2008-2009
HOT SEASON FOR
YOUNG PEOPLE PRESENTS

JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS
Visible Fictions

TEACHER GUIDEBOOK
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Dear Teachers,

When we saw Jason and the Argonauts at the International Performing Arts for Youth conference, we were impressed and delighted with the way the show shares a classic and rather complicated myth. The artists from Visible Fictions in Scotland use their talent and expertise to capture the freedom of play and pretend that children can experience when immersed in a truly great story.

This guidebook recounts aspects of the myth in many different formats for students. The more familiar they are with the basic characters and plotline, the more they will enjoy the inventiveness of this version.

Look forward to a spectacular trip for your own and your students’ imagination with this virtuosic storytelling feat!

TPAC Education

Visible Fictions artistic director and co-creator of Jason and the Argonauts, Douglas Irvine:

“I love an adventure - and if I can’t have that, the next best thing is a good adventure story. Ever since I was a younger boy, Jason and the Argonauts has been one of my very favourites. Of course, it’s a very old tale passed down through the ages and has been told in various ways. . . . The older young people amongst you may remember the Ray Harryhausen film with its magic, monsters and swashbuckling escapades.... I love that version. Now I’m delighted that we’re passing this old myth onto you in a brand new telling. I hope the story thrills you as much as it thrills me, and who knows, it may even inspire you when you have your own next adventure.”

Guidebook written and compiled by Lattie Brown with contributions from F. Lynne Bachleda and TPAC Teaching Artists.

Special Note: Place and name spellings in the Jason myth vary widely. We have used the spellings chosen by Visible Fictions except where source material differed.
Visible Fictions creates vibrant, high quality and accessible theatre for young people and adults. For over sixteen years, our work has inspired and entertained audiences across the world – from Broadway to schools in the Scottish Highlands – always aiming to challenge, excite, and thrill. No two Visible Fictions performances are alike but all guarantee an equally memorable and powerful experience.

Alongside our professional performance work, the company produces dynamic education components that enthuse all who connect to them. We help participants to discover their own artistic potential and inspire their own learning.

We are regularly invited to perform at the Bank of Scotland Imaginate Festival and other festivals across the world. We have collaborated with BBC Panorama and co-produced with BBC Scotland for BBC Radio 4.

Abroad, we have co-produced with the Danish International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People (ASSITEJ Denmark), and we were thrilled to be the first Scottish theatre company invited to perform on Broadway with our production of *Red Balloon*. We have collaborated with The Seattle Children’s Theatre, The Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles and are delighted to be currently working with The Children’s Theatre Company, Minneapolis.

Visible Fictions is a member of Young Audiences Scotland, the pilot audience development project for the children and young people’s theatre sector created by the consortium of Catherine Wheels, the Bank of Scotland Imaginate Festival, Giant, TAG Theatre Company, Visible Fictions and WeeStories. The ultimate aim of the project is to increase and develop audiences for children and young people’s theatre in Scotland, through collaborative working and dissemination of best practice.
How did they make it?

The creation of Jason and the Argonauts was a highly collaborative venture. Go to Britain’s “Web Play” site to see an excellent storyboard of the creation process. It’s better if students visit this site after the performance because through telling the production’s history it reveals some surprises that are best enjoyed first during the show. Here are a few of the web frames to pique your interest.

First ~ the idea

Dougie Irvine, Visible Fictions Artistic Director, has an idea that he’d like to create a show of Jason and the Argonauts. Initially, he wants it to take place in a large tank of water with puppets and two actors, but realises this idea is never going to be possible. He needs to talk to somebody else about this idea.

Second ~ sharing the idea—is it possible?

That person is the writer Robert Forest. Dougie asks Robert if he’d like to write the script. The only condition is that the play has to have only two actors. Both are not sure how possible this is, but are excited about giving it a go.

Next~ Workshops

Scenes from one of the three workshops Visible Fictions held with the actors and other members of the creative team to develop the play.

Visit
www.webplay.org/story_board.php
OPENING AND SET-UP

Two actors, wielding a handful of toy action figures, a highly mutable “wagon,” and some newspaper, share the thrills of an ancient narrative with numerous characters and larger-than-life scenes on land and sea.

