

Ride the Red Mare

Based on the book A Ride on the Red Mare's Back

by Ursula K. Le Guin

Adapted for the puppet stage by Nancy Aldrich

Curriculum Guide

The Plot

On a snowy winter day in Northern Sweden, little Leo is captured in the woods by trolls, and his sister Sofia sets out with her small wooden Dala Horse to rescue him. On the way, her Dala Horse transforms into a magnificent red mare, and together, Sofia and the Red Mare must rescue Leo from the trolls.

Background

Author Ursula K. Le Guin writes:

"When I visited Sweden a couple of years ago, a friend there gave me as a parting gift a little red wooden horse, a Dalarna (or Dala) Horse, a symbol of Sweden. I then bought myself a very little one, a colt, to give my granddaughter Lyra.

I thought perhaps there was some story about them. But there seemed to be no legend. The furniture-makers of Dalarna carved little wooden horses from their scraps of wood, and painted them red, with flower garlands – and everyone who saw them loved them!

As a child I had a book about a wooden horse that comes to life. The book was missing some pages – and it was in German! I would only make up the story by looking at the charming pictures. Perhaps it was memories of that half-told tale that made my little red mare begin to come to life in my mind. But the tale she told me was a new one."

The Characters

- Sofia
- Leo
- Mother (shadow puppet)
- Father (shadow puppet)
- The Red Mare
- The Trolls: Bridge Troll, Troll Sitter, Child Troll, Gang of Trolls

Vocabulary

Troll – a creature of Scandinavian folklore, living under bridges or in caves

Whittle – to cut thin shavings from wood with a knife

Grieving – to feel deep sadness

Hooves – the horny covering of the toes or lower part of the foot of a mammal

Tracks – a footprint or a trail of marks left behind by something

Mare – a female horse

Colt – a baby horse

High House – the mountain cave where the trolls live

Style of Puppetry

Two kinds of puppets are used in this play: bunraku puppets and shadow puppets. In bunraku puppetry the puppeteers wear black costumes and their heads are covered with hoods. Often, two puppeteers are manipulating one puppet. Shadow puppets are behind a shadow screen and you only see the shadow of the puppet, not the puppet itself. The sizes of the shadow puppets change depending on how close to the light they are.

The Music

Third Angle New Music Ensemble was commissioned to record a new score composed for this play by Bryan Johanson. It uses violin, cello, clarinet, and a variety of percussion instruments.

Before the Play

- Find the Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark on a map or globe
- Read A Ride on the Red Mare's Back by Ursula K. Le Guin. (Ms. Le Guin assisted us in the process of turning the story into a play and approved the script) How do you think the different characters sound and move?
- Find out about Dala Horses. How big are they? What color are they? In what country are they made?

During the Play

- Identify which characters in the play are only seen as shadow puppets
- Which characters in the play are seen as both shadow puppets and bunraku puppets?
- Listen to the music. What does it make you feel? How does it match the story?
- Look at the costumes of Sofia and Leo. How do the costumes let you know where the story is taking place?
- How does the set change to represent different places?

After the Play

- What changes were made from Ursula K. Le Guin's original story to make it work as a play?
- What other stories do you know that have trolls in them? Describe the characteristics of trolls
- Write a short story about your encounter with a troll. In *Ride the Red Mare*, Sofia and the Red Mare rescue Leo from the trolls. How would you outsmart the trolls in your story?

About Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre

Tears of Joy brings amazing puppet theatre to audiences throughout the United States. Founded in 1971, the theatre is recognized nationally for its commitment to excellence and innovation. The theatre has received a young Audiences Sunburst Award for its "exemplary commitment to arts and education." Four of the theatre's productions have received American puppetry's highest honor, the *Citation of Excellence in the Art of Puppetry* from UNIMA-USA.

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