

A Donkey's Burden: Storytelling Tips and Learning Tools

Before narration:

- Introduce this story as a folktale from India
- Explain the character names-in 'Hindi', India's official language, 'Ghada' means donkey and 'Bhola' means innocent chap
Note: In India, donkeys are owned by washer men to carry clothes. This story has some variation in the occupation of the owner
- Start a discussion on what would happen if each substance in the story is immersed in water. [Salt and sugar dissolve, cotton absorbs water hence gaining weight.]

Storytelling:

- Enact the story:
 - Show facial expressions of the donkey and man when the contents of each bag are lost
 - A disappointed look for Bhola and a happy look for Gadha the first three times. For the last time when Gadha is caught, Ghada should have a bewildered look and Bhola should have a smug face. Act out the donkey's sly smile when he gets away with his tricks and his 'caught' look at the end
- Use character voices for Bhola and Ghada. Insert a 'hee-haw' every once in a while. Kids are sure to giggle
- Hold suspense for when cotton dissolves and lead to it slowly. You may say, "...and the cotton got submerged in the water and guess what? Did it dissolve like the salt and sugar?"
Invite the children to guess.
If they guessed it right, tell them something like, "That's right. The cotton soaked up all the water. The trickster got tricked."
If they didn't get it right, tell them, "No. The cotton soaked up all the water. The trickster got tricked."
- Feel free to replace the items the donkey carries with anything else suitable but make sure that it fits the storyline

After narration:

- Start a discussion on whether the donkey was right or wrong in deciding not to work
- This could be a story narrated after a science class and can be a good introduction to scientific principles (an experiment can be conducted in class with a glass of water, spoon of salt, spoon of sugar, and a sponge showing how each substance behaves when dropped in water)
- Ask kids:
 - To describe Bhola and Gadha
[Answer: Bhola-innocent, hard-working, trusting. Gadha-lazy, cunning]
 - If they know of any similar tales from other countries
 - 'Kismet' is an Arabic word that was added to the English dictionary. Ask the kids to guess its meaning with reference to the context
[Answer: Luck]
 - What characteristics of donkeys they are aware of? Strength, stubbornness, stupidity?
 - To describe how Bhola's outfit is different from what's worn in their country
 - If they are aware of any rivers that can be crossed on foot. Where are the rivers located? Describe them

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[Ex. Big Sur River in California, USA can be crossed in summer when the water level is low, just before it meets the sea.]

Extended activities:

- Sketch a happy donkey, whistling, and trotting along
- The story can be performed as a puppet show.

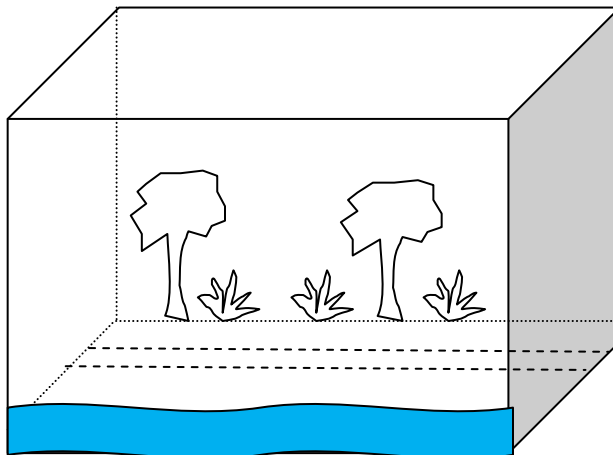
The below directions are for a stick puppet show.

Materials needed:

- 1) An empty cardboard box
- 2) Sticks
- 3) Colored paper
- 4) Glue

Directions (Kids can do this with some help from an adult):

- 1) Make a hollow box cutting out any extra flaps from one end to create the puppet stage (One end should be open and the other closed)
- 2) Cut out a rectangular strip from the bottom center of the cardboard box (shown by dashed lines in the figure below)
- 3) Draw a natural setting with trees and hills for the backdrop. Color and paste to the inner back side of the box
- 4) Draw lines of water and color them blue and paste in front of the box for the river
- 5) Print the man and donkey from the story for each of the scenes. Cut out the shapes and stick them to foot-long sticks
- 6) Set the box so it sits on two tables with enough room between them for two kids to sit. The slit in the bottom of the box will be the opening for the puppets to enter and leave the stage. Cover the tables with cloth so the audience cannot see the kids sitting under the tables
- 7) Have one child be the narrator while two others hold the puppets and enact one scene per illustration. Change the puppets when the scene changes



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Reading Comprehension:

- Questions to ask the children:
 - 1) Which is heavier? A pound of cotton or a pound of iron?
 - 2) What does "traverse" mean?
 - 3) What modes of transportation use animals?

Answer Key

- 1) Both weigh the same!
- 2) Cross over
- 3) Bullock cart, camel cart, chariots driven by horses, sleds driven by dogs, etc.