discovery Guide helps prepare your students for the performance.

About This Play

This section includes a synopsis of the play as well as biographies of the artists involved.



L.A.'s Theatre Company

Ahmanson Theatre
Mark Taper Forum
Kirk Douglas Theatre

601 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Comprehension

This section includes background information about the setting and subject matter of the play. We have selected the information that most directly connects to or informs what happens in the play. This section furthers and deepens the background information provided in the student Discovery Guide, and can be shared before the play and/or discussed after the performance. It can also be used to provide research topics for your classroom.

Connection

This section provides ways to explore connections between the ideas presented in the play, the students' lives and the world we live in. Structured thematically, each section contains questions and exercises that may be used for reflection, discussion and/or writing prompts both before and after the performance.

Creativity

This section provides opportunities for your students to use theatre to explore and express. Theatre activities are included that examine both specific artistic aspects of the production, as well as delve deeper into the ideas and questions raised by *Stories by Heart*. The activities and information in this section can be used both before and after the performance.

We know the hard work and dedication that it takes to bring students to see theatre. These materials are designed to support you in making the most of that experience. We applaud your passion for sharing theatre with your students and thank you for sharing your students with all of us at Center Theatre Group. We look forward to seeing you at *Stories by Heart*!

About

Stories by Heart

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Among John Lithgow's many talents, he is an expert character actor. He defies typecasting with his ability to play almost anyone – from a kindly transsexual in *The World According to Garp*, to a wacky space alien in *3rd Rock from the Sun*, to a terrifying serial killer in *Dexter*. In *Stories by Heart*, he does something completely different and unexpected – he plays himself.

With an armchair, a table, a standing lamp and a stool, wearing a simple black suit and button-up shirt, Lithgow shares with the audience a very personal story. His style is conversational, his dialogue improvised. Completely breaking through the “fourth wall,” he addresses the audience directly, often asking questions that he fully expects to hear answered.

He begins by giving a bit of family history. His father, Arthur Lithgow, had a life-long passion for telling stories that began in childhood. Lithgow describes a common scene from his father's childhood, in which toddler Arthur would gather with his siblings around their mother, Ina, devouring the poems she recited from memory night after night. During times of hardship, those stories were the children's salvation. Ina's storytelling planted in Arthur a deep respect for the art and power of a well-told story, a respect he would pass on to his children.

Lithgow describes his father's adult life as “restless and prolific.” A man completely committed to the theatre, particularly the works of Shakespeare, Arthur was drawn back and forth across the Northeastern states establishing outdoor summer programs, such as the Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival, which 50 years later is still one of the most respected theatre festivals in the country.

Lithgow refers to Arthur as the “Johnny Appleseed” of theatre: a nomad who brought theatre to places that didn't have it, then moved on to the next place. This did create a kind of rootlessness for his wife and four children. Moving often, being surrounded by new people and immersed in a world of theatre was, in many ways, a challenging environment for children. But Lithgow remembers those times fondly, as adventures. His childhood, he says, “was wonderful...because of stories.” Arthur did for his children what Ina had done for hers – he told them tales they devoured. Every night, he'd read to them from *Tellers of Tales*, a collection of 100 short stories from around the world. It didn't matter what city or state they found themselves in, their bedtime stories didn't change. Arthur could tell any one of those stories, play any of the characters and every time the children would squeal with laughter. *Tellers of Tales* was their family bible. The pleasure and consistency they received from those stories, from that book, gave them roots.



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After a lifetime of going wherever theatre called, Arthur retired with wife Sarah in Amherst, Massachusetts. In 2002, at the age of 86, Arthur became ill and required surgery. Because Lithgow was, as he says, the only one of his siblings “between engagements” at the time, it fell on him to move in with his parents and help them through Arthur’s recovery. What shocked Lithgow was not his father’s physical frailty — that was to be expected at his age after a major surgery. Rather, he noticed immediately that his father’s spirit was deflated; that Arthur, a normally vivacious man, had “fallen silent.” Arthur’s depression naturally affected wife Sarah and both of them were fading.

Overwhelmed and desperate for inspiration, Lithgow happened upon a treasure: the original family copy of *Tellers of Tales*. Remembering the joy its stories gave him and his siblings, he brought it to his parents and asked what story they’d like to hear. They chose P.G. Wodehouse’s “Uncle Fred Flits By,” a story that had been a childhood favorite but that Lithgow had completely forgotten until then. He opened the book and read, and as he did so, for the first time in ages, Arthur laughed. “A helpless, girly laugh,” Lithgow remembers. It was the most wonderful sound he’d ever heard and an unequivocal demonstration of the power and necessity of story. Uncle Fred revived Arthur’s spirit and brought laughter to the last year of his life.

Taking *Tellers of Tales* in hand, Lithgow opens the book and begins to read “Uncle Fred Flits By” to us, as Arthur read it to him when he was a child and in the spirit of Ina reciting poetry to Arthur when he was a child. In this way, Lithgow shares with us his family legacy – the deep, rich, passionate respect for a story, well told.

Biographies

JOHN ARTHUR LITHGOW is an actor’s actor, with a broad range of interests and talents in every area of the entertainment industry. He has worked in show business for 40 years and has achieved stunning success in a wild variety of ventures. A list of his relentless pursuits strains credulity.

At heart, Lithgow is a theatre actor. Theatre is where he started, and he started big. In 1973, he won a Tony Award three weeks after his Broadway debut, in David Storey’s *The Changing Room*. Since then, he has appeared on Broadway 19 more times, in productions that included *My Fat Friend*, *Trelawney of the ‘Wells,’* *Comedians*, *Anna Christie*, *Bedroom Farce*, *Once in a Lifetime*, *Beyond Therapy*, *M. Butterfly*, *The Front Page*, *Retreat from Moscow*, and the musicals *Sweet Smell of Success* and *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*. His most recent appearance on Broadway was in a revival of Arthur Miller’s *All My Sons*, and Off-Broadway in A.R. Gurney’s *Mrs. Farnsworth* and Douglas Carter Beane’s *Mr. and Mrs. Fitch*. In the course of this remarkable run, Lithgow won a second Tony, three more Tony nominations and four Drama Desk Awards. In 2007 he was one of the very few American Actors ever invited to join The Royal Shakespeare Company, playing Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* at England’s Stratford-upon-Avon.

In the early 1980’s Lithgow began to make a major mark in films. At that time, he was nominated for Oscars in back-to-back years, for *The World According to Garp* and *Terms of Endearment*. In the years before and after, he appeared in over 30 films. Notable among them are *All That Jazz*, *Blow Out*, *Twilight Zone: The Movie*, *Footloose*, *Buckaroo Banzai*, *Harry and the Hendersons*, *Memphis Bell*, *Raising Cain*, *Ricochet*, *Cliffhanger*, *Shrek* and *Kinsey*. Lithgow will be seen on the big screen next summer in *Caesar: Rise of the Apes*, for 20th Century Fox.

For his work on television, Lithgow has been nominated for 11 Emmy Awards. He won five of them, one for an episode of *Amazing Stories*, and three for what is perhaps his most celebrated creation: the loopy alien High Commander, Dick Solomon, on the hit NBC comedy series *3rd Rock from the Sun*. In that show's six-year run, Lithgow also won a Golden Globe, two SAG Awards and The American Comedy Award. His recent terrifying work as The Trinity Killer on Showtime's *Dexter* won him the Golden Globe for Best Supporting Actor in a Television Series, as well as his fifth Emmy Award for Outstanding Guest Actor in a Drama Series. Since 1998 Lithgow has written eight NY Times best-selling children's picture books, including *The Remarkable Farkle McBride*, *Marsupial Sue*, *Micawber*, *I'm a Manatee* and *I Got Two Dogs*. In addition, he edited *The Poets' Corner* for Warner Books, a compilation of 50 classic poems aimed at young people, to stir an early interest in poetry. He released three kids' albums, *Singin' in the Bathtub*, *Farkle & Friends* and *The Sunny Side of the Street*, and has performed concerts for children with the Chicago, Pittsburg, Detroit, Baltimore and San Diego Symphonies, and at Carnegie Hall with the Orchestra of St. Luke's. He also wrote the libretto and narration for Christopher Wheeldon's child-friendly ballet *Carnival of the Animals* for the New York City Ballet, and joined the cast of 50 City Ballet dancers in the role of The Elephant. All of this work for children has won him numerous tributes, including two Parents' Choice Silver Honor Awards and four Grammy Award nominations.

Lithgow received both his Bachelor's degree and an Honorary Doctorate from Harvard University and a Fulbright Grant to study at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. He has been inducted into the Theater Hall of Fame, given a Star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, and was recently elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Despite the honors and accolades, his family is his greatest source of pride and joy. He has three grown children, two

grandchildren, and lives in Los Angeles with his wife Mary, a Professor of Economic and Business History at UCLA.

