

# Study Guide for Visible Fiction's *Jason & the Argonauts*

By Dana Lambert

Every spring, the Chicago Humanities Festival offers **Stages, Sights, and Sounds**, a mix of the best theater, music, dance, puppetry, and visual art the world has to offer. 2010 features three international companies making their Chicago debuts: Scotland's Visible Fictions, Israel's The Galilee Multicultural Theatre, and France's Vélo Théâtre. Two Chicagoans, Frank Maugeri of Redmoon Theater and beatboxer/vocal percussionist Yuri Lane, treat us to brand-new work. At the audience's request, we also welcome back Leah Mann and Ela Lamblin, the dynamic duo behind Lelavision, whose stunning physicality and musical sculptures made it the runaway hit of the 2008 festival.

We have prepared study guides for each of the 2010 performances. These materials will help teachers ready their classes for the 2010 **Stages, Sights, and Sounds** and provide activities and ideas to explore with students long after the Festival is over.

## ABOUT THE CHICAGO HUMANITIES FESTIVAL

The Chicago Humanities Festival (CHF) creates year-round opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds, and economic circumstances to explore, enjoy, and support the arts and humanities. We accomplish this by presenting programs throughout the year, culminating in two annual Festivals of the Humanities, one in the spring specifically for children and families and one in the fall for the general public. The CHF's mission of providing broad access to the humanities – at a low ticket price – depends in part on the generosity of its most committed and enthusiastic supporters.

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## Lesson Plan:

# Jason & the Argonauts

## Visible Fictions

Jason's uncle isn't exactly lovable...he's murdered his brother (the king) and stolen the kingdom and now nobody dares stand up to him. Things are about to get a major shake up though because Jason is BACK! After being banished as a baby, our wannabe hero returns to claim his rightful throne and make some big changes.

However, in ancient times nothing's that straightforward. Jason and his crew must sail on The Argo to the other side of the world to find the Golden Fleece and bring it back in order to unite the people again. As if that wasn't difficult enough, the odd monster, sleeping dragon and clashing rock endeavor to ruin his trip and spice things up on this most fantastic of journeys!

**BIOGRAPHY: Visible Fictions** creates vibrant, high-quality, and accessible theater for young people and adults alike. For over 16 years its 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 offer a memorable and powerful experience.

**Visible Fictions** is regularly invited to perform at the Bank of Scotland Imagine Festival and other festivals across the world. The company has collaborated with BBC Panorama and co-produced with BBC Scotland for BBC Radio 4. Abroad it has co-produced with Danish ASSITEJ and was the first Scottish theater company to be invited to perform on Broadway with its production of *Red Balloon*. The company has collaborated with Seattle Children's Theatre and the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles and is currently working with The Children's Theatre Company in Minneapolis.

# STAGES SIGHTS & SOUNDS

## CONTENTS

In this guide you'll find:

- A lesson plan and an accompanying worksheet recommended for 4th and 5th grades.
- The activities will take between two and four class sessions.
- This activity can be used in response to the **Visible Fictions** performance of *Jason and the Argonauts*

**OVERVIEW:** The Greek myth of *Jason and the Golden Fleece* is one of the oldest myths of a hero's quest. The hero's quest is one of the most commonly portrayed mythological story types. A quest is a journey where the hero must overcome his or her own faults and weaknesses in order to reemerge as a valuable member of their society. In general, a quest begins when a hero is called to action. Along the way, the hero will meet many allies and enemies and as the protagonist reaches their goal they usually face one final ordeal. Upon his success, he makes his way home, which is not always easy.

Myths, like *Jason and the Golden Fleece*, are more than mere stories. Myths are sacred tales that explain the world and reflect universal topics such as life and death, the origin of man and good and evil. In effect, myths answer timeless questions and serve as a compass for each generation. Through the retelling or reinvention of a myth over time, the familiar archetypes and themes can be applied to the lives of each new generation.

#### **ACTIVITY: WRITING YOUR OWN MYTH**

**Purpose:** This activity will allow students to explore why myths have endured throughout history and their relevance today by writing their own myth. Also included is a pre-writing story-map to help organize ideas, and a rubric to guide their efforts.

**Time Frame:** Discussion (One (1) class period); Brainstorming/Myth Map (One (1) class period); Writing (One to two class periods or take-home assignment)

**Lesson Plan:** Begin by explaining to students that they will be writing their own myth using the performance of *Jason and the Argonauts* as inspiration.

