



Kids' Entertainment Study Guide for *Tall Stories*' "The Gruffalo."

Kids' Entertainment

119 Spadina Avenue

Suite 305

Toronto, Ontario

M5V 2L1

CANADA

Tel: (416) 971-4836

Fax: (416) 971-4841

email: info@kidsentertainment.net

Site design and PDF preparation by Kagami Word & Image

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THE GRUFFALO

tall
stories

41 maygrove road
london NW6 2EE
020 7372 3003

tall.stories@virgin.net
www.tallstories.org.uk

Notes for Teachers

Tall Stories

Over the last five years, Tall Stories' outstanding and inventive family shows have charmed and delighted audiences worldwide. *Alice and Mr Dodgson*, *The Happy Prince*, *Rumpelstiltskin* and last year's *Snow White* have provided audiences from 5 to 105 with an inventive, imaginative look at classic stories.

Our latest show, *The Gruffalo* performed at the Scottish International Children's Festival and at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe as part of a national tour. The production is touring from May to December 2002 and can be seen at the Royal National Theatre, the Galway Festival and the Adam Smith Theatre amongst other venues.

For more details on the company, log on to our web site at www.tallstories.org.uk

The Book

The Gruffalo is an adaptation of the picture book by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler ('a modern classic' *The Observer*).

The picture book won Scottish-born Julia Donaldson the Smarties Book Prize Gold Award and the Blue Peter Award for Best Book to Read Aloud. Julia opened World Book Day 2001 with a rendition of the Gruffalo Song at the Traverse Theatre. Every primary school in Scotland received a copy of the Gruffalo Song to sing in school assembly on World Book Day.

The Story

A mouse strolls through a wood, meeting a fox, an owl and a snake. They all try to eat him, but he scares them away with stories of the terrifying Gruffalo. Then he bumps into a real-life Gruffalo... The quick-thinking mouse explains that he is the scariest creature around and he takes the Gruffalo back through the wood to prove it. When the other animals see the Gruffalo they run away. The Gruffalo gulps in fear and escapes...

Theatrical Style

Tall Stories have used *The Gruffalo* as a starting point for our story. Whilst we utilise the rhymes in the book, we also use imaginative storytelling, physical representation of the animals, original new songs and a lot of giggles. *The Gruffalo* is scary fun for children aged 3-7, and their adults...

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Follow-up activities (3-5 year olds)

This production of *The Gruffalo* uses a variety of physical theatre techniques to create lots of different characters with three actors and a minimal set. The following ideas aim to encourage children to think imaginatively about the story that they have seen.

Monster Pics

'A Gruffalo? What's a Gruffalo?'

'A Gruffalo! Why, didn't you know?'

He has terrible tusks and terrible claws

And terrible teeth in his terrible jaws.'

The Mouse in the story imagines a monster to scare away the other animals. Ask the children to draw pictures of their own invented monsters (with labels showing tusks and claws, etc, if applicable).

Sounds Good

Using the pictures that the children have created, ask the class to create a monster noise for each picture. Can they create very different sounds or do all monsters sound the same?

Do the same for other characters in the story – what noises do foxes, owls, snakes and mice make?

In the play, the characters each have vocal traits. Take this exercise one step further – if animals could speak English, how would they talk?

Where did you get that hat?

In the play, the animals are suggested by different costumes. To simplify this, ask the children what kind of hats specific animals would wear. Can they make them out of card and felt tips?

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Follow-up activities (5-7 year olds)

This production of *The Gruffalo* uses a variety of theatre techniques to create lots of different characters with three actors and a minimal set. The following ideas aim to encourage children to think imaginatively about the story.

Thinking in pictures

To get things moving, split the students into two groups and, as a team game, give them a variety of 'situations' that they have to portray in a 'photograph'. The teams have 5 seconds to create each picture and the best picture wins a point. Sample situations are: climbing, swimming, tea party, space, the zoo. Move on to places and situations from *The Gruffalo*, perhaps using the deep dark wood, the owl's nest, the fox meets the mouse, etc. This will allow students to think about how to create a 'story' visually, on the stage.

Telling tales

For the Gruffalo, we used a picture-book as our starting point – but sometimes we start with nothing. Try coming up with your own story to act out. Going round the class ask each student to tell one word of a story. For example:

Student 1: There	Student 2: was	Student 3: a
Student 4: big	Student 5: green	Student 6: giant
Student 7: who	Student 8: went	Student 9: to
Student 10: buy	Student 11: a hundred	Student 12: sausages...

... and so on. Once everyone has added a word, split the class into groups of five or six and tell them that they have five minutes to show the other group their version of the story. See what they come up with! It will be interesting to see how different their renditions of the same story may be.

Looking good

How can we make a character come alive on stage? How do you determine the way that a character stands, moves and speaks? Ask two students (A and B) to stand in front of the class. Ask a third and fourth student to manipulate their arms and legs and faces, moving them from a neutral position into a character. Perhaps these characters stoop, or lean back, or have their head held high. Ask Student A and B to try to create a voice to match their new positions. Would the character have a squeaky or a low voice? How fast or slow would they speak? Do they have an accent? Try different things. Does a big character need a big voice? What happens if you give a small character a booming voice? Ask the rest of the class to vote on which voice best matches the character.

Using this idea, ask the students to work in pairs to create two characters from pre-prepared character names. Students can create characters based on animals (Mr Hippo, Ms Snail, Mr Rat...) or create from emotions (Ms Cool, Miss Miserable, Terrified Tom etc). Encourage the students to try to use more than their faces to create the character, thinking about how heavy they are, how fast they can move, how straight/bent their legs are etc. Allow the students to create their own characters in this way and then introduce them to the group.

Whose story is it anyway?

Taking the story of the Gruffalo (or perhaps another pre-selected tale) discuss what happens if you tell a story from different points of view. For example, in the story of the Gruffalo – what would the story be like if told from the point of view of the fox? Or the Gruffalo? Or if the mouse was telling the tale to his mates? Ask different students to tell the story using the first person from different perspectives. Do all the characters have the same version? Are there things that a particular character doesn't know?