



Playing with American Folk Heroes of the Nineteenth Century

Curriculum Unit 89.05.07
by Ann Griffith Magda

“Remember this when I am dead,
Be sure you’re right,
Then go ahead.” David Crockett

Parson Weems: Thank you, Mr. Crockett, for those well chosen words of encouragement. Now, there are some things that I have been wanting to come back and share with the youth of America, and if you will all honor me with one moment of your time, I am sure that you will feel it is well worth any inconvenience. The youth of America today, especially here in your fine city of New Haven, come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, but they all have one thing in common. They are Americans. And, as Americans, they have a rich heritage from which they can draw many lessons. It is the people that I speak about here today. Good, virtuous men—

A.G.M: And women.

Parson Weems: Oh, yes, yes, and women. Now, let’s see, where was I . . . good, virtuous men, like our Founding Fathers who set free and united the scattered colonial settlements born on the edge of a wide wilderness. Take for instance George Washington. As Rector of Mount Vernon I knew him well. Now, here is a man, Father of our Country, a grand fellow. The youth of America would do well to follow such a fine example. In fact, I have even written a little book about him. I have one in the back of my wagon. No better buy than *The Life of George Washington* at only one quarter of a dollar. Have you ever heard the story of honest, young George and the cherry tree? It’s all here in my—

Thank you, Parson. We will get back to the cherry tree later. Let me warn you about the Parson. Given an audience and half a chance, he’ll sermon for hours, especially if he sees a booksale in it. Born in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, in 1759, Mason Locke Weems was the youngest of nineteen children. He studied the ministry for a few years in England and then returned to America. By 1791 Weems had found his true calling, that of promoter, bookseller. and fabricator. Seeing as there was no church at Mount Vernon, it is highly unlikely that Weems was its Rector. And his stories about George, well there does not appear to be much

evidence to support them either. But the Parson was not so much concerned with the truth but with stories that sounded good and virtuous. He was a mythmaker, and it is exactly his way of dealing with reality that this unit will focus on.

Through the medium of drama, this curriculum unit will explore selected mythic heroes and cultural figures drawn from American folk literature, who typify the changing American experience, late 1700's to 1900. Most of the heroes, eccentrics, and villains found in this unit were actual people. But, as we see with the Washington of Weems' creation, the deeds of characters brought to life in folktales and ballads are often inflated and romanticized. Passed down orally from generation to generation, their stories have been told, not only for their entertainment value, but because they filled a need. The narratives helped to ease over the contradictions of reality. They made sense out of confusion. The stories of extraordinary people provided models of behavior for other Americans to follow, a way to fit within the society, or, in other cases, a way to escape it.

It may seem that Parson Weems' attitude on the importance of the sexes has won out. There are more heroes than heroines. This does not mean that girls are excluded from participation in the unit. Nineteenth century America was not alone in awarding top-billing most often to men. But the women were present all the same. I have tried to select tales that include women, and I also urge a nontraditional approach when it comes to casting. Most important is that the class understands the meaning of each tale and is able to transform that meaning to a dramatic interpretation.

Weems' George Washington was set as a model for young people to emulate. I do not think that Weems would approve of all the characters that will become known in this unit. Should one roar and boast like a backwoodsman or follow in the steps of a western outlaw? Each story had a meaning for its time, whether it be about the comic regional characters of the early national period or the tragic, but socially responsible, folk figures of the postCivil War era. But, then again, if there is a sale in it, or a public performance of some type, maybe Weems could be persuaded to adjust his "code of ethics." We'll see.

I will be teaching this unit to seventh and eighth grade Drama students at the East Rock Community School in New Haven. The Drama elective is offered through the Comprehensive Arts Program. Each class meets three times a week for a fifty minute period. The eighth graders meet for twenty weeks, while the seventh grade students take the class for ten weeks. I expect to use this unit as a major part of the eighth grade curriculum, which will culminate in an end of the semester production. The Comprehensive Arts Drama curriculum is open-ended in that it expects certain skills and vocabulary to be taught, while leaving the content of each class up to the individual instructor, depending on his/her background and expertise. I am rather excited about the possibilities that the source materials for this unit open up to creative exploration.

