Creating Characters with Irish Dance Drama

with Máire Clerkin

A QUICK GUIDE
How to create a character from an Irish folk tale using dance and drama:

“The White Gander” is found in Irish fairy tales and legends.

STORY SUMMARY Seamus, a young musician, is taken away by a Puca – a supernatural creature that appears on Halloween – and flown to “The Land Beyond” – to a party with very old people, known as “hags.” Here he meets the White Gander who helps the Puca cast a magic spell.

Although Seamus is horrified by the hags’ appearance, he soon realizes they are friendly. The Puca makes him play his “Uilleann” Bagpipes. The old hags get up to dance. Seamus can’t stop – his fingers are taken over by magic. Eventually, the White Gander bursts the Uilleann Pipes airbag with its beak, stopping the music. Seamus is exhausted but to his surprise the Old Hags have become young again! The music and dance transformed them.

1 Review the video and Máire’s telling of the story. Re-tell it in your own words.
2 Explore each of the “Six Steps to Create a Character” – Gestures, costumes, posture & walk, facial expressions, voice, and dance.
3 Dance sequence of the “Old Hag”: Walk & posture; Promenade step; Jump & kick, step-step-step; Heel & toe, alternating sides; Stamp/stamp, 3 claps.

MATERIALS
Uilleann Pipes music; clothing or objects.

CONSIDER THIS
What does “Don’t judge a book by its cover” mean? How does it relate to the story?

DIG DEEPER
Máire recommends Amalia Hernandez Artsource Unit, Lesson #1, a humorous dance about old people, “Los Viejitos.”
www.musiccenter.org/education/Teacher-Resources/artsource-curriculum/available-artsource-units/amalia-hernandez--ballet-folklorico-de-mexico/

TRY THIS CHALLENGE
Practice the dance drama featuring your “Old Hag.” Think up ideas for new gestures. Perform it for your family.

NEW WORDS

White Gander
A male goose.

Puca
Irish Halloween creature – half horse, half goat with magic horns.

Uilleann
Irish word meaning “elbow.” The player uses the elbow to pump air into the Irish Bagpipes.

Character
A person, animal, or object in a book, play, movie, flip book, or game.

Hag
A very old, ugly witch, usually a woman, but also men in this story.