The play opens with the two, Josh and Andy, preparing to tell Jason and the Argonauts’ story using their large wooden cart and its contents. The action starts with a deadly fight (sticks for swords) between two brothers. Pelias quickly gains the upper hand over King Aeson. Before Pelias kills him, he tries unsuccessfully to force Aeson to say where he has hidden the heir to the throne, King Aeson’s son, Jason.

DREAMS, WARNINGS, GOOD DEEDS, AND CURSES

Recovering from their exertion, the actors step out of character to joke about the intensity of the scene. The action moves to Thessaly where young Jason is growing up with his stepfather, Chiron (KĒRon). Jason’s father, King Aeson, comes to him in a dream and reveals Pelias’s treachery. Jason sets out to avenge his father and claim the throne. The actors fluidly change roles, and each actor gets a chance to play Jason.

The scene shifts to Iolcos where a soothsayer warns King Pelias that a dangerous man is coming. He will bear Aeson’s sword, made for him by the god Hephaestus, son of the goddess queen, Hera.

On his way to Iolcos, Jason encounters an old woman who wants to cross the swift, blood-red river. With great effort he carries her across. In return, she grants him advice and a blessing, for she is Hera, in disguise. At this point, one actor gets carried away and over-excited. He tries to add some modern flourishes to the tale, but his partner pulls him back on track.

Pelias fools Jason with the tale of a curse on Iolcus. If Jason will lift the curse, Pelias swears to surrender the crown. Jason must go to the end of the world and bring back the Golden Fleece from Colchis. Jason agrees. Skilled only in Thessaly’s forest ways, Jason knows nothing of sea voyages.

NEW ACTION CHARACTERS

As narrators, the actors assemble the new characters in the story: Argonauts Hercules, Mopsus, Orpheus, and Hylas. Jason recruits fifty Argonauts, and so the actors must resort to using large action figures to represent them, trading back and forth between the full-size and toy-size characters. The smaller versions allow the actors to change both the scale of the setting and the story point-of-view to great effect. Heracles introduces Jason to Argus, the shipbuilder. The actors create the Argo on stage, and the vessel and her crew sail.

In a scene change to Colchis, Medea, a guardian of the Golden Fleece, relays to her father, King Aeetes, her vision that Jason is coming. Princess Medea has magical powers.

BATTLES INSIDE AND OUTSIDE

Back on the Argo, a massive flock of deadly bronze birds attacks the Argonauts. With Hercules’s guidance, Jason assumes leadership and defeats the birds. The second attack comes from a giant sea monster, Ceto. Again, the Argonauts prevail, but shaken by the fight, Jason retreats below deck.

At Colchis, Medea sees Jason is deeply disturbed by the losses and the battle itself. She sees the forthcoming challenges and through telepathy tells Jason to go to King Phineas for guidance.

When Jason finally surfaces, Hercules and Hylas have disappeared, but Jason must decide to go forward or go home. Following the mysterious message Jason hears in his head from Medea, the Argo sets sail for Salmydessus.

There they find King Phineas, blinded and tortured by the Harpies as punishment from the gods. Jason and the Argonauts capture the Harpies for Phineas. In return, he promises valuable advice, but his only recommendation is to avoid the great Clashing Rocks by retreating to home. Still, the Argonauts proceed. As one actor ingeniously creates the Clashing Rocks, the other “sails” a tiny Argo through the danger.


The Argonauts make it to Colchis, but, afraid for the Fleece, King Aeetes throws Jason in prison. Medea, wishing to escape Colchis herself, comes secretly to release him. Together they overcome the dragon guarding the treasure, taking the Fleece back to the Argo. The actors tease each other about not acting out the “lovey-dovey” part of Jason and Medea’s new partnership.

When the Argo returns to Iolcos, Jason must conquer his fear of facing his uncle Pelias, who refuses to relinquish the throne. After another fight Pelias dies, and Jason wins the kingdom. The actors play out the final scene, full of satisfaction at the teamwork of all. His faithful Argonauts and his future queen, Medea, triumph with the new King Jason.
What choices can you make in telling a story?

