

A NUFFIELD SOUTHAMPTON THEATRES AND CURVE PRODUCTION IN ASSOCIATION WITH LYRIC HAMMERSMITH

ROALD DAHL'S FANTASTIC MR FOX



ADAPTED FOR THE STAGE BY SAM HOLCROFT

A RESOURCE PACK FOR TEACHERS



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Synopsis of the original story by Roald Dahl

'On a hill above the valley there was a wood. In the wood there was a huge tree. Under the tree there was a hole. In the hole lived Mr Fox and Mrs Fox and their four Small Foxes.'

Fantastic Mr Fox

The clever and fantastic Mr Fox lives underground beside a tree with his wife, Mrs Fox and their four little foxes. To feed his family, he makes nightly visits to farms owned by three wicked, cruel and dim-witted farmers named Boggis, Bunce and Bean, and steals chickens, ducks and turkeys from them. The farmers are furious about this and try everything to kill him, but to no avail. Tired of being outwitted by Mr Fox, the evil farmers hatch a plan to ambush him as he leaves his hole, but they succeed only in shooting off his tail.

Determined to catch him, the farmers dig up the Foxes' den with spades and then bulldozers, but the Fox family manage to escape by digging further beneath the earth to safety. The horrible trio decide to surround Mr Fox's hole and wait until he is hungry enough to come out. Cornered by their enemies, Mr Fox and his family, and all the other underground creatures, begin to starve.

But the clever Mr Fox comes up with a plan to get food. He and his children tunnel through the ground and wind up burrowing into one of Boggis' chicken houses. Mr Fox kills several chickens and send his eldest son to carry the food back to Mrs Fox. On the way to their next destination, Mr Fox runs into his friend Badger and asks him to accompany him on his mission. Aided by Badger, the animals tunnel to Bunce's farm for ducks, geese, hams, bacon and vegetables, and then into Bean's cider cellar. Here, they are nearly caught by Bean's servant Mabel, but manage to escape by the skin of their teeth.

They carry their loot back home, where Mrs Fox has prepared a great banquet to celebrate for all the starving underground animals and their families. At the table, Mr Fox invites everyone to live in a secret underground neighbourhood with him and his family, where he will hunt for them daily and none of them will need to worry any longer about the farmers. Everyone joyfully cheers for this wonderful idea, while Boggis, Bunce and Bean are left waiting above ground for the fox to emerge from his hole, 'and as far as I know, they are still waiting'.

"You know as well as I do: no-one outfoxes a fox!"

The Characters

In the Play:

MR FOX, male
MRS FOX, female
KIT (Mr & Mrs Fox's daughter), female
RABBIT, female
MOUSE, female
BADGER / FARMER BOGGIS, male
MOLE / FARMER BUNCE, male
FARMER BEAN / RAT / KILLER, male
ROOSTER, to be doubled by either KIT or MRS FOX
Four birds (form the band)
Mrs Badger

In the Original Story:

Mr Fox
Mrs Fox
Four Small Foxes
Farmer Boggis
Farmer Bunce
Farmer Bean
Badger
Rat
Mabel
Mrs Bean

Three Small Badgers
Mole
Mrs Mole
Four Small Moles
Rabbit
Mrs Rabbit
Five Small Rabbits
Weasel
Mrs Weasel
Six Small Weasels

Things to talk about:

- 1 Why has the play got certain characters that aren't in the book and vice versa?
- 2 Why has the playwright listed the characters at the beginning of the play in that way?
Why do some of the actors play more than one part?
- 3 Why does the character list for the play have 'male' and 'female' written after each part?



Main Character Descriptions

Mr Fox

Mr Fox is smart, clever and rather fantastic, but he doesn't realise how determined the farmers are to get revenge. However, he is never beaten as he's always coming up with plans to get himself and others out of danger.

'..He poked his long handsome face out into the night air...'

"'I've got it! Come on! There's not a moment to lose! Why didn't I think of it before!... A fox can dig quicker than a man!' shouted Mr Fox, beginning to dig. 'Nobody in the world can dig as quick as a fox!'"

Mrs Fox

Mrs Fox is a loyal, loving and supportive wife, ably holding the fort while her husband is off poaching chickens and turning her hand to the creation of a superb feast.

'...Mrs Fox said to her children, "I should like you to know that if it wasn't for your father we should all be dead by now. Your father is a fantastic fox."'

The Three Farmers

'Down in the valley there were three farms. The owners of these farms had done well. They were rich men. They were also nasty men. All three of them were about as nasty and mean as any men you could meet. Their names were Farmer Boggis, Farmer Bunce and Farmer Bean.'

