

WILL & COMPANY

Robin Hood

Art Form: Theatre

Style: Traditional

Culture: Western European

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:

Will & Company's retelling of the classic story Robin Hood is based on the medieval ballads. The exploits of the famous outlaw who robbed from the rich to give to the poor are believed to have taken place in Sherwood Forest during the time of the Crusades. A cast of five actors play all the major roles along with a group of six students who portray the sheriff's foresters, the King's archers and Robin's merry men. The character of Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine, wife to King Henry II and mother of Richard I, narrates the action between the various stories. The tales enacted include scenes with Robin Hood, Little John, Friar Tuck, Maid Marion and Robin's enemy, the Sheriff of Nottingham. Choreographed scenes of stage combat utilize the long bow, quarter staffs, broad swords, and daggers.



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

No one knows for certain if the legendary English outlaw, Robin Hood, was in fact a real person. The stories about him are legend, not history. They may have been based on a real outlaw listed in the English courts of 1225 as "Robin Hood, fugitive." Robin Hood is the subject of many medieval ballads dating back to the 1300s. The ballads were first sung by minstrels and later by ordinary people. The oldest reference appears in the *Vision of Piers Plowman*, a long poem written in 1378. By the late 15th century, the character of Robin was featured in games and maypole festivities that took place to mark the beginning of summer. Maid Marion and Friar Tuck were also part of the merriment. The first detailed description of his exploits was written around 1500 called *Lytell Geste of Robin Hood*.

By 1600, Robin Hood had become associated with Robert, Earl of Huntington (1189-99) who lived during the reign of Richard I. At least one scholar believes he actually was the Earl whose real name was Robert Fitzooth. Whatever the origin, the stories of Robin Hood and his merry band of followers continue to engage readers of all ages.

Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire is known as the site where Robin Hood and his outlaws camped. In the year 1200 it covered roughly 19,000 acres in central England. It was the royal forest, reserved by the king for hunting deer and boar. In Robin's day, oak, birch, elm, ash and chestnut trees flourished. Robin and his men could pick wild raspberries and blackberries, and nuts such as walnuts, hazelnuts and chestnuts. The

secret, winding paths of the forest hid Robin and his men from their enemy, the sheriff of Nottingham. Today Sherwood Forest is much smaller, covering only 450 acres. The giant oak of the Robin Hood legends remains and is estimated to be one of the oldest trees in all of England.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- If you were to describe the story of *Robin Hood* in two or three sentences, what would you say?
- 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?
- Do you admire Robin Hood for stealing from the rich and giving to the poor? Why or why not?
- What do you know about life in the Middle Ages? What was the structure of the government in medieval times? Where and how did people live?
- What theatrical techniques were used in the archery contest to convey the shooting and landing of arrows?
- Did Will & Company's performance stir your interest about English history and legends? Would you like to read more stories about Robin Hood?

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - SOCIAL STUDIES:

Robin Hood's story is set in the Middle Ages where life revolved around a king and his castle, nobles, knights, workers and peasants. Ask students to choose a partner and research a profession one would find in a medieval town. Examples: blacksmith, butcher, baker, bowyer, candle maker, confectioner, potter, herald, falconer, miller, troubadour, jester, weaver, arms maker, executioner, etc. Have each pair make six examples of a product that would have been made and traded in the market place. A confectioner could make homemade candies or chocolates; a jester could make colorful wands. On market day in the Middle Ages, merchants set up stalls in the town center to trade their wares. Create a medieval market in your classroom or outdoor on the playground. Have students dress in character and set up shop with a sign to promote their products. A baker's sign might have a sheaf of wheat; a herald's sign might have a shield with a coat of arms. Allow students to barter their products with other tradespeople the same way goods were traded in Robin Hood's time.

Legend:

- ⦿ Artistic perception
- ❖ Creative expression
- ▮ Historical & cultural context
- ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
- * Connections, Relations, Applications

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- ⦿ Make a list of vocabulary words used in medieval times: crusade, gael (jail), harken, henceforth, knave, moat, mutton, poach, plunder, scoff, yeoman, etc. Write lines of dialogue to show their meanings.
"That knave maketh off with my purse!"
- ❖ Divide students into small groups for role-playing. Have them choose a character from the play: Queen Eleanor, King Richard, Robin Hood, Maid Marion, the sheriff of Nottingham, Little John, etc. Have them imagine a situation in which one might find the various characters and then improvise scenes using dialogue and action. Suggestions: at a tournament, at a feast, in the forest, on a hunt, at the castle, etc.
- ▮ Heraldry is the study of a system of symbols used to represent families, countries and churches. The basic heraldic symbol is an emblem called a coat of arms. Coats of arms were originally used on the shields of knights, as well as on banners and flags. An object or figure on a shield is called a charge. Examples of charges are a lion, a dragon, a unicorn, a winged horse, a bird or a sword. Colors, stripes, crosses, circles and other figures indicate relationships and status. Have students research a coat of arms and create a replica using tagboard, paper, paints and markers.
- ⇒ Discuss the ethics or set of values embodied by the character of Robin Hood. By some he is considered an outlaw and by others, a hero. He is a thief, but he gives his booty to the poor and needy. Do you consider Robin Hood a hero or an outlaw? Is stealing ever right? Why or why not?
- * Before the invention of the printing press in the mid-1400s, books were written by hand using a writing style called calligraphy. The text was written with a quill and ink on parchment. Often the books were decorated with bright colors and precious metals. This art was called illumination because the books seemed to glow with brilliant blue, gold and silver. Use modern calligraphy pens and have students practice writing their names and then illuminate their initials, enlarging them using color and designs such as vines or flowers.



BIBLIOGRAPHY:

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Philip, Neil. *Robin Hood*. DK Publishing, Inc., New York, NY: 1997.

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