Do you focus on the fantastic or the realistic? From whose point of view do you tell it? Which parts of the myth do you include? What new truth does it tell about people? How do you explore the characters emotions?

How does the performance style highlight the qualities of myth?

How can you capture the epic scale of a myth on stage? How can you present so many characters with two actors? How do you make an ancient myth seem relevant today?

What is destiny and does it take away free will?

What does it mean for Jason? Will Jason fulfill his destiny no matter what he does because the gods will it? What does Hercules mean when he says it took him years of study and work to fulfill his destiny? Robert Forrest, the writer/adapter/dramaturge expresses one way of looking at the issue with a lovely simile. Hylas, one of the Argonauts, wonders: “But is it like a map the gods draw and simply hand to us—that we have to follow? Where’s the freedom in that? Maybe destiny’s more like an idea they plant in us to aspire to—something that’s there to win.”

How is teamwork important in this show?

What do each of the Argonauts contribute to the voyage? How do Jason and Medea work together? How do the actors work together?

What does it mean to be a hero?

What does is courage? How do you overcome your fear? If you are afraid, does that mean you are not brave? Who are our heroes today, in the 21st century?

Where do myths come from?

What did the Greek mythical stories explain or express? Why have they lasted centuries?

DID YOU KNOW?

- The people of the ancient city of Colchis still pan for gold with the fleeces of sheep to catch tiny bits of gold in the river.
- In some versions of the Jason story, Athena helped build the Argo.
- A constellation was named for the Argo, but it had so many stars and was so complicated that later astronomers “broke it up” into three constellations.
- Atalanta, a famous female huntress, was one of the fifty Argonauts.
King Pelias is warned by a soothsayer that a dangerous man is traveling to Iolcus to threaten his rule. On his way to the city, Jason meets an old woman who wants to cross the river, so he carries her over. She turns out to be the goddess, Hera, and she blesses him. When Jason confronts his uncle, Pelias apologizes and swears to surrender the crown if Jason brings back the Golden Fleece from the city of Colchis.

At sea, the Argonauts are assaulted by a flock of deadly birds made of bronze, but they fight them off. The next attack comes from a giant sea monster, Ceto, but once again, the Argonauts prevail. In Colchis, Medea can magically watch Jason. She sends him a thought message to go to Phineas. The Argo sets sail for Salmydessus and the palace. Jason and his men find King Phineas, who has been blinded and is being tortured by the Harpies. They capture the Harpies for Phineas in exchange for advice. Medea told Jason that Phineas knew how to get through the Clashing Rocks, but he didn’t. Back on the Argo, Jason and crew face the dangerous rocks and barely manage to get through.

Once the Argo returns to Iolcus, Jason faces his uncle. Even though Jason brought him the fleece, Pelias refuses to give up the throne. Jason must win it with a fight to the death with Pelias. Jason and Medea become the King and Queen of Iolcus.

Queen Nephele appeals to the gods to save her children from their father’s wicked and jealous second wife, Ino. Hermes sends his magical Golden Ram, and it flies the children towards Colchis. Tragedy occurs on the way as the little girl, Helle, falls into the sea. Her brother, Phrixus, manages to stay on and reach Colchis. He sacrifices the ram to Hermes and gives the magical Golden Fleece to King Aeetes.
JASON’S FAMILY

King Aeson – Jason’s father who appears to him in a dream.


Chiron – Jason’s stepfather, who raises him and keeps him from Pelias.

Jason - The heir to Iolcus and leader of the Argonauts.

JASON’S FAMILY


Chiron – Jason’s stepfather, who raises him and keeps him from Pelias.

Jason - The heir to Iolcus and leader of the Argonauts.

THE ARGONAUTS

Hercules – The strongest man in the world who thinks he should be the captain of the Argo.

Hylas – A wise and an expert archer.

Orpheus – The greatest musician and poet in the world.

Mopsus – A natural philosopher who studies beasts and birds and plants.

On the Journey

Ceto – The sea monster.

Phineas – The wise King. Punished by the gods for seeing the future too clearly with blindness and torture by the Harpies.