One may wonder how such "dated" material might interest the children of today. Well, the stories are time worn and tested. One copy of an American folklore book that I found in the public library almost fell apart in my hands, from use not neglect. Folktales are fun. But its more than that. While today's students may seem far removed from the days when our heroes strode the earth, many of the life experiences are universal. What child hasn't rebelled against his parents, like George Washington did when he took a swing at his father's favorite tree. Every eighth grade student knows what it means to become one with the crowd, just as Daniel Boone learned to become one with the wilderness. Ever try to beat a friend in a boasting contest? That was Davy Crockett's forte. Here's one that's a favorite improv situation: you've overslept and are late for school. The mad rush is on to get there in time. Now imagine you are Casey Jones racing against the clock as you try to pull the train into the station on time. Everyone has dreamed of getting away from it all at one time or

another, like the slaves who constantly yearned for freedom. Part of making drama real and believable is the ability to take the reality of something you know and then transferring it to another situation. The situations found in these tales are rich and colorful, and part of our American heritage.

This unit may be used for different age levels, but especially in the Junior High students benefit from work that values each individual for his/her own creative insight and talent. While looking to assert their own stamp of individuality, students at this age level often get caught in the need to conform and to be accepted by the group. Many are afraid to let go in class, feeling they will appear stupid in front of their friends. Younger children need structure to give focus to their endless creative energies, while older students need exercises to reopen their creativity, allowing the “juices” to flow freely once more. Respect for one another’s work and trust between class members is essential to a successful class.

One thing that I hope to achieve in this curriculum unit is the development of activities that promote cooperation and collaboration. The work of theater is done by many people. Just as it took many people to form America, to create and pass down the myths, stories and songs, it takes individuals working together as a whole to create drama. The overall aim of this unit is to develop exercises that will encourage students to explore and share their own talents, foster acceptance of one another’s work, allow students to work cooperatively as part of a team, and to collaborate on the final production.

I plan to use a variety of exercises and activities, both as a way of introduction to the folktales and ballads, and as a means for exploring them and making the tales the class’ own.

One series of activities that always stimulates student imagination deals with props. A prop is an object that an actor uses on stage, that can usually be carried around. In one exercise students create as many objects as they can think of out of a nondescript item (ie. a dowel or paper towel roll). Or I may hand each student a slip of paper that names an object and they must pantomime its use while the rest of the class guesses what it is. I usually discourage guns, because they are an easy choice and I want the students to delve deeper. I will be more tolerant with this unit, but will encourage the exploration of older types of guns and tools.

At this point I would like to add a basic list of materials. I suggest that a selection of dowels and a bag of cloth scraps be on hand for prop and costuming purposes. You may want to add paper towel or T.P. rolls to this list. The dowels should be of various lengths, but be sure to include a number that are at least three feet long. The cloth scraps should vary in size and color. Paisley and calico prints would be great. You should have pieces large enough for students to drape creatively around their waists, shoulders and heads. These should fulfill the basic needs for class use. Later, if you have a pair of striped pants all the better, for no self-respecting Yankee peddler would be caught without them. Of course long skirts, fringed hunting frocks, a cooking pot, a coon skin cap, and a railroad hat would add greatly to the fun of costuming. Each tale will suggest other props that could be used, but the above basic list should be enough to get you started.

An exercise that builds group awareness and cooperation is called “Machines.” Here the students must work together to form the moving and stationary parts, as well as the sounds, of various machines. The real fun will come when we add human machines to the telling of the latter nineteenth century tales.

Improvisation, “making it up as you go along”, encompasses much of the work that we do in class. The selected stories offer a wealth of material for improv. We will begin by enacting situations that relate to our own lives as well as those of the characters in the folktales and ballads. Later, after hearing or reading the stories, the class will work on the folktales directly.

Before one can truly appreciate the tales, the characters must be able to come to life. We will explore what makes each character unique. What do our heroes look like? What do they wear? How do they stand, walk or sit? What do they think about? Where have they been and what do they want to accomplish? What is each character's general attitude and philosophy of life?

Some of the folktales are comic and some end quite tragically, while others fall somewhere in between. We will discuss the basic elements of comedy, tragedy and melodrama and see if they apply to the folktales and ballads.

All of the above activities will lead to the writing of scripted material. After exploring a specific tale through warmup exercises, characterization work and improvisation, students will review the basic mechanics of script writing. They will be broken into small groups, each group being responsible for scripting a small scene or part from the tale. Each group will be asked to look at the folktale from a different perspective, character point of view or sequence order. Copies will be made so that the groups may share their work with others. Groups may exchange scripts and do a reading so that the class can see what does and doesn't work. The work done here will form the basis for scripting other folktales.

