



*We Educate, Entertain and Enrich
the lives of children through
the magic of professional theatre.*

STUDY GUIDE

the Snow Girl

About the Play:

The Snow Girl is based on an old Russian folktale, but its exact origins are unknown. It is believed to have come from the Slavic countries (countries incorporated into Russia hundreds of years ago by conquering czars.) One can well imagine that telling a story about a child, who came to life out of snow, passed many a cold winter's evenings in front of a crackling fire. The adaptation you will see is an original work, written especially for Birmingham Children's Theatre, by playwright Mr. Michael Price Nelson. Mr. Abe Reybold both directs and choreographs (sets the dance sequences) our production.

Summary:

Set in a land of pure white snow and ice, this fable based on a Russian folktale, finds the wood carver, Ivanovitch, and his wife, Maroosha, wishing for a child of their own. One night in the woods, Ivanovitch builds a snow statue of a young girl who suddenly comes to life and begins to dance. The rest of the story is told in dialogue and dance, with the Snow Girl facing challenges and learning what it is like to be human and living in a real family. Exquisite ballet dancing and exotic Russian music transform this land of cold and ice into a warm and endearing family experience.

A Chat with the Playwright, Michael Nelson:

When did you write the play and was it a commissioned piece? If so, for who? *The Snow Girl* was commissioned by BCT and was written in the summer of 1985. Unfortunately, it was over 100 degrees in Los Angeles most of that summer, so I decided it would be easier to write outside and went to a local park. I grew up in Minnesota with LOTS of snow, so it wasn't too much of a stretch to imagine winter. Across from the picnic table where I was writing, there was a group of children playing, so that kind of became my inspiration for the scenes where Snow Girl, Peter and Kupava play on the river. As I recall, there were playing with a piece of large material, billowing it up and down and running underneath it. I was never sure what they were playing exactly, but it got me thinking about how I could put a river on stage. I had seen long silk fabric used for that, so it wasn't original especially, but it did jog my creativity!



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A Chat with the Playwright, Michael Nelson, Continued:

When/where did it receive its premiere? I believe its first presentation was at BCT in the fall of 1985. The show was so well-received by students, teachers, and adults, that BCT took it on a national tour in 1986.

What prompted you to write about the little Snow Girl? What was/is your hope audiences will take away from the play? The then-managing director of BCT, Jim Rye, came to me with this simply dreadful (!) little story he'd found in a children's reader. It had a fox in it as I remember, and I kept thinking as I read it, "Oh, he's gotta be kidding. I don't write foxes." But since it was Russian tale, and I love dance as an art, I pitched him the idea of using ballet in it - and he bought it. Here's a little secret: Jim was convinced that he probably couldn't find an actress who could do ballet, or a ballet dancer who could act. So we decided to write the script so a dancer could take the role, but then be narrated. It added a certain amount of charm to the character that neither of us had expected. In some productions, the Snow Girl has even spoken in ASL (American Sign Language) - which adds yet another dimension. Ultimately, I tried to make the script about accepting differences among people. I wanted to illustrate that prejudice against anyone who is different - no matter the difference - is wrong and always backfires. (I write about this a lot, I've noticed.)

The Snow Girl is based on a Russian folktale... how was the original inspirational and in what ways did you make changes to the original to suit the needs of your script? What excited you about the original to write a play based on it? As a folktale, there are many versions of *The Snow Girl*. Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis was editor for a beautiful picture book of *The Snow Girl*, but it was quite an involved story. In that version, the Snow Girl was being chased by a witch with iron teeth - which seemed a little violent for my tastes. The version that BCT originally showed me was about an adventure the Snow Girl had with a fox, but I thought that was way too silly. In all the versions, however, she is given - for a time - to a childless couple and then melts when spring comes, so that's really the only part I kept. For my script, I got to thinking that it would be fun to do a more personal story about how this fantasy child interacts with regular people and the problems that might present for her as "the new girl." How might she deal with being a stranger trying to make friends with new people? How do the other children in her neighborhood accept her, given the fact that she is so clearly different from them? How do they deal with her differences? Then I got to thinking about her "powers" - what kind of things would an ice girl be able to do? Freezing things with her breath was the most obvious, and also the most fun as it allowed her to cry tears of ice, freeze tea in a cup, or to freeze the river and dance with it. It lended itself to a comedy as well as stage "magic." Once I had a handle on the comedy, I knew I was onto something and started writing the piece."



