

An Educator's Guide to Cracker Cinderella: An Old-Time Florida Fairy Tale

Presented by
Katie Adams' Make Believe Theater



Welcome to the show!

This musical version of Cinderella features handcrafted rod puppets, storytelling and audience participation.

Cracker Cinderella immerses the audience in Florida history and culture while telling the tale of Cinderella - with a twist! Will "Ella" make it to the Spring Dance to meet Jasper Fairfield, the cattle rancher's son? Through her own gumption and the help of her magical fairy godmother, Ella foils the plans of her mean stepmother, and lives happily ever after.

Every culture around the world has a version of Cinderella. With this Florida version, young audiences can see what makes this fairy tale unique and what makes it universal. This 45-minute show emphasizes perseverance.

Before the show:

What happens in Cracker Cinderella? What to look for.

Cracker Cinderella is a puppet show, which uses tabletop puppets made like old-fashioned dolls. The story is set in the pioneer days of Florida - the 1800's. I have saved a part in the show for audience members, so students (and teachers!) are welcome to join in when invited.

Synopsis of the Story

In the beginning of the story "Ella" and her Mama and Papa live in the Peace River valley. When Ella is five years old, her mother catches yellow fever, which was common in those days, and dies. Ella is heart-broken but she and her Papa don't give up. They struggle on together and learn to be happy again.

When Ella becomes a teenager, her Papa takes work as a Cow-hunter, the Cracker term for a Cowboy. He is gone for weeks at a time on cattle drives. He worries about Ella being alone and one day brings home a new wife and step-daughter, Rachel. They are nice enough while her Papa is home, but when he leaves, the

Stepmother makes Ella do all the work and sleep on the floor. Rachel bullies Ella, calling her "Cinder" Ella because of her ragged clothes. But Ella doesn't give up. She keeps a positive attitude and dreams of a better life.

Ella finds comfort out in the woods under an old oak tree. She tends to it, and sits in its shade, remembering her mother and the songs her mother sang.

One day invitations go out to the Spring Festival Ball. Anyone with a suitable dress may attend. Ella makes a patchwork gown, only to have it ruined by Rachel on the evening of the ball. Ella, very upset, runs to the oak tree. She is just about to give up her dreams when help comes in an unexpected form.

The oak tree she has cared for all these years turns out to have a Fairy godmother inside who wants to help Ella. She dresses Ella in magic moss which transforms into a lovely ball gown. The Fairy warns her the magic only lasts until midnight, and Ella hurries off to the ball.

There she meets Jasper Fairfield, the most eligible bachelor in the county and they dance the night away. As midnight strikes Ella runs away leaving her shoes and Jasper, who determines to find Ella. He searches throughout the county, and finally arrives at Ella's cabin, where the Stepmother and Rachel try to fool him into marrying Rachel. After dealing with the stepmother and Rachel, Jasper finds Ella, asks her to marry him, and they live happily ever after.

Check out your Florida Map!

The Peace River runs from Lake Hancock located near Bartow, Florida, and extends south to Charlotte Harbor (Sarasota).

The area called Peace River Valley is mainly the area along the river from Bartow to Ft. Meade.

The term "Cracker" is said to come from the crack of the whips the cow-hunters used to round up the cattle.

Patchwork is an old-fashioned way of piecing cloth scraps together to make new fabric for a blanket or quilt.

Look for the turning dance floor. It is patterned after old mechanical devices such as whirligigs and automata

Standards connected to the Performance

Language Arts: LAFS.K12.SL.1.2 – Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Theater: TH.2.C.1.2 – Respond to a play by drawing and/or writing about a favorite aspect of it.

TH.5.H.1.1 - Research and describe the context in which a specified playwright wrote a particular dramatic work.

Music: MU.3.H.1.1 – Compare indigenous instruments of specified cultures

MU.4.H.2.1 - Perform, listen to, and discuss music related to Florida's history.

The Role of the Audience

This is a reflective exercise for your students. You could read this section to them with discussion or, for 3rd, 4th and 5th grades, copy this section and pass it out for their review.

- You are the audience - an important part of the performance. You help the performers by pretending and participating with them.
- Seeing a live show is not like watching TV or a movie. The performers are in the same room with you, and can hear and see the audience, and interact! What are some other differences? (no commercials, no eating, no lying down or running around...)
- Enter the performance space quietly and listen. Who might be giving instructions?
- The performers need you to watch and listen quietly. Talking to friends disturbs the performers and other members of the audience.
- Your job is to pretend along with the performers. They like it when you laugh if something is funny. They also like to hear you clap at the end of a performance when they bow.
- After the bows the audience stays seated. Who might give instructions on how to leave?

Standards for Theater Etiquette

TH.K.S.1.1-Demonstrate appropriate audience behavior at a live performance.