Harpies – Half-woman, half-bird creatures sent by the gods to torment Phineas.

OTHERS

Hera – The queen of Heaven, who appears to Jason as an old woman. He carries her across the river of blood.

Soothsayer – He warns Pelias that Jason is coming to Iolcus.

Argus – A master shipbuilder who builds the Argo. Jason names it for him.

Medea – The powerful princess, one of the guardians of the fleece who falls in love with and runs away with Jason.

Aeetes – The King of Colchis, guardian of the fleece and Medea’s father.

The Dragon – Guardian of the fleece.

Character List and Groups

Characters (in order of appearance)

3. Jason - the leader of the Argonauts.
5. Soothsayer - foretells the future.
6. Hera – the queen goddess.
7. Hercules – the strongest man in the world.
8. Argus - a shipbuilder.
15. Phineas – tortured king of Salmydessus.
17. Dragon – guardian of the fleece.
**Where Did It Happen?**

From ancient Greek writers to modern day sailors, people have tried to chart Jason’s famous route. Luckily, many places in mythology share the names of historical sites, so we can approximate where Jason traveled. Marked on the modern maps below are key locations in the story. The dotted line “route” loosely represents the outward half of Jason’s voyage. Researchers made more precise estimations for the events described in the article on the next page.

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**Thessaly**

Jason grew up here, living with and learning from his stepfather Chiron. Jason does not know of his uncle's treachery, or that he should be the rightful king of Iolcus.

**Iolcus**

Jason's kingdom included this port city, where the journey begins and ends.

**The clashing Rocks**

Called the Sympleglades, they are thought to be the dangerous cliff narrows of the Bosphorus Strait, now called the Dardanelles.

**The Aegean Sea and Beyond**

The Argonauts begin their adventure here. They encounter various monsters of the sea and air, rescue Phineas from the dreaded Harpies, and must cross through the Clashing Rocks to reach Colchis.

**Colchis**

Medea and her father, King Aeetes, live here and guard the Golden Fleece. Jason and Medea work together to take the Golden Fleece from the dragon.

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**PRE-STORY**

New stepmother, Ino, is jealous of her step-children, so she asks the gods to kill them. Their mother discovers this and asks other gods to save them. They fly away on a magical, Golden Ram, but the daughter, Helle, falls to her death in the channel. Those waters, the Hellespont, carry her name. The son, Phrixus, arrives safely in Colchis and sacrifices the Ram to thank the gods. He gives the Fleece to the king of Colchis who guards it with a dragon.
Read the June 2008 article below and find out about the Argo in 2008!

ATHENS, Greece: A replica of the Argo, the ship that according to legend carried Jason and the fifty Argonauts in search of the Golden Fleece, sailed Saturday, June 14, 2008 from the central Greek city of Volos. The two-month journey will stop at 37 ports along the way.

The 50-oar ship will carry a crew from all 27 European Union member-states and sail a total distance of 1,200 nautical miles (2,222 kilometres), traveling between 10 and 15 nautical miles a day. The ship’s crew comprises 50 oarsmen with another 22 on standby on a ship following the Argo, said Vangelis Constantinou, a spokesman for the project. It is accompanied by the ship Hellenic Seaways, where the volunteer rowers eat, wash, dress and receive medical treatment.

The Argo was originally scheduled to replicate the Argonauts’ legendary journey from the ancient port of Iolkos, (near modern-day Volos) to the Black Sea kingdom of Colchis (in what is modern-day Georgia at the eastern end of the Black Sea). However, organizers were unable to secure assurances for the ship’s safe passage through Turkey.

Turkish authorities said they could not guarantee the safety of the modern Argo, a replica of a 14th century BC Greek warship, in the congested shipping lanes of the Bosporus. The strait, which measures 765 yards (700m) at its narrowest point, is probably the location of the mythic Symplegades, moving rocks that smashed boats.

Instead, the modern version will trace part of the Argo’s return trip. According to one version of the legend, Jason and the Argonauts, while fleeing from King Aites of Colchis from whom they had stolen the Golden Fleece, sailed from the Black Sea up the Danube river. They continued into the Sava and Ljubljana rivers before continuing their trip on the Adriatic and Aegean seas.

