

# When Camels Could Fly

## Teacher's Notes

**Introduction...** Storytelling has long enchanted people of all ages and cultures, allowing children and adults to take a journey into their imaginations. The ancient art of storytelling provided entertainment long before modern media. It is a valuable educational tool through which cultures have passed down values and lore from one generation to the next.

Through the magic of language, the power of listening and the imagination, storytelling encourages our unique expressiveness and ability to communicate.

*When Camels Could Fly* takes us on a magical journey through other worlds and cultures. Stories are brought to life through puppetry, music, song, dance, language, rich characterisations, humour and beautifully designed props and costumes.

These Teacher's Notes are designed to help you prepare for and follow up the wonderful storytelling experience your students will have when *When Camels Could Fly* visits your school.

Thank you for your support and interest,  
Bronwyn Vaughan

**When Camels Could Fly is...** Performed by Bronwyn Vaughan, Written by Bronwyn Vaughan and Brian Joyce, Directed by Brian Joyce and Designed by Janet Clouston and Bronwyn Vaughan.

**The Aims of the Performance are...** To present , through the richness of storytelling, the diversity of migrant cultures in the Australian community; to introduce aspects of cultural diversity to young audiences; to record the traditions of stories and storytelling from a range of migrant cultures in the Australian community and to provide a rich and inspiring theatrical experience for young audiences.

**Background to the Performance...** The play is based on favourite or remembered stories from childhood told to Bronwyn by people from non English speaking backgrounds living in the Illawarra region of NSW. Bronwyn made contact with a wide range of NESB

people living in the region, meeting with over 20 groups and individuals and collecting more than 30 children's stories, folktales and traditional stories from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. The stories were told to her orally, sometimes through an interpreter. She recorded the stories on tape, later transcribing them.

Throughout the many meetings she had with the participants in the project she heard their amazing personal stories of how they came to live in Australia. These stories of journeys and escapes, of arrivals and departures were as inspiring and interesting as the children's stories themselves and so, in writing *When Camels Could Fly* the authors decided to weave together the personal stories with the traditional. The three stories presented in the performance were told by Wahebe, Ahn and Vasco (see below for more details). They are all proud to be Australian. They love their "new" country and all remark on the acceptance, freedom and tolerance they have found here. At the same time they value deeply their cultural backgrounds, particularly traditions, celebrations, stories, religion, customs, food, music etc. They were very generous in sharing these things with Bronwyn.

**Synopsis of the Show...** we meet a storyteller who likes to travel. She travels the world collecting stories. Now she is traveling all over Australia. She meets a camel by the side of the road and finds out he is originally from Afghanistan and was bought here to "carry loads and people all over Australia". She also learns that this camel likes stories and so the traveler obliges by telling him stories she has collected in Australia. These stories are all from other cultures, Middle Eastern, Vietnamese and Macedonian, and were told to her by people who, like the camel, came from other countries to make Australia their home. This notion resonates with the camel, so, between stories, the two discuss how and why these people came to Australia. In the end the traveler has to say good bye but she leaves with a promise to return with "lots more stories to tell".

**The Stories...**

### **Story One: The Wise Princess**

A traditional Middle Eastern Story about a princess who has to choose between 3 suitors. She sends them on a quest to seek out a rare treasure, offering to marry the suitor who returns with the most wondrous gift. The plot twists when the princess falls fatally ill and all 3 suitors must use their found gifts to restore the princess to health. She must then decide which gift was most important in saving her life and it is here we see her true wisdom emerge in finding a solution in which everyone is a winner.

*The Wise Princess* was told to Bronwyn by Wahebe who came to Australia as a refugee from Afghanistan to escape the repression women faced under the Taliban regime. She wanted to give her two daughters the opportunity to get an education and have a career, options not

possible under that regime. The Wise Princess is her favourite story as it shows a woman being powerful and wise and in a decision making role.