ARTHUR WASHINGTON LITHGOW III was born September 9, 1915 in Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic. His mother Ina was a nurse, and father Arthur Washington II a business executive first for a sugar business in Puerto Plata and then for an electric utility in Puerto Rico. Arthur spent most of his childhood, however, in Melrose, Massachusetts where he got his first taste of the stage playing a cherub in the local Christmas pageant. From there, he was off on a career in the theatre that would span five decades, six states and 11 institutions dedicated to the arts and education.

He attended Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio where he received his B.A. in 1938, and met the love of his life, actress Sarah Jane, whom he married in 1939. He made his Broadway debut in 1938 in the hit musical *Lorelei*. His Broadway career continued until 1945 when he served a year in the Army. Returning stateside, he returned to the theatre, receiving a master's degree in playwriting from Cornell University and, in 1947, becoming a professor of dramatics at his undergraduate alma mater, Antioch, which required relocation to Yellow Springs with his wife and four children – David, Robin, John and Sarah Jane. This was the first of many moves the family would make in service of bringing theatre to a wider American audience.

Summer theatre festivals drew Arthur's particular interest. In early 1951 he acted in and served as associate producer for the Shaw Festival at the Rice Playhouse in Martha's Vineyard. That summer, he returned to Antioch College, founding the Antioch Shakespeare Festival. In the six seasons that followed Arthur produced and directed all of Shakespeare's works, an unprecedented accomplishment in Shakespearean theatre in America. He acted in them as well, and because of his encyclopedic knowledge

of the entire Shakespearean canon was able to fill in for sick or injured actors at a moment's notice. Under Arthur's guidance the fledgling theatre festival drew the appreciation of the Yellow Springs community, the acclaim of critics around the country, and even the praise of Queen Elizabeth II.

He achieved this by adopting an unbelievably rigorous schedule. Between 1951 and 1956, the Antioch festival produced seven plays in repertory every summer. For the next two years Arthur added a rotation of venue as well – between Antioch's campus and the Toledo Zoo Amphitheatre. By 1961 the company had performed regularly in four different Ohio towns – Yellow Springs, Toledo, Akron and Cuyahoga Falls. His capacity to first envision and then see through such a complicated endeavor is a testament to his skill and drive, to say nothing of his passion for the art.

Aware of his expertise, and interested in offering summer theatre to their community, the city of Lakewood, Ohio called on Arthur to build a festival there from the ground up. The result was the 1962 opening of the Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival. With a \$50,000 budget they performed six plays in repertory that first summer. Almost 50 years later, the festival – now named the Great Lakes Theatre Festival – is a \$3 million dollar, state-of-the-art operation, and one of the most respected theatrical institutions in America.

Never content with one undertaking at a time, Arthur simultaneously produced the summer festival in Lakewood and served as artistic director of the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, New Jersey. Where some would find the split focus distracting, Arthur saw his dual role as an opportunity for the organizations to exchange productions, a practice he envisioned as the future of American regional theatre (and an idea well ahead of its time). The Board at Great Lakes, concerned about losing their financial autonomy, did not pursue the collaboration beyond 1965, when Arthur

transitioned to the McCarter Theatre full time. He stayed there until 1972.

The birth of American regional theatre is often attributed to Tyrone Guthrie founding the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1963. Yet, by that time, Arthur had already been at it for more than a decade. Regional theatre, and therefore American theatre, is robust today in significant part due to the talent, inspiration and commitment of Arthur Lithgow. His impact is undeniable. Consider the sheer number of people who were reached by his work as an actor, director, producer and educator. Factor in those who then went on to make their own commitment to theatre and his legacy becomes immeasurable.

Actor Christopher Reeve reflected on his experience as a young man at the McCarter Theatre then under Arthur's directorship, "During one performance, I was horsing around backstage when I found myself face-to-face with Arthur. I remember him chastising me for playing such an immature game instead of preparing for my entrance. But then he said something I will never forget, "You may be the one in a thousand who succeeds in the theatre. You'd better decide what you want, because you'll probably get it." In an instant I realized that it is a privilege to appear onstage and that while it may be fun to fool around occasionally, fun is nothing compared to the satisfaction of doing something well. I believe my entire approach to being an actor was formed at that moment."

Arthur Lithgow died March 23, 2004 at his home in Amherst, Massachusetts. He was 88 years old. He left behind his wife Sara, their four children, and 13 grandchildren.

Comprehension

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

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Biography of P.G. Wodehouse

I know I was writing stories when I was five. I don't know what I did before that. Just loafed I suppose. – P. G. Wodehouse

Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse (Oct. 15, 1881—Feb. 14, 1975), known as “Plum” to his friends, was perhaps one of the most prolific English writers of the 19th and 20th centuries. Over the course of 73 years he wrote 96 books (including novels and short story collections), 15 plays and the lyrics to more than 30 musical comedies. His subject was mainly the upper classes – both English and American – whose own eccentricities often cause their undoing. He considered his work light-hearted fiction but close reading reveals a comic genius that buried his characters under multiple layers of ridiculous complications before guiding them to the inevitable happy ending. Many of his works, including “Uncle Fred Flits By” (1935), feature friends or relatives who drag a character into precarious situations, often involving acts of impersonation and a good-natured disregard for the law. The situations seem impossible to resolve without utter catastrophe but Wodehouse always finds his way to a clever and comedic conclusion.

Wodehouse grew up and went to school in England, but spent most of his adult life in France and the United States. While living in France at the beginning of World War II, he was taken from his home by the Nazis and interned for a year. In camp, he used his comedic gifts to entertain fellow prisoners. The German government convinced him to develop them into a series of radio broadcasts, which led to accusations of treason from his native England. Ultimately, investigation by the British government concluded that he may have shown a naïve lapse in judgment but he was not a traitor. Although exonerated, Wodehouse moved his family permanently to the United States

and never stepped foot in his native England again. He died at the age of 94 in his home in Remsenburg, New York.

The Story within the Story : Synopsis of “Uncle Fred Flits By”

“Uncle Fred Flits By” marks the first appearance of two of P.G. Wodehouse’s most loved characters: Fredrick Altamont Cornwallis “Uncle Fred” Twistleton, 5th Earl of Ickenham, and his nephew Reginald “Pongo” Twistleton. Wodehouse would go on to feature the pair in four additional novels.

The story begins in the dining room of an exclusive club for London’s wealthiest gentlemen. A club member, referred to as Crumpet, and his guest observe a haggard, wild-eyed young man who, “If he had a mind, there was something on it.” Crumpet identifies Pongo Twistleton and offers his guest a very reasonable explanation for Pongo’s despair – the impending visit of his infamous Uncle Fred, who doesn’t come to town often but when he does chaos inevitably ensues. As proof, Crumpet relates the details of Uncle Fred’s most recent visit.

On this occasion, Pongo is surprised and delighted when Uncle Fred proposes they visit a home in the suburbs – Mitching Hill— that used to belong to the family. Pongo agrees wholeheartedly, relieved not to be dragged to the dog races or any other such nefarious destination. After all, it’s the suburbs – what trouble could Uncle Fred possibly get into?

In Mitching Hill much of the day passes without incident, as Uncle Fred nostalgically points out the locations of his boyhood antics. All is peaceful, that is, until it begins to rain. Pongo and Uncle Fred seek shelter in a home’s doorway, which for Uncle Fred

is clearly not shelter enough. He rings the doorbell. Pretending to be a veterinarian called to clip the household parrot’s nails, Uncle Fred finesses his way past the servant and into the warm, dry home. At once, the shenanigans Pongo had been dreading all along begin.

Uncle Fred begins by convincing the servant he’s a veterinarian but doesn’t stop there. When relatives drop by who have never previously met the owner of the house, Uncle Fred assumes that role. When face to face with the actual owner, he pretends to be a concerned neighbor. Uncle Fred effortlessly assumes new identities for each new situation and likewise creates them for his nervous, powerless nephew. Pongo must pretend to be a veterinary anesthetist; the homeowner’s son; a deaf, mute parrot expert; and finally a lard and butter salesman, switching from one role to the next at head-spinning speeds.

In assuming these personas, ostensibly to avoid the rain, Uncle Fred inserts himself and Pongo into the extremely personal business of a family he is not a member of, and has not in fact ever even met. Why go to all this trouble? An unexpected rainstorm started it all, but as Uncle Fred sees it, this is his way of making the world a better place. He explains, “On these visits of mine to the metropolis, my boy, I always make it my aim, if possible, to spread sweetness and light...I ask myself, how can I leave this foul hole a better and happier foul hole than I found it? And if I see a chance, I grab it.”

Fred or Pongo?

Fredrick Altamont Cornwallis Twistleton, aka Lord Ickenham, aka Uncle Fred

“You’ll never go far wrong if you leave things to me.” — Uncle Fred, “Uncle Fred Flits By”

Uncle Fred is one of P.G. Wodehouse’s most beloved characters. He lives fully, believes nothing is impossible, and delights in causing mischief despite his age (62) and station (5th Earl of Ickenham). He particularly enjoys grand charades, impersonating real people and making up fictional characters, as the situation requires. Lying comes as naturally to him as breathing and he doesn’t think twice about it.