Boggis

'Boggis was a chicken farmer. He kept thousands of chickens. He was enormously fat. This was because he ate three boiled chickens smothered with dumplings every day for breakfast, lunch and supper.'

'...Boggis gives off a filthy stink of rotten chicken-skins.'

Bunce

'Bunce was a duck-and-geese farmer. He kept thousands of ducks and geese. He was a kind of pot-bellied dwarf. He was so short his chin would have been underwater in the shallow end of any swimming pool in the world. His food was doughnuts and gooselivers. He mashed the livers into a disgusting paste and then stuffed the paste into the doughnuts. This diet gave him a tummy-ache and a beastly temper.'

'...Bunce reeks of goose-livers...'

Bean

'Bean was a turkey-and-apple farmer. He kept thousands of turkeys in an orchard full of apple trees. He never ate any food at all. Instead, he drank gallons of strong cider which he made from the apples in his orchard. He was thin as a pencil and the cleverest of them all.'

'...and as for Bean, the fumes of apple cider hang around him like poisonous gases.'

'Bean never took a bath. He never even washed. As a result, his earholes were clogged with all kinds of muck and wax and bits of chewing-gum and dead flies and stuff like that. This made him deaf.' "... When he smiled you saw his scarlet gums. You saw more gums than teeth...'

It is Bean that comes up with the farmer's plan to capture the Foxes, and it is because of him that Mr Fox loses his fine tail. But even Farmer Bean is no match for Mr Fox.

Q&A with Stage Adaptor, Sam Holcroft

Sam Holcroft adapted the story of Fantastic Mr Fox for the stage. We asked her some questions...

What do you love best about this story?

Roald Dahl has written a brilliant action adventure story, with really high stakes for Mr Fox and his friends. I love that Mr Fox is pushed to the limit of his abilities and must find ingenious ways to outsmart the horrible farmers.

What do you think are the most important themes, and how did you go about bringing these out in your script?

In the book, Roald Dahl explores the theme of sharing with others versus being greedy. The farmers are greedy while Mr Fox shares generously with his friends and family. I was careful to include these themes in the script, too. In fact the whole play centres around Mr Fox and his friends, and how their willingness to share and work together saves the day.

How do you do justice to a great and well known writer like Dahl without copying the dialogue word for word?

It's very hard to do justice to such an extraordinary writer - impossible probably. It was very daunting! But you can only do your best, and I tried very hard to capture the spirit of the book, rather than copying word for word. By 'spirit' I mean that I tried to recreate how the book made me feel: I felt love for Mr Fox and his friends, I was afraid and excited by his race for survival, and I was delighted that he succeeded and celebrated with his friends, at the end, while the farmers suffered in the rain because of their obsessive greed.

Which of the characters do you think is the...

Silliest?

Rabbit.

Smartest?

Mr Fox. (Badger is very clever, too)

Nastiest?

Farmer Bean.

Friendliest?

Mole.

Most sensible?

Mrs Fox.



The Themes of Fantastic Mr Fox

- Team work
- Survival
- Looking after your family and friends
- Social Justice
- The importance of celebration

Things to talk about:

- 1 Mr Fox thinks he can do everything on his own, but soon finds out he can only achieve his goals by the help of all the other animals. Everyone has their own particular skills and talents to contribute. What skills and talents do each of you have?
- 2 In a theatre, making a production involves everyone working together as a team. Look at the list in the programme of all the people involved in putting together Fantastic Mr Fox. Choose one job and discuss what would have been different about the play if that job didn't exist?
- 3 Is it right for Mr Fox to steal from the farmers in order to feed his family and the other animals?
- 4 Why is it important to look after your family and friends?
- 5 Is it right that some people have more than others?
- 6 Why is important to celebrate? When do you celebrate with your family and friends? What sort of things can you do to celebrate?



Preparing for your visit to the Theatre

It is often a good idea to familiarise young people with what they are about to experience; regarding both the show they are seeing, and the theatre they are visiting. Before your visit make sure they know something about the theatre and what they will be doing there.

Things to talk about:

- What is a theatre? (a place that shows plays and performances which people agree are of high quality)
- What is the difference between a performance in a theatre and seeing a filming of that performance on a TV? (a theatre performance is a unique experience that involves both the actors and the audience. The film is one of many copies, it is the same no matter who sees it)
- What sort of theatre is it? (old, young, big, small)
- Does that affect the kind of shows you will see there and how they are put on?
- How should we behave in a theatre? (more on this below)

Behaviour and 'Rