



Sponsors

Dick Whittington

Teachers Resource Pack



★ Welcome to the Teacher Resource Pack for First Family Entertainment's *Dick Whittington*, sponsored by Robinsons!

For many of us the annual school pantomime trip was our first experience of live theatre, and a very exciting and fun-filled one that kept us wanting to return again and again.

Linking your traditional end of term Christmas treat to exciting projects back in the class can help you and your pupils gain more from the experience and we hope that this pack will provide ideas and inspiration.

We have included a variety of background information and follow-up activities inspired by the pantomime genre and *Dick Whittington* itself. The activities are designed to be adaptable to a range of ages and abilities, although the pack is written with particular focus on the Key Stage 1 and 2 National Curriculum and National Literacy Strategy.

How to use this pack:

The pack is designed for you to dip in and out as you wish, picking resources and activities that best suit your class. With each section you will find a range of activities; look out for the symbols indicating the type of activity:



Performance



Art and Design



Writing



Discussion



Research



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The History and Traditions of Pantomime...

In this country we have all grown up with the annual pantomime as a traditional part of our Christmas celebrations but try explaining pantomime to an American, French or German child and see how much they understand of this strange tradition...

For a start there's a man dressed as a woman... and often a woman dressed as a man, lots of audience participation, lot's more slapstick comedy and very often one or two animals thrown in. It is really a very British tradition not usually seen in other countries. So what really is panto and where does it come from?

The word 'pantomime' comes from the words 'panto' meaning 'all' and 'mime' meaning 'no words'... it is a story told in actions without words. It is generally believed to stem from the 16th Century Italian tradition of 'Commedia Dell' Arte'. These were very physical shows performed by travelling actors which told a repertoire of stories using mime, music, dance, acrobatics and slapstick. 'Commedia Dell' Arte' made its way across Europe to Britain where it became very popular and where its stock characters (such as the 'Harlequin' and 'Clown') began to appear in British plays. The form was developed until, in 1717 the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane opened what is now recognised as the first modern pantomime.

From these very early performances the genre developed, becoming more widespread as more theatres were granted performing licences and the traditions that we recognise today began to be introduced. The first transformation scene (such as Cinderella's famous transformation into a princess fit for a ball), now a necessity in pantomime, was first seen in 1849 in Planche's 'Island of Jewels', the use of the fairytales that we now know and love as pantomime titles first came about in the 19th century as pantomime became popular with children who already knew the storylines, the Victorian era saw the beginning of many Christmas traditions and it was at this time that pantomimes became particularly associated with the festive season and in 1902 Dan Leno became the first ever pantomime dame starring in 'Mother Goose'.



Find out more about Commedia Dell Arte, what it was, where it came from and the characters and stories involved. Develop your findings into a display or even produce your own Commedia Dell Arte inspired production.



Discuss what experience the class has of pantomime. Who has been before and what are their favourite pantomime traditions? If this is a first visit, what expectations does the class have. Invite an older member of the community into class to talk about their own memories of pantomime.



Write a letter to a pen friend from America who has never heard of pantomime – how would you explain what it is?



The Story of Dick Whittington...

Dick Whittington is the story of a young orphan who comes to London to seek his fortune, as he has heard that the city's streets are paved with gold.

All he has in the world is his faithful best friend, a cat named Tommy and so, together they travel to the city. Dick and Tommy are soon disappointed when they find that, far from being paved with gold, London is a dark, busy and lonely place. Finally, Dick manages to find a place to stay, with a wealthy merchant named Fitzwarren and his daughter Alice. Dick and Alice quickly fall in love, but the story's villain, King Rat conspires to come between them.

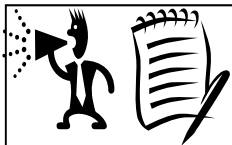
King Rat rules the underworld of London and sets a trap for Dick so that he is accused of stealing money from Alice's father. Dick is sent from the city in disgrace and sadly he begins to make his way home, until he falls asleep and has a dream that the bells of London, orchestrated by the Fairy Bowbells, chime a message to him, telling him to return to London, where he will one day become Lord Mayor!

He returns to the city where Alice convinces her father to give Dick another chance. And so, he is given the opportunity to be part of the crew on the next ship sailing from the port. While at sea, King Rat causes the ship to sink in a storm, and the crew gets washed up on the shores of Morocco.

The Sultan of Morocco explains to our hero that his country is overrun by rats – a problem that Dick assures him, Tommy the cat can solve, being a champion rat-catcher! In return for saving his country, the Sultan gives Dick more gold and jewels than he could have dreamed of, and so, when he returns to London, he is greeted as a hero. Just as the bells told him, Dick becomes Lord Mayor of London... and marries his beloved Alice!



Dick Whittington is the only pantomime story to be based, not on a fairytale, but on a real life character. Research the real Dick Whittington and present your findings to the class.



