

# BOXTALES Theatre Company

LEYENDAS DE DUENDE/Magical Tales of Latin America

Teacher Guide K-6

## About the Artists

Boxtales is a storytelling theatre company which uses masks, movement, storytelling and live music to present myths and folklore from around the world. Performers Matt Tavianini, Jeff Mills and Michael Andrews combine their diverse talents to create a professional, high energy, highly interactive theatrical experience for young audiences.

## About the Program

This production, directed by renowned Mexican theater artist Sigfrido Aguilar with masks designed by Ann Chevrefils explores the rich Indigenous and Hispanic folklore and mythology of Latin America. The stories include *La Calavera* from Mexico, *Fire Taking* from Venezuela, *Paco and the Witch* from Puerto Rico. The program also includes an introduction to **Capoeira** a Brazilian martial art/dance form, **Afro/Cuban Rhythm and Song** as sung during ceremonies of **Santeria** and **Argentine Tango**. The production, created in Guanajuato, Mexico- is performed in English and in Spanish.

## Objectives

- To introduce students to classic stories from Latin America.
- To introduce students to traditional Afro-Cuban Rhythms played on authentic instruments.
- To introduce samples of Brazilian Capoeira and Argentine Tango
- To encourage students to seek out and read other stories.
- To help develop creative imaginations.
- To introduce the importance of oral tradition as an educational tool.
- To create an appreciation and affection for live stage performance.
- To allow Spanish speakers to enjoy storytelling in their own language.
- To present stories that will help raise self-esteem and teach important lessons.
- To foster cross-cultural understanding.

## Preparation for the Program:

Through the myths of a society an understanding of the culture can be reached. Stories older than the art of theatre itself, find their way into nearly every civilization during every age. These myths and folk tales provide us with a window into each culture and into our own humanity.

### **THE TITLE- LEYENDAS DE DUENDE**

*(The following definition and discussion of Duende comes from [www.DuendeDrama.org](http://www.DuendeDrama.org), the web site of Duende: Drama & Literature, a Northern California theater group. We include it in full because it conveys exactly what we think about Duende. It is used with permission.)*

Duende like art itself has faces that are both appealing and dangerous. It can be dark and hard to pin down. Coming from southern Spain, “Duende” has only recently migrated to English. Dictionaries give meanings sometimes at odds with each other.

The New Oxford English Dictionary gives:

- 1. A ghost, an evil spirit; 2. Inspiration, magic, fire.**

The Random House Dictionary gives:

- 1. A goblin, demon, spirit; 2. Charm, magnetism.**

The Larousse Spanish-English Dictionary translates *duende* as Goblin, elf, imp/Magic. It gives the usages: *los duendes del Flamenco*, the Magic of Flamenco; *tener duende*, to have a certain magic.

We take our cue from the great Spanish poet, Federico Garcia Lorca. He gave a famous lecture on *La Teoria y Juego del Duende* – The Theory and Function of Duende. Lorca says:

*“All through Andalusia . . . people speak constantly of duende, and recognize it with unfailing instinct when it appears. The wonderful flamenco singer El Lebrijano said: ‘When I sing with duende, no one can equal me.’ . . .*

*“These dark sounds are the mystery, the roots thrusting into the fertile loam known to all of us, ignored by all of us, but from which we get what is real in art. . . .*

*“Thus duende is a power and not a behavior, it is a struggle and not a concept. I have heard an old master guitarist say: ‘Duende is not in the throat; duende surges up from the soles of the feet.’ Which means it is not a matter of ability, but of real live form; of blood; of ancient culture; of creative action.”*



Duende is there to challenge us to keep our ears open to the ‘dark sounds,’ to keep our touch with the earth and with the ghosts of those who have come before, to never refuse the struggle which is needed to keep the spirits working on the side of truth.

## THE STORIES

*\*Because of time constraints and other limitations, it is possible that not all of the stories will be performed during the show.*

### **LA CALAVERA- a Mexican Folk Tale**



This wonderfully scary ghost story from Mexico is a classically eclectic mix of themes, motifs and characters from Spanish and Indigenous traditions. Right in keeping with the Dia de los Muertos\* celebrations this story follows a young healer who tries to outsmart his godmother- Death. Death gives him great healing power but always lets him know who's boss. The moral of the story is that one should never try to fool Death because Death will always get the upper hand eventually. Including God and El Diablo, some very interesting Characters cross paths with the healer's father as he tries to choose a god-parent for his young son, such as-

#### Tezcatlipoca-

the Aztec god of night and all material things. He carried a magic mirror that gave off smoke and killed enemies, and so he was called "god of smoking mirror." He was god of the north. As lord of the world and the natural forces, he was the opponent of the spiritual Quetzalcoatl, and sometimes appeared as a tempter, urging men to evil. Punishing evil and rewarding goodness, he tested men's minds with temptations, rather than trying to lead them into wickedness. He was also god of beauty and war, the lord of heroes and lovely girls. Yet he appeared most frequently as a magician, a shape shifter and a god of mysterious powers.