Uncle Fred was a rambunctious child, the type who shot the gardener in the “trouser seat” with a bow and arrow and smoked cigars until they made him throw up. This precociousness did not fade with age. If anything, he is more a handful as a senior citizen than he was as an adolescent. The elder Fred is someone who takes what he wants, breaks the rules and bucks the establishment. Living in the countryside of Hampshire far away from the temptations of the city, his wife Jane does her best to keep him in line, albeit unsuccessfully. When visiting their nephew Pongo in London, he spends money with abandon and frequently gets himself thrown out of various establishments, if not arrested.

He’s not beyond lying to avoid getting in trouble, either, even if it means laying the blame on a loved one. For example, after giving away money Jane designated for bills, he intends to tell her “that I was compelled to give the money to you [Pongo] to enable you to buy back some compromising letters... She will scarcely be able to blame me for rescuing a fondly-loved nephew... It may be that she will feel a little vexed with you for a while.”

For all of his mischief, he is also generous, charismatic and equitable. When it comes to young lovers, he is warm and sensitive. When it comes to the snobby parents standing in the way of their love, however, he is almost cruel. In the end, Uncle Fred is ultimately well meaning. He doesn’t see his little schemes as cons; he sincerely believes he’s helping people (and often he does). As he explains to Pongo after their adventure, “I always make it my aim, if possible, to spread sweetness and light. I look about me, even in a foul hole like Mitching Hill, and I ask myself—How can I leave this foul hole a better and happier foul hole than I found it? And if I see a chance, I grab it.”

Pongo Twistleton

“He had a sort of notion that oiling into a perfect stranger’s semi-detached villa on the pretext of pruning the parrot was a tort or misdemeanor...” —Pongo, “Uncle Fred Flits By”

Pongo is Uncle Fred’s favorite nephew and often his unwilling accomplice. Uncle Fred’s visits fill Pongo with extreme anxiety. Quite unlike his Uncle, Pongo is quiet, gentle and unassuming. He sees rules as necessary and traditional conventions as essential to maintaining order. And order, to Pongo, is a good thing. According to his friends, “Nobody is more of a whale on correctness and not doing what’s not done than Pongo.”

Pongo finds himself pretending to be a deaf-mute veterinarian in one of Uncle Fred’s charades and is a nervous wreck, his forehead “wet with honest sweat.” He is studying to be a lawyer after all, and he knows they are breaking several laws. And yet, Pongo goes along with it. He knows lying and breaking rules is wrong but he doesn’t do anything to stop it. Uncle Fred’s adventure becomes more complicated, involves more people and more lies. Pongo obviously

experiences extreme mental stress but, swept up by Uncle Fred's boldness, he doesn't tell the truth despite many opportunities. He doesn't even break character. For all his rigidity and caution, there is something in Pongo that draws him to Uncle Fred. To friends Pongo claims it's because he relies on his aunt and uncle for money. He may also be in denial on some level, believing that despite all evidence to the contrary the next visit from Uncle Fred will be different, "that even an uncle within a short jump of the looney bin couldn't very well get into trouble in a suburb."

Whether financial dependence or unwavering hope, something bonds Pongo to his uncle and compels him to go along with whatever Fred comes up with, no matter how senseless, ridiculous or borderline criminal. Fred is a permanent part of his life, and he must accept whatever comes with that. Besides, Uncle Fred only visits a few times a year, which isn't so bad. Or is it? Crumpet asks, "Is it better to have a loopy uncle whose loopiness is perpetually on tap but spread out thin, so to speak, or one who lies low in distant haunts for three hundred and sixty days in the year and does himself proud in London for the other five?"

Glossary

There are many words and phrases in P.G. Wodehouse's "Uncle Fred Flits By" that are hard to understand. This is in part due to the Wodehouse's own creativity – he described people, states of mind and situations in a completely unique way. That's part of what made him such a talented and popular comedic writer. A large number of the unfamiliar words, however, are either British colloquialisms or words that are rarely used in the United States. Many of those are defined here:

- address** – capacity to deal well with a person or problem; adroitness
- barratry** – an unlawful act
- bird** – can be an associate or peer, most often is a young woman – this usage is somewhat derogatory
- blast** – an exclamation of annoyance or surprise
- blench** – flinch or draw back due to lack of courage
- blighter** – disliked or contemptible person
- bloke** – guy; casual term for "man"
- bounder** – jerk; cad; a bad egg
- buster** – someone extraordinary or unique
- chap** – upper class way of saying "bloke"
- clam** – someone who expresses little emotion
- constabulary** – police
- dash** – damn
- down among the wines and spirits** – as low as you can get
- Earl** – technically a minor nobility serving the king, but for two centuries has been mostly a title in name only
- fancy** – (in this context) to believe but not be completely sure
- flat** – apartment
- for two pins** – for the smallest reason
- give you the devil** – give a harsh scolding, like our "give you hell"
- got it up his nose** – got it into his head

Grand National – world famous horse race in Aintree, England

Hants – abbreviation for Hampshire

I'll be bound – I am sure

in fine – Latin for “in the end”

I say! – exclamation of surprise

jellied eel – once a popular English dish, particularly among the poor

jolly well – used to emphasize a point

Lammas – an English harvest festival celebrated on either the 1st or 6th of August

latchkey – key to the front door

liver pad – worn around the waist and under the shirt, it claimed to cure everything from malaria to sea-sickness

mackintosh – raincoat

magistrate – a British judge in the lower criminal courts

make a goat of – embarrass, like our “make an ass of”

mazzard – head; face

McDonald, Ramsay – British Prime Minister from 1931 to 1935

milk walk – milk delivery business

mop it up – consume eagerly

nipping – making a quick trip; moving quickly

omnibus – public bus

paling beneath the tan – going pale; feeling anxious

parlour – room in a house used mainly for conversation and entertaining guests

penn'orth – amount that can be bought with a penny

pippin – person or thing that is highly admired or valued

playing the game – behaving fairly

Pommery Seven – kind of car

pound – Great Britain's basic unit of money, 50 pounds in 1935 would equal \$4,144 today

public weal – common good

pushed off – departed

put on dog – assume pretentious airs

quid – slang for “pound”, like our “buck”

quite – (when used alone) exactly; absolutely

ratepayer – homeowner

repine – feel dejected; fret

rompers – jumpsuit, usually for infants

rummy – strange

scrap – fight

settee – a long wooden bench with a back and arms; a medium sofa

shoved off – same as “pushed off”

shoving his oar in – (typically “putting his oar in”)

giving an opinion even if no one asked for it

socage in fief – having the free use of land on an estate in exchange for labor or rent without having to serve in the military (despite Pongo's anxiety, this doesn't actually have anything to do with criminal activity)

spot of – small amount of

step high, wide and plentiful – play on the phrase “step high, wide and handsome” which means in control or confident

straight bat – honest; honorable

tenantry – group of tenants, especially those with the same landlord

tenner – slang for ten-pounds, like our “ten bucks”

till – money drawer in a store or bank

topping – excellent

touch – (*n.*) a scoring hit in competitive fencing

touch – (*v.*) ask for someone to give or lend something

tithe – one-tenth

villa – house in a middle-class suburb

wire – telegram

worse luck – said at the end of a sentence to express unhappiness or anger

Additional Online Resources:

The Best of British – The American’s Guide to Speaking British,
<http://www.effingpot.com/index.shtml>

Cambridge Dictionaries Online,
<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british>

A Dictionary of Slang – English Slang and Colloquialisms Used in the United Kingdom,
<http://www.peevish.co.uk/slang/index.htm>

Expressions & Sayings,
<http://users.tinyonline.co.uk/gswithenbank/sayindex.htm#I>

Measuring Worth, “Purchasing Power of the British Pound from 1264 to Present,”
<http://www.measuringworth.com/ppoweruk>

The Phrase Finder, <http://www.phrases.org.uk>

TV Tropes – Stock British Phrases,
<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/StockBritishPhrases>

Connections

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

This section provides ways to explore connections between the ideas presented in the play, the student's lives and the world we live in.

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Stories

***“Why do all of us want to hear stories?
Why do some of us want to tell them?”***

—John Lithgow, *Stories by Heart*

Why do human beings need stories? What can a story give an individual, a family or a community? How do stories help us make sense of the world we live in? How do stories matter in your own life?

What do you hope for when you hear a story?

What is the place of storytelling in today's world of technology?

Would you rather tell a story or listen to a story?

If you enjoy telling stories, why? Who do you like to tell stories to? What is the pleasure of sharing a story for you?

What is your favorite way to receive a story? Do you prefer to listen, read or see the story? How do each of these shape your experience of the story?

