

WILL & COMPANY

The Odyssey

Art Form: Theatre
Style: Classical
Culture: Greek

MEET THE ARTIST:

Will & Company is a multicultural theatre ensemble with Professional Designation in Arts Education that performs exciting adaptations of some of the world's greatest classic literature. Under the artistic direction of *Colin Cox*, they present major scenes from plays interspersed with narration and background information. Trademarks of Will & Company include physical humor and dazzling swordplay. The troupe performs Shakespeare's perennial favorite *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as well as adaptations of literatures great works: *Robin Hood*, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Homer's *The Odyssey* and Charles Dickens' novella *A Christmas Carol*. Will & Company has performed locally at The Geffen Playhouse, The Los Angeles Theatre Center, and El Capitan and tours nationally to present both classic works and original plays on diversity. In 2005, Will & Company was nominated for a GLADD award for their production of *A Pebble in My Shoe*.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

Homer's literary epic, *The Odyssey*, is brought to the stage in an adventurous, theatrical style. The production includes innovative use of puppets, mime and choreographed swordplay. A narrator describes the plot as it unfolds, while the company performs major scenes using the convention of a Greek chorus.

The scenes include:

- Odysseus Sets Sail
- The Battle with the Ciconians
- Encountering the Cyclopes
- Odysseus and His Men in the Land of Circe
- Odysseus Travels to the Underworld
- The Island of the Sirens
- Charybdis the Whirlpool and Scylla the Monster
- Athena Gives Odysseus a Disguise
- and Odysseus Strings the Bow.



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

The Odyssey: A Synopsis

Odysseus, king of Ithaca, sails with his army to take part in the mighty Achaean expedition led by Agamemnon against the city of Troy to restore Helen to Menelaus. After ten years of bloody warfare, the city is sacked and the Achaean heroes sail for home. When the *Odyssey* begins, an additional decade has passed since Troy fell and Odysseus still has not returned home. All the other chieftains have safely arrived in their native lands or died, but there is no news at all of the ruler of Ithaca. In his absence, the noblemen of Ithaca and the surrounding states have converged upon his palace hoping to win the hand of Penelope, his wife. She, ever faithful to her husband's memory, will not remarry and while they remain at the palace trying to change her mind, the suitors grossly waste the wealth of Odysseus' estate for their own pleasure and corrupt many of his servants. As soon as he has grown old enough, Telemachus, the son of Odysseus, visits various Achaean lords, hopefully trying to learn whether his father still lives.

During these ten years Odysseus has wandered throughout the world, undergoing an unbelievable series of adventures and torments caused by the malice of the god, Poseidon. All his ships and men have been lost and only he of the whole brave army that sailed to Troy survives. Finally, with the aid of the king of the Phaeacians, Odysseus returns to Ithaca. Assisted by the goddess Athena, whose favorite he is, Odysseus punishes the suitors and re-establishes himself as king. He is reunited with his wife, son and father, and a potential civil war on Ithaca is averted by the intercession of the gods.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- If you were to describe the story of *The Odyssey* in two or three sentences, what would you say?
- Is Odysseus a hero? Why or why not? Are all of his actions admirable?
- If you had one hour to spend with one of the characters in the play, which character would you choose? Why? What would you talk about?
- Which characters did you identify with most? Which characters did you identify with least? Why?
- What were some of the obstacles that Odysseus had to overcome in order to return home to Ithaca?
- How do the various gods and goddesses intervene and/or interact with the characters in the story? Describe.
- Did Will & Company's performance stir your interest about Greek literature? Would you like to read some? Would you like to see a Greek play?

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - SOCIAL STUDIES:

The jugs, cooking pots and containers used in the households of ancient Greece were made of pottery decorated with patterns and scenes of people and animals. The Greeks had special methods for painting pottery called "black-figure" and "red-figure" painting. Black-figure vases have their decoration painted on in black and the background is left the color of the clay -- an orange-red. With red-figure vases it is the other way around -- the background is painted black and the figures and decoration are left the color of clay. Look at pictures of Greek vases in books or take a field trip to the J. Paul Getty Museum to see actual examples in the antiquities collection there. When students' research is completed, have them do a rendering of a vase of their own design using black markers and orange construction paper.



- Legend:
- ☉ Artistic perception
 - ❖ Creative expression
 - ▶ Historical & cultural context
 - ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
 - * Connections, Relations, Applications

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- ☉ Read some Greek myths about Zeus, the king of the gods, and his family. Examples are: Aphrodite, Athena, Poseidon, Apollo, Hermes, Persephone and Demeter. Other Greek stories such as "Theseus and the Minotaur" or "The Golden Fleece" will also engage students' imaginations.
- ❖ Theatre was an important part of life in ancient Greece. In a Greek play there was a chorus and a few actors who would play all the individual parts. The actors wore masks that conveyed the personality of the characters: some tragic, some comic, some young, some old, some heroes and heroines, some warriors, monsters, etc. Have students create a mask of a character he/she would like to play. Use a paper bag, paper plate or tagboard for the face and decorate it with color, feathers, glitter, yarn, etc. Look at pictures of masks for inspiration: classic Greek, Native American and African masks.

▶ The ancient Greeks had many different gods and goddesses. Each had his or her own attributes or special symbols. Athena was a warrior goddess, wearing a helmet and carrying a spear and shield. The patron goddess of Athens, her symbol was the owl. Zeus was father of the gods. He carried a thunderbolt and scepter and often had an eagle with him. Have students choose a god or goddess and draw a portrait using both historical sources and their imaginations.

⇒ Have students read a review of a theatrical production in the "New York Times" or the "Los Angeles Times." Have them develop a list of criteria to use to write a review of *The Odyssey* performance.

* Reenact scenes from the performance. Divide the class into groups of 6 to 8 students. Appoint a director in each group. Have the group select a scene and list the action which took place. Cast the play, with one student cast as Narrator, providing key information as the scene unfolds. Rehearse; then share the scenes with the class in sequence.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Cullum, Dr. Albert. *Greek & Roman Plays For the Intermediate Grades*. Fearon Teacher Aids, Carthage, IL: 1993.
- Grant, Michael. *The Founders of the Western World: A History of Greece and Rome*. Charles Scribners Sons, New York, NY: 1991.