

Crabgrass Puppet Theatre

Study Guide for

Jack and the Beanstalk

CRABGRASS PUPPET THEATRE'S shows are aimed at educating as well as entertaining our audiences. School performances include a demonstration of the puppets and techniques we use. This study guide provides background information about the show and suggestions for classroom activities.

ABOUT OUR SHOW

Jack and the Beanstalk is an English fairy tale. The earliest literary reference for the story is in the 1730's, called "The Story of Jack Spriggins and the Enchanted Bean." This story is one of many "Jack Tales," the earliest of which was probably "Jack the Giant-Killer."

Jack Tales usually follow a pattern: Jack is an underdog who goes out into the world to make his way. He faces challenges that his brothers have failed before him, but Jack succeeds, often with the help of a magical object given to Jack by someone to whom Jack has been kind. Jack passes the tests, wins what he wants (usually riches and a wife), and lives happily ever after.

SYNOPSIS

Jack's mother sends him to the market to sell their last cow, because they have no food in the house. On his way, Jack meets a man who offers to trade his magic beans for Jack's cow. What a great idea! Jack returns to his mother, who is not at all happy about the beans. Angrily, she flings the beans out the window and they go to bed without supper.

The next morning Jack awakes to find an enormous beanstalk growing outside his window. He begins to climb, and eventually comes to a

land in the sky. He knocks at the door of a mansion and is greeted by the giant's wife. She takes pity on hungry Jack and is giving him lunch when they hear the giant coming home. She hides Jack, who then listens to the giant play with one of his favorite toys, a hen that lays golden eggs. When the giant falls asleep, Jack grabs the hen and goes back down the beanstalk. His mother is overjoyed to see the hen and her golden eggs, and they live comfortably.

But Jack can't forget the giant's mansion, and one day he climbs the beanstalk again. Again he is welcomed by the giant's wife, and again he has to hide when the giant returns. This time the giant is counting his money. Jack waits for him to fall asleep, steals the money, and heads down the beanstalk. Plenty of money, a hen with golden eggs – there's no way Jack would risk his life to go back up the beanstalk, right?

Wrong! Eventually Jack climbs back to the giant's mansion, and this time the giant is playing his magic harp. When the giant is asleep, Jack grabs the harp – but is terrified to hear the harp calling for help! The giant wakes and chases Jack. Jack reaches the bottom of the beanstalk and chops it down, and Jack and his mother live a long and comfortable life.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Have your class plant beans, and watch over time as they sprout and grow into beanstalks!

Read Jim and the Beanstalk by Raymond Briggs to the class. Discuss the differences between the two stories. How is the ending different? How are Jack and Jim different in the way they deal with the giant?

Read Kate and the Beanstalk by Mary Pope Osborne to the class, and discuss the differences between this story and the original "Jack and the Beanstalk."

Jack and the Beanstalk is perhaps the most-parodied story in the English language. It seems like everyone from Bugs Bunny to Sponge Bob has taken a crack at it. Have your students come up with some new plot twists and write their own versions of the story.

Read some of the "Jack Tales," and identify the major elements of a Jack Tale in each story. Is Jack more or less the same character throughout the stories?

How big do your students think that giants are? Using their rulers, have them draw themselves "in scale:" if one inch equals one foot, how many inches tall would they be? Have them put the rulers away and draw a giant next to the picture of themselves. Afterwards, use the ruler to measure how tall their giant would be.

What other stories about giants do your students know? How are the giants in the different stories similar to Jack's giant? How are they different?

Have each student draw a section of the beanstalk, then post them on the wall, one on top of the next.

Have each student draw a scene from the story, and post them on the wall in order of occurrence.

Recommended Books

The Jack Tales, Richard Chase . Sandpiper, 2003.
Southern Jack Tales, Donald Davis. August House, 2005.

Jack and the Beanstalk, E. Nesbit. Candlewick, 2006. Beautiful illustrations by Matt Tavares
Jim and the Beanstalk, Raymond Briggs. Puffin, 1997.

Kate and the Beanstalk, Mary Pope Osborne. Aladdin, 2005.

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS ON AUDIENCE BEHAVIOR:

Many children do not have much experience with live performance, and do not understand that live performance is different from a sports event, a movie, or television. It is helpful to discuss audience behavior with them prior to the performance. In addition to the basics (pay attention, don't talk, don't yell out), the following is important:

Applauding: this is the main way the audience shows its appreciation to the performers. Teachers can explain this prior to the performance, and can lead the way by applauding at the end of stories and at the end of the show.

Laughing: is another way of showing appreciation! We are *trying* to make the audience laugh, and sometimes we will visit a school where the teachers quiet the children when they laugh. We *want* them to laugh! Young children may need to be reminded that after they laugh, they need to quiet down again to listen.

Is it okay for teachers to laugh? YES! We are performing for teachers as well as students, and there is plenty of humor in our shows for adults. Many teachers seem uncomfortable laughing in a school performance, but teachers' laughter does several important things. Overall, it shows the children that the teachers are paying attention to and enjoying the performance, which elevates the children's interest. It also raises the children's understanding of more sophisticated humor: when teachers laugh at something the children didn't find funny, the children often realize quickly that it *was* funny, and we get a second wave of laughter. The most enjoyable performances we do are the ones in which both teachers and students are engaged and responding.

Teachers: please be courteous to the performers! We're well aware of how overworked and short of time most teachers are these days. But if teachers are correcting papers or carrying on conversations during a performance, they are unable to become involved in the performance, discuss it with their students afterwards, or set an example for the children by responding and applauding at the correct times.