The synopsis given here is the pantomime version that you have seen. Read some other versions of the Dick Whittington story, especially the traditional tale.

Discuss where the versions differ and where they are similar; can the class identify similar characters, places and events across the versions?

Use the discussion to explore how the same narrative can be structured and written differently to suit the writer's purpose. Ask the class to retell the story in their own way to suit a chosen audience and medium.



Characters in Dick Whittington...

Every pantomime has a number of 'stock characters', which we expect to see in every pantomime. There is always a villain, a hero or principal boy and his helper, a principal girl, an over-protective parent figure, a fairy, a dame and usually an animal.

The following characters all appear in Dick Whittington:

Dick Whittington	A poor orphan boy who becomes our hero
Tommy the Cat	Dick's best friend and helper
Mr Fitzwarren	A wealthy merchant who takes Dick in on his arrival in London
Alice	Daughter of Mr Fitzwarren and the love of our hero's life
King Rat	The villain of the piece
Fairy Bowbells	Dick's guardian angel
The Sultan of Morocco	A Sultan with a rat problem!



Discuss the characters you have seen in ***Dick Whittington***.

Identify who the 'stock characters' are in the story. How do we identify them? What other characters do we see and do they fit into any of the roles given above? Can you think of any other stock characters that you would expect to see in a pantomime?



Design a costume or a piece of headwear for one of the characters in ***Dick Whittington***.

Think about who they are and their personality and choose a design that reflects this. Are they rich or poor? Outgoing or shy? Good or bad?



Split into groups assigning one character to each group and give each person a name tag. Move around the room until the teacher shouts 'stop' and turn to the nearest different character. Improvise a short scene with them, thinking about how your character feels towards the other. On 'go' move around again, next time stopping at a new character you've not met before.




From Fact to Fairytale...


As we have discovered ***Dick Whittington*** is the only pantomime story to be based on a real life character so how did the real history of Mr Richard Whittington become a legendary childhood tale?

Real life stories are often told in communities over and over again, each time becoming more and more embellished until eventually they bear little resemblance to the truth. In the days when stories were told by word of mouth rather than written down many myths and legends were born in this way. When the real life Richard Whittington died he left many generous gifts to the City of London in his will and through this became a very famous figure. But as Londoners did not know how he had made his money they began to make up stories telling of how he made his fortune. Gossip surrounding Richard's fortune was rife and the stories began to flourish – there were many different versions but the story we know today stood out as a favourite and this was immortalised in the first recorded version titled '*Dick Whittington and His Cat*' published in 1605.


The legend of 'Dick Whittington' was born. Later the same year the story was adapted into a play called '*The History of Richard Whittington*' and other written stories and plays followed. Finally in 1814 the first recorded pantomime version was produced.

 The game of Chinese Whispers perfectly demonstrates how gossip can change as it is passed from one person to another.

Why not play a game to better understand how the gossip surrounding Richard Whittington originally developed into the story we have heard at the pantomime?

 Think about how gossip surrounding celebrities is spread today. Look at a recent news item where gossip about an individual was spread through the media. Do you think the story is true or could it have been embellished like Richard Whittington's?

Imagine you are a writer for a magazine and write a celebrity gossip style story about Richard Whittington and his will.

 Think about other legends that you have heard, such as *George and the Dragon* or the *Loch Ness Monster*. Where did these stories come from? How have they changed over time?

In small groups produce your own plays telling the story of these legends or you could even make this a bigger project and produce a new pantomime title based on the legend. A guide to producing a pantomime is included in this pack.



History in Dick Whittington...

As we have seen the story of *Dick Whittington* is based on a real historic figure, Richard Whittington who lived in the 14th century during Tudor times. This means that unlike most pantomimes the people, places and themes featuring in it are based on historic fact rather than being fairytales.

People and Places:

Instead of being set in a fairytale land like a lot of pantomimes, *Dick Whittington* is set in London and there are references to many existing places in the story, many of which are linked to the real Richard Whittington. For example, Highgate Hill, where Dick hears the bells of Bow chiming to him, overlooks 'Whittington Hospital'. On top of the hill stands a statue of his cat.

As well as 'Dick Whittington', there are other characters in the story based on real life figures. If you have already researched the story of the real Dick Whittington you may have been able to identify them. Mr Fitzwarren was a real merchant and Richard Whittington married his daughter, Alice in 1402.



Discuss the story and list all the historic places in it that the class can remember. Chart the places seen in the story on a map of modern day London.

The Rats:

The villain in *Dick Whittington* is King Rat, he sets a trap for Dick so that he is accused of stealing from Alice's father and later causes the ship to sink in a storm. Rats are also the baddies in Morocco, where they overrun the Sultan's kingdom and it is by ridding the land of these creatures that Dick gains his wealth.