TH.1.S.1.1-Exhibit appropriate audience etiquette and response.

TH.2.S.1.1-Exhibit the behavior necessary to establish audience etiquette, response, and constructive criticism.

TH.3.S.1.1-Demonstrate effective audience etiquette and constructive criticism for a live performance.

TH.4.S.1.1.-Exhibit proper audience etiquette, give constructive criticism, and defend personal responses.

TH.5.S.1.1-Describe the difference in responsibilities between being an audience member at live or recorded performances.

After the Show:

Florida Cracker Culture

You may wish to ask these questions and discuss these themes with your class.

Cracker Cinderella is a version of Cinderella set in Florida's Cracker Culture. This is the heritage of many people living in the rural areas of Florida whose families settled here in the 1800's. There are still lots of Crackers to be found today!

Who is a Florida Cracker?

Like most cultural groups it is hard to have a one sentence definition without stereotyping. Historically they are Florida's proud pioneers, or plain folks. They came from North and South Carolina and Georgia and were mostly of Scotch-Irish ancestry.

Where do they live?

Throughout the state, mainly in rural areas, but many people living in our cities call themselves Crackers too.

How do they live?

Many Crackers are farmers, or ranchers. Historically they were very self-sufficient, meaning they grew, hunted for, or made everything they had.

“Crackers were strongly individualistic and self-reliant, yet generous and proud even in poverty. These age-old character traits shaped a poor but courageous population of backwoods settlers who, long ago, carved out a life from a hostile land and, in turn, provided a spirited foundation for the peopling of the south.” Dana St. Claire, Cracker: The Cracker Culture in Florida History

<p><u>Where to find out more about Florida cracker culture and pioneer life:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doyle Carlton Jr. Cracker Country Rural Florida History and Folklife Museum, Florida State Fairgrounds, P.O. Box 11766, Tampa, FL 33680., www.crackercountry.org • Pioneer Florida Museum, 15602 Pioneer Museum Road, Dade City, Florida (904)567-0262
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Discussion topics

You may want to pick one of these topics for class discussion.

One of the themes in the show is Perseverance - Not Giving Up. Ask your students which character in the story shows perseverance? Let them discuss it.

- Jasper Fairfield shows perseverance. He has the very difficult task of finding Ella without knowing her name, or where she lives. All he has is her shoes as a clue to finding her. He is determined to find her and he does not give up.
In the end, how is Jasper rewarded for his perseverance?

Another aspect of Perseverance is Overcoming Poor Decisions. We all make mistakes or poor decisions in life. However we can learn from our mistakes. We can overcome poor decisions. “There is always something that can be done”. Ask your students what characters in the story make poor decisions?

- Rachel makes poor decisions. She chooses to say negative things about Ella to her mother, she makes fun of Ella’s clothes and how she looks, and she tears up Ella’s patchwork dress.
Why?
How might Rachel feel when she makes these poor decisions?
How might she correct her mistakes?

One other strong theme in the story is Coping With Stress. Ask your students which character in the story has to deal with the most stress?

- The clearest candidate is Ella. She has many unexpected things that life throws at her that she cannot control. All of these can cause stress.
Identify with your students some of these stressful situations in her life. (Her mother has died, her father is away long periods of time, she has a new stepmother and sister.)
Ask your students how does Ella cope with these stressful situations? (she chooses to have a positive attitude. She takes positive action when she can. She helps people. She finds comfort in a quiet, reflective place.)

- HE.K.B.4.1 - Recognize healthy ways to express needs, wants, and feelings.
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 HE.3.B.5.1 - Recognize circumstances that can help or hinder healthy decision-making.
 HE.4.B.5.1 - Identify circumstances that can help or hinder healthy decision-making.
 HE.5.B.5.1 - Identify circumstances that can help or hinder healthy decision-making.

Language Arts Activities– Reading

Check out two or more versions of the story of Cinderella. (See the list below.) Read them with your class. Compare and contrast the differences and similarities.

Versions of Cinderella

- Charles Perrault. Cinderella; A Fairy Tale. 1985, Dial Books for Young Readers, New York, NY
- Erica Silverman. Raisel’s Riddle. 1999, Douglas and McIntyre, Ltd., Canada
- Tony Johnston. Bigfoot Cinderrrella. 1998, G.P. Putnam, New York, NY
- Robert D. San Souci. Soot face; an Ojibwa Cinderella Story. 1994, Bantam, Doubleday, Dell Publishing Group, New York, NY

LAFS.K12.R3.7 - Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

LAFS.2.RL.1.2 - Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.

LAFS.3.RL.1.2 - Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.

LAFS.5.RL.1.3 - Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

Use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the book and the performance.

Use a version of Cinderella from the list above.