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Characters:

The Snow Girl

Old Nemirovich: the narrator

Ivan Ivanovitch: a grey-headed man, husband of Maroosha

Maroosha: Ivan's wife

Young Nemirovich: The Narrator's self in past years

Kupava: a young girl, friend of Young Nemirovich

Peter: a young boy, another of Young Nemirovich's friends

Vocabulary:

Snyegurochka: (sneegoo-ruhch-kuh) a Snow Maiden.

Balalaika: (bal-a-lai-ka) a stringed instrument of Russian origin, with a characteristic triangular body and 3 strings (or sometimes 6, in 3 courses).

Izba: (iz'ba) a traditional Russian countryside dwelling.

Northern Lights or **Auroras:** sometimes called the northern and southern (polar) lights or aurorae, are natural light displays in the sky, usually observed at night, particularly in the polar regions.

Saubresaut: (soo-bruh-soh) a term of the Russian and French Ballet schools; it indicates a sudden spring or jump from both feet, traveling forward in either *croisé* or *effacé* position and landing on both feet in the same position as they started.

Changement de pieds: (shahnzh-mahnduh pyey) literally "changing of feet". A jump in which the feet change positions in the air.

Samovar: (**sam-uh-vahr**) is a heated metal container traditionally used to heat and boil water in and around Russia.

do svidanya: (dah svee-**dah**-nee-ya) "God be with you." "Good bye."

Czar: (zär) is a term designating certain monarchs.

Siberia: is the name given to the vast region constituting almost all of Northern Asia and for the most part currently serving as the massive central and eastern portion of the Russian Federation, having served in the same capacity previously for the U.S.S.R. from its beginning, and the Russian Empire beginning in the 16th century.

Da: "yes"

Nyet: "No"

Pas de Deux: (pahduh **dœ**) meaning "step of two". Pas de deux is a duet usually performed by a female and a male dancer.



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Classroom ACTivities

Feelings explored in Storytelling: *The Snow Girl* : **Grades K-4**

Language Arts Skills Addressed: *Making Connections, Sequence of Events, Building Background Knowledge, Compare and Contrast, Story Elements.*

The Snow Girl is a story that touches many different feeling and emotions, just like we do in real life.

Pre-show:

- 1) Before seeing our production at the Birmingham Children's Theatre, discuss with your class the idea of "feelings." What is a feeling? What sort of feeling have they already experienced that particular day?
- 2) With their help, create a list of feelings to keep for future reference.
- 3) Preview the summary provided of the show with the class. How would a girl made out of snow be different from you? What problems might she face? How would the Snow Girl be like you?

Post-show:

- 3) After seeing the production on our stage, pull out the list of feeling. Then, with your class, draw out a sequence of events, or a vertical timeline, that chronicles the important points of the story's evolution.
- 4) Once you have created the timeline, discuss each event while focusing on the feelings that the characters displayed on stage. How do they know that feeling was alive or real? What made them understand the feeling? Was it the actors face? Voice? Posture? Perhaps it was the lighting? The Set? The Costume?
- 5) Let each student pick their favorite character and feeling from the play. Give them an opportunity to make a real still "picture" in front of the class that demonstrates the feeling.
- 6) End with applause!

Writing Prompts:

- 1) A time I felt different was...
- 2) If I were made out of snow, I would...
- 3) If my friend was the Snow Girl, I would...



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Classroom ACTivities

Staging your own version: *The Snow Girl* : **Grades 3-8**

Language Arts Skills Addressed: *Making Connections, Sequence of Events, Building Background Knowledge, Compare and Contrast, Story Elements.*

The Snow Girl, like many folktales, has different versions that have been handed down through the tradition of oral and written literature. You and your class will see a version of *The Snow Girl* on stage at the Birmingham Children's Theatre.