Ballads of John Henry, Sweet Betsey, and Casey Jones will be approached in much the same way as the folktales. In final form, the action of the stories may be played out during the singing of each verse, or the chorus may be added at critical moments as each dramatic plot unfolds.

The other songs are not about individual heroes but of a people's purpose, whether that be of standing ground or escaping bondage. Here, the words and music suggest that the stories be told in a choreography of simple movement and pantomime. *Patriotic Diggers* points to the strength of a united front, with a chorus of flexing arms and legs ever stretching across the stage. *Pick a Bale of Cotton* is a vibrant work song, an introduction to the slave tales of freedom. Following the songleader, the group picks up speed as they "harvest the crop." *Follow the Drinking Gourd* is a night song, steady and trancelike. The songleader, unseen, pulls the slaves from bondage in slow, but strong, purposeful steps.

The music should be kept simple. Let the words and music flow from the singers. You may want to experiment with simple rhythm instruments, tamborines, and triangles. Chords may be supplied with a guitar or piano. And, of course, one should always be open to the musical talents of the students. But again, keep the accompaniment simple.

Comprehensive Arts does not require the Drama elective to include a production. It is through the process that we learn the needed skills. This unit offers the guidelines for the process, but, to me the thrill of theater comes with performance. Whether onstage or off, there is nothing like being part of a production that receives an audience's approval to fan the spark of interest. Students come off stage wanting more. What else could a teacher ask for?

I admit that while developing this unit, selecting the tales and ballads, I have had an end product in mind. My thoughts have mulled over what it should include and how it should go. But I am only one person in the process. I am (as you will be) the facilitator or group leader. The students will in large part, with guidance, be the creators of the final play. The students will explore, work out given problems, evaluate, rework, cut and put together the final product. Each student, working either independently or in a small group, will be responsible for scripting a specific tale or ballad for production use.

Parson Weems: May I jump in here?

A.G.M: Yes, Parson?

Parson Weems: Would you be offended if I offered a suggestion or two? You know, I have had much experience in the telling of tales. And I have been musically trained. I can apply the fiddle to any tune you have in mind, and teach the words, too. Why, I have even had some experience in theatrical matters. I once had the great pleasure of accompanying a fine troupe of traveling puppeteers. We were quite the success, if I may be so bold as to say so. You must realize that I have an eye and ear for what folks want and I was thinking, since selling stories of worthy people is my trade, perhaps you would do well to take advantage of my experience. "Parson Weems and his band of MythSpinners" has quite a ring to it. Do you agree? Now, we could—

A.G.M: Thank you, Parson.

Parson Weems: No, I really believe you should give it some thought.

A.G.M: Actually I have, Parson. I think it's a great idea. And I'm sure that the class will agree. But, I think now is the time to acquaint the readers with our chosen tales. That is, if you approve.

Parson Weems: Oh yes, most certainly. Now here's an idea. What do you think? We start at the beginning, with the Father of our Country, honest George Washington—

A.G.M: And the cherry tree?

Parson Weems: English cherry tree to be precise.

In *American Myth American Reality*, James Oliver Roberston notes, "Tools and the knowledge of how to use them are, for Americans, imperatives to action. So the defiance or disobedience becomes 'necessary' because there is a way to carry it out." (p. 12) Tools are an important force and symbol in the lives of most of our heroes. Young George had his shiny new hatchet. There stood his father's prize tree daring him on to action. He chopped it down. George did not hide from the deed, and when asked, he replied, "Father, I cannot tell a lie. I did it." Many a child would expect a whipping on the spot. But not George. His brave and honest reply brought joy to his father's heart and caused him to hug George in forgiveness. And so, a new nation, honest in its intent for independence from the rules of its fathers, was forgiven.

Not only did the hatchet symbolize a break with the old, it also served as a tool as civilization cut its way through the wilderness. Another necessary tool was the rifle, and the early frontiersman knew how to use it well.

Before the newly freed American could push through to the lands of the west, he needed to learn how to become one with the wilderness. Daniel Boone, the man who later led settlers into the "Eden of Kentucky", first entered the wilderness armed with a naive innocence and his rifle. As an adolescent he united with the wilderness while out hunting with his torch at night. He spied two eyes glowing in the bushes. Thinking it was a woodland deer, he raised his gun and took aim. But he could not shoot. His prey bound away. He followed, and found his deer in human form, a girl named Rebecca. They were later joined in marriage.