LAFS.K12.R.3.7 - Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

LAFS.5.RL.1.3 - Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

Language Arts Activity - Writing

Letters to Ella

Have your students write an encouraging letter to Ella with their ideas about how she could have coped with her problems.

*Example: When Rachel calls her “Cinder” Ella, what should Ella do?
Younger students could do a class letter.*

LAFS.K.RL.1.1 - With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

LAFS.1.RL.1.2 - Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.

LAFS.2.RL.1.3 - Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.

LAFS.3.RL.1.3 Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

LAFS.4.RL.1.3 - Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character’s thoughts, words, or actions).

LAFS.5.RL.1.3 - Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

Puppetry and Theater - Concepts and Vocabulary

The puppeteer and audience agree to “suspend disbelief”, to pretend together that the action of the play is real and is happening for the first time. This agreement means the audience members accept the use of theater conventions such as:

- Storytelling - the puppeteer talks and interacts with the audience.
- The puppeteer plays multiple characters and uses many voices.
- The puppeteer sings to provide information, move the action forward and set a mood.

The puppets in this show are table-top puppets. This is a relatively new style of puppetry that is defined by the fact that the puppets are operated on an elevated “table-top” or what puppeteers call a playboard. Other features of the style are: the smaller size of the puppets, their ability to stand on their own if the puppeteer lets go of them, and a minimum of rods (handles) or strings attached to the puppets.

The Puppeteer frequently uses black curtains and a black costume to minimize their appearance and help the audience focus on the full colored puppets and scenery. Theatrical lighting also helps the audience to focus on important visual elements or helps create mood as when the lights dim (become darker or brighter) for the ball scene.

The pre-recorded sound track for Cracker Cinderella is traditional folk music, which would typically be heard, in early Florida. The music is played on a hammered dulcimer and was performed by Ray Belenger of Simple Gifts.

Puppet Theater Activity

- 1) Working as a group, pick a well known fairytale that most of the class is familiar with.
- 2) Decide what the theme or message of the story is.
- 3) Decide what characters you will have in the play.
- 4) Divide the class into two or more groups depending on the number of characters. Each group will have a turn performing for the rest of the class.
- 5) Using dolls, toys, or simple paper cut-out puppets let the students take turns improvising the main scenes of the story. Remember to keep the theme in mind!
- 6) If you choose, you can write down your scripts, rehearse and put on a show within your class!

TH.1.F.1.1 - Pretend to be an animal or person living in an imagined place.

TH.2.H.1.1 - Read and dramatize stories with similar themes to show developing knowledge of, and respect for, cultural differences.

TH.3.F.1.1 - Create and/or collect appropriate props and costumes and use them to help tell a story.

TH.4.F.1.2 - Create sound and lighting effects to suggest the mood of a story.

TH.5.H.3.4 - Act out a character learned about in another content area.

Doll making

The puppets are designed and constructed to look like old-fashioned cloth dolls. Young people in Florida in the early days would have played with dolls very similar to the ones in the show. This style of doll has a muslin fabric "skin" and is stuffed with cotton or polyester fill, wire and wood. The arms and legs are attached to the body with button joints, and wooden shoes or feet were added for weight and stability.

Rachel is made like a "topsy-turvey" doll. This is basically a two-in-one doll that could be flipped to show another character or outfit.

Bibliography

On Florida Cracker Culture and History

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- Canter Brown Jr. Florida's Peace River Frontier. 1991, University Presses of Florida, Gainesville, FL

On Dolls and Doll Making

- Susanna Oroyan. Anatomy of a Doll; The Fabric Sculptor's Handbook. 1997, C&T Publishing, Lafayette, CA
- Caroline Goodfellow. The Ultimate Doll Book. 1993, Dorling Kindersly Limited, London

Other Versions of Cinderella

- Charles Perrault. Cinderella; A Fairy Tale. 1985, Dial Books for Young Readers, New York, NY
- Erica Silverman. Raisel's Riddle. 1999, Douglas and McIntyre, Ltd., Canada
- Tony Johnston. Bigfoot Cinderrrella. 1998, G.P. Putnam, New York, NY

Robert D. San Souci. Soot face; an Ojibwa Cinderella Story. 1994, Bantam, Doubleday, Dell Publishing Group, New York, NY

About the Artist

Katie Adams is a puppeteer and storyteller who loves to perform for children and family audiences. In 2000, Katie started her own company, Make-Believe Theater dedicated to entertaining, inspiring and enlightening young audiences. Katie tours to schools, libraries, theaters, museums and festivals.

Recent performance highlights include the National Festival of the Puppeteers of America, the Smithsonian Discovery Theater, the Great Arizona Puppet Theater, Mahaffey Theater for Performing Arts, and the Kravis Center. **Check out her web site at**

www.katieadamstheater.com.