



## ***Mozart in China* Teacher Resource**

A great deal of thanks and appreciation goes out to the members of our Teacher Advisory Committee, who volunteer their time to assist in the development of Sprockets teacher resources.

**TITLE:** *Mozart in China*

**COUNTRY OF ORIGIN:** Austria

**RELEASE YEAR:** 2008

**ORIGINAL LANGUAGE:** German, Mandarin

**DIRECTOR:** Bernd Neuberger

**RUNTIME:** 91 minutes

### **DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY:**

1. *Mozart in China* (2008)
2. *Summer with the Ghosts* (2003)
3. *Wenn die Liebe flöten geht* (2001)

### **CURRICULUM LINKS:**

#### **Language, Grades 4 to 6**

- produce media texts for specific purposes and audiences, using few simple media forms and appropriate conventions and techniques
- identify purposes for listening in a variety of situations, formal and informal, and set goals related to specific listening tasks (e.g., to summarize the theme of a small-group drama presentation; to record important details about an upcoming event announced on the radio; to clarify suggestions for improvements in a peer writing conference)



- identify some non-verbal cues, including facial expression, gestures and eye contact, and use them in oral communications
- identify, in conversation with the teacher and peers, how their skills as viewers, representers, readers and writers help them improve their oral communication skills
- write more complex texts using a variety of forms
- generate ideas about a potential topic and identify those most appropriate for the purpose
- identify, in conversation with the teacher and peers, how their skills as viewers, representers, readers and writers help them improve their oral communication skills

### **Arts Curriculum, Drama and Dance, Grades 4 to 6**

- enact or create, rehearse and present drama and dance works based on novels, stories, poems and plays
- distinguish between different dance forms and different theatrical genres
- demonstrate understanding of some of the principles involved in the structure of works in drama and dance (e.g., variety, unity)
- create, rehearse and present drama and dance works to communicate the meaning of poems, stories, paintings, myths and other source material drawn from a wide range of cultures
- communicate, orally and in writing, their response to their own and others' work in drama and dance (e.g., through discussions, interviews, research projects)
- interpret and communicate the meaning of stories, poems, plays and other material drawn from a variety of sources and cultures, using a variety of drama and dance techniques
- represent and interpret main characters by speaking, moving and writing in role (e.g., write and present monologues)
- demonstrate an understanding of the use of production technology to create different effects
- evaluate drama and dance presentations done in class
- demonstrate an understanding of the principles involved in the structuring of works in drama and dance



### **FOCUSING QUESTION:**

How do the various characters in this film help and support each other to overcome obstacles? Why is friendship critical to success? How can arts and culture make our lives more fulfilling?

### **SYNOPSIS:**

After accidentally colliding during a soccer game, Danny and Li Wei wind up spending the summer together at Li Wei's grandfather's house on the tropical island of Hainan in China. Despite a rocky beginning, they become fast friends with the help of Li Wei's cousin Lin Lin, and the three youths embark on a mission to save Li Wei's grandfather's shadow puppet theatre from a greedy loan shark. As their adventure unfolds, so too does that of the Austrian marionette Mozart. A puppet who comes to life at night, Mozart has smuggled himself over to China as a stowaway in Danny's luggage. Will he find musical inspiration in Hainan? And can he possibly help save the shadow puppet theatre?

Peppered with delightful animation sequences featuring the sometimes-cheeky puppets, this scenic live-action film highlights the beauty of contemporary and ancient China. Though the dialogue is in both German and Mandarin, the film's subtitles translate only the German lines, so that, like the characters in the film (both human and puppet), the audience succeeds in transcending cultural and language barriers. *Mozart in China* is a wonderful tale of cultural discovery – of Chinese food, history, customs and life, and the universal nature of friendship.

**Recommended for grades 4 through 6**

### **AN EDUCATOR'S COMMENTS ON THE FILM:**

"This film is a great tool to address friendship, perseverance, trust and honesty; all part of character education. I think this film is a great example of how friendships grow and develop between two people. The puppetry theme that runs through this story provides creative inspiration for puppetry activities in the classroom."