Cooking pot on his head and no shoes on his feet, Johnny Appleseed was able to live as one with his environment. He did nothing to disturb the life of the creatures around him. It is said that he once put out his campfire in order to save the lives of the mosquitoes that were drawn to its flame. Johnny did not need a rifle. His "good book" and his strange brand of common sense were enough. He was able to carry out his mission of

spreading the good word and offering the comforts of apple orchards to the new settlers of Ohio.

A second generation of Americans were starting to settle into the occupations of the new country. Farmers, teachers, undertakers and preachers were ready to stand guard with the tools of their trade to protect what their fathers had won. I found a song in an old Burle Ives collection that comes from the War of 1812. Probably written to unite the various factions found in the U.S., it patriotically dares any country to invade the home borders. The chorus of Patriotic Diggers names the new country's main defense. "Pick ax, shovel, spade, crowbar, hoe and barrel. Better not invade, Yankees have the marrow." These Americans meant business.

Problem: How to get all these new, voting age citizens to vote for you, a common man from the backwoods? David Crockett took the stump to make his name known, and with Walt Disney reruns, people are still cheering him on. There are many Davy Crocketts. It just depends on whose version you want to believe. Personally, I don't put much stock in the Davy that Mr. Disney immortalized. And, I'm not sure I believe that he was halfhorse, halfalligator either. Davy was a braggert, and mighty good with a rifle, even if he had to say so himself. His political success hinged largely on his gift of gab and his ability to provide refreshments for his thirsty constituency. The story I like is the one in which Davy was bested by a raccoon. One day Davy was out hunting in the backwoods. A raccoon climbed down from a tree and walked over to Davy. "Hey, aren't you the famous Davy Crockett? I heard tell that you are a mighty fine shot. Never miss. Why, I better just give myself up now, and forego the pleasure of being shot at." After some more flattering words and a bit of small talk, the raccoon bid his farewells and walked off. Davy! That raccoon got away.

Davy Crockett hated Yankees and their cunning, sophisticated tricks. There are many wonderful tales of Yankee Peddlers selling their dubious wares of wooden nutmegs, broken clocks, double bonnets, tablecloth shawls, and, my favorite, gollywhopper eggs. It seems that one day a shipment of pineapples came into the port of an eastern town. Our Yankee Peddler figured he could make a bundle of money selling them to the gullible farm women out west. He told them that the fruit was an exotic gollywhopper egg. When hatched, the egg produced a bird that would be found indispensable around the farm. Well, the women bought it, but it wasn't long before they discovered what they possessed was actually an ordinary pineapple. These farm women did not appreciate being deceived and quickly ran the Peddler out of town.

Myth reconciles contradictions. The pioneers heading out west found the promise and the reality of life to be two different things. Whether they were searching for gold, land or freedom, these folks encountered many hardships along the way. Making fun of their problems helped to ease the conflicts. *Sweet Betsey from Pike* provided a heroine that everybody who had been in similar shoes could appreciate. Sweet Betsey and her lover, Long Ike, were traveling west to the gold mines of California, and although they finally made it, they found themselves in the midst of trouble numerous times. They ran out of food, the wagon broke down, Brigham Young took a fancy to Betsey, and desert sands almost made them give up. But like good, hardy pioneers, they persevered.

Not everyone was free to search for a better life. Slaves were not free people, they were property. Their futures were determined on the auction block and by the whims of their masters. Some escaped to freedom, but many more were left behind to toil and to dream. Yearning for a better life, they told tales of freedom. One day a slave named Jim discovered a turtle who could talk and play the fiddle. Jim ran and told his master, who, of course, didn't believe him. Walking back to the pond, Jim was promised his freedom if he could prove his story. Jim called and called and called. Finally, the turtle showed himself and asked, "What do you want?" Jim was a free man. Another tale tells of a people who could fly. Old Toby knew the magic words. After long suffering under the hands of a mean spirited overseer, Toby raised his fellow slaves to the skies and off to

freedom.

Peg Leg Joe stepped onto the shores of Mobile, Alabama. Offering his services of carpentry to the local plantation owners he was quickly employed. All day he labored, fixing what needed to be repaired. But it was at night that he did his real work. You see, he was a conductor on the Underground Railroad. He met with the slaves after dark and taught them the words to *Follow the Drinking Gourd*. A week or so after Joe departed, slaves began to disappear in the night. "Left foot, peg foot, traveling on. . ."