What does it take to really listen? To a person? To a story?

How do you know when someone is really listening to you?

Family Stories

For John Lithgow and his family, stories traveled with them as they crisscrossed the country.

How can stories create a sense of home even if you have to leave home?

Are there stories that have traveled with your family?

How can stories help us connect and/or communicate within families?

Is there a story that has helped you better understand your family, your parents

or your heritage? How has that story helped?
What stories are told and retold in your family?
What stories do you love to hear in and/or about your family? Why is this story part of your family's history?
Who are the storytellers in your family? Are you one of them?

Stories as Medicine

Stories can be pure entertainment. They can also be life changing. In *Stories by Heart*, John Lithgow recalls a time when he used the art of storytelling to lift his father's spirits after an operation.

How can a story act as medicine in a person's life? How are stories healing?

Have you ever told a story to another person in order for them to feel better? What was the story? Who did you tell it to?

Has anyone ever told you a story that made you feel better? What was the story? Who told it to you? How did it affect you?

John Lithgow used stories as the best way for him to be a caregiver to his parents. How have you taken care of someone you love? What was your version of sharing a story?

Have you ever had to take care of a sick family member? What did you do to help them feel better – emotionally and/or physically?
Has there been a time in your life when you were sick and someone took care of you? How did they help you feel better? Was it with food, stories, music, companionship?

Link to an interesting article on stories as medicine from the journal *Storytelling, Self, Society* (<http://www.courses.unt.edu/efiga/SSS/Intro-1.pdf>)

And quotes from the article; In West Africa, when a person in the village becomes sick, the Healer will ask, "When was the last time that you sang? When was the last time that you danced? When was the last time that you shared a story?"—Allison Wolf

Trauma, illness and grief create frightening forests of pain, with unfamiliar roads; in such a context, listening to stories suggests myriad pathways out of dark forests (Sunwolf, 2003).

Humor as Medicine

The P.G. Wodehouse story “Uncle Fred Flits By” is a comic story and the sound of Arthur Lithgow’s laughter was how John Lithgow knew his father was coming back to life.

What is the healing power of laughter? Can you remember a time when laughter made you well?

Do you know about Patch Adams? Robin Williams played him in the movie about his life. Patch Adams is best known for his work as a medical doctor and a clown, and he is also a social activist who has devoted 40 years to changing America’s health care system. He believes that laughter, joy and creativity are an integral part of the healing process. <http://www.patchadams.org/>

Gifts

John Lithgow was given the gift of stories by his father and his grandmother. When his father Arthur got sick, Lithgow was able to re-pay this gift using stories from his childhood to bring his father’s spirit back. He was able to use the gift he had been given to bring joy, laughter and life back to his father. What is a “gift” that you have been given by an adult in your life? Was it a story, a recipe, music, a value, a belief, a sacrifice?

What is a “gift” you would like to give to this person? Can you share back the gift they gave you or is there a different way to show your appreciation of their “gift”?

Tribute

Tribute: a gift or other acknowledgement of gratitude, respect or admiration
Stories by Heart is a tribute to John Lithgow’s father and the power of stories. He created the play after Arthur Lithgow passed away in 2004.

Have you ever created something beautiful out of grief or loss? How did the grief help you create? How can creativity be healing for both the creator and the audience?

Who would you like to pay tribute to? What form do you imagine that tribute would take?

Legacy

The Lithgow family has a legacy of stories, words and theatre handed down from one generation to the next. Lithgow values and creates art because his father and grandmother told him stories.

Is there a legacy that has been passed down in your family and helped shape you? What would you say is most valued in your family? Music, food, faith, laughter, art, education, hard work, kindness...?

What is a legacy that you would like to pass along – perhaps to a younger sibling, to a friend, to your own children? What do you value that you would like to share today and with future generations?

By Heart

Is there a story, a monologue or song that you have memorized “by heart”? Did that piece have an emotional or heart connection for you that made it easier to memorize?

Do you know a person who lives “by heart”? What is it like to be around them? Are there times when you feel like you live “by heart”?

How would our world be different if more people led from their hearts rather than from their heads?

What is something that you do or would like to do for yourself or for someone else “by heart”?

Creativity

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

This section provides opportunities for your students to use theatre to explore and express.

Theatre activities are included that examine both specific artistic aspects of the production, as well as delve deeper into the ideas and questions raised by *Stories by Heart*. The activities and information in this section can be used both before and after the performance.

Cultural Mapping

Objectives

- *Students will gain knowledge of similarities and differences in their classmates.*
- *Students will be introduced to Stories by Heart and begin to reflect on the play.*

Exercise

Ask the students to move the desks to the side and stand in a circle. Describe the room as a map of the world. Identify Los Angeles in the space. Have students who were born in Los Angeles gather in that place. Have the other students group themselves according to their birthplace (north, east, south or west of Los Angeles). Each group must determine two additional things that they have in common. Report back to the whole class. (Example: The members of the “north” group all like pizza and are the oldest in their families.) Repeat activity using other divisions: Oldest, middle, youngest, only child. Speak one language, two languages, etc. Ask each student to stand by the quote that most intrigues them. Discuss in the group why they chose that quote. What intrigues them about it?

There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside of you.

—Maya Angelou

Storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it. —Hannah Arendt

You have to understand, my dears, that the shortest distance between truth and a human being is a story. —Anthony de Mello

There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories. —Ursula K. Le Guin

Stories tell us of what we already knew and forgot, and remind us of what we haven't yet imagined. —Anne Watson

Tableau/Frozen Picture

Objectives

- *Students will practice using their bodies to communicate an idea or theme.*
- *Students will reflect on the varied interpretations of the theme.*
- *Students will reflect on *Stories by Heart* through a physical exploration of its themes.*

Exercise

Divide students into pairs. Student A is the artist. Student B is the sculpture. Have student A create a statue out of B on the theme of the “future.” Examples: Flying cars, world peace, destroying the environment, graduating from college. Statues can be realistic or symbolic, personal or global. Have each student title their statue and present to the class. Repeat exercise with B as the artist and A as the sculpture.

Repeat with the themes of story, family, parents, trickster, memory. Have each student sculpt an image that represents one of these themes. Discuss what these ideas mean to your students and what these ideas meant in *Stories by Heart*. Are they similar or very different?

Solo Performance Monologue

In this exercise, students interview someone special in their family or neighborhood. Then they learn to turn the interview into a monologue to share with the class.

YOU’LL NEED:

A simple video recording device, like a flip cam, a cell phone video camera or a small traditional video camera.

INSTRUCTIONS:

In the show *Stories by Heart* actor John Lithgow becomes many different characters by using all three items in his actor’s toolkit. Voice. Body. Imagination. One actor, using three simple tools that we all have, to create several different people on stage.

In this activity, you will get a chance to try becoming someone you know and love.

“Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.” —Charles Colton

Take a simple video camera home with you. Ask a parent or older relative if you can ask them a few questions on camera. Find a quiet place with a lot of light. Make sure your relative is sitting comfortably. Ask these questions and record the interview.

What was the happiest moment of your life? The saddest?

Who was the most important person in your life? Can you tell me about him or her?

How has your life been different than what you’d imagined?

How would you like to be remembered?

Once the interview is over, thank your relative for their time.

Back in the classroom, work in groups of two. Each pair watches the interviews on the flip camera, laptop or even a TV. They should first transcribe the interviews. Then, using the transcriptions, students should re-watch the interviews and write down how the person moves while they are answering the questions.

For example, if your Uncle Fred scratches his cheek while answering a question, mark on the transcription that he is scratching over the actual words he is saying. The more specific the notes, the better.

The students will then work to memorize ten lines from the transcription. Memorization includes the words AND body actions noted on the script. In the pairs, the students will share the monologues, then watch the tapes again to see if they are getting close to capturing the essence of the interview. It doesn’t have to be perfect imitation, just as close as possible. Students can offer their partner suggestions. For example, a student could say, “Did you notice your Uncle Fred wrinkles his nose when he is saying he loves pumpkin pie at Thanksgiving?”

Once the students are all ready, the teacher can moderate a sharing of the different stories for the full class.

Playback Theatre Activity

In this exercise, students work together as a small theatre ensemble to recreate a simple moment from a classmate's life through tableaux, gesture and costumes.

YOU'LL NEED:

A few folding chairs, theatre blocks, a table and some simple, large colorful scarves.

INSTRUCTIONS:

In the show *Stories by Heart* actor John Lithgow becomes many different characters by using all three items in his actor's toolkit. Voice. Body. Imagination. One actor, using three simple tools that we all have, to create several different people on stage. He recreates a favorite childhood story that his father told him over and over again when he was a boy.

In this activity, you'll get to hear a story from a friend, then work together as a group to re-create a short version of the story.

The teacher makes groups of six students. One student volunteers to be interviewed. One student volunteers to conduct the interview as "The Conductor." The other students will sit and listen to the interview and then "playback" the interview by recreating the story.