Jason is considered to be the founder of Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia: the city’s coat of arms includes a dragon, allegedly representing the one which Jason slew.

The Argo’s captain, Coast Guard Vice-Admiral Apostolos Kourtis, heads the Argo research program. They built the 28.5-metre (93-foot) wooden ship with Bronze Age tools according to known designs for warships during the Mycenaean era. The modern-day Argo is a reconstruction of an ancient Greek penteconter, a ship with one tier of 25 oars on each side, a simple sail, and a ram used to sink enemy ships.

Upon its return to Volos, the Argo will become a permanent city exhibit.

With thanks to Sky News for photos. Go to www.sky.com and search “Argo” for more.

Compiled from accounts from the Greek Embassy, Sky News, France 24, UK’s The Star and The Telegraph.
OBJECTIVES
Students will address some of the teamwork challenges facing the actors in Jason and the Argonauts. Students will demonstrate knowledge of plotlines and characters in a different format.

SUPPLIES: some kind (or more than one kind) of buzzer, bell, or a kazoo--the funnier the sound, the better.

WARM-UP: Ask for suggestions of stories that everyone in the class knows well. Fairy tales, myths, or any literature the students have recently studied will work. To begin, choose one with a limited number of characters and an easy plot. Identify the main characters and solicit opinions and examples about how their voices might sound.

PART ONE:
~ Divide the class into pairs.

~ Explain that each pair will take turns telling the story you have chosen from the warm-up. When you blow the kazoo or sound the buzzer, whoever is talking must stop, and then their partner must pick up the story where they left off. Vary the time of your intervals between “buzzes,” but keep the pace fairly fast.

~ Every few minutes, tag a new team to replace the current pair and continue the story. Try to get through the whole story and the whole class. Start on a new story if students finish the first one. You can also instruct them to go back to parts they left out, or to repeat a section in a character voice.

~ Discuss the experience with students. Was it difficult to remember the storyline under performance pressure? Did the buzzer/kazoo focus or scatter their concentration? How would they describe the experience of watching their classmates tell stories? Could they follow the plot?

PART TWO:
Students will use a technique similar to the one described in Part One, but this time with preparation, practice and no buzzer.

~ Combine students into groups of three pairs for a total of six.

~ Each group will have a story to tag-team tell; each pair will be in charge of the beginning, middle, or end of the story. Two partners will switch back and forth telling the beginning and then tag the next pair to tell the middle and so on. You can use new literature the class is studying or old familiar work. Have at least one group tell Jason and the Argonauts.

~ Ask students to plan out their segment of the story. Where will it start and stop? Who will tell which part? When will they use character voices? What emotions are the characters experiencing during this part of the story? How will students convey them?

~ Ask students to include one segment in which they act out two characters having a conversation with each other.

~ Perform the stories. Mention the impact of audience attention if you can. Point out that it is more exciting to be an audience member in this kind of performance because the production only works if the audience pays attention and contributes their imagination.

~ Discuss the process. Let each pair share one of their challenges. Ask the audience to relay one positive thing about each pair’s performance.

~ Explain that during Jason and the Argonauts each actor gets a chance to play Jason, and they switch back and forth playing other character, too. Ask students to suggest ways one or more of the pairs could try this technique. What would they have to do to keep the audience from being confused?
Transformations in the Classroom

In the spirit of pretend and play, *Jason and the Argonauts* performers transform everyday items into the mythical objects of the story in very clever ways.

~ As a class, make a list of objects that are important to the story of Jason and the Argonauts or another myth they have studied. Include anything else that might figure in the action of the story.

~ Ask students to gather a few items from the classroom for the story. Encourage them to use their imaginations, as they will be changing those items into the story objects from the list. For example, a pencil sharpener could sprinkle gold dust, or it could be a pepper grinder!

~ When they have found enough classroom objects to transform, ask them to demonstrate the use of each item. Remind them that the reason the transformation works, both for children pretending and performers acting, is that they completely believe. For example, the baseball cap really becomes a crown, and the yardstick really becomes an archer’s bow.

~ You also can take one object and pass it around the room. Each student must immediately pretend it is something different and show, by the way they handle it, what they are pretending it is. They can speak, but cannot name what they have changed the object into. If it unclear what they are doing, you can ask them to show what the item does in another way. The game becomes more challenging and even funny the longer it continues.

What’s the Story?

Discuss with students that *Jason and the Argonauts* is a very old tale, so there are many details that have varied across its several centuries.

~ Have groups of students search the web for different versions of the myth.

~ Ask them to note new details or variations that they like and decide upon their own version of *Jason and the Argonauts*.

~ After the performance, discuss the choices that Visible Fictions made in their adaptation. What truths about people did they explore?
The following are adapted from Visible Fictions activities.

**Introduction:**

In this production, Jason makes both a physical journey to another land and a personal journey of self belief and self esteem. Together, Jason and his team of Argonauts negotiate and overcome different problems. These Education Resources are designed to explore the themes of transition, self awareness, independence and interdependence through practical, experiential learning exercises.

**HERO STRUT**

~ Ask the group to walk around the room at a steady pace without talking to or bumping into anyone else. Ask them to try and fill any space they see. When the group is focused and walking fluidly, explain that you are going to call out a word and that you want them to freeze like a statue in response to that word. When you call out “come to life,” they are to bring that statue to life and walk around the room (keeping the feeling of that word) until you call out “normal walking.”

~ Work through the following words:

- Hero
- Brave
- Villain
- Adventurous
- Frightened
- Hero on a Mission

~ Ask students to notice the “Hero on a Mission” statues and observe how they come to life. Discuss:

- What makes a hero?
- What sort of things do heroes do?
- Is it easy to be a hero?
- How does a hero change when he or she is on a mission?

**MISSION (IM)POSSIBLE**

~ Divide the group into teams of four or five. Tell them that they are going to invent a mission where something important has to be achieved. Give them a sheet of paper with the following headings to complete:

- Name of the Mission
- Importance of the Mission
- Dangers of the Mission

~ Ask each team to present their mission information to the rest of the class.

There are two options for the next stage. You can either select one mission for the whole group to work on or you can pair the teams up so one team works on the other team’s mission. (This will depend on how clear and easy to work with the missions are.)

~ Ask the teams to come up with the ideal hero to achieve the mission they are working on and list the characteristics or special powers that make him or her ideal for your mission.

~ Ask students to think of team members the hero will need on this mission and to list what they can do.

~ Get each team to present their hero and his team to the rest of the group. If the whole class is not working on the same mission then re-cap what the mission is before each team presents.

~ Discuss the presentations. Focus on how suitable the hero and his team are for the mission, and what challenges they will have to work to overcome.
Be Brave or Afraid?

~ Ask the group to recall what is said to Jason near the end of the play, just before he is going to fight Pelias:

“If you’re not afraid of anything, you can’t really be brave – you’re just stupid. And if you’re not brave you can’t be a hero. So to be a hero you have to be afraid.”

~ Divide the class into groups of four or five.

~ Ask them to choose a moment from the story when Jason needs to be brave but felt afraid.

~ Explain that they are to create two “tableaux” (still poses that make a picture, a kind of living sculpture) of that moment. The first one will show Jason feeling afraid, and the second one will show Jason being brave anyway. Who else is included in each picture? What are they doing and feeling?

~ Explain that once each group shows its tableaux, you are going to come around and tap each character on the shoulder. When they are tapped, the student will say what their character is thinking at that moment. This is called a “thought track.”

~ Give them time to prepare and then ask each group to show their “afraid” tableau. You will tap them one at a time for the “thought tracks”. When all the groups have had a turn, discuss:

  • Why is Jason afraid?
  • How is Jason’s fear affecting the others in the tableaux?
  • What could help Jason be brave?

~ Next, show the “brave” tableaux, “thought track” them, and then discuss:

  • Why does Jason need to be brave?
  • What is helping Jason be brave?
  • How is Jason’s bravery affecting the others in the tableaux?