Peg Leg Joe disappeared from sight in 1859, but by 1965 the battle for freedom had been won. Up from the rank of slave to freedman came John Henry, and he was looking for work. This naturalborn steel-drivin' man found employment with the C. & O. Railroad at the Big Bend Tunnel in West Virginia. The work of hammering steel was dirty and dangerous, but John loved every minute of it. He could sing louder and drive steel faster than any man around. And that's why, when the salesman showed up with his new steamdrill, John Henry was the natural choice for the contest between man and machine. With a twenty pound hammer in each hand, and pretty Polly Ann by his side, John Henry took on the steamdrill. Nine hours later John Henry was deadily tired, but he had won the contest. The hero was buried with a hammer in his hand.

Jesse James held up his share of banks and trains. You would think that would make him the villain. Folks realized he was an outlaw, but they regarded him as a hero, a kind of Robin Hood, who had a soft spot in his heart for the poor, and, especially, for ladies in distress. One night Jesse and his brother, Frank, were in need of food and a place to stay. A widow fed them a good dinner and offered them shelter for the night. At breakfast the next morning she told them her troubles. She owed four hundred dollars on the farm, and seeing as it was due that day, and she had no way to get it, she was sure to lose her home. Well, Jesse would never let that happen, so he gave her the money she needed. The villainous mortgageholder was right on time to collect the money, but he wasn't able to keep it long. Jesse and Frank were waiting for him down the road a piece. They soon had the money back in hand.

Little Sure Shot won the hearts of Easterners wherever Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show played. Frank Butler was always ready to tell about the time he first met Little Sure Shot. Years back Frank was billed as the World's Champion Rifle Shot. Some folks in Cincinnati said they had heard of a fellow that could give Frank a run for his money. Frank agreed to a shooting match. You could imagine his surprise when this fellow turned out to be a fivefoot tall girl. Frank figured this was going to be the shortest match in history, but Annie Oakley kept up with him, hit after hit. In fact, little Miss Oakley never missed, and that was more than Frank could say.

Oh no. Parson, wake up! Get off the tracks! Can't you hear that whistle screaming? It must be Casey Jones trying to make up time. Oh, no. There's a freight train in his path! Everyone is jumping off. Where's Casey? I can't look! (CRASH).

Parson Weems: That was too close. Too close for these old bones. Got to catch my breath. (Pause) Is that the end? What, what about Casey and all the—

A.G.M: the end, for now at least. But don't worry, Parson. As long as there are people to tell the tales and to sing the songs our folk heroes will never die. Parson, stop looking at me so funny. And brush yourself off. We have a show to put on!

The above stories came from a variety of sources, (please check the bibliography), and ran once more through

the “folk process.” That means I changed them as I saw fit. If you care to read more, I have compiled a folder of the folktales and ballads, available at the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute office, 53 Wall Street. I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I did. A.G.M.

Sample Lesson Plan #1: PROPS

Objectives to encourage imaginative problemsolving while developing pantomime skills, and to introduce the props of the unit.

Materials a selection of dowels, be sure to include a number that are at least three feet in length, paper and pencils, a recording of *Patriotic Diggers* , by Burl Ives. 3 lists of the following: hatchet, rifle, sack on a stick, firewood, cane, fiddle, carpenter tools, sledge hammer, telescope, hoe, rake, sixshooter, train throttle, wagon brake, parasol, torch.

Activities Warmup: Explain to the class that a prop is something that an actor uses on stage that he can usually carry in his hands. Name an object, (eg. table, coffee cup, book, grandfather’s clock) and ask the class to reply “prop” or “not a prop.” Continue until they get the idea. Then, show the class a dowel and pantomime a specific prop, (eg. telescope). Have the class guess what it is. Pass the dowel around to each student, allowing each a turn to pantomime an object. (Note: See *Bananas* , listed in bibliography, for other wonderful warmups of this type.)

Divide the class into three teams and provide them with a selection of dowels and paper and pencil. The teams are given three minutes to write down as many different types of props that they can think of using one or more of the dowels. Collect the pencils. Give each team two minutes to pantomime their objects. A point is scored for each new object that is correctly guessed by the class. The team with the most points wins.

Listen to *Patriotic Diggers* . Have the class try to count the number of possible props named or suggested. See how many they remember. You may want to have the students pantomime the different objects.

