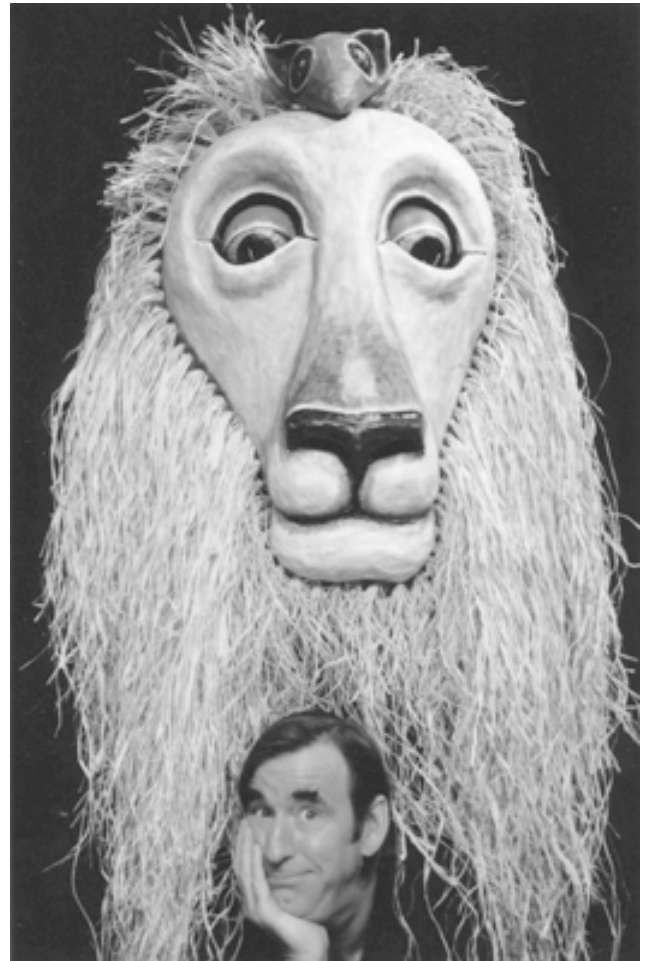


# “GEMS: THE WORLD’S WISDOM STORIES”

**Doug Berky** presents stories from around the world. Classic collections such as “Aesop’s Fables” from Greece, the “Jataka Tales” from India, and stories of Hans Christian Andersen from Denmark have inspired and educated the world’s young people for years. Also included in the performance are stories from lesser known collections of folklore and mythology from Asian, African, the Middle Eastern, and Native American peoples. It is through story that people around the world have passed on knowledge and wisdom to their children.

In a performance of **Gems**, Doug weaves together many art forms to create the fabric of the stories. Masks, puppets, mime, drama, comedy, music, and storytelling are integral elements that help the audience to experience these treasures of wisdom. The composition of each performance of **Gems** is determined by considering the audience, the occasion, and the venue of an engagement. A performance might include a selection from the following stories: “The Lion and the Mouse,” “The Boy Who Cried Wolf” (Aesop’s), “The Drippy Nose Boy” (Native American), “The Lame Man and the Blind Man” (Middle East), “The Tiger’s Whisker” (Korea), “The Crocodile and the Monkey” (India), and others.



**Doug Berky** has been performing since the mid 1970’s. He has toured with groups such as “The Two Penny Circus” and the “The Montanaro Mime Theatre.” As a member of “The Montanaro Mime Theatre,” he appeared in the award winning children’s NBC television series, “See Saw,” and four television specials for Swedish National Television. In the early 1990’s Doug created a video series entitled, “Jesus Stories,” and “Light in the Darkness” with EcuFilm. Since the early 1980’s he has toured nationally and internationally with his one-man shows. Doug has been a featured performer at events such as the Eugene O’Neil Theater Cabaret Symposium and the fifty year celebration of the CROP walk for the National Council of Churches. He has performed and taught as Artist-in-residence at numerous schools and colleges including the Commedia School in Denmark, Roanoke College, Furman University, and the University of Wisconsin. His mask creations are in use in schools and theaters from Stockholm to Seattle.

## **STORIES.....WHAT ARE THEY?**

Stories have influenced almost every aspect of who I am. For example, I learned through story how my grandfather, Joe Shull, left Valle Crucis, NC, to homestead a little plot of land in western Kansas and became a farmer. I take special interest in the sod house museum near the farm, because he built and lived in a sod house. I learn my history from stories.

