

Introduction to Study Guide (notes by Mermaid Theater staff)

About *When Dinosaurs Dine by Moonlight* - a brief synopsis

Sheree Fitch's latest story, offers wonderful possibilities for a Mermaid adaptation because of its subject matter and its literary style. It's a whimsical tale of a young boy who meets a collection of extraordinary dinosaurs who parade by his window at bedtime. He's frightened yet fascinated, and soon becomes a welcome member of the gathering. Each dinosaur is distinctive, amusing, fanciful - and anatomically accurate. The result is a science lesson, but also a listening adventure, thanks to Sheree Fitch's unique sense of wordplay, and Steven Naylor's evocative music. Holly Carr's vibrant decor and Jim Morrow's staging and innovative puppets offer plenty of surprises, as the cast of characters grows larger in front of our eyes.

About the Writer

Sheree Fitch is a poet, educator, journalist, author, and activist who has performed her work as far south as Belize and as far north as the Canadian Arctic. Her award-winning books for youngsters have been characterized by exuberant verse and humour, and have served to introduce a generation of Canadian children to the joy of reading and the excitement of language. Sheree regularly travels throughout North America and further afield to fulfil engagements as a workshop leader, keynote speaker and ambassador for Canadian children's literature. She's a major advocate for literacy, and a spokesperson for world children's rights and UNICEF. Her most recent publications include a guide for children who aspire to be writers, and a work of fiction (*The Other Author Arthur*) for which she has been nominated for a Rocky Mountain Book Award. Her first collaboration with Mermaid in 1997, ***Rummabubba, Lidmaker of the Snufflewogs***, was an unusual blend of science fiction and fairy tale.

About the Director/Production Designer/Script

Jim Morrow creates puppets for stage, television and film. During his twenty-three years with Mermaid Theatre, he's directed and designed numerous shows which have toured nationally and internationally and been enjoyed by a million spectators. A gifted performer, Jim has toured extensively in Canada, the US, the United Kingdom and Japan. He has served as director of puppetry for Symphony Nova Scotia's production of ***The Nutcracker*** for the last ten years, and frequently conducts master classes in the US and Canada. Jim is Mermaid Theatre's Artistic Director.

About the Composer

Composer/lyricist/arranger/producer Steven Naylor has created the music for a dozen Mermaid shows, including ***Stuart Little, Just So Stories, Gulliver's Travels, The Red Ball*** and ***Rummabubba***, and the synthesizer adaptation of ***Peter and the Wolf***. Steven is highly regarded for his original scores for stage, film and television. He's a respected teacher as well, and taught electroacoustic music at Dalhousie University for many years. Steven is Mermaid Theatre's Composer-in-Residence.

About the Narrator

Known throughout Canada for his diverse contributions as actor, writer and humorist, Bill Carr began his professional stage career with Mermaid Theatre in 1979. He's been a major contributor to public affairs and comedy programs on CBC radio and television, and has worked extensively with the Atlantic Theatre Festival and Neptune Theatre. Bill travels the country as a humorous corporate speaker and gives

workshops on communication and creativity. He ranks among Atlantic Canada's most generous volunteers, offering his services as host and raconteur to countless charitable, medical and cultural organizations.

Visual Artist/Designer

Holly Carr ranks among Nova Scotia's most inventive visual artists. Known for her unique silk painting and themes which range from social satire to bold florals, Holly's work has been widely exhibited and is held in both private and corporate collections. Holly's performance-inspired hangings were featured at the Festival Theatre in Wolfville and in the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium in Halifax. This is Holly's second commission with Mermaid, her first design collaboration was ***The Little Lame Prince***.

Mermaid Theatre's objectives

Since 1972 Mermaid Theatre has toured with unique productions designed specifically for family audiences. The company's unusual mix of puppets and performers, its strong emphasis on striking visual effects, and the inclusion of original music provide an impressive introduction to the performing arts. Equally important is the company's objective of promoting literacy and the love of reading, so that productions are generally drawn from contemporary or traditional children's literature. These goals are reflected in our choice of ***When Dinosaurs Dine by Moonlight***, a fanciful story which stretches the imagination, as well as offers considerable scope for stunning theatrical effects.

History and Personnel:

Mermaid Theatre was co-founded by the late Evelyn Garbary (former director of drama at Acadia University), Tom Miller, (a visual artist who formerly served as art consultant to the Nova Scotia's Kings County school board), and Sara Lee Lewis (an arts administrator). The company had its headquarters in Wolfville, prior to moving to Windsor, NS in 1987. Jim Morrow became Artistic Director of the Theatre in 1999, following more than twenty years of active involvement in production, design, directing, performing and teaching. Mermaid Theatre's staff members include Cathy White (Administrator), Karen Gasser (Tour Manager and Office Manager), Christopher Heide (Youtheatre Director), Steven Naylor (Composer-In-Residence), Deborah MacLean (Production Manager), Jonathon Ford (Shop Manager), Alice Lund (Workshop co-ord), Sarah Hart (Seamstress), and Marcel Boulet (Technical Director). Ashley Caldwell and Jasmine Tait (Production Assistants).