Hand out the three prepared lists to the above groups, explaining that these are some of the props that will be used throughout the semester. Each group is to select three to five items and to create a short pantomime scene, no words, with them. Encourage the students to be imaginative. (No horror-film-mass-murders.)

Conclusion You may want to discuss the importance of tools in our lives and in the lives of our heroes. Talk about the differences and similarities between the tools we use today and those of the nineteenth century. Have students make a list of tools they, or family members, use in one week, then compare the lists.

Sample Lesson Plan #2: MACHINES

Objectives to encourage group cooperation as individuals build on the physical ideas of one another, and to provide an introduction to the tales of the industrial age—John Henry and Casey Jones.

Materials Drum, optional.

Activities Warmup: Have students loosen up by shaking out their arms and legs. Begin a repetitive movement, (eg. bending and straightening arm from the elbow). Have the class do the same. Add a sound to the movement. Ask volunteers to initiate new movements and sounds. Encourage the use of other body parts and postures. To the beat of a drum, have the class experiment with their own movements and sounds. Increase or decrease the speed with the use of the drum.

Have a volunteer go to the center of the circle to start a motion. The students are to create a machine by adding their own movements and sounds. Volunteers should be called up one at a time to join the expanding machine. Body parts are not to touch, though the aim is to find cause and effect motions. (Eg. If I “push” your elbow, your arm raises over your head.) Encourage students to find interesting places to add on, not only in a linear fashion. Speed up the machine. Slow it down to a standstill and start it up again. Repeat, with new volunteers furnishing the first motion.

Divide the class into groups. Have them create their own machine as the class did above. Then, the Leader may suggest a real machine to each group, eg. washing machine, crane, record player, or, each group may come up with their own. Have them practice building their machines. Give each group a chance to show their machine to the class. See if the others can guess what it is.

Explain to the class that they will be working on the folktales of John Henry and Casey Jones. Ask what machines are found in their stories. The students should answer steamdrill and train engine. Divide the class into two groups, assigning the steamdrill to one and the train engine to the other. Tell them to use their imaginations to create each machine, and the sounds. As the steamdrill performs for the rest of the class, suggest it is a new machine, not use to working on such hard rock. It has a tendency to break down. The operator is continuously fixing the drill. To the train engine group, remind them that the engineer is in a hurry. The engine must go faster and faster. Have the group try to increase speed without actually moving ahead. The brake is applied, but too late. The engine crashes into another train.

Conclusion Ask the class members if they felt they were a part of a whole working machine. Any suggestions on how it might work better? Give students a chance to go to the library to find pictures of the machines. How well did our imaginations compare with the real thing? The students will be asked to recreate these machines when the folktales of John Henry and Casey Jones are acted out.

Sample Lesson Plan #3: IMPROVISATION—GEORGE WASHINGTON

Objectives to create improvisations from students' own life experiences and to relate that work to the story of "George Washington and the Cherry Tree".

Materials empty peanutbutter jar, blackboard and chalk, or posterboard and marker.

Activities Warmup: a) Have each student think of something, silently, that they shouldn't do but want to. Everyone together is to say "Yes", then "No" out loud, while thinking of reasons for and against what they want to do. Continue to say "Yes" and "No" until each student has made an inner decision. For fun you may want to count the yeses and noes.

b) Show the students a peanutbutter jar. Tell them that is a new jar that never has been opened. They are tempted to open the jar to stick their finger in it to get a big lick. Should they or shouldn't they? Pass the jar around so that each student gets a chance to show his inner conflict. No words. The class will determine if the student was able to tell others what he was thinking by his actions.

Next the class members will be asked to verbalize their temptations. Write down on the board the student answers to the question, "Were you ever tempted to do something that you weren't suppose to do? What was it?" After each student has a chance to contribute, divide the class into small groups of two to four people. Each group will create an improv based on one of the temptations. In group, they decide *what* the conflict is, *who* the people are, and *where* it takes place. (Eg. What—to take or not to take cookies; Who—playmates and a mother; Where—in the kitchen.) It is important *not* to over plan an improv. Stress that the students are not to plan ahead of time, but to allow the action to develop as they perform for the class. To keep things interesting, other members of the class may be chosen to call out "caught in the act" or "caught after the fact." Or an audience member might suggest the actors "tell the truth" or "tell a lie." Experiment and see what happens.