The Conductor and the interviewee sit together. The Conductor ask these questions:

What was your most embarrassing or funny moment?

What happened?

Can you describe how it started?

What were you wearing?

How did you feel when it was happening?

How does the story end?

How do you feel about it now when you think of your most embarrassing or funny moment?

While the interview is happening instruct the students in the ensemble to listen and pay attention to details in the story including pictures, sounds, clothes, etc.

The Conductor then explains that the four student actors will create a beginning, middle and end tableaux of the student's most embarrassing moment. But the important part of the re-creation is that the students are not making fun of the story, but celebrating the moment that the student is sharing. And each moment in our lives make up the story of our lives. These moments became memories that we can share later with friends and family, just like John Lithgow in *Stories by Heart*.

The Conductor helps the actors remember how the story started.

The students create a beginning tableaux using the chair, tables and scarves if they choose.

The Conductor helps the actors remember what happened next.

The students create a middle of the story tableaux.

The Conductor helps the actors remember how the story concludes.

The students create an ending tableau.

The Conductor then plays a simple piece of music on a CD and asks the students to re-create the three tableaux in order without stopping.

The ensemble claps for the student who shared the story.

The Conductor asks the student interviewee if the actors captured any moments from the story that they liked.

The Conductor asks the student interviewee if there were adjustments that could be made, like a theatre director. If there is time, the ensemble makes the adjustments to the tableaux and then shares the new work.

Portrait Writing:

Much of the inspiration for *Stories by Heart* comes from what John Lithgow describes as the grounding influence of storytelling in his life. No matter how many times he and his family moved from town to town, starting fresh with no friends or familiar sights, the same stories, told over and over again, became like a security blanket for the family.

In this writing exercise, students will be asked to explore their own lives through storytelling. By revisiting an earlier time in their lives, students can safely revisit the past and pull from it what they see as important.

Step 1: Students consider themselves as they were when they were half their current age (so, a 16-year-old junior, would consider their 8-year-old self). Thinking back on that time, students should start by drawing a very simple self-portrait. This does not have to be a literal interpretation, but it does need to be a drawing or painting of some kind that represents themselves as children. Students take time to consider their own portrait and share their work for comment and explanation.

Step 2: Students create a simple list, including all relevant information about themselves at the younger age. They may include anything they wish, but the lists should also include the following:

- Age
- Height
- Hair color
- Type of clothes they wore
- Where they lived
- Whom they lived with
- Where they went to school
- Who their friends were
- Favorite books, television shows and / or movies
- Favorite music
- Favorite food and drink

Students share the lists and again a short debriefing of the information allows for explanation and a deepening of comfort with the work.

Step 3: Students add to their lists and consider some important facts about their lives.

- Where did they feel most comfortable at that age?
- Where did they feel the least comfortable?
- With what person did they feel most comfortable?
- With what person did they feel least comfortable?

Step 4: Next, students try to recall a favorite story from that time period. Ideally this would be a favorite bed time or camp-fire story, but it could be a book, movie or even a television show as long as it has specific meaning to them and can be broken down into a beginning, a middle and an end. Students write the stories by memory, including as much or as little detail as they remember. They should write the stories as if they will be read for an audience of children who are the same age as they were at the time they are choosing to recall.

Students share back these stories and discuss:

- Why was this story important to you? Why are stories important to humans?
- How do they help us communicate with our parents / with our children?
- Is there a place for storytelling in today's world of technology?

If there is a nearby elementary school, it could be a fun extension to have your students share their favorite stories with a third or fourth grade class.

Improvisation and Storytelling:

While stories can be created by a single person, they are often passed down from generation to generation, growing through the years as different individuals add onto or even change the original tale. Likewise, improvisation as a theatrical form depends on every member of the group taking what is given to them and adding on to it, moving the story forward. The following group of exercises draws on the collaborative nature of creating stories as well the importance of listening to others and being in the moment when working creatively as a group.

Hamlet's Backbone:

Step 1: With students arranged in a circle, review some of the components of a story (i.e., a beginning, a middle and an end; a protagonist and an antagonist; conflicting objectives that lead to a series of event or building action, culminating with a climax, after which comes a resolution of some kind.) With these things in mind, ask for some examples of stories. It does not matter what the story is, but whether *The Three Little Pigs* or *Hamlet*, everyone should know it. Once the students have decided on a story, ask them to brainstorm on the most important details.

Next, the class is going to tell the story as a group, passing it around the circle with each student contributing one sentence at a time. They must move the story along fast enough to finish it by the time it gets around the circle. Suggest that students can always return to the structure of a story if they get stuck. By considering the components of a story and its natural transitions, they should be able to compress even the densest material down to a few sentences.

Here are the components and some transition suggestions:

- **Exposition:** Once upon a time ... and every day ...
- **Inciting incident:** But then one day ...
- **Building Action:** ... and because of that ... and so ...
- **Climax:** Until finally...
- **Resolution:** ... and ever since that day...

Step 2: Next, divide the students into groups of five or more (at least one person per component.) Give each group a few minutes to choose a new story. Once they have a story to tell, let each group present to the rest of the class, using the transitions and moving through the story using only as many sentences as they have people. This is most fun in real time. In other words, don't let them rehearse!

One Word Story:

Explain that there is a challenge before the group. As a class, you are going to create your own story, but there is a catch:

“We. Are. Going. To. Tell. The. Story. One. Word. At. A. Time.”

As you say these words, point to a different student with each word. When you get to the final word (“time”), let the student you are pointing to fill in the blank. They will get the point and the game can begin.

Now, the task is to send a story around the circle with each person only able to contribute a single word. To help the process, tell the students they may assume the words “Once upon a time” and “They all live happily ever after” are givens. However, even small words like articles (“the,” “a,” “an,” etc.) or conjunctions (“and,” “but,” “so,” etc.) count. So, students must pay careful attention and move the story along by listening closely to the last word before them and continuing from exactly where that person left off—no exceptions. Inevitably, there will be some funny moments as well as some deliberate non-sequiturs. Generally, students should be successful within a few rounds—remember, you’re just looking for a simple story with a beginning, middle and end! That said, even *Hamlet* could be broken into one sentence—A brooding prince wants to avenge his father’s murder, but can’t bring himself to kill his step-dad and dies before he gets the chance (along with almost everyone else.) There you are—that’s 29 words—at least one or two fewer than most classes have room for! Have fun!

Conducted Story:

Approximately six volunteers form a line on stage or at the front of the classroom. As a group, they represent “the storyteller.” A single volunteer (or the classroom teacher) stands facing the line. This person represents “the conductor.” A suggestion is taken from the remaining students for the title of a story. Based on this suggestion, the students on stage will create a story from their own imaginations, but they will behave as a single storyteller.

Using clear hand gestures, the conductor starts the game by pointing to a player, who simply starts telling the story based on the suggested title. The conductor can switch to another player by pointing at any time. That player then continues the story, and so on, until a natural ending happens and the conductor ends the game.

Note: As the conductor points to different students, they must pick up not just the story but the actual sentence (or even the word) *exactly* where the last person left off. For example, Student A might start out by saying “Once upon a time there was a clown who was actually very sa—” At that moment, with only half of the word out of Student A’s mouth, the conductor decides to cut

her off and send the story to Student B. That person must pick up right there... “...atisfied with his job.” We all thought the word would be “sad,” but instead, Student B took it in a new direction. Only by listening closely and reacting in the moment are students able to really get a story told. If they try to think ahead, the story will be disjointed.

As the class gets even better at the game, you may choose to add the challenge of performing in a given genre. This may be added as a single challenge for the group or each student could be responsible for their own genre. For example, the whole group may tell a story in film noir style, or each student may have a different genre (fairy tale, romance novel, spy thriller, etc.). Don't forget that the group is still telling one story; it is just being told through different voices and genres (changing as each student takes a turn.)

A Physical Approach to Creating Characters:

Storytelling often involves “taking on” different characters – that is, physically showing them to the audience. The storyteller gives voice to any number of people throughout the telling of a given tale and we, the audience, go along for the ride. In *Stories by Heart*, John Lithgow tells two kinds of stories. This first is really more of a personal anecdote—remembrances of his childhood, his relationship with his father, his memory of storytelling as an important part of his family's chemistry. For these stories, Lithgow's performance is an extension of himself. He plays the part of John Lithgow the actor, on stage, remembering. However, in the P.G. Wodehouse story “*Uncle Fred Flits By*,” Lithgow gives a different kind of performance. He starts by reading, but soon abandons the book and gives actual shape to the story through physical and vocal acting. Through shifts in accent, pitch, posture and movement, Lithgow is able to clearly delineate one character from another and paint the picture of the madcap scene for the audience. Indeed, our enjoyment of the stories depends on the clarity of Lithgow's choices for each character. To achieve this clarity, Lithgow has boiled each character down to its most essential characteristics. He has created repeatable poses and gestures for each person which function as signals to the audience as to which person is speaking and to whom. Take, for example, the moment in “*Uncle Fred Flits By*” where the family arrives at the house only to find Pongo and his Uncle Fred, two complete strangers, comfortably inside. Wodehouse describes Pongo's reaction to the moment:

Turning, he [Pongo] perceived that Hampshire's leading curse had come back, bringing the gang. It consisted of a stern, thin, middle-aged woman; a middle-aged man and a girl. You can generally accept Pongo's estimate of girls, and when he says that this one was a pippin one knows that he uses the term in its most exact sense. She was about nineteen, he thinks, and she wore a black béret, a dark-green leather coat, a shortish tweed skirt, silk stockings and high heeled shoes. Her eyes were large and lustrous and her face like a dewy rosebud at daybreak on a June morning.