Notes from the Director, Jim Morrow

Mermaid's newest play is an adaptation of a wonderful story written by Sheree Fitch, in which a quiet night of reading leads to the invasion of a young boy's bedroom by a cast of unusual dinosaur characters. From the mighty Tyrannosaurus rex to the diminutive Micropachycephalosaurus, these fantastical animals, who once roamed our earth, have been the source of inspiration for writers since their discovery almost two hundred years ago. Sheree's skillful manipulation of language playfully introduces our audience to this cast of unique personalities.

The construction of Mermaid's dinosaurs is based on a traditional puppet style called a 'marionette' in which the puppet is suspended from strings. In the case of our dining dinos, we have included both the conventional sized marionette as well as an expanded version for the larger creatures.

Many accomplished artists have contributed their time and energy to the success of our new show, including our Composer-in-Residence, Steven Naylor, who created the soundscape; Holly Carr, who decorated the puppets and stage with her wonderful silk paintings; and Bill Carr, who gave each dinosaur a distinctive voice. No Mermaid performance would be complete without the talents of our Production Manager, Deborah MacLean, and our Shop Manager, Jonathon Ford, who lent their considerable skills to all aspects of the show, and in particular with the evolution of the puppet design.

Notes from the Composer, Steven Naylor

Imagine a very, very large dinosaur walking down the street outside your house. Would you hear his footsteps? Or feel them? Probably both!

Increasingly, movie theatres and 'home theatres' (a fancy name for a big TV with a great sound system!) are including special speakers called subwoofers, which reproduce very low pitched sounds much better than conventional speakers. The sound system for 'When Dinosaurs Dine by Moonlight' also includes a subwoofer, to give you a better sense of the earth shaking footsteps of our dinosaurs.

Of course, there's a lot more to the music for the play than just footsteps. In fact, if you listen carefully, you'll notice several different styles or moods of music, depending on which character the music supports.

Try to pick out some of the styles we use - and see if you can hear how the music 'goes with' a particular character or scene. Listen for rhythms (what kind of dance would you do to this music?) and instrument sounds (what kind of music do you associate with that sound?) Finally, try to notice which sounds are high, which ones are low - and which ones are so low that you feel them more than you hear them!

Notes To Teachers from Writer, Sheree Fitch

The world of Mermaid Theatre is a magical world. Colour, music, movement, words, and imagination come together and stories spring to life! There is energy and drama in every play; a sense that anything can happen at any time. It often does! Sometimes we laugh, other times we are scared or surprised and yes, even moved to tears. After watching theatre such as this, we can be inspired to create worlds of our own----- to compose our own music, script a play, write a poem, design a mask or puppet or dance. The urge to create can emerge from other's ideas. In fact, that's how this poem had its beginnings.

When Dinosaurs Dine By Moonlight was inspired by a visit I made to a school several years ago. I was talking about the music of words, how if we think about it, every word is a poem. "Think discombobulating," I said. "Think thermometer! Think gurgle! Just listen to the music in the sounds of words." A boy put up his hand, "Like the names of dinosaurs" he exclaimed! "Like Tyrannosaurus rex, like Argentinasaurus" " Exactly!" I

said. "I think you should write a poem book about dinosaurs using their real names" he said and all the class chimed in, "Yeah! Cool!" Their enthusiasm for the idea got me thinking..what if..? I started to do a bit of research on dinosaurs. Wow! What words! Words I could not even pronounce. What a lot there was to learn about the prehistoric world they roamed in. Incidentally, I am still learning.

Once again, I am thrilled to watch a poem travel from page to stage thanks to the work of so many talented people at Mermaid. I am especially honoured and excited that Holly Carr agreed to lend her talent and energy to this play. Her spirited gorgeous art work breathes life into these dinos. As always, her landscapes of whimsy and beauty, her textures and textiles, make my heart glad.

The following list of activities are meant as springboards for further creative exploration in writing. I hope these ideas will fuel your imagination and make you even more curious about magical worlds that existed so many years ago. Even better, may they encourage new worlds---the worlds you can create today and tomorrow.

Related Writing Activities

1 PREMISES, PREMISES!

Yes! The word is premise not promise but a good *premise promises* to get your imagination bumper started!

By premise I mean the idea that the story or play is built upon. A good way to come up with a premise is to begin with the magic words ...*what if....* ?

For example, here is the premise for this play:

What if a boy woke up in the middle of the night and discovered a dinosaur parade passing by his bedroom window?

Answering the question is how I "found" the story.

For you to do:

a. Make a list of ten what if questions. Let your imagination go!

Example:

What IF?

what if it rained sunflowers?

what if I spent a night on the moon?

what if the earth turned to gingerbread?

what if I was a leaf being blown by the wind

what if I met an angel?

b. Read the list. As it is, it could be your what if poem!

c. Start to answer one of your what ifs. It could be a story idea.

#2 Characters in your neighbourhood.

Most of the characteristics of the dinos in this poem are taken from the people or *characters* in my own neighbourhood. Example: a marathon runner, a musician, a real estate agent! Take a look around your neighbourhood. Start taking notes on what you observe.

