



Instructors Guide for

Len Piper's Pinocchio



The Story

Once, in a small town in Italy, a long time ago, there was an old carpenter called Gepetto. He had just spent his last penny on a piece of firewood when he had an idea. He was lonely because he did not have a son. He decided that he would carve a wooden boy out of the log that he had just bought. He would tie strings on his arms and legs so that he could dance and play. He would make a wonderful wooden puppet to be his son, and call him "Pinocchio," the Italian word for "pine seed."

An old cricket lived in Gepetto's house. The cricket teased Gepetto for making a wooden son, but the cricket knew that Gepetto was really very lonely and he wished that the puppet were alive. A beautiful fairy with blue hair heard the cricket's wish, and with a tap of her wand, Pinocchio became a living puppet! Gepetto was happy that Pinocchio was alive, but not happy that he was rude, naughty, and that every time he told a lie, his nose would grow! Gepetto decided that Pinocchio needed to go to school to learn reading, writing, and good manners, and sold his coat to buy the puppet a spelling book.

Pinocchio had only begun his trip to school when he met a fox and a cat and began a whole series of adventures. He would meet an evil puppet master; ride in a donkey cart to a magical place called "Idle Island;" and have an amazing adventure under the sea before returning to his papa Gepetto, and discovering what it really means to be alive.

The Author

Carlo Collodi is the pen name of Carlo Lorenzini (1826-1890). Collodi took the name from the little village in Tuscany, Italy, where his mother was born. He was born in Florence, the son of a cook and a servant,

and spent just as much of his childhood in the rough and tumble of the streets of his native Florence as in the classroom. This, no doubt, stood him in good stead in his two periods as a soldier – first in 1848 when Tuscany rose in revolt against its Habsburg rulers, and again in the war between Italy and Austria in 1859.

Collodi started his writing career as a newspaperman: He wrote for various papers and started his own satirical paper “Il Lampione” (The Lantern) – but the government closed it down. He later became a government official himself, working as a civil servant for the education department where he later tried to push through much-needed educational reforms.

In the 1850s, he began to have a variety of books, both fiction and non-fiction, published. He once translated some French fairy-tales so well that he was asked whether he would like to write some of his own. The result was his first major success, “Giannettino,” which is a kind of educational fairy-tale. He then devoted himself to writing for children, “because adults are too hard to please!”

In 1881, he sent to a friend, who edited a newspaper in Rome, a short episode in the life of a wooden puppet, wondering whether the editor would be interested in publishing this “bit of foolishness” in his children’s section. The editor did, and the children loved it. The adventures of Pinocchio were serialized in the paper in 1881-82, and then published in 1883 with huge success. The first English language version was just as successful upon its publication in 1892.

The Creator

Len Piper started his puppetry career in the Air Force, while entertaining troops stationed in Greenland. After his discharge, he pursued a career in theater design in New York, but found he was getting more and more requests for his puppet productions. In the late 1950’s he was asked to be the Director of the Puppetry Department of the University of Wisconsin, developing and touring shows throughout the Great Lakes region. In 1962, Piper was hired as Lead Puppeteer by

the producers of television's "H. R. Pufnstuf" and "Land of the Lost" for a mammoth production for adults that toured first at the 1962 Seattle World's Fair, and then traveled to Las Vegas, the 1964 New York World's Fair, and Hollywood. While in Hollywood, he created his magnum opus, "Pinocchio."

Len Piper's "Pinocchio" was first performed in Hollywood during the day, since Piper performed as Lead Puppeteer in a second show, "Les Poupée de Paris," for adults at night. "Pinocchio" was a critical success and was performed time and again until Piper was asked to open the latter show in Las Vegas. When Len and his family moved to Hawaii, the show was produced by the Hawaii Performing Arts Society, then sat idle until revived and restored by Len's son, Christopher, and the Puppet Co. creative team in 2008.

The Production

Len Piper's "Pinocchio" is a marionette play. The characters are made out of carved wood, and molded out of various sculpting materials. They are jointed with knees, elbows, et cetera so that they can approximate the movement of the human body. The marionettes are controlled by strings that go from the figure to a controller that looks like a model airplane. The puppeteer, who is controlling the character and speaking its voice, is standing on a platform called a bridge about eight feet off the floor.

The scenery for the production is projected. Models were made of the village street, Gepetto's house, Idle Island, and all of the other locations of the story. The models were digitally photographed, and in some instances, animated, and then projected during the performance.

The wonderful underwater effect is created using ultra violet, or "black," light. The sea creatures are painted with "Day-Glo" paints or made of materials that will glow under the special light.

Before You See Len Piper’s “Pinocchio”

“Pinocchio” is a story about making personal decisions, good or bad, and the consequences of those decisions. Ask your students about good or bad decisions they have made, and what happened because of those decisions. If they have trouble understanding the concept, give them an extreme example to get them started. For instance, if Susie and Billy were in art class, and Susie asked Billy for the red paint, what would happen if Billy made the bad decision to just dump the paint on Susie’s dress and laugh about it? What would happen if he made the good decision to carefully hand Susie the paint and then compliment the picture of flowers that she was painting?

After You Have Seen Len Piper’s “Pinocchio”

At the end of the story, Pinocchio, as we know, turns into a real, live flesh and blood boy. But what causes this transformation? Is it the magic of the Blue Fairy? Is it the good advice of the Talking Cricket? Or, is it because of an unselfish, even heroic, decision that Pinocchio made himself? Explore this with your students.

Other Resources

There are many versions of “Pinocchio” on the library shelves and in bookstores. We feel that the original story is the best. There are many characters and many adventures in it that young people will enjoy and that never appear in stage or film presentations. To make sure that you have the original version, look at the opening passage of the story. If it reads, “There was once upon a time... “A king!” all my little readers will instantly exclaim! No, children, you are wrong. There was once upon a time a piece of wood,” you’ll know that you have the correct book.

There are also many film versions of “Pinocchio” available on DVD. Many are overly complicated, and do not reflect the intentions of the original story. The 1940 animated cartoon from the Walt Disney studio provides characterizations and a plot line that are close to the original, and it remains the most beautiful to see.

Theater Etiquette

A visit to the Puppet Co. Playhouse may be the very first trip to any theatrical performance for some of your students. We want this to be a happy experience for everyone. Before you enter the theater, our House Manager, the person who is responsible for your safety and comfort during the performance, will welcome you, and will inform you about the seating of you group. At some of the performances, one of the performers will come out to introduce the show and remind everyone about theater “manners” using this easy to remember poem:

Please don't eat, and stay down in you seat.
Don't walk about, and don't talk or shout.
Don't take pictures or touch the display fixtures,
And, if the babies bawl, take them down the hall!

Have a great visit to the Puppet Co. Playhouse!