From here, the story goes on, gaining speed at a precarious rate, as the moment becomes more and more tense, and we wait to see if poor Pongo and his Uncle Fred will be discovered or get away with their charade. As an audience, our enjoyment depends on our own understanding of the situation and the characters involved. We need to feel that we are one step ahead of the family and are in on the joke, though we do not know how it will play out. The only way we can keep pace is through the clarity of Lithgow's performance. In order to achieve this clarity, Lithgow must show the dewy innocence of Julia as deftly as he shows the curmudgeonly stodginess of her father, Claude, or the shrewish snobbery of her mother, Connie. He must relay the terror in Pongo's body as clearly as he shows the mischievous confidence of Uncle Fred or the longing ambition of Julia's fiancée, Wilberforce Robinson.

In the following set of exercises, students will explore the physical creation of characters.

Students will start by looking at simple archetypes and move on to create the actual characters from the Wodehouse story. Armed with these physical representations, they can compare their own work to the choices made on stage by John Lithgow.

Step 1: Discussion: What is an archetype? Discuss the word and what it means in order to introduce the concept of recurring character-types within the greater context of literature, theatre and art.

The word breaks into two parts—arch =over reaching, and type=sort or kind. Dictionary Definition: ar-che-type (n) 1. A typical, ideal or classic example of something; 2. Something that served as the model or pattern for other things of the same type; 3. In Jungian psychology, an inherited memory represented in the mind by a universal symbol and observed in dreams and myths; 4. An image or symbol that is used repeatedly in art or literature.

Human Sculpture:

Instructor will lead an exercise, which allows students to explore the use of archetypes in a physical way, allowing them to show (rather than tell) what they know.

Teacher Prompt: Since an archetype represents a familiar sort of character often found in literature, theatre, film and television, we probably already know some. For example, a king is an archetype.

Ask students to list all of the things they know about kings. Students should consider posture, clothing, how the king might hold his head, whether he would make eye contact with the other people around him, etc. As students are ready, they should start to walk around the space as kings, feeling what it's like to inhabit the regal body of a king.

Remind students about the ultimate kingly symbol: his crown. Have students place their hands on either side of their heads with their fingers pointing upward. Students should walk around like this. Tell them that soon, they will feel an ache in their shoulders. Tell them not to take their crowns off if they want to remain in power. Remind them that it's not easy being the king. Point out that there are all sorts of things the king must deal with that are unpleasant—there are burdens, there are dangers, there are those who would overthrow you, steal from you, etc.

With all this in mind (the regality, the privilege, the danger, the burden), ask students to come up with a single pose to represent the king. Students should take a moment to think, and then begin striking poses as their own kings. Students are asked to freeze when instructor says, “3...2...1... Snapshot!”

Allow students to show what a king looks like to them one at a time in order to show that there are differences between the images we all have in our minds.

Character Warehouse:

Students will have read or listened to “Uncle Fred Flits By” before this activity. In groups of six, students are asked to draw on the work they have just done, to create single poses to represent a character. Each group will create six statues to represent each of the characters from the story, drawing on any details they can recall from the story that could help to inform their work. The goal is to create six clearly identifiable characters, shown through a

repeatable, teachable pose. Every member of the group should be able to recreate each of the six poses. They may also refer to the character descriptions in the text of “Uncle Fred Flits By.”

Playback:

- When students have had enough time to create the six characterizations, they will share back with the rest of the class.
- Each student should take on a different character.
- Have them switch so each student shows each character

In the end, students will have built several collections of the six characters, broken down into identifiable poses that an audience can reconnect with quickly.

Putting it all Together:

- Students cover the space using a neutral body position.
- Call out the different characters they created in random order, pausing between each one.
- As each character is called, students must strike the appropriate pose to represent that character.
- Continue the game, moving faster through the characters. Students must switch definitively as they hear the commands.
- When all the students are comfortable with each of the characters, ask for six volunteers to narrate the story “Uncle Fred Flits By” (one sentence at a time like before.) They can help each other as much as they need to or even ask the rest of the group for help.
- As the tale is told, the rest of the class shifts from character to character as the story dictates.

Tricksters

The character of Uncle Fred could be considered a “trickster.” He enjoys pretending to be other people and telling stories that may or may not be true.

Definitions:

From <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/trickster>:

1. a deceiver; cheat; fraud.
2. a person who plays tricks.
3. a supernatural figure appearing in various guises and typically engaging in mischievous activities, important in the folklore and mythology of many primitive peoples and usually conceived as a culture hero.

An interesting definition of a trickster is the one given by Lewis Hyde.

From <http://faculty.gvsu.edu/websterm/Tricksters.htm>:

A “trickster is a boundary-crosser.” By that, he means that the trickster crosses both physical and social boundaries – the trickster is often a traveler, and he often breaks societal rules. Tricksters cross lines, breaking or blurring connections and distinctions between “right and wrong, sacred and profane, clean and dirty, male and female, young and old, living and dead.”

From <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trickster>:

In mythology, and in the study of folklore and religion, a trickster is a god, goddess, spirit, man, woman or anthropomorphic animal who plays tricks or otherwise disobeys normal rules and conventional behavior.

Who are the tricksters in *Stories by Heart*?

Uncle Fred contains many aspects of the trickster. He happily breaks societal rules, changes identities instantaneously and plays with people’s gullibility. He says outrageous things to people, and almost no one questions his authority, his statements, even his identity. He is so skilled at deception that when others do venture to question him in any way, he deftly improvises an answer that gives him the upper hand.

In “Uncle Fred Flits By” it is difficult to know whether to root for Uncle Fred. He makes painfully obvious the inability and/or unwillingness of people to question what is happening before them. At the same time, he deceives without the faintest sign of conscience. Is he a hero or a villain?

The same goes for the characters with whom he interacts. These people are portrayed simultaneously as fools and as victims. Because they are unable or unwilling to see through Uncle Fred's facade, they can be viewed as ignorant and cowardly. At the same time, who can blame them for not questioning Uncle Fred because he acts with such confidence and authority?

Writing Prompts:

- What other trickster characters have you seen in stories from books, theatre, television, movies, video games, internet, in person, etc.?
- Do you know any real-life tricksters?
- What happens when someone breaks normal rules and conventional behavior? What is the value in doing this? How can this cause harm?
- Tricksters gain power through the use of their wit. Can intelligence be both evil and good? When and why?
- "Uncle Fred Flits By," whom do you find yourself cheering for? Uncle Fred? Pongo? Other characters? Why?
- Tricksters are extremely bold about being deceptive. Is this something to admire or to dislike? Why?

Trickster Storytelling Exercise:

Student volunteers are chosen. One at a time, the volunteers are asked to tell two stories: one that is true, another that is pure fiction. The audience must then decide which one is the true story. The storyteller is to make the fictional account as believable as possible; it should be difficult for audience members to tell the difference between what is true and what is not. Discuss storyteller and audience reactions to the exercise.

Variety of Hats Exercise:

Uncle Fred wears a variety of "hats" in his role as trickster: harmless, cheerful uncle; veterinarian; and concerned, fatherly uncle who wields all of the power in the family.

John Lithgow wears a variety of "hats" as he embodies every character in the story.

What kinds of "hats" do we wear throughout our day?

- Teacher brings a box to class containing various hats, costume pieces and props.
- Students are divided into groups of three to five people.
- The group members choose hats, costume pieces and props that they would like to use in their scene.

- After choosing costumes and props, each group must define the elements of Where, Who and What for its scene. (Or, the audience and teacher decide Where, Who and What for the group.)
- Students have one minute to improvise their scene for the class.
- Near the end of the minute, the teacher tells students to freeze. The actors are to switch roles and costumes. The scene commences for another minute (or until the teacher deems appropriate) with the actors playing the new roles. Teacher may have students change roles until all students have played all roles in their scene.

Tricksters in folklore and fiction (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_tricksters_in_fiction#Tricksters_in_folklore_and_fiction):

Anansi – the spider trickster of African origin.

Brer Rabbit – a slave trickster of African origin.