#### Coatlicue-

The Aztec goddess of earth and fire, mother of the gods and mother of the stars in the southern sky. Her daughter is the goddess Coyolxauhqui. Coatlicue was magically impregnated by a ball of feathers. Her outraged children decapitated her, but the god Huitzilopochtli emerged fully armed from his mother's womb and slew many of his brothers and sisters. She represented the type of the devouring mother in whom were combined both the womb and the grave. Coatlicue was a serpent goddess, depicted wearing a skirt of snakes.



## Chaac-

or Chacmool is the Mayan god of rain. He helped the Mayan's to grow their crops. Chaac is associated with creation and life. He was also considered to be divided into four different entities. Each division represented the North, South, East and West. The name "Chacmool" as heard in the story La Calavera was apparently invented by a 19<sup>th</sup> century archaeologist when he discovered a statue of a reclining god holding a cup at the Chichen Itza pyramid site in the Yucatan. The Mayans have no known God named CHACMOOL. They worshipped CHAC.

*\*Dia de los Muertos is celebrated throughout Mexico and coincides with the Christian All Souls and All Saints Days. On November 1st and 2nd people remember those who have died in the past year. November 1st is considered the **dia de los angelitos**, it is the day that is put aside to remember children that have died, November 2nd is the traditional dia de los muertos. Pictures of the deceased are placed on altars or **ofrendas** with their favorite food and drink. Candles to light their way home and soap and water to freshen up after their long trip back are also often placed on altars. Trinkets they were fond of, symbols they would understand and are gifts left to communicate to them that they are always in the hearts of those they left behind and that they are still part of the family, even though they aren't physically with us.*

## **FIRE TAKING- Venezuela**

This magical and strange story from the Makiritare people takes place in the rain forests of Venezuela. Iureke is a hero, younger twin to the equally heroic Shikiemona. But where Shikiemona depends only on his strength and courage, Iureke follows the trickster's way of cunning and cleverness. The twins outsmart their evil step-parents who are half animal, half human and are reunited with their mother who is the goddess of the river. The story is both a trickster tale and a creation myth. At the end we discover how fire was brought to the people of the earth and why you can get fire from rubbing two sticks together.

**T**he Republic of Venezuela is the sixth largest country in South America, but in variation its landscape rivals that of the much larger countries like Brazil and Argentina. In fact, comparing its geography really doesn't do it justice: the country is simply unique. Venezuela lies at the northern extreme of South America, bordered by Colombia to the West, Brazil to the South, Guyana to the East, and the Caribbean Sea to the North. In all, the country is just



over 900,000 square kilometers and divided into 23 states. Its borders seem to hold all of South America in miniature: there are fine stretches of the Andes, huge areas of Amazonian rain forests, fertile plains known as llanos, miles of Caribbean shoreline, and even a small desert. The nation also has a few geographical superlatives, including the world's highest waterfall and South America's biggest lake.

## ***PACO AND THE WITCH- Puerto Rico***

Paco is a good boy who likes to help his mom but when he goes to town to run an errand he has to pass through the dark forest where a bruja or witch is waiting to snatch him up. She takes him prisoner but he is helped by some talking animals (natives of Puerto Rico) who betray the witch and set Paco free. The first is an ordinary Crab or Señor Cangrejo, then a parrot or la Cotorra **and** el Coquí, the frog.



The Puerto Rican parrot is bright green, about a foot in length, with red forehead, blue primary wing feathers, and flesh-colored bill and feet. This bird feeds chiefly on wild fruits, particularly the sierra palm (*Prestoria montana*), but may also consume flowers and tender shoots. During October, when other fruits are scarce, the tabonuco fruit (*Dacryodes excelsa*) becomes an important food item.

The Puerto Rican parrot is presently found only in Puerto Rico, but up until 1899 it was also found on nearby Culebra Island, and earlier on Vieques and Mona Islands. In Puerto Rico, the parrots were known to be in Guajataca Forest at medium elevations until 1910; and in Rio Abajo Forest, also at medium elevations, until the 1920's. In Carite Forest, the parrot was found at high elevations until the 1930's; and in the swamp at the mouth of the Mameyes River until 1927. Since 1940, the range has been limited to the Caribbean National Forest in extreme eastern Puerto Rico. Although the Caribbean National Forest contains over 26,000 acres, the parrots have concentrated in a small area of some 3,000 acres in the western and west central part of the forest (Rodriguez-Vidal 1959).

