

THE STORY OF THE DANCING FROG

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By Quentin Blake

Themes: Folklore, Dreams, Acceptance, Kindness, Families

Grade Level: K-5; Ages: 5-10

Running Time: 28 minutes

SUMMARY

This is a family tale, told by a mother to her son, about Cousin Gertrude and her friend, a dancing frog. The story begins with Gertrude's marriage to a sea captain. Though she loves her husband, Gertrude is often lonely. After the captain's ship goes down, she is so lonely she wants to die. Then she meets a dancing frog. She teaches the frog to dance to music, and the two of them go into show business. They get their "big chance" replacing a talking dog, and are soon performing to international acclaim. On their wildly successful European tour, Gertrude is followed everywhere by the devoted Lord Belvedere, who wants her to quit show business and become his wife. She is tempted. But after the frog almost dies in a hotel fire, Gertrude realizes that the theater is her true love. The pair are last heard of in the south of France, where they have retired. At the end, the mother and son talk gently about the meaning of Gertrude's story: "You can do anything if you need to enough."

OBJECTIVES

- Children will watch and listen to a fictional story.
- Children will identify music, dance, and other movie elements in a story.
- Children will recognize and appreciate humor in a story.

BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Introduce the title and ask students if they think the story will be a realistic story or a fantasy story. Since frogs don't really dance, most students will expect a fantasy. Ask students to imagine some of the adventures a dancing frog might have. Alert them to keep track of the people who look after the dancing frog.

AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Ask again whether the story is a realistic story or a fantasy story. Recall what the mom who is telling the story says—it's mostly true. Discuss how family stories get passed down from generation to generation and distorted in the telling. Ask students to tell which parts of the story the mother made up just to entertain her son. Since the term was usually derogatory, do not volunteer that "frog" is a slang term for a Frenchman. Should a student volunteer this information, talk about how this changes our perception of the story. It's possible that the entire dancing frog family legend is the result of a misunderstanding. But it's also possible that the mother changed this detail on purpose, because a "real" dancing frog made a funnier story.

Connect the story to literature, history and popular culture by talking about the kinds of entertainment seen in the story. Have students recall details that set the peak of the dancing frog's career during the time before movies and during the early movie era. Ask students to tell about similar song and dance acts they've seen in old movies or on TV. Compare the story's plot to the plots of old show-business movies.

Connect the story to music and dance by having students plan and perform an animal revue. Students can perform as dancing frogs, talking dogs or any other animals. Use the sound track from the program or encourage students to write their own show tunes.

Connect the story to social studies by having students make family trees. Students should get help from parents and other family members in drawing the trees. In the process, students will hear stories from older family members. Encourage students to share these stories with the class.

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