Jack Mary Ann – a folk hero from the Wrexham area of north Wales whose fictionalised exploits continue to circulate in local folklore.

Puss in Boots – a magical cat who tricks a king into raising a low born miller to the station of a great noble.

Reynard – a red fox and trickster figure who plays a central role in the moralistic fables of the Reynard cycle.

Kuma Lisa – a fox and trickster figure in Bulgarian folklore.

In animation, novels, short stories, comics and video games:

Aang – The hero of “Avatar: The Last Airbender” enjoys tricking and playing jokes on his foes. Most of the Fire Nation thinks this of him.

Bart Simpson – from the animated TV series “The Simpsons.”

Bugs Bunny – a rabbit trickster, in some respects similar to Brer Rabbit.

El-ahrairah – the Prince of Rabbits, or the “Prince with the Thousand Enemies;” the trickster folk hero of the rabbits in *Watership Down*.

Harvey – the Pooka, a large anthropomorphic rabbit who can be seen only by the protagonist, from the play and film bearing his name.

Impossible Man – an amoral, childlike, shapeshifting extraterrestrial from the *Fantastic Four* comics.

Jareth – King of the Goblins from Jim Henson’s *Labyrinth*, who changes forms and uses magic to cajole the story’s heroine through a series of puzzles.

The Mask – wears a mask imbued with Loki’s powers and lack of inhibition.

Mister Mxyzptlk – an imp from the fifth dimension featured in the *Superman* comics.

The Pink Panther – a character featured at the start of the film and the animated series of the same name.

Q and fellow members of the Q Continuum – from the TV series “Star Trek.”

The Trickster – the main antagonist of *Thief: The Dark Project*, he masquerades as an eccentric noble named Constantine and apparently has the ability to shapeshift. His disguise serves to trick Garrett into giving him a powerful artifact that will return the world to a wild state.

Wile E. Coyote – featured in the “Road Runner” cartoons and based on a traditional Native American trickster figure, Old Man Coyote. An argument might also be made that Wile E. Coyote’s arch nemesis, the Road Runner itself, is also at least as great a trickster as Wile E. himself.

Families and Storytelling

John Lithgow grew up with a tradition of storytelling in his family. His father, Arthur, was a successful actor, director and producer. Lithgow received a great deal of pleasure from watching his father act out stories for the family. These moments left such an impression on him, many years later Lithgow decided to utilize the same stories to cheer his father during an illness. He was able to bring new energy to his ailing father through the joy of storytelling. He gave back the gift his father had given to him. Essentially, he mirrored what his father had done for him as a child.

Mirror Exercises

- **Partner Mirror:**

- o Students stand in a circle. Everyone finds a partner.
- o The partners face each other. One plays the role of leader, the other follows.
- o The leader begins movement and his/her partner mirrors the movement.
- o This goes on for a few minutes.
- o The teacher indicates when the partners should change roles by announcing, “Switch!”
- o The teacher has them switch roles again once or twice more.
- o Then, the partners are asked to lead and follow each other at the same time.
- o Next, partners close their eyes and try to stay connected with their movement (without touching.)
- o Students open their eyes and freeze, taking note of how connected their movements were (or not!)

- **Mirror with Audience:**
 - A pair of student volunteers enacts the above mirror exercise in front of an audience.
 - Beforehand, the pair decides who will start as the leader but they do not divulge this information to the audience.
 - The teacher indicates when the mirroring exercise is to begin.
 - The audience observes the pair in order to figure out who the leader is.
 - The teacher will call out one name in the pair and ask students to raise their hands if they think that particular person is the leader. The teacher calls out the other name and takes a similar vote.
 - The game goes on until the class votes unanimously on one name as the leader.
 - Repeat with new pairs.

- **Group Mirror:**
 - Students stand in a circle.
 - One student is chosen as the leader.
 - The leader begins sound and movement (in place.)
 - The rest of the group “mirrors” the leader’s sound and movement.
 - When the leader is ready, he or she passes leadership to another in the circle by “throwing” movement and sound, making eye contact with the new leader.
 - Encourage students to be free and creative in their expression of sound and movement.

Commentary on families and storytelling at <http://marriageandfamilies.byu.edu/issues/2004/Summer/familybonds.aspx>:

There is an old Hasidic Jewish saying that states, “Give people a fact, and you enlighten their minds; tell them a story, and you touch their souls.” To have an enlightened mind is a good thing, but it is also good to have an enlightened soul. “Turning hearts” through storytelling creates a sense of oneness and connection between family members and generations that is quite different than parents and children who simply feel they are related by blood and the fact that they live under the same roof. Instead, they become connected by a love that grows out of knowing and understanding each other and feeling committed to each other.

Writing Prompts:

- How do you tell stories in your family?
- What kinds of stories does your family like to engage?
- What is your favorite storytelling medium (books, theatre, television, movies, video games, internet, in person, etc.)?
- What story do you love to hear in and/or about your family? Write the entire story down. Who tells the story? Why do you love to hear it?
- What story do you love to tell about and/or to your family? Write the entire story down. Why do you love to tell it? Who do you tell it to?

Accent and Dialect Activities

In *Stories by Heart*, John Lithgow shares his own voice and then transports us to a different time and place with different characters in part by changing his voice. He utilizes British accents to bring “Uncle Fred Flits By” to life.

Actors make choices regarding how a character talks and expresses him/herself. How a character talks is due to the words of the story we’re given to speak and it is also due to how we express ourselves physically with gestures and how we move through the world as different characters. The physical expression greatly affects our voices; the range, the quality and the actual sounds reflect where our character comes from in his/her life experience.

Preparation for Dialect and Accent Work

Exploring language through experiencing sound-making is getting to the essence of a character and how we can perceive them for a richer theatre-making and theatre-going experience.

The exercises in this section are excerpts from a speech approach called Experiencing Speech. This approach was developed by actors/professors of University of California, Irvine, Dudley Knight and Philip Thompson.

Aim: Through this articulator workout and warm-up, we get in touch with all areas of our mouth, tongue and lips. This workout reminds us we have all the sounds of the world in our mouth.

Another goal of this workout/warm-up is to prepare, explore and even master the jibberish language of Omnish for the following exercise Omnish Poet Laureate.

Omnish is the official fictitious language of Omnia invented and developed by Dudley Knight. This language was developed to offer a way to practice the

verbal sounds of the world instead of only the targeted sounds of our first languages or languages we speak primarily in our daily lives. These exercises keep actors prepared, open and flexible to take on accents at a moment's notice for an audition or role.

Exercise: Begin by making sounds with just the lips. Be creative – there is no right or wrong. Explore. Create friction, fluttering, voicing with vibration of the vocal cords, breathing in and breathing out (ingressing and egressing.) Be sure to support your sounds with plenty of breath so as not to strain your voice and to keep your throat relaxed.

Add on making sounds with the lips and teeth. Again, be creative, there is no right or wrong, explore. Create sounds with friction, fluttering, voicing with vibration of the vocal cords and ingressing and egressing.

Add on making sounds by adding the tip of the tongue. Be creative and explore with the tip of the tongue coming in contact with the lips, teeth and just behind the gum ridge of the upper and lower teeth. Add tapping the tip of the tongue behind the teeth to your exploration. Again, be sure to use plenty of breath to support your sound making. Ingressing and egressing continue to be wonderful choices as well.

Now add on making sounds and using the middle of the tongue coming in contact with the lips, teeth, behind the gum ridge and into the upper middle of the roof of the mouth (soft palate.) Remember there is not right or wrong. Continue to explore knowing you can use friction, fluttering, voicing with vibration of the vocal cords and add on clicking, too. Continue to include ingressing and egressing.

Next add on making sounds while using the back of the tongue coming in contact with the hard palate (back of the roof of the mouth.) Also add using friction and tapping and clicking in the glottal area. Yes, again, continue to include ingressing and egressing.

Now continue to breathe and support your sounds with plenty of breath. Continue to mix it up moving from one end of the mouth with two lips to the back of the tongue clicking and using friction at the middle and back of the tongue. Continue to explore ingressing and egressing with all of the various positions.

“You now have a full repertoire of the distinct vocal sounds that are used in language...now begin to explore the feel of these sound-actions when used in combination. This is play, pure and simple, and like all the best forms of play it will inform as well as entertain.” —Dudley Knight

Using these sounds, turn to another actor and begin to talk, as mentioned earlier, in a jibberish language called Omnish. So as not to be intimidated, this is really just jibberish. There is no right or wrong, only continued exploration. With a relaxed open jaw, begin to speak consonant and vowel combinations using the sounds you discovered in the warm up. This is Omnish. Find a partner and carry on a conversation. Allow gestures, the sounds, the intentions underneath the Omnish to emerge. Play with volume and intensity. What happens to your breathing? Perhaps tell a secret in Omnish to your partner. Try proclaiming a statement you're passionate about and then see what your partner feels about this. Most important, have fun!