For you to do:

Write your own dinosaur poem based on people you know. Your teacher, for example, or your mother or father. Include what they wear, the colour of their hair, a hobby they might enjoy. Share the poems.

#3 Write Away Your Fears!

The boy in this story is afraid of dinosaurs at first. When he sees a dino in trouble he overcomes his own fear and tries to help. Sometimes, writing about what we are afraid of helps us not be so afraid.

For you to do:

Make a list of things you fear. Example, spiders, snakes, speaking in public, war. Begin a story with someone who has the same fear and has to conquer it. See what happens.

#4 A Dino Dialogue

A monologue is when someone talks out loud to themselves in a play. A dialogue takes two. You have dialogues every time you talk with someone. Writing dialogue, however, is not as easy as it seems!

For you to do:

Imagine you are both the boy in this play and one of the dinos. You are on a bus travelling to Halifax. During the trip, you talk and get to know each other. What do you find out about each other? Write it as a dialogue.

#5 Group Story

Two or more brains are better than one!

For you to do:

Write a class story together. Here is a possible start for your story:

Rex was lonely. He was as lonely as the very last dinosaur on earth. That's because he was. In the morning, when he woke up.....

#6 Word play

Poetry does not always have to rhyme but it is a playing with sound of

words. Here is my favourite word play exercise.

For you to do:

- a. Pick a letter from A-Z in your head.
- b. Have someone keep time for one minute.
- c. When the time keeper says go, start writing as fast as you can, all the words you can think of that start with that letter.
- d. When the minute is over, read your list. It's a tongue twister!
- e. Using your words and maybe adding to them, write a tongue twister nonsense sentence or paragraph.

#8 Word Search

The boy who suggested that the proper names of dinosaurs were small poems was right! If we look at the proper names for animals, or plants or rocks, you find some amazing ones as well.

For You to Do:

Look in science books and encyclopedias for the proper names of animals, plants or rocks. For example, look up marsupial. There's a delicious word!! Look up the proper name for the koho salmon. Look up the other name for certain herbs you find in the garden. Or weeds. Or trees. Write a story with a character that uses these proper names. See what happens.

#9 WORD WALL

Discovering new words and experimenting with them rolling off my tongue is something I do all the time as a writer. You could say I am a word collector. It's great fun for anyone.

For you to do:

Make a word wall in your classroom. Every time some one finds an exciting word, print it in large letters, say it together, learn its meaning and put it on the word wall. Test them!! There might be some words even your parents do not know! Invent a fun name for your word wall.

#10 Dinosaur Acrostic

An acrostic is an unrhymed poem that uses the letters of a word to describe what that word is.

D--angerous

I --guanadon

N--ow extinct

O--nly found in museums

S--tories in their fossilized bones

A--rchaeologists search for them, paleontologists study them

U--nder tons of earth
R--eally cool
S--uper cool dinosaurs.

For you to do:

Write your own acrostic using dinosaur or a word related to dinosaurs like prehistoric or paleontology or Argentinasaurus.

Interesting information on Dinosaurs can be found at the following websites:

<http://www.museum.gov.ns.ca/fgm/dinosaurs/dinosaurs.html>

Fundy Geological Museum - Information on local dinosaurs. The museum, situated in Parrsboro plays an important role in the study of the period wherein dinosaurs began to rule the earth. Links to "The Lab" which details the museum's ongoing uncovering of a 200 million year old Prosauropod. Information on various educational programs the museum offers.

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/dinosaurs/>

Zoom Dinosaurs - Site Description: Zoom Dinosaurs is a comprehensive on-line hypertext book about dinosaurs. It is designed for students of all ages and levels of comprehension. It has an easy to use structure that allows readers to start at a basic level on each topic, and the progress to much more advanced information as desired, simply by clicking on links."

<http://www.fmnh.org/sue/default.html>

Sue at the Field Museum - Sue is the largest preserved Tyrannosaurus Rex ever discovered. Dinosaur images, facts, theories, and a just for kids section". Kids section includes crossword puzzles, flip books, etc. intended for older children.

<http://www.dinofun.com>

Dino Fun - Plenty of dino info for children, mostly in the form of links to dinosaur education sites.

http://www.learningpage.com/free_pages/

Teacher Resources - After a brief signup to become a member of this site, teachers will have access to worksheets, lesson plans, etc...

<http://www.dinosaurworld.com/teachers.asp>

Dinosaur World - Dino information for teachers and a link to a dino-kids page with more information and educational links.

<http://www.dinosaurdiscovery.com>

Dinosaur Discovery - Educational resource - Order Dinosaur Dig kits from this site and follow the suggested curriculum and activities for grades K-6 for a realistic paleontological experience.

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RBC Financial Group believes in giving something back to the communities in which we operate. In addition to being Canada's largest corporate donor, we support a wide variety of events and causes, with special emphasis on those relating to the performing arts, youth, culture and education. We are pleased to once again join as tour sponsor of Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia's ***When Dinosaurs Dine by Moonlight***.

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