Family stories teach us about our character and how it developed. One such story involves my older brother and sister and myself. After a freshly fallen snow, the three of us and a friend were throwing snowballs at cars. (To this day, I maintain I did not throw any). A snowball found its mark on someone's windshield. We were fast and escaped the irate driver. However, we were not very smart. First, we were throwing snowballs at cars. Second, we ran straight to our home. Little feet leave tracks in snow, and the unhappy driver had the time to follow them right to our door. My father was not a happy man. The result of his conversation with this irate driver is a story in itself. I learn humility from these stories.....and there is no lack of these in my family.

Stories serve to answer intimate questions. As a young teenager, I approached my father one night as he worked alone in his study. I had some questions that I was embarrassed to ask and I could tell he was embarrassed to answer them. His answer came in the form of story about his experience with some of his men in the Korean war. The story almost answered my question and allowed us a safe distance to deal with sensitive material.

Other stories encourage us to embrace the mysteries of life. These try to give insight into the indescribable and are told both at home and in communities of faith. Stories such as these help us understand our relationship to the created world and to struggle with questions of life and death.

Storytelling is a valuable tool for parents in entertaining their children. It can help to pass the time on dreary days or on family trips. Often I tell stories to my children as I drive or our family creates a story, with each individual contributing a part. These stories usually have no relationship to reality and are a good exercise in nonsense and creativity.

Stories serve many purposes, they teach, inform, nurture, challenge, warn, frighten, and entertain us. Every culture in the world use stories to renew itself. They are small gifts from one generation to another.

### **“GEMS”**

The New International Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines the word “gem” as, “1. A precious or semiprecious stone....2. Anything rare, delicate or perfect, as a work of literature or art.”

When I began to research and develop the stories included in this performance, it did not take long for me to find a title for the show. “Gems” seemed like a natural title. Each of the stories included in the show is a wisdom story. They come from diverse cultures, they vary in their style and character. What they have in common is their desire to teach us. Each story attempts to impart little “gems” of wisdom that teach the audience what it means to live together in community. By listening to stories from other cultures we see that we hold many of the same values, and by the context of the stories we gain insights

into what makes each culture unique and special. My hope is that these stories will stir questions and discussions about these values and these cultures. Ultimately, I hope they will motivate your students to discover the world of stories and help them discover their own creativity and voice as they begin to tell stories that are meaningful to them.

## **CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES**

### **TELLING STORIES TOGETHER**

Have your students sit in a circle. Starting with one student and going around the circle in order, have your class make up a story together. Each student should contribute one sentence or a short paragraph. As each student adds something new they should build upon what has already been told by the previous students. This is not an exercise to create deep, meaningful narratives. It is an exercise in complete nonsense and fun.

### **FAMILY STORIES**

Ask your students to ask their parents to tell them a story about themselves when they were very little. The next day have them come to and tell that story to their class. If they want to bring in a picture or object that relates to the story.....great!

### **CONTINUING A STORY**

Choose a favorite class story. Tell or read that story and discuss the characters and their qualities. Take those characters and make up a new story with your class by putting them in a different place and situation. You can also have them illustrate your new story with artwork.

### **LEARNING FROM A STORY**

Select a story from a different culture and part of the world. Read or tell the story to your students. When you have finished, discuss with the students what they were able to learn about the culture and the people from the story.

### **PLAYING WITH STYLE**

Divide your students into small groups. (Your stories will help determine the size.) Have each group find a story that they enjoy. Have them work up the story in at least three different ways. One, have them just tell it. Two, have them pantomime it, act it out without talking. When doing it this way they have to also create the environment with their bodies. For example, they would have to find a way to be trees, doors, cars, whatever the story requires. Three, have a combination of a narrator and actors who would work together in portraying the story. Four, have your students do the story as an opera or musical. Five, using simple puppets, create a simple background, or draw a background on a chalkboard, do the story with puppets.

## **POINT OF VIEW**

Select one story that your students enjoy. Assign each a character in the story. Have them tell the story from their characters point of view. Discuss with the class how the story changes with the point of view.

## **MASKS, HATS, AND COSTUMES**

Collect an assortment of costumes, hats, and masks. Let the students try on different hats and costumes for the different characters. Encourage them to play and let the way the hat or costume looks to effect the way they walk and talk. Help them find items that will enhance the characters they are doing.