## **PRE-SCREENING PREPARATION:**

Danny and Li Wei live in Salzburg, Austria, but spend the summer together in China, specifically a small island on the southern coast called Hainan. You can help students gain an appreciation for the distance the boys have travelled by showing Hainan Island (China) and Salzburg (Austria) on a world map. Give students a general understanding of the size and scope of China's provinces and population to indicate to them that Hainan is not representative of the whole country.

### **People's Republic of China**

**Population:** 1.3 billion (the most populous country in the world)

**Capital:** Beijing, formerly known as Peking

**National Language:** Standard Mandarin (various other regional languages are recognized, including Cantonese)

**Land Divisions:** 22 provinces (The People's Republic of China also claims, but does not control, Taiwan – population 22.9 million, capital Taipei – as a 23rd province. The Republic of China controls Taiwan, as well as some offshore islands including Kinmen and Matsu.)

**Size:** 9,596,960 km<sup>2</sup> (the 4th-largest country in the world)

**National Holiday:** October 1, the anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

China's climate and geography vary quite a bit depending on where you are. The south is filled with jungles and is very hot and humid. In the north are mountains, where it snows for much of the year and winter lasts longer. In between, there are mountain ranges, deserts, rivers and fields. Usually the weather is not extreme, but large floods, droughts and blizzards sometimes occur. There are even typhoons, which are similar to strong hurricanes. They come out of the Pacific Ocean and hit the southern parts of China, like the island of Hainan – where Danny and Li Wei have their summer adventure.

Located in the South China Sea, Hainan is China's most southerly province, a tropical island whose lush greenery and dramatic landscapes have earned it nicknames such as Fine Jade Cliffs and Fine Jade Land. The island's moist, tropical monsoon climate is warm throughout the year. July and August are the hottest months, with temperatures averaging from 25 to 29°C, but often hitting higher than 35°C. The coldest months are

January and February, with temperatures ranging from 16 to 21°C. In contrast, the northern Chinese province of Heilongjiang is subarctic in climate. Winters are long and frigid, with temperature averages of -31 to -15°C in January!

Hainan, whose literal translation is "South of the Sea," is the smallest province in China at 33,920 km<sup>2</sup> in size. That's still six times bigger than Canada's smallest province and island, Prince Edward Island. Nevertheless, Hainan holds over eight million people. The whole country of Canada has four times the number of people but is over 300 times larger than the tropical island! China is the most populous country in the world, boasting well over a billion inhabitants.

## **Chinese Shadow Theatre**

The Chinese word for shadow puppet is *pi ying*, which means "shadows of hides." This is because some shadow puppets are made from the hides of donkeys or – as Li Wei explained – of oxen. Paper is also a common material for puppets. Shadow puppets are intricately carved, cut and painted. You can actually tell which region of China a puppet comes from by the size and design.

Shadow puppet theatre can now be seen in night markets, where people can watch performances based on traditional myths and legends. Because the puppets do not speak, some say that the theatre evolved as an art form that could cross language barriers.

## **The Cultural Revolution**

Li Wei and Lin Lin tell Danny that years ago, shadow theatre was banned in China. People actually stormed the theatre, took away Grandfather's puppets and burned them in a fire. Grandfather was able to sneak out that night and save a few puppets, hiding them until puppet theatre was again permitted.

The leaders of the Cultural Revolution in China (which took place about 40 years ago) tried to rid the country of traditional ideas, culture and customs that threatened their political goals. Much art and literature was destroyed during that time. Fortunately, some artifacts were saved, and eventually the Chinese government allowed these customs to be practised freely again.



### **SCREENING ACTIVITY:**

Have students make observations and take mental notes of who the various characters are that make up the story.

1. What character traits make each character distinct, and how do individual character traits push the storyline ahead?
2. Have students reflect on one aspect of the film that surprised/affected them.
3. Discuss the ending of the film. How did Danny change? Why did this happen?
4. Did the main characters in the film have to overcome a problem or obstacle to achieve their goal(s)? Would you have tried to solve their problem differently? Why?

