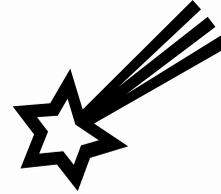




Red Herring Puppets

presents



The Legend of La Befana

Study Guide
and
Resource Manual
for Teachers

The Legend of La Befana



The Legend of La Befana is well-known in Italy where Befana is beloved as the gift-giver, much like Santa Claus is in the United States. La Befana is an old woman who spends much of her time keeping house. One night she receives a visit from three wise-men who are following a magical star which they say will lead them to the newly born Christ child. They invite her to join their procession, but she declines. Later she has a change of heart and sets off with gifts to bring to the child. She travels the world unable to find him. Weary from her long journey, she sets down to rest and has a vision in which she understands that her search has not been in vain as the Christ child represents the goodness in everyone. She decides to share her gifts with all the children of the world. There are similar legends in Poland, Rumania, and Russia which honor Old Babushka.

The name Befana is related to the word “epiphany”. Her day is celebrated in Italy on January 6, the day that the Magi are believed to have arrived to offer gifts to the Christ child. In the legend, La Befana gains an intuitive grasp of the goodness inherent in all children. The angel awakens Befana to this simple truth which was overlooked through all her desperate searching.

*An epiphany is a deep understanding
of the nature of the world that can change
the way one looks at things*

Red Herring Puppets has created an original version of the popular legend featuring a procession of animals, a glowing sequence of magical stars, and an animated journey through the world during the Year One. The story is set in a Byzantine style and employs over fifty puppets mixing hand, rod, shadow, and black-light figures.



MEET THE RED HERRING PUPPETS

Red Herring Puppets was founded in 1988 and based in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Western North Carolina. They delight young audiences with their lively and informative "edu-tainment."

LISA STURZ, Artistic Director and puppeteer, is a nationally recognized puppeteer whose credits include Jim Henson Productions, Lucasfilm, Walt Disney Imagineering, NBC, PBS, the Ice Capades and the Lyric Opera of Chicago. Lisa's giant puppets have been featured at such places as the Field Museum, the Shedd Aquarium, and the Biltmore Estate. Her film and television credits include Murphy Brown, Puzzle Place, Elmo in Grouchland, Muppets in Space, the Flintstones, Howard the Duck and Ninja Turtles III. She holds an MFA in puppetry from UCLA. Her work has been supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Jim Henson Foundation, the Puppeteers of America and many State and local arts agencies. She has earned a California Emmy.

Lisa is also a teaching artist who has lead hands on residencies in the schools for students and teachers. She works with curriculum standards to integrate arts in the classroom.

CATHERINE HAAS RILEY, composer, grew up in a creative family. Her piano teacher mother married a Viennese artist with a passion for music. Cathy majored in art at Brandeis University and then did her post-graduate studies in music. She became certified in Orff-schulwerk music and presently teaches the approach to piano, guitar, and voice in the Asheville area. She writes her own music and has recorded several compact discs.

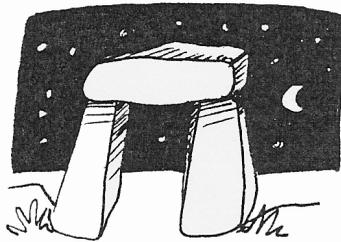
MARSTON BLOW, puppeteer has been performing with Red Herring Puppets for eight years. She has many years of experience as a theatrical and circus technician. Marston is also an actress and a professional potter.

The Year One

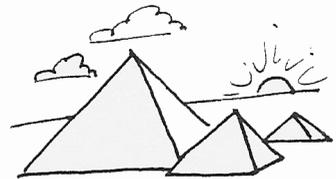
Our story takes place over 2000 years ago in the Year One – an historic time when important events were happening all over the world.



The Roman Empire was ruled by Caesar Augustus. He controlled much of the world around the Mediterranean Sea and as far north as the British Isles. King Herod who governed the area of Judea passed a ruling that all Jews must return to their birthplace to pay him a tax. For this reason, Mary and Joseph are believed to have been returning to Bethlehem when Mary gave birth.



The Year One was a time of cultural expansion, increased trade, and a blossoming of spiritual ideas. Much of northern Europe, now known as France and Britain were occupied by Celtic tribes.



The great Egyptian civilization was taken over by the Romans and many of their ancient temples were laid in ruin. Commerce was active on the silk route that connected the wealthy Han dynasty of China with the Mediterranean.



Buddhism, a major movement in India, was spreading its teachings to China. The Sahara region of Africa was beginning a 2000 year drought and by now most of the animals have disappeared. Across the Pacific Ocean, the Mayan people were constructing large pyramid shaped temples and North America was scattered with various Indian tribes.



Astronomy



The three wise men from the East were probably Babylonian priests who kept time by using equinoxes and eclipses as markers and advised the King on divine matters by interpreting dreams, omens, and astronomical events. They were likely following a rare astronomical occurrence.

With modern planetarium equipment, we are able to turn back the sky to the time of our story. By matching the movement of planets and stars with historical records, we can establish a sequence of events that might have been visible to the wise men.

Some historians have guessed that the magi may have seen a comet which can make a startling appearance into the sky and disappear within a few days. Others suggest it was an exploding star which can create a spectacle of light 100 million times brighter than its usual state for several weeks. Most astronomers rule these out because the “star” was seen by people in the East; but not by those in Rome. The Chinese, who

kept very accurate records, noted no such events for the time in question. Another likely explanation is that the magical star may have been an astonishing sequence of planetary conjunctions known to have occurred about this time involving Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn and the bright star Regulus all of which had astrological significance for the magi.



Italian Words

Here are some Italian words used in the story:

Buon giorno hello
bambino baby
buena notte.....good night

Discussion Questions

What are some similarities and differences between La Befana and Santa Claus?

Have you ever had an experience that might be called an "epiphany" ?

How would the story have been different if Befana found the Christ child?

Further Studies

Befana visited many different cultures during the Year One. Research another country to see what other experiences she might have encountered.

Have different students find out about comets, meteors, shooting stars, and planetary conjunctions. Discuss what the Christmas star might have been?