At the time of Columbus, the parrot's total population may have exceeded 100,000 individuals. In the 1950's, the population was estimated at 200 birds; and, in 1975, reached an all time low of 13 birds. By August, 1989, the population count of the wild flock resulted in a minimum of 47 birds. There were five breeding pairs, although not all bred each year. Hurricane Hugo hit eastern Puerto Rico on September 18, 1989, severely impacting the Caribbean National Forest. Currently, there are about 24 to 26 parrots in the wild, including four breeding pairs, and 56 in captivity at the Luquillo Aviary.

A coqui is a tiny tree frog that lives only in Puerto Rico. There are 16 species of coquis. Of those, coquis, 13 of these live in El Yunque, and 11 of these live only in Puerto Rico. The Burrow Coqui, el Coquí Duende, can be found only in the Dwarf Forest of El Yunque. Coquis vary in color from green to yellow to gray to



brown. They range in size from 15 mm in length, such as the tiny Burrow Coqui, to 80 mm in length, such as the Web-footed Coqui.

Sadly, three of the 16 species of the coquis in Puerto Rico are highly endangered. The Web-footed Coqui, el Coquí Palmeado, and the Mottled Coqui, el Coquí Eneida, are classified as threatened in Puerto Rico. El Coquí Dorado is the most endangered of the three.

Unlike most other frogs, coquis do not turn into tadpoles before they become adult frogs. The female lays about 28 eggs, and in at least five of the species, the male broods and guards the eggs, aggressively forcing the female away soon after laying. When the eggs hatch, out come tiny froglets that look like tiny versions of their parents.



The story of Paco and the Witch ends with a fiesta or party where Paco tries to tell of his adventure with the Witch. The music during this part of the story is an Afro-Caribbean drum rhythm and song (from Cuba- not Puerto Rico, although similar songs would be sung there.) This song is from the Santaria religion and calls to the Orisha Elegua.

Santeria originated in Cuba as a combination of the Western African Yoruba Religion and Iberian Catholicism. It is one of the many “syncretic” religions created by Africans brought to the Caribbean islands as slaves. It was developed out of necessity for the African slaves in order to continue practicing their native religion in the New World. As in all countries where the African slaves were taken, Cuban slave masters discouraged and sometimes prohibited the practice of their native religions.

An Orisha is like a god. Each Orisha is guardian over a certain aspect of human life.

Elegba (Eleggua)- the owner of the roads and doors in this world. He stands at the crossroads of humanity and the divine, the intermediary between the Orisha and humans. When one wants to pray, they call on Elegba first, as he opens the doors of communication between this world and the Orisha. Nothing can be done in either world without his permission. The Catholic saint he represents is Saint Anthony. His colors are red and black and his number is 3.



*Palmira bembé drums played for Elegua*

## OTHER TIDBITS

**Capoeira** (pronounced Capo-air-a): One of many cultural weapons used to break the chains of enslavement in Brazil. Music was played during Capoeira sessions to teach the rhythmic heart of the art and to mask its power. In front of the enslavers it looked like playfulness, acrobatic dancing, and joking around. Eventually the enslavers realized its power and outlawed Capoeira. Death was the penalty paid if you were caught during the slavery years. For almost 400 years Capoeira was taught and practiced in secret. Only in the 1930's did this African martial art become legal to teach and practice.

**Capoeira** is fluid, dance like movements done close to the ground. With shifty rhythmic movements, combined with the look of playfulness or vulnerability an adversary is brought to defeat. The basic technique through which the Capoeira player develops the game is the Ginga, a shifty side to side movement. At the heart of the art is the music lead by the Berimbau, a steel stringed bow instrument with a gourd resonator. When Capoeira is played the Berimbau signals the beginning and the end of each game, and governs the style and speed of the play. The Berimbau is usually joined by the Pandeiro (Tambourine), the Agogo (African bell), and the Atabaque (a conga-like drum).



**Tango** is a very famous dance from Argentina. It is a very passionate and creative dance that is completely improvised (which means made up in the spur of the moment.) Today in Buenos Aires men and women gather at dances called **Milongas** but in the old days when the Tango was just beginning women of decent families and good reputation did not want any part of it. So if a man wanted to practice the new dance his only possibility was..with another man.

Groups of men would get together to practice, improvise and innovate, creating new moves and new steps this approach allowed a rapid development of this dance.

To be a good dancer was (and still is) a sure way of attracting the ladies' attention... men practiced among themselves so that they could surprise, and attract the admiration of other men and women.

