

Breathing Life Into Myths

Length:	30 minutes
School:	Hand Middle School
Location:	Columbia, S.C.
Grade:	6
Teachers:	Helen Schell, 6th-Grade Language Arts Jennifer Larson, Theatre
Description:	Students create puppet theatre based on a study of Greek mythology.

About This Program

Helen Schell's sixth-grade language arts class has been studying Greek mythology. Her students have created puppets of the god or goddess of their choice. She seeks advice from the school's theatre teacher, Jennifer Larson, about enhancing the puppet experience for her students. Jennifer gives her resources, standards, and advice, plus lots of enthusiastic support for working with puppets.

In Helen's classroom, we see lessons where the students discuss the influence of Greek myths on modern society, and how the Greek language pervades modern English. Students then work in small groups writing original skits for their puppets to perform. Helen teaches them some basic puppetry techniques, noting that she is not trying to take the place of a theatre teacher.

Jennifer comes to Helen's classroom for a first run-through of a student puppet production, and gives students more advanced tips on working with puppets. The puppeteers repeat their performance, and the class critiques their work using a technique that Helen calls "PPQ"—Praise, Polish, and a Question.

Finally, Helen and Jennifer meet to reflect on the students' work and their own, looking forward to further collaboration next year.

Arts and Non-Arts Standards Addressed in This Program

The standards below refer to the McREL Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks, a synthesis of national standards in each of the disciplines, found at www.mcrel.org.

Theatre

Standard 1: Demonstrates competence in writing scripts

Language Arts

Standard 6: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts

Viewing Suggestions

Who Should Watch This Program

Teachers—“Breathing Life Into Myths” will be especially interesting to teachers of any discipline who want their students to explore mythology, or other areas of study, in a creative, collaborative, and interdisciplinary setting.

Administrators and professional development providers—This program can be useful in encouraging teachers to expand their repertoire of interdisciplinary instruction within the classroom and to collaborate with a colleague.

Before You Watch

Respond to the following questions:

- How does infusing theatre into the study of literature help middle school students learn?
- What roles might an arts teacher play when a classroom teacher has already integrated the arts into a lesson or unit of study?
- How do non-arts teachers work to improve the art-making components of their lessons or units?

Watch the Program

As you watch, keep track of the ways that Helen is integrating the arts into her study of Greek mythology. Jot down aspects of this project that strike you as particularly creative. Also note when and where Jennifer, the theatre teacher, steps in to help.

Reflect on the Program

- How did Helen stimulate and maintain students’ interest in Greek mythology?
- What evidence did you see that students understood the myths in a deep or flexible way?
- Which part of the unit you saw—creating the puppet characters, writing original scripts, or performing and polishing the plays—would be most challenging for you to accomplish?
- What struck you most about Helen and Jennifer’s collaboration? What were the successful elements of this collaboration?

Additional Resources

Consult some of these resources for more information.

Books

Barclay, Greta. *Mighty Myth: A Modern Interpretation of Greek Myths for the Classroom*. Torrance, Calif.: Good Apple, 1982. ISBN: 0866530649

D'Aulaire, Ingri, & D'Aulaire, Edgar Parin. *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths*. New York: Doubleday, 1962. ISBN: 0385015836

Fitzsimmons, Robin, & Verniero, Joan C. *One-Hundred-and-One Read-Aloud Myths and Legends*. New York: Black Dog & Leventhal, 1999. ISBN: 1579120571

Graves, Robert. *Greek Gods and Heroes* (reissue edition). New York: Laurel Leaf, 1965. ISBN: 0440932211

Graves, Robert. *The Greek Myths*. New York: Penguin USA, 1993. ISBN: 0140171991

Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology*. Boston: Back Bay Books, 1998. ISBN: 0316341517

MacRone, Michael. *By Jove! Brush Up Your Mythology*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992. ISBN: 0062700235

Rosenberg, Donna. *Mythology and You: Classical Mythology and Its Relevance in Today's World*. Lincolnwood, Ill.: NTC/Contemporary Publishing Company, 2001. ISBN: 0844255610

Williams, Marcia. *Greek Myths*. Cambridge, Mass.: Candlewick Press, 1995. ISBN: 1564024407

Taymor, Julie, & Blumenthal, Eileen. *Playing With Fire: Theater, Opera, Film*. New York: H.N. Abrams, 1999. ISBN: 0810935171

Latrobe, Kathy Howard, & Knight Laughlin, Mildred. *Readers Theatre for Young Adults: Scripts and Script Development*. Englewood, Colo.: Teacher Ideas Press, 1990. ISBN: 0872877434

Video

Yoshida, Tamao (Puppeteer), & Takemoto, Sumitayu (Chanter). *Bunraku: Masters of Japanese Puppet Theater* [Motion Picture]. Princeton, N.J.: Films for the Humanities and Sciences. ISBN: 0736545328

Web Sites

Myth Mania: A site containing information on Greek mythology for school projects, homework help, and well-told humorous myths
<http://mythman.com/>

The Puppetry Home Page: An extensive puppetry site that includes many puppet-making resources and supplies
<http://www.sagecraft.com/puppetry/>

What You Need To Know About: Top 10 Puppet Making Books: Create everything from shadow puppets to fancy marionettes
<http://familycrafts.about.com/cs/toppicks/tp/puppetbooks.htm>

Additional Resources, cont'd.

The Mask (& Puppet) Studio: Making a Hand/Rod Puppet: Methods that are quick, non-toxic, and can result in a very durable puppet character
<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~dhell/diy2.htm>

Classroom Puppet Studio: Fun puppetry workshops for teachers, home school educators, children, and adults of all ages
<http://www.classroompuppets.com/web/home/index.html>

Teaching Is a Work of Heart—2001: Reader's Theater Scripts and Plays: A teacher-created site with plays and scripts to print and read
<http://www.teachingheart.net/readerstheater.htm>

Films for the Humanities and Sciences @ films.com: An extensive resource for educational media
http://www.Films.com/Films_Home/Index.cfm?S=1