## Story Two: The Star Fruit Tree.

A traditional Vietnamese story about two brothers who inherit their father's fortune under the condition that it is shared. The older brother, Tam, takes advantage of his younger brother's good nature and steals the inheritance leaving Loc with nothing but a star fruit tree. But good fortune shines on Loc when he meets a big bird with whom he shares his star fruit. The big bird rewards Loc's generosity with a bag of gold from the golden mountain. When Tam hears of this he swaps his inheritance for the star fruit tree, seeing an opportunity to trick the big bird into giving him lots of gold. However, his greed only leads to ruin, while Loc's patience, humility and tolerance is rewarded. The story ends with a Vietnamese saying, "Tam ti tam" or "Too greedy, get nothing"

*The Star Fruit Tree* was told to Bronwyn by Ahn who came to Australia over 30 years ago as a refugee from the war in Vietnam. The story of her journey as one of "the boat people" is told within the performance. Ahn was a teacher in Vietnam and *The Star Fruit Tree* was a story she remembers telling her students. She works now as a pre-school teacher. She writes poetry and is part of a multicultural performance group.

## Story Three: The King Has Donkey's Ears.

A traditional story from Macedonia about a barber who discovers the King's secret; that he has donkey's ears. The barber promises to keep the secret on pain of death, but it haunts him. So, his wife hatches a plan for him to dig a hole into which he screams his secret. This frees him of the burden but a tree grows on the very spot where he screamed the secret and flutes, made from the wood of that tree, cry out the secret when played, revealing the truth of the king's secret to all. The barber, brought before the king to plead for his life, explains everything and convinces the king that he should be proud of his ears, as they do indeed make him special. The barber is made the King's chief adviser and, as in many a good story, they all "live happily ever after".

This story was told to Bronwyn by Vasco who came to Australia as an unskilled migrant, leaving his wife and children at home, in Macedonia, until he could save enough money to support them. This took him 14 years, and when he had bought a house and earned enough to feed, clothe and educate his family they were finally able to join him. This was a common story told to Bronwyn. In the post war era of migration it took anywhere from 10 to 20 years for families to be re-united, especially when unskilled migrants worked for very low wages and had to send much of it back "home" to support extended families. Little wonder it took so long for families to be re-united. Vasco sees himself as an Aussie, but still remembers the stories, songs and traditions from his old country.

## Before the Show: Discussion Questions

### About Stories

- \*Where do we find them? Books, told, remembered, mass media, created ourselves.
- \*Where do stories come from? Traditional myths, folk tales, legends, modern stories, family stories, true stories, other cultures, our own culture and our imaginations.
- \*Who tells stories? Storytellers, actors, family members, friends, teachers, librarians, films, cartoons, T.V.
- \*Why are stories important? Information, entertainment, education, imparting morals and ethics, understanding emotions and feelings, talking about what it is to be human, understanding others, understanding ourselves and our community/culture.
- \*What type of stories are there? Adventure, horror, love/romance, comedy, tragedy, fables, legends, autobiography, biography, stories with a moral, etc.
- \*What are stories about? There is one school of thought which suggests that all stories can be broken up into five broad categories:
  1. The quest
  2. A death in the family
  3. Love i.e. Boy meets girl/looses girl/ finds girl.
  4. A letter/ stranger/ something? arrives.
  5. A life.

## After the Show: Discussion Questions

### The Storyteller

- \*What did you expect the storyteller to be like? \*Was it different to what you expected? How?
- \*What did you enjoy about the performance?
- \*How did the storyteller make you listen and use your imagination?
- \*What techniques, devices or tools did she use?
- \*How did she transform written stories into a theatrical experience?
- \*What theatrical devices did she use? Props, set, costumes, puppets, make up, wigs, etc.
- \*How did the storyteller use music, song and dance in the performance? Why? Did they help create mood and provide links in the stories?

### The Stories

- \*What were they about?
- \*Where did they come from?
- \*Where did the storyteller find these stories?
- \*What type of stories were they? Traditional, fiction, non fiction?
- \*In the show some stories were fictional and some were true stories, e.g., Ahn's story of how she came to Australia. Why did the storyteller mix fiction with biography? Did it work? How could you tell the fiction from the biography?

- \*What were the main themes, ideas and morals presented in the stories?
- \*What was your favourite story? Why?

