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Jack & The Beanstalk

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BOOK, MUSIC, AND LYRICS **SPICER W. CARR**

DIRECTED BY **JOHN NEWMAN**

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

This touring production of *Jack and the Beanstalk* has provided an opportunity for UVU student Spicer W. Carr to write and compose an original musical version of the story. As the producer and director of the production, it was important to me to address an element that is often overlooked in the tale: our young hero, Jack, is a liar and thief!

As we explored the material, Spicer and I considered why Jack justifies lying to and stealing from the giant and the giantess: he never thinks of them as real human beings with needs and emotions like his own. When people dehumanize other people, they can justify lying, stealing, and even killing. When children dehumanize other children, they feel justified in bullying.

During Spicer's musical version of the story, Jack realizes that the giant is a person like him and that the giantess is a person who deserves his honesty. My hope is that the children who see this show will consider the idea that those they dismiss as enemies are human beings deserving of kindness and respect. By building empathy, theatre can help people change for the better.

-John Newman

ELEMENTS OF AN OPERETTA

As writer and composer, Spicer created a musical version of *Jack and the Beanstalk* in the style of an English operetta, like those written by William Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan in the late 19th century. In an operetta, the majority of the dialogue is sung rather than spoken, as is the case with our show. Other operetta elements that Spicer used include:

Patter Songs: These songs deliver clever lyrics at break-neck speed. The famous example of a patter song from Gilbert and Sullivan is "I am the very model of a modern Major General" from *Pirates of Penzance*. In *Jack and the Beanstalk*, the peddler's song, when he sells Jack the beans, and Jack's song, when he tells increasingly wild lies to his mother, are patter songs.

Aria: This is an emotional solo sung by a character in a moment of intense emotion. The giant's lament, when he realizes that his hen has been stolen, would be considered an aria.

Chorus: As with musical theatre, operetta includes a chorus of singer/actors who serve as the background characters in the story. In our show, the chorus becomes farm animals that Jack torments. They also form the growing beanstalk, singing about photosynthesis.

Refrain: As in musical theatre, there is often a phrase, or refrain, that is sung repeatedly, sometimes in rapid succession. In our production, Fi Fie Fo Fum is used as a refrain.

Ballet: While operettas do not generally have large dance production numbers, many operas and operettas include a ballet, in which performers dance to music. In *Jack and the Beanstalk*, the Giant's dogs do a ballet as they try to sniff out Jack in the castle.

Topsy-Turvy Comedy: Gilbert and Sullivan operettas typically progress to a climax that resolves in a comedic way through a clever trick or plot twist. In our show, the giant is convinced not to eat Jack when he finds that the peddler's beans taste good. Another topsy-turvy element in the show is that everyone climbs up the beanstalk, including the cow. The plot is resolved in a comical way, with reconciliation rather than with the death of the giant.

THE MANY FACES OF JACK

Jack and the Beanstalk is a popular folktale that goes back to the oral storytelling tradition. It is most often associated with the English folk tradition. There are many different versions of the tale recorded and many adaptations that have been created for stage and screen.

In a common version recorded by Joseph Jacobs, a 19th century folklorist from Australia, Jack is a thirteen-year-old boy who goes up the beanstalk to steal from ogres and doesn't question his childish greed. As with most versions of the story, Jack makes three trips of the beanstalk, stealing gold coins, a hen that lays golden eggs, and a magic harp. Because Jack becomes rich, he is able to marry a princess and live with her happily ever after. The male giant is killed when he tries to follow Jack down the beanstalk and the boy cuts down the stalk before the giant can reach the bottom. You can access the text of this version of the story from the Authorama site at <http://www.authorama.com/english-fairy-tales-15.html>

Stage adaptations of *Jack and the Beanstalk* are frequently presented by British "Pantomime" (or "Panto") companies which mount spectacular adaptations of folk and fairy tales for family audiences during the Christmas holiday season. These theatre productions may add love interests for the principal characters, so Jack might go up the beanstalk not to gain treasure but instead to rescue a damsel in distress. Pantomime plays often end with a comedic rather than dramatic ending, with the giants or ogres being tamed rather than killed.

In the version presented in Shelley Duvall's PBS series *Faerie Tale Theatre*, Jack is an older teen and considered the man of the house. His father was murdered by a giant. Jack kills the giant but not the giantess and returns up the beanstalk a fourth time to live in the castle that the giant took from his father. Jack is not presented as a thief because he is taking back what the giant stole.

