

Crabgrass Puppet Theatre

Study Guide for

The Three Little Pigs

Build a Better House

CRABGRASS PUPPET THEATRE'S shows are aimed at educating as well as entertaining our audiences. School performances include a demonstration of the puppets and techniques we use. This study guide provides background information about the show and suggestions for classroom activities.

ABOUT OUR SHOW

Everyone knows the story of the Three Little Pigs. But the great thing about stories is that every time you tell them, they change a little. And everyone who tells a story tells it a little bit differently.

In our version of this old tale, the three little pigs need new homes but aren't sure if they can trust their architect, B. B. Wolfe. They think he might have ulterior motives. "Straw?" asks the first pig. "Excellent insulation," says the wolf. "Sticks?" says the second. "Built-in ventilation," replies the architect. "I'm using bricks!" says the third pig. "Bricks are so old fashioned," says the wolf. "So boring. So . . . solid."

The award-winning Crabgrass Puppet Theatre delivers a delightful and hilarious new take on an old tale, featuring beautiful puppetry, lively music and three adorable pigs.

SYNOPSIS

The Big Bad Wolf has a problem: jobs for wolves are few and far between these days, and they often come with occupational risks. So he's going into business for himself, as a house builder. Oddly enough, his first three clients are – yep, you

guessed it – pigs! The three pigs also have a problem: they've grown too big to fit into their house. They each decide to build their own house, and consult B.B. Wolfe, Architect/Builder. It seems, however, that Mr. Wolfe does not have their best interests at heart. In fact, he seems to want to eat them! He catches the first two pigs, but the third gives him more trouble. Since Mr. Wolfe refuses to build her a house out of bricks, she does it herself. And she comes up with a plan to get rid of the wolf for good!

TYPES OF PUPPETS

All of the puppets in "The Three Little Pigs" are rod puppets. Rod puppets are moved with sticks, which are called rods. Some of the puppets have strings which go from their arms down the rod to a control. When the puppeteer pulls the strings using this control, the arms of the puppet move.

The pigs' break-away house at the beginning of the show is held together with magnets. The pretzel stick house (which is made out of wooden dowels, not pretzels!) also stays together with magnets. The straw house is, in fact, made out of bendy straws, and the brick house is made of a strong, plywood-like foamboard and painted.

We also use an old storytelling technique that is being revived: The crankie! A crankie, according to crankie enthusiast Sue Truman, is "a long illustrated scroll that is wound onto two spools. The spools are loaded into a box which has a viewing screen. The scroll is hand-cranked while the story is told." You can visit Sue's crankie website at <http://www.thecrankiefactory.com>

In our show, the Big Bad Wolf uses crankies to show the pigs what their houses will look like. Unfortunately, he tends to go one picture too far, revealing his true designs for the pigs!

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

How many books about the three little pigs can you find in your library? Read them and look for what makes them different. What are the differences in how the story is told? How are the pigs different in each book? Which illustrator do you like best, and why?

When we create a show, we often change the story a bit. “The Three Little Pigs” is a fairly simple story, but it can be told in an infinite number of ways. Working in groups or alone, have your students come up with a new element to the story: a different kind of house that the wolf can get into, a different ending, a different reason why the pigs are building their own houses, etc. This will give your students an idea of what our brainstorming process is like!

Using white glue or paste as mortar, have your students build a pretzel-stick house. We don’t recommend trying a bendy-straw-house. It involves a great deal of hot glue.

In our show, B.B. Wolfe has accepted and lost several jobs: wolf in sheep’s clothing, grandma impersonator, a starring role in Peter and the Wolf . . . but there are other wolf stories and wolf jobs out there. Can your students come up with any?

The scrolling pictures we use in the show are on a “crankie.” A crankie is an old-style storytelling device which is having a resurgence lately. Teachers of older students can look at www.thecrankiefactory.com for ideas on using crankies with a school class.

Have each student draw a scene from the story, and post them on the wall in order of occurrence.

We love getting letters from students! They can be sent to:

Crabgrass Puppet Theatre
P.O. Box 2363
Brattleboro VT 05303

RECOMMENDED BOOKS & WEBSITES

As with most folk tales, there are many different variations on the basic theme. Here are some early versions of the tale, which influenced our retelling:

Jacobs, Joseph, [English Fairy Tales](#) (this contains one of the classic versions of the story)

<https://americanliterature.com/childrens-stories/the-three-little-pigs>

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/eng/eft/eft15.htm>

<https://archive.org/stream/nurseryrhymesofe00hall#page/38/mode/1up>

Here are some of our favorite modern retellings and variations:

Marshall, James, [The Three Little Pigs](#)

Teague, Mark, [The Three Little Pigs and the Somewhat Bad Wolf](#)

Scieska, Jon, and Smith, Lane, [The True Story of the Three Little Pigs](#)

Wiesner, David, [The Three Little Pigs](#)

The Disney cartoon can be found on youtube here: https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=MxQd_Lbb49M

Information on crankies and their construction can be found at www.thecrankiefactory.com

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS ON AUDIENCE BEHAVIOR:

Many children do not have much experience with live performance, and do not understand that live performance is different from a sports event, a movie, or television. It is helpful to discuss audience behavior with them prior to the performance. In addition to the basics (pay attention, don't talk, don't yell out), the following is important:

Applauding: this is the main way the audience shows its appreciation to the performers. Teachers can explain this prior to the performance, and can lead the way by applauding at the end of stories and at the end of the show.

Laughing: is another way of showing appreciation! We are *trying* to make the audience laugh, and sometimes we will visit a school where the teachers quiet the children when they laugh. We *want* them to laugh! Young children may need to be reminded that after they laugh, they need to quiet down again to listen.

Is it okay for teachers to laugh? YES! We are performing for teachers as well as students, and there is plenty of humor in our shows for adults. Many teachers seem uncomfortable laughing in a school performance, but teachers' laughter does several important things. Overall, it shows the children that the teachers are paying attention to and enjoying the performance, which elevates the children's interest. It also raises the children's understanding of more sophisticated humor: when teachers laugh at something the children didn't find funny, the children often realize quickly that it *was* funny, and we get a second wave of laughter. The most enjoyable performances we do are the ones in which both teachers and students are engaged and responding.

Teachers: please be courteous to the performers! We're well aware of how overworked and short of time most teachers are these days. But if teachers are correcting papers or carrying on conversations during a performance, they are unable to become involved in the performance, discuss it with their students afterwards, or set an example for the children by responding and applauding at the correct times.