## Links to Curriculum Areas

The show can be used as a starting point to stimulate discussion and activities around 3 main curriculum areas:

- \*English- story, storytelling, narrative writing, reading, listening and speaking.
- \*Creative Arts- drama, music, dance, design and construction of props, sets, puppets and costumes.
- \*HSIE

## English

- \*Retell your favourite story from the performance in either a written or aural form.
- \*Find a story you like and retell it in your own words in a written or aural form.
- \* Using a story from the show, retell it from the perspective of one of the central characters. E.g., Tell *The Star Fruit Tree* from Tam's perspective (the evil brother).
- \*Retell a story, either from the show, or one you have found, completely in dialogue, spoken by the characters from the show. In this way you are really writing a play or a script. This could then be acted out in class.
- \*Look at stories from different cultures. You will probably find some collections in your library. Find one you like or choose a favourite from home. Retell them in your own words. Act the stories out in small groups with a narrator. Use one as a basis for a class play.
- \*Research aural storytelling. Collect stories from family, friends, neighbours, and teachers. Ask them to tell you children's stories they remember from their own childhood. Record these stories and retell them to the class in a written and/or aural presentation.
- \*Collect true stories from family, friends, neighbours, teachers about important events in their lives. Where were they born? How did they come to live where they do? What is a memorable time in their life? Retell these stories in a written/ aural presentation.
- \*Discuss the ideas and messages in the show. Identify or invent proverbs for the stories. The proverb for *The Star Fruit Tree* is "Too greedy, get nothing". Proverbs are like little gems of wisdom and exist in all cultures. The following are some selected proverbs from around the world. Discuss them and use them as a basis for creative story writing. *One finger cannot lift a pebble*(Iranian), *Talk does not cook rice*(Chinese), *Little brooks make great rivers*(French), *After the rain there is no need for an umbrella*(Bulgarian), *Every ass loves to hear himself bray*(English). Do you know any other proverbs?

## Creative Art

- \*Find a short story and tell it to the class using theatrical techniques in the telling. Use movement, voice, characterisation, props, costumes, music, dance, puppetry, sound effects etc. Work alone, in pairs or in a group.
- \*In the after show, question time Bronwyn would have talked about making the props, puppets, set etc, for the show. Talk about the theatre. Why was this show more than just someone coming to the school and telling a story? Why was it a theatrical experience?
- \*Design and make your own sets, puppets, costumes and props for a storytelling performance.
- \*Talk about the way music and song was used in the show. Bronwyn used music and song to set the mood and add interest or dynamics to the stories. Find percussion instruments, either at home or from the school, and use these to add mood, dynamics and sound effects to your storytelling. Use song, dance and recorded music to achieve the same effect.
- \*Learn some simple folk song and / or folk dances. Perhaps parents or grandparents may be of assistance here.

## HSIE

- \*Talk about the concept of multiculturalism. In the performance the storyteller told stories from other cultures, yet she learned them all from Australians.
- \*Talk about the benefits migrants bring to a country. Migrants bring work skills, traditions, language, religions, story, music, dance, food, cultural festivals and activities. They also bring a willingness to fit into the Australian way of life or culture. Talk about how successful Australia has been at peacefully and creatively integrating many different cultures into the one society.
- \*Talk about the values a society must have to make multiculturalism work- friendliness, tolerance, understanding, peace, acceptance, freedom, democracy and belief in a “fair go”.
- \*Research the different cultural backgrounds of students, staff and parents at your school. Find out about and share customs, traditions, festivals, food, costumes, clothing, music, dance, song stories etc.
- \*Talk about immigration in Australia. Since white settlement Australia has been populated by waves of immigration giving our country a cultural diversity we can be proud of. In the show the camel represents one of the earliest immigrants, Afghani cameleers and their camels. They opened up the desert/ outback regions of Australia before the days of trains, cars and planes and, hence, were vital in the settlement of this country.
- \*Talk about refugees in Australia. Bronwyn told the story of how Ahn came to Australia as a refugee on a boat. Why would people leave home, family, friends and country to come to another country? Talk about the benefits as well as the hardships.
- \*Talk about camels. The camel in the performance was a Bactrian camel which has two humps. Camels with one hump are called Dromedaries and are the most common.

Bactrians are, sadly, on the road to extinction and are rarely found in the wild. Modern forms of transport have made them redundant and modern life and settlement have slowly encroached on their natural habitat. They are found in the wild in Western China in the area of the Gobi desert, in Southern Mongolia and in the north of Afghanistan. Bactrians are now a protected species. Camels show remarkable adaptation to an inhospitable desert environment. Your class may be interested in researching these in books and on the internet. *The Weeping Camel*, a recent feature length movie about camels and their traditional owners in Mongolia, is highly recommended.