- Start by arranging students into small groups.
- Give each group some paper and tell them to list as many famous superheroes as they can think of from stories, movies, and television.
- On another sheet of paper have the groups brainstorm the traits and qualities of the superheroes they listed.
- After a few minutes invite a few students to share some of the items on their lists. Once you feel all the groups have a sufficient understanding of the qualities of a superhero ask the groups to look back at their lists and, on another piece of paper, determine which of the listed qualities Jason possessed. Groups should include specific examples from the performance to support their claims.
- When the groups have finished recording their answers, facilitate a class discussion on what characteristics make a good superhero story, jot down the students' ideas on chart paper.

#### **Time Period**

Discuss where *Jason and the Argonauts* took place (time period/location, etc) and how the setting of *Jason and the Argonauts* is important to the plot. Help the students understand that setting is essential if the reader is to understand the story. For example, in a historical novel you need information about the period and the place so that the reader doesn't wonder why most people travel on foot or why women were not allowed to own land. Use examples of settings from other familiar myths such as *Star Wars* or the *Lord of the Rings* to enforce the importance of setting. You could use the 2004 movie *A Cinderella Story* starring Hilary Duff as an example of a classic story that was retold in a modern setting with a modern twist.

## Characters

Discuss the characters from the performance. What role did each one play in Jason's quest to capture the Golden Fleece? Encourage students to start thinking about the characters they want to include in their myth.

- Jason
- Aeson – Jason's father who appears to him in a dream
- Chiron – Jason's stepfather, who looked after him after Jason's father was killed.
- Pelias – Jason's evil uncle who murdered Jason's father and who Jason fights for the throne.
- Hera – The queen of Heaven, who appears to Jason as an old woman whom he carries across the river of blood.
- Hercules – the strongest man in the world who thinks he should be the captain of the Argo.
- Mopsus – a natural philosopher who studies beasts, birds, plants.
- Orpheus – the greatest musician and poet in the world.
- Hylas – beautiful and wise and a dab hand with a bow and arrow.
- Medea – the witch princess, one of the guardians of the fleece who falls in love with and runs away with Jason.
- Aeetes – The King of the End of the world, guardian of the fleece and Medea's father.
- Ceto – the sea monster.
- Phineas – The wise King, blinded by the Gods for seeing the future too clearly and tormented by the harpies.
- Harpy – The half woman, half bird creature sent by the gods to torment Phineas.
- The dragon – who guards the fleece.

## Jason's Quest

Next discuss Jason's quest. All myth stories revolve around a journey. Why did Jason leave; what brought on his quest? What obstacles did Jason encounter on his journey? How did he overcome those obstacles? Remind students that the driving force of any story is conflict and that a myth story is especially dependent on moving the story forward one problem after another. The hero is supposed to encounter difficulties at every turn.

## Making the Map

Now that the students have a basic understanding of the characteristics that make a good myth, the characteristics that make a good hero, the obstacles Jason faced, and the characters involved they can begin to brainstorm and write their own myth. Instruct students to complete the Myth Map before writing their myths.

## DIGGING DEEPER

1. Write a "how-to" composition on stealing the Golden Fleece
2. Pick a modern-day hero and retell his or her story in an ancient setting
3. Tales from the past generally equate heroism with physical strength and raw courage, however, people like John Glenn and Martin Luther King are often viewed as contemporary heroes and they don't slay monsters. What qualities of heroism that they possess? Is it possible that they will some day find a place in myths our generation will leave to the future ages?

## MYTH MAP

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Setting: Where does your myth take place (i.e. a school, a playground, a grocery store, a desert, Wisconsin, space, under the ocean, medieval times, the future, a farm, etc?) Be as specific as possible because the setting will determine what kind of obstacles and characters your hero must face.

Characters: You must think of new characters. What are their names? Who are they? What is their role? You should have at least 5 distinct characters (one of them being your hero).

Character 1 (hero or heroine):

Character 2:

Character 3:

Character 4:

Character 5:

Problem: What is the problem? Why is your hero being called to action? What will be achieved if your hero succeeds?

Goal: What is your hero's ultimate goal? In the performance, Jason had to steal the golden fleece.

Obstacle #1: What is the first obstacle your hero must pass? What is the solution? Who or what must they conquer? Will anybody help your hero?

Obstacle #2 What is the next obstacle your hero must pass? What is the solution? Who or what must they conquer? Will anybody help your hero?

Obstacle #3 What is the final obstacle your hero must pass in order to achieve their goal? What is the solution? Who or what must they conquer? Will anybody help your hero?

Resolution: Did your hero succeed? How was the return home? What was accomplished by reaching their goal?