Conclusion Have the students read or tell the story of "George Washington and the Cherry Tree." Ask the class to determine the What, Who and Where of the tale. How did George's actions and words compare to those in the student improvisations? Discuss the validity of the tale and have the class determine what values the tale was trying to teach. This would be a good time to introduce Parson Weems.

Sample Lesson Plan #4: IMPROVISATION—YANKEE PEDDLER

Objectives to encourage group problemsolving, cooperation, and collaboration while creating improvisations from short tales and given props.

Materials tales and corresponding props:

- Sale of Broken Clocks* : Having a quantity of broken clocks, the peddler sells them to unsuspecting farmers, with the promise that he will replace the clock if it doesn't work. He
1. sells all but one which he takes back to the first farmer, who is happy to get a new clock. The peddler continues exchanging broken clocks. Props: A sack of clocks, or other such item.
- Sam Toleman's Bonnets*: Sam travels to Nantucket where he knows fashion news is slow to reach. He carries with him two boxes of small bonnets. He convinces the ladies that the latest fashion trend is to wear two bonnets at a time, one on top of the head and one in back. Props: Two boxes of small paper plates with ribbons attached.
- 2.
 3. *Tablecloths for Sale* : Unable to unload a batch of tablecloths, our Yankee Peddler stops at a farm house before hitting the next town. He offers the lady of the house a free "shawl" on the condition that she wears it to church the next Sunday. She causes quite a stir and the women of town can't wait until the peddler shows up on Monday. He unloads everyone of his tablecloths. Props: A suitcase of cloth squares.

Activities *Divide the class into three groups and distribute the tales and corresponding props. (One to each group.) Allow each group enough time to read the story and to inspect the props. Have each group determine the Who, What, and Where of their tale, and a sequence of events. The leader should visit each group to see how they are doing, suggesting that they may add characters if needed so that everyone has a chance to participate when they do their improv. Have the students assign the parts.*

Give each group a chance to perform their improv in front of the class.

Evaluate the improvs. (Stress objective criticism.) Could we tell who the characters were? Where were they? What was the trick played by the peddler? Was he able to get away with it? Could we observe a beginning, middle and end to the improv?

Conclusion *This work provides an introduction to the longer and more involved tale Gollywopper's Eggs. Have the class read the tale. Ask them to make note of the Who, What, and Where, and to write a sequential order for the tale, and five words or phrases that describe the Yankee Peddler's character. This can be used in the next class session as a basis for more improvisation work, and eventually scripting.*

Sample Lesson Plan #5: GAME—SLAVE FOR A DAY

Objective *to provide a nonthreatening way for students to experience the workings of slavery.*

Materials

whips (dowels with strings attached),
lists of tasks to be completed,
play money,
a timer.

How to play Choose an Auctioneer from volunteers. Have the rest of the class count off, eg. 1234, 1234, etc. All the 2's are Slave Masters and the rest are Slaves. Slave Masters receive a whip, a list of tasks to be completed and equal amounts of money. Slaves must remove all shoes and jewelry. (The Leader should hold all valuables.) Slaves meet in a group behind the auction block. Friends may stand together at this point.

The Auctioneer must sell all Slaves, individually, to the highest bidder. As each Slave is brought to the auction block the Auctioneer points out the Slave's good qualities, eg. mental abilities, physical endurance, willingness to obey, etc. Each Slave Master tries to buy a team of Slaves that will be able to complete his particular list of tasks in ten minutes. Extra credit will be awarded to Slave Masters who complete their tasks. Each Slave Master must decide if he/she will be a kind or harsh master, and if extra credit will be awarded to his/her slaves. Slaves will decide for themselves if they will be obedient or not.

Set the timer for ten minutes when all the Slave Master-Slave teams are assembled. The Leader and Auctioneer should check on the teams as they do their tasks. At the end of ten minutes award the extracredit. (You may at this time decide to give extracredit to all who participated. Even those who wouldn't do anything actually did participate.)

Variation You may consider creating a "Freedom Spot" to which Slaves may try to escape. The Auctioneer may serve as an Underground Railroad Conductor in disguise.

Conclusion Students should discuss the experience. Did the Slaves feel they had any power? How about the Slave Masters? What was it like "up on the auction block"? Did the kindness or harshness of the Slave Masters affect team performance? The game and following discussion will serve as an introduction to the slave tales of freedom and to the story of Peg Leg Joe.

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