Given the history of the *Dick Whittington* story it is not surprising that the rats became the bad guys... As we saw earlier the first written version of the story was published in 1605 and many other versions appeared before the first pantomime version was produced in 1814. Between these years the Great Plague had been at its height in London and as it was rats that first brought this terrible disease to England, people had no problems in viewing them as arch enemies. As the story developed it must have been easy for writers to make popular baddies out of the rats!



Robert Browning's poem *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* was set around the same time as *Dick Whittington*. Read the poem and think about how the rats are portrayed. Do the texts treat them in a similar way?

Act out the poem: think about the description of each character and how they should be played.



History in Dick Whittington (continued)...

Merchants and Life at Sea:

London was the main trading port in Tudor England and many wealthy merchants, like Mr Fitzwarren were based there. A lot of money could be made through buying and selling goods abroad.

Although they were making a lot of money for their masters, the sailors onboard the merchant ships endured very poor conditions. They were often at sea for months on end and space was very cramped. Sleeping quarters were hard to come by so many sailors would sleep on the deck. Fresh food and water was not available so they lived on salted, smoked or pickled food. Good hygiene was unheard of as there were no toilet or wash facilities and many sailors would only have one set of clothes to wear day and night. As a result disease was rampant and many would succumb to illnesses such as scurvy and rickets.

As we see in *Dick Whittington* journeys were often very dangerous and many ships would be attacked by foreign boats who would steal their goods or would be caught up in bad storms meaning accidents and injuries were commonplace.

Those taking on these journeys had to be hardy souls indeed!



Look at some other sources describing life at sea in Tudor times. Make notes about life on board ship and present your findings to the rest of the class in a creative way. Perhaps you could write a poem or story and act it out?



Write a letter from Dick to Alice telling her about his journey on Mr Fitzwarren's ship – Think about his thoughts and feelings on leaving England for probably the first time. Does he enjoy life on board? How are his living conditions? Is he excited or scared?



Producing Your Own Pantomime...

A big event in any school calendar is always the Christmas production but if this is your first time in the directors chair it can be a daunting prospect! Our brief guide to producing panto should get you started...

1/ Choose your title... Decide which pantomime you would like to produce. Traditional favourites include *Peter Pan*, *Cinderella*, *Dick Whittington* and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

You may wish to write your own script with references to local people or places (perhaps your baddie is the headmaster and your fairy the lollipop lady!) or use a pre-written script but if you do, remember that you will need to pay for the performance rights.

2/ Cast your stars... Once you have a script ready you will need to cast your stars... hold auditions to choose main characters although when working with young children it is nice to ensure there are enough parts for everyone, providing numbers are manageable. If there is a lot of interest some children could be encouraged to be involved behind the scenes.

It can be an idea to hold a workshop rather than 'x-factor' style auditions to take the pressure of individuals.

3/ Give out scripts and arrange rehearsals... Now your script is completed and your cast have been given their roles, hand out scripts and encourage everyone to learn their lines BEFORE rehearsals start. This will give you more time to devise each scene and work on movement and spacing.

Give out rehearsal schedules with dates and times so everyone knows when they are needed in advance. It may also help to outline what you hope to achieve in each session so you know that you are on track for opening night!

4/ Sets, props and lighting... Get some volunteers involved at this stage! The school caretaker and parents who are handy with DIY may be able to help. Sets and lighting may be more or less complicated depending on the facilities your school has but remember to make them easy to work with. If necessary it is better to keep things simple.

5/ Costumes... Again a volunteer who is handy with a needle is useful here! Your wardrobe mistress will need to identify any specific costumes needed for principal characters as these may need to be specially made or hired. For ensemble, pick simpler costumes that can be picked up easily on the high street or that some may already have and ask parents for donations.

6/ Marketing... School plays always have a guaranteed audience of parents and family members but if you are relying on ticket sales to help cover the costs of the production some marketing is useful! Encourage the children to sell as many tickets as possible by offering a prize for the person who sells the most. Encourage the schools wider community to be involved by coming along as well...your local press and 'What's On' Guides can help with this.

7/ Opening Night..! Ensure you have had at least 3 run-throughs of the entire play, including a technical and dress rehearsal and you are ready to go! Break a leg!



Resources...

You may find the following resources useful for information on pantomime and ***Dick Whittington...***

Dick Whittington by Ronne Randall, published by Penguin Books Ltd.

www.museumoflondon.org.uk - "The Man Behind the Myth" by Angela Voon, for information on Richard Whittington.

www.historylearningsite.co.uk - for information on Tudor life

www.tudordiscovery.org.uk - for information on Tudor life

www.aboutbritain.com - for information on the background of pantomime.

www.lazybeescripts.co.uk - for information on the history of pantomime and producing your own pantomime.

www.its-behind-you.com - for information on the history of pantomime and *Dick Whittington*.