### **POST-SCREENING ACTIVITY:**

#### **Shadow Puppet Play**

In this activity, students write a short play or skit, create shadow puppets for the characters and then use them to enact a shadow play for their peers. The short story or play can be any kind of style, such as comedy, tragedy, drama or musical. The play should contain as few characters as possible to simplify the performance.

#### **Puppet and Stage Materials:**

- pencil or pen
- medium-coloured or dark bristol board or construction paper (thin cereal box cardboard or bristol board is best)
- scissors
- long chopsticks or bamboo skewers
- masking tape
- large cardboard box to make the stage
- ruler
- a small translucent white plastic or cloth sheet to use as a screen
- a table, ideally at least three feet high (e.g., a kitchen table)
- stapler (optional for attaching screen to frame)
- bright flashlight or overhead projector



### **Part 1: Write a story**

1. Arrange students into groups of two or three.
2. Ask students to create two to four characters and write a short story or skit. The story should be no longer than one to three pages long. The story need not be written in script format, but should make distinctions between the narrative and the dialogue elements of each character.

### **Part 2: Create the shadow puppets**

1. Each student in the group should create a puppet shape for one of the characters. They can begin by drawing their shapes or designs on the bristol board.
2. Using scissors, students cut out the shapes. They can use a hole punch to create eyes for characters, or attach tissue paper, feathers or other materials to give the puppets an interesting silhouette.
3. Using masking tape, students fasten the chopsticks or skewers to the backs of the puppets.

### **Part 3: Build the stage (due to safety concerns, an adult instructor should perform step 1)**

1. Use the scissors to cut off the top and one side of the cardboard box, leaving three sides and the bottom flaps to make the stage. Using a ruler, draw a large rectangle in the centre of the central panel (the one that will face the audience), being careful to leave a border of at least two inches on each side (this two-inch-wide border will be handy for attaching your screen to). The bottom flaps of the box can be shortened and taped to the table to keep the stage stable.
2. With help from another person, stretch the screen material across the rectangular hole on the inside of the box and attach it there using tape or staples. Make sure the screen is tight and firmly affixed.
3. When the stage is finished, set it up on the table with the open side in line with the edge.
4. Place the flashlight on the table behind the stage, pointing the light directly at the white screen. (Tip: students can place thin coloured paper or plastic over the lighting to create different moods for the play.)

## Part 4: Perform the stories

1. Turning out all the other lights in the room, students sit underneath or stand beside the stage, moving their characters around behind the screen. They can place their arms on either side of the flashlight and move the puppets around in the beam of light.

## CONCLUSION/WRAP-UP:

The film provides students with insight into daily life in a distinct region of China and some of the ideas and events that have shaped local customs. In addition, the focus on shadow puppet storytelling encourages discussion as well as multidisciplinary practice of traditional artistic forms. As the plotline progresses, the main character Danny, a native Austrian, becomes more deeply immersed in Chinese customs, suggesting to students that it is beneficial to explore other cultures. At first, Danny experiences friction trying to integrate into the local environment. Through questioning and contemplating this other culture, he learns to appreciate it, finding he has more in common with it than originally thought.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

1. **National Geographic Travel & Cultures: China**  
Here you can read general information about China, view a map, photo galleries and videos, and listen to traditional Chinese music.  
[http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/places/countries/country\\_china.html](http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/places/countries/country_china.html)
2. **“Enchanted Stories: Chinese Shadow Theater in Shaanxi”**  
China Institute offers a detailed history of Chinese shadow puppetry that traces its evolution through different regions and time periods.  
[www.chinainstitute.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewPage&pageID=685&nodeID=1](http://www.chinainstitute.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewPage&pageID=685&nodeID=1)
3. **“Opera Stories”**  
This website contains the synopses of some traditional Chinese operatic works.  
[www.chinapage.org/xwang/story.html](http://www.chinapage.org/xwang/story.html)