The word Tango is African in origin and means closed space or circle. The dance was originally influenced by African slaves and like so many other African art forms has evolved into a world wide sensation.

# ACTIVITIES

## Story Review\*

Review with your class the stories from the performance by asking these questions.

1. In **La Calavera** What was the Old Man looking for? A/ A godparent for his new son.
2. Who did the old Man choose as a godparent? A/ La Calevera- Lady Death.
3. What did it mean when La Calavera appeared at the foot of a sick person's bed? A/ That they could get better.
4. In the cave at the end of **La Calavera**, what did the candles (or velas) represent? A/ People's lives.
5. In **Fire Taking** what did the Toad Woman hold inside of her? A/ Fire.
6. The Toad Woman's husband MANUA was half man, half what? A/ Jaguar.
7. Which brother in **Fire Taking** was the **trickster**? A/ Iureke.
8. In **Paco and the Witch** who told Paco the Witch's name? A/ The Crab, Senior Congrejo.
9. Where did Paco meet the witch? A/ In the forest between his house and village.
13. What was the witches name? Casi Lampu'a Lentemue.

# A Storytelling Festival

This activity encourages students to explore the native cultures of Latin America, to learn some aspects of oral storytelling, and to share their knowledge with others.

## WHAT YOU NEED

Examples of legends or folktales from the cultures and peoples of Latin America (such as the stories in this BOXTALES performance.)

## WHAT TO DO

1. Introduce students to legends and folktales of Latin American cultures by reading one to the class (or referring to the BOXTALES performance.) If possible, choose a story that explains some aspect of the culture, such as the origin of a custom, or of the environment, like the existence of a mountain range.
2. Explain that many of these stories were created by storytellers, who passed them on to others orally, not in writing. Only later were they written down. Tell students that they are going to become oral storytellers themselves. They will choose a story to learn and then present the story as part of a storytelling festival.
3. Divide students into storytelling teams or, if you prefer, have them form their own groups. Give students time to do research and to choose a story. Tell students that their story should say something important about the culture from which it comes. Remind students that their stories will be performed and that they might want to choose a story that lends itself to a dramatic reading or presentation. (Note: You might want to review the groups' choices.)
4. The group should study the story and make a plan for how they would like to perform, or "tell," it. For example, students may want to assign different parts of the story to each group member or have one group member act out a part or play an instrument, etc. The group should know the beginning, middle, and end of its story.
5. Encourage students to be creative about their presentations. Some students may want to add music and props, some may be able to incorporate costumes or rhythmic movements.
6. Allow enough rehearsal time for each group. Hold the first performances in the classroom. Then discuss with students how to share the storytelling with other classes, or with family and community members.

## TEACHING OPTIONS

Tape the presentations and make them available in the school library. You might also share the tape with a class in another community that is studying the same, or a related, theme.

If student enthusiasm stays high, suggest that students share their stories with the community by presenting it at a local nursing home, hospital, or the like. Encourage students to think of a landmark or custom in their region and to write a "folktale" about it.

# A Message in a Bottle

In this activity, students will create an imaginary tale of travel and adventure.

## WHAT YOU NEED

- Maps of the Mexico, Central and South America
- Plastic bottles with caps (one for each child writing a tale)
- A water table, fish tank, or large basin (optional)

## WHAT TO DO

1. Tell children that they are going to write a tale about an imaginary adventure or trip that has left them stranded on a desert island. Explain that the only chance for rescue is to write a message, put it in a bottle, and put the bottle in the water, with the hope that someone will find it.
2. Brainstorm with children the kind of information they should include in their tales. For example, they might want to explain who they are, where they were going when they got stranded, where they left from, and how they were traveling. They should also include information about where they are, such as the climate, what the island is like, what plants and animals they have seen, and how they are surviving. Record their suggestions on the board or chart paper.
3. When children are ready to begin writing, make maps and/or atlases available to them. They can refer to the maps if they need help planning their trips or spelling the names of places they might want to include in their tales.
4. When students have finished their tales, have them place the tales in the bottles and set the bottles afloat in the water table (or whatever container of water you have available).
5. Then have students fish the bottles (not their own) out of the water, and read aloud the tales within. After reading each tale, they can "rescue" the author by using maps and story details to find approximately where he or she is stranded.

## TEACHING OPTIONS

- Refer to the BOXTALES performance of LEYENDAS DE DUENDE. Have your class write about being stranded on desert islands off the coasts Mexico, South America and the Caribbean.

You may want to arrange with a teacher of another class to have your tales sent there. Then the students in that class can try to locate the writer of each tale. Your class could do the same with tales from the students in the other class.

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