

# Crabgrass Puppet Theatre

## Study Guide for

# The Lion and The Mouse *and Other Tales:* Smart and Small Conquers All

**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

Can a turtle win a tug of war with a mighty elephant? Can a tiny mouse help an enormous lion? Can a jackal outwit a terrifying tiger twice his size? Find out as Crabgrass Puppet Theatre travels around the globe to tell stories that show even the small and weak can have a big impact on the world. With beautiful puppets and their signature hilarious style, the award-winning Crabgrass Puppet Theatre presents tales from Africa, Asia and Europe that will inspire and enthrall children of all sizes.

**The Lion and the Mouse *and Other Tales*** includes folktales from three different continents: Asia, Africa and Europe.

### ***One Good Turn***

This story comes from India. A wise and honorable man meets a Tiger trapped in a cage. The Tiger pleads with the man to set him free. "Why should I?" asks the man. "You'll turn around and eat me." "Nothing could be further from the truth!" the tiger assures the man, "We'll be friends forever." But when the man opens the tiger's cage, the tiger pounces on him. "Wait!" This is so unfair!" cries the man. "Unfair? For a

tiger to eat a man? Ha!" says the tiger. "If you can find just one creature who thinks this is unfair, you may keep your life."

The man is unable to find a single animal to take his side, and prepares to meet his fate at the hands and teeth of the Tiger. Just in time, a clever jackal happens by, saves the man and teaches the tiger a lesson about gratitude and keeping his word.

### ***Tug of War***

From West Africa comes a story of arrogance and humility. The elephant and the hippopotamus each claim to be the strongest animal in the forest. "I'm just a powerful as you are," claims the lowly tortoise, and he challenges the other animals to a tug of war. The tortoise uses his intelligence to outsmart the elephant and the hippopotamus and show that he can pull his own weight – and theirs as well!

As with most folktales, variants of this story are told all over the world. Our version comes from West Africa. The animal characters vary depending on where the story is told. Sometimes the trickster is a rabbit, and the tug of war is between an elephant and a whale. In a Native American version, a rabbit tricks two snakes.

### ***The Lion and the Mouse***

Aesop's classic fable about friendship was written in ancient Greece, but the lesson it teaches is just as true today. A tiny mouse angers a mighty lion by waking him up. The mouse begs the lion not to eat him, promising to help the lion when he is in

need. “What a laugh!” sputters the lion. How could someone so small help someone so large?

But not long afterward the lion is caught in a hunter’s net. He struggles to escape, roaring in anger and confusion, but the net holds him fast. The little mouse hears the lion and uses his sharp little teeth to chew him free. Even those small in stature can do great deeds.

“The Lion and the Mouse” is one of Aesop’s fables. Aesop is thought to have been a slave and storyteller who lived in Greece in the fifth century B.C. A fable is a short story that uses creatures, plants or other natural elements to illustrate a moral or lesson. Aesop’s fables include “The Tortoise and the Hare,” “The Fox and the Grapes,” and “The Ant and the Grasshopper.”

## ABOUT THE PUPPETS

All of the puppets in **The Lion and the Mouse and Other Tales** are rod puppets.

**ROD PUPPETS** are moved from below or behind with rods (sticks). Some of the puppets have several rods; others have just one.

**HOW ARE THE PUPPETS MADE?** We make all of the puppets, as well as the scenery and stage. Most of the puppets' heads are carved out of styrofoam and then covered with paper maché. The bodies of the puppets are usually made of a dense, stiff foam rubber – the same stuff that pool noodles are made of. We carve it with an electric carving knife.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Folktales are stories that have been told for many years. While this may be your students’ first exposure to these stories, they should know that there are many versions of the tales. Often the variations are due to the animals and natural elements found in that particular part of the world: stories involving elephants, for example, would be more prevalent in a place where there were elephants.

In all three of our stories, the major characters are animals that represent human characteristics. Make a list of the major characters and have the children name each animal’s human trait. For example, the jackal is clever, and the lion is proud.

Ask your students to write their own versions of one of our stories, using the elements of where they live. For example: write “The Lion and the Mouse” set on an elementary school playground, or “Tug of War” in a family setting.

One of the best activities for literacy and writing practice is to have your students write letters to the performers. What parts did they like best? Letters and drawings can be sent to:

Crabgrass Puppet Theatre  
P.O. Box 2363  
Brattleboro, VT 05303

### Discussion questions for after the production:

What kind of animal is a Jackal?

Do you think the Tiger should eat the man?

Does bigger mean better?

Who won the tug of war?

Discuss the elements of a fable, and have your students create their own.

Ask your students why they think Aesop used animals instead of people to tell his stories.

Read several of Aesop’s Fables to your class, and discuss the morals at the end of the story, to acquaint them with the way fables work. Then read several more without reading the moral at the end, and ask the children to verbalize the lesson illustrated by the story (provide their own moral).

Divide the class into groups of 4. Assign each group one of Aesop’s Fables, and have them create a short play from their fable.

Divide the class into two teams, and play a game of tug-of-war.

Discuss audience behavior: how are live performances different from television or movies? How are they different from a football or basketball game? How should you act in a performance? If you were giving a performance, how would you want your audience to act?

## **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.

## **Recommended Books**

All three stories can be found in **Best-Loved Folktales of the World**, Joanna Cole, Turtleback Books, 1999.

**Wonder Tales from Around the World**, Heather Forest, August House Publishers, Inc. 2006.

**Clever Tortoise**, Francesca Martin, Walker Books, 2001

**The Lion and the Mouse**, Jerry Pinkney, Little, Brown Co., 2009. This beautifully illustrated wordless version won the Caldecott Medal in 2010.

**Aesop's Fables**, Beverly Naidoo, illustrated by Piet Grobler. Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2011.

**Unwitting Wisdom : An Anthology of Aesop's Fables**, Helen Ward. Chronicle Books, 2004. This edition has stunning illustrations.