- 1) After seeing the production on stage, discuss with your class the vocabulary of: **character**, someone in a book, play, or movie; **compare**, to examine two or more people or things in order to discover similarities; **contrast**, to examine two or more people or things in order to discover differences; **non-traditional**, not based on tradition; **scene**, a small part of a story that occurs in one time and place; **setting**, the time and place of a story; **traditional**, handed down from one generation to the next. Put these terms into use with the following activities.
- 2) With your class, review the Children's Theatre production by drawing out a visual sequence of events, or a vertical timeline, that chronicles the important points of the play's evolution.
- 3) Next, read aloud an additional version found of the folktale that may be found at http://russian-crafts.com/tales/lit_snow.html.
- 4) Continue to explore the version of the folktale not already see on stage. Separate your class into groups that will allow for each student to have a character. Divide the text and give each group a section of the story for them to act out and present to the class. They should be given a strict fifteen minute period of time to work together (creativity comes from restrictions). Be sure to explain that their scenes should be set, not improvised, so that everybody know what they are doing.
- 5) Once time has been called, arrange the groups in order of the story and let each group perform their scene in sequential order, while being the audience when they are not performing.
- 6) Discuss how the story changed from group to group. How did each different actor, playing the same character, make the story special? What do the students feel make a good storyteller? Without lights, set and costumes, how could you tell that location and time changed in the play.
- 7) End with applause!

Writing Prompts:

Narrative- Tell the story of an inanimate object that suddenly comes to life.

Descriptive- Describe a snowman you would like to build.

Expository- The Snow Girl is coming to your house to spend the night. Explain what preparations you and your parents will need to make for her arrival

Persuasive- The Snow Girl is new at your school. Your friends are afraid of her because she is different. Persuade them why they should get to know her.



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Traveling to Moscow: *The Snow Girl* : **Grades 4 - 8**

Language Arts Skills Addresses: *Making Connections, Compare/Contrast*

Mathematic Skills Addressed: *Addition, Subtraction, Multiplication and Division*

Social Science Skills Addresses: *Map Reading, Plotting Geographic Points, Using a Distance Scale*

The Snow Girl takes place in a “village... in the middle of a forest that wraps around it like a sash and stretches all the way to Moscow.”

- 1) Ask your students if they have ever been on a trip or vacation to another city? Perhaps it was to Atlanta, GA. What was the experience like? What did they see along the way? How did they get there?
- 2) On a globe of the Earth, have your student first find the North American continent, then the United States, then Alabama and Birmingham. Then find the Asian continent, Russia, and finally Moscow.
- 3) Next, give each student (or break them up into small working groups) a copy of a United States map (<http://www.mapsofworld.com/usa/usa-political-map.html>) and a world map (<http://www.mapsofworld.com/world-atlas/#>) that includes a scale indicating miles. Explain the conversion process of using such a scale.
- 4) Ask your students to find Atlanta. Using the scale, have them figure out how far in miles it is from Birmingham to Atlanta.
- 5) If a person drives 60 mph, how many hours would it take to drive from Birmingham to Atlanta, based on their findings.
- 6) Have your students find Moscow on the world map and ask them to determine how many miles it is from Birmingham to Moscow, where the Snow Girl lives.
- 7) Using their imagination, what if there existed a straight road (with a very long bridge over the Atlantic Ocean) that connected Birmingham to Moscow. How would the drive be different from a drive to Atlanta? What would the weather be like? Who would they see along the way?
- 8) Using the scale, how many hours would it take to drive that distance if you drive 60 mph?
- 9) How many more hours would it take to get to Moscow, than Atlanta?
- 10) Ask each student to tell what they would take as a gift to the Snow Girl in Moscow.
- 11) End in Applause!

Narrative- Tell the story of a trip that you and your parents went on recently.

Descriptive- Describe the kinds of clothes that you would need to wear in Moscow during the Winter.

Expository- You are planning for a long trip with your family. Explain what you and your parents will need to do at your house before you leave.

Persuasive- You and your family get to take a airplane to Moscow to see the Snow Girl. Persuade your parents why you should get to take a friend with you.



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Dear _____,

I wanted to tell you all about my trip to the Birmingham Children's Theatre on
_____ (date) _____ (month) _____ (year)! I thought the play *The Snow Girl*
was _____.

My favorite part of the play was _____.

A character that I really liked was _____, because _____
_____. It was so funny when
_____.

The set looked like _____.

It was cool how _____.

Something else that I loved about the play was _____
_____.

I would love to go back again sometime! Maybe you can take me to a public performance
and we can see a play together. We can look up the schedule on the internet at
www.bct123.org, or you can call 205-458-8181. It would be fun if _____ went
with us too!

Love,



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Special Thanks:

Donald Garrett, Jefferson Count Board of Education
Carla DuMontier

**Birmingham Children's Theatre is the resident professional theatre company
at the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex.**

Founded in 1947, BCT is one of the nation's oldest continuously run children's theatre.

**BCT has over six decades of making a positive difference in the lives of over
twelve million of our children.**

Dane Peterson

Director of Education

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