Composer Stephen Sondheim included Jack's story in his popular musical *Into the Woods*, which has had several successful runs on Broadway and was recently made into a Hollywood film. As Sondheim developed his musical, he was surprised to discover that much of his adult audience were unfamiliar with common fairytales and folktales. Therefore, Sondheim had characters recount their adventures through solos. As Jack sings his story, he describes pausing on the beanstalk and wishing he could live between the adventurous world of the giants and the safe world of his home. The giant is killed in the traditional way in the first act, but in the second act, Sondheim has the giantess come down to earth and offers to spare the other characters if they will let her eat Jack. In Act II, all of the characters are forced to confront the ethics of the choices they made and the actions they took in Act I.

In his book *The Uses of Enchantment*, psychologist Bruno Bettelheim claims that through his adventures, Jack learns how to provide for himself as a mature adult. According to Bettelheim, the gold represents material things, the hen represents gainful employment, and the harp symbolizes beauty, art, and the higher things in life. The psychologist asserts that Jack learns that he cannot rely on magic alone to solve his problems.

PERSUASIVE WRITING EXERCISE FOR STUDENTS

After reading a version of the story to the class or after the class has seen the play, have the students choose and write a response to one of the following prompts.

1. Write a monologue in the voice of Jack, justifying his decision to steal the gold, the hen that lays the golden eggs, and the magic harp.
2. Write a monologue from the perspective of the giant or the giantess, telling their version of the events of the story.
3. Write a dialogue between Jack and the giant in which they each argue why they need the gold, the hen, or the harp more than the other one does.
4. Write a sales pitch in the voice of the peddler in which he tries to convince Jack to trade his cow for the beans.
5. Write a dialogue in which Jack tries to convince the harp to leave the giant's castle with him.

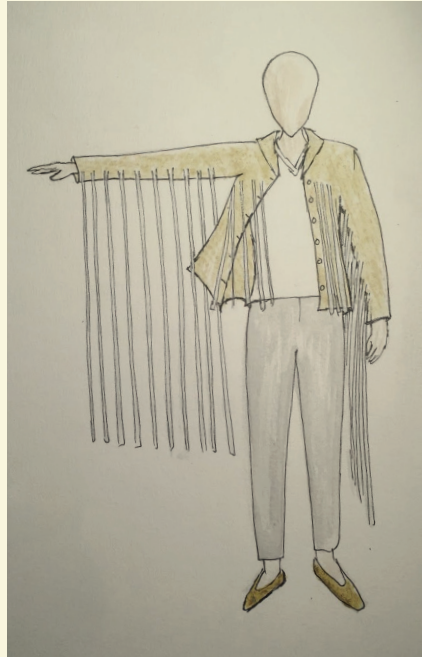
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COSTUME DESIGN FOR *JACK AND THE BEANSTALK*



Mother



Harp



Giant



Jack

McKenzie Kiser and Allyson Mitchell, theatre majors at UVU, designed the costumes, set pieces, and props for our production of *Jack and the Beanstalk*.

The design inspiration for the production is children's backyard play. Children are natural theatre-makers and transform the places in which they play into imaginary worlds and use objects they find to enhance their dramas. They often work out conflicts in their lives through creative play.

The backgrounds are designed to be ambivalent. They might represent a suburban house and a cinder block fence or they may seem to be, as a child would imagine them, a country cottage and a castle wall. A ladder and a couple of hoses become the beanstalk.

Likewise, the costumes might be things that people would wear in a modern backyard or they may seem like what children would imagine people wearing long ago.

Jack's mother is dressed in what his own mother might wear in the garden.

The harp's costume extends and exaggerates the fringe someone might have on a jacket. The hands of the giant and giantess are made extra large with loose gardening gloves and the cow's udder is suggested by a pink glove. In creative play, children start with what they see and enhance it with their imaginations.

CREDITS:

Teaching Stage is published by the Theatre for Youth and Education (TYE) Center at Utah Valley University. This issue was edited by Dr. John Newman with graphic design by Jason Warren and contributions from cast members Whitney Black, Danna Facer, Abby Heywood, Jake Siolo, Aspen Thomas, Caleb Voss, and Chris Walters and Company Manager Anna Thulin. Costume renderings by McKenzie Kiser.