The Omnish Poet Laureate: A Translation Exercise
(from Philip Thompson)

John Lithgow takes on many voices/characters in *Stories by Heart*. While he tells and acts out “Uncle Fred Flits By” for us, he also shares stories of his own family. Notice how his voice changes. Is there a familial dynamic of storytelling that goes on in your family or with your friends? Is there a difference in his voice when he acts out the story by P.G. Wodehouse versus when he tells us stories of his own family? How do you feel as audience member? Do you feel the story differently when he is acting out the P.G. Wodehouse’s story versus when he talks about his family?

Enjoy this exercise to explore the English translator and Omnish language speaker roles. Notice if your translator voice is different than how you speak when you’re having a relaxed conversation with your friends and family versus when you’re presenting information. We all have many voices within us. Explore all the ways you can use your voice.

Aim: To develop listening, improvisation and articulation skills. The actors also practice acquiring a sense of connection to their fellow actor. The actors have the opportunity to develop trust in their inner voice and creative impulse and instincts.

Exercise: This is an exercise for two persons working together. One person plays the role of a famous Omnian poet visiting an English-speaking country. The other person is the poet's translator.

The translator conducts the proceedings and begins with an introduction of the poet in English. The poet then begins reciting a poem in Omnish (all improvised jibberish). After a line or two, the poet pauses as the translator provides a translation into English (all improvised). This continues throughout the rest of the poem.

This exercise should not be rehearsed in advance. Encourage the actors to think and say "yes" to the offers the other actor is giving in order to keep the creative process alive and moving forward. The instructor might need to encourage this notion of yes and accepting the offer throughout the exercise.

Eventually, the instructor asks them to find an ending to the poem and leads the audience to applause. Rotate and bring another pair of actors up to work and translate an Omnian poem. Pairing up the actors and having them try this on their own all together is another way to get everyone working if time is of the essence or if your group is shy and needs practice first.

One of the many virtues of this exercise is that the translator and also the poet will be encouraged by the form of the performance to listen to each other closely and to pick up cues from the other person as to the progress of the poem. These cues will relate primarily to the sounds employed, but will also be found in intonation patterns, timing and gestural signals.

If your classroom make up is, for example, primarily Spanish speaking, feel free to use a Spanish translator in addition to an English translator with an Omnish Poet. So, the Omnian Poet would speak, the English speaker translates, then the Spanish speaker translates the English to Spanish. Or you can have great fun having the Spanish speaker translate the Omnian first, then have the English speaker translate next. Improvising the interpretation is part of the fun and getting the translation correct is not the goal, it is the flow of the student's creativity---the sillier the better. The translator role's language can be substituted with the primary language of your students.

Creating a British Accent

As actors when we develop an accent and voice of a character, we read the story and see what it tells us about the characters. We consider the class background of the character: their physical surroundings, how they talk to other characters and how other characters treat and talk to them.

In “Uncle Fred Flits By,” John Lithgow speaks in various British accented voices of different characters and his voice changes constantly depending upon what is happening in the story. What are the surroundings of the characters? Where are they? Does this affect how they talk to each other? Is there a secret? What happens when the dramatic tension rises?

This sequence of exercises is a fun way to begin to experience a British accent. **Aim:** Heighten listening skills, ear training, practice articulation/speaking skills, explore English literature through language/linguistics, gestures and physical movement.

Exercises: Because of the theatrical nature of John Lithgow’s performance, samples of **Received Pronunciation** (a standard of dialect/accents often used in the theatre in England and around the world when portraying well-spoken English/city/educated characters) are shared below as well as directions on how to download the audio samples. Three samples, one male and two female, were chosen to offer a variety of voice types so your students might find a voice they can relate to.

Listening Samples:

English 7 was chosen for the example of a male voice speaking the Received Pronunciation accent of London.

English 63 was chosen for the example of a female voice speaking the Received Pronunciation accent of London.

England 31 was chosen for the example of a female voice that comes more from the suburbs and who might be the voice of the “Female at the Cedars” in the “Uncle Fred Flits By” story. This voice reflects a different class, perhaps someone who works for a well-to-do family and is entrusted with the duties of their home.

- Download the Mp3 samples and transcriptions, listen and follow along with the transcriptions.
- Listen again and encourage the students to speak along with the recording imitating the sounds/speech of the sample voices.
- This is a technique used to experiment to find the shape of the mouth, lips and tongue to speak like the voice in the sample. This is how to acquire the oral posture of the accent being heard.
- After listening and imitating the sample voices, have fun applying the newly acquired accent an excerpt from “Uncle Fred Flits By.”
- If time is an issue, feel free to choose just one of the first two voice samples to work with. Feel free to break the project up into sections and work with the voice samples over the course of a number of days or weeks. Returning to the work repeatedly is a great way for students to practice and acquire the accent over time with multiple sessions. This helps them to develop their ear training and more sensitive listening skills.

Getting the voice samples:

A computer and on-line capability are required. You can download the voice samples before presenting the samples to the students, or share the process with the students so they can see where to do more research on their own if they desire. External speakers are ideal for the students to listen to the voice samples.

1. Go to this website: I.D.E.A: International Dialects of English Archive Exercise (<http://web.ku.edu/~idea/>)
2. Look up and click on England in the right hand column.
3. Scroll down to the Received Pronunciation and Miscellaneous Table and you will find the samples listed above.
4. Or go directly to this link and it will take you right to the page with these sound samples:
<http://web.ku.edu/~idea/europe/england/england.htm>
5. Download the Mp3 samples in the Received Pronunciation and Miscellaneous Table at the very end of this page.
6. The specific sample descriptions and transcriptions selected are provided below.
7. Print out these sample descriptions and transcriptions so the students can follow along as they listen to the voice samples.
8. Most students can use visual reinforcement of seeing the words of the descriptions and transcriptions on the page while listening to the voice samples.

England 7 sample description: White male, an archaeologist by profession. Speaks Received Pronunciation. Tells amusing story of his first dig at the country estate of a local aristocrat. Perfectly impersonates the lord of the manor. No more detailed transcription available at this time. Recorded in Cairo by Krista Scott, edited by Paul Meier 11/06/99. Running time 00:03:52.

England 63 sample description: Female, born 1954, child of a diplomat, went to boarding school. Speaks Received Pronunciation. The speaker, who submitted the recording, also provided transcript.

England 31 sample description: White female, born 1944, recorded and edited summer 2001 by Paul Meier. Subject works as a nurse, was born and raised in Appledore, North Devon. She and her friend, England 32, reminisce about their childhood in this ancient fishing village and seaport. Note the difference between the formal speech of the reading and the delightfully vernacular dialects she takes pleasure in using in conversation. Note the fairly uniform rhoticity; the dropped 'h' of *holiday*, *whose*, *house*, etc.; the higher front starting

point for the diphthong of *round, house, town*, etc.; the dropped “yod” in *beautiful*, etc.; and the very lip-round nature of the vowel in *boat, nose, only*, etc. Some denasality will be heard in this speaker, quite prevalent in the dialect. Running time: 00:07:11. Speech Transcribed by Cali Gilman. 11 February 2008

*** Note – the end of this segment contains a reference to women’s breasts as “fenders.”**

Practicing And Applying The Accent To The Text

Have fun applying your new Received Pronunciation accent to “Uncle Fred Flits By.” Select a section of the text to work on.

Choose three students to read and play the parts of Lord Ickenham, Pongo and British Narrator. If necessary, split the class into groups of three to get everyone active and working with this exercise.

1. Encourage them first to read the text with their own accents.
2. Then, encourage them to read the text again and to use the Received Pronunciation accent. You may need to play the voice sample again so the students can get the accent back in their ears and mouths.
3. Reassure them it is an experiment and there is no right or wrong and that it isn’t about getting the accent perfectly. It is a process to play and acquire an accent.

Ask them to notice if the text flows differently expressing the words with their own accent versus with the Received Pronunciation accent? How did the British English colloquialisms (regional expressions) feel when speaking lines like “Splendid. Topping!” versus when speaking in their own Los Angeles American English accent?

1. Next, begin to imagine how each character, Lord Ickenham, Pongo or the British Narrator gestures and moves when he/she speaks versus how you gesture and move when you normally speak.
2. Find one gesture for your character.
3. Now move about the room, cover the space and experiment using your gesture and finding how your character walks and have fun!

4. Return to your group and begin to play your parts with the text/scene below.
5. You just might feel more British! Enjoy watching yourselves transform into Lord Ickenham, Pongo and the British Narrator by using your voices differently!

To further the project of applying this sequence, script out other sections of “Uncle Fred Flits By” and perhaps utilize the England 31 voice sample to fashion the Female character at “The Cedars” and the students will have another voice type with which to experiment.

If you and/or your students want to work further/deeper or are more advanced and/or have a specific need to learn an accent for the school play or drama project, return to the I.D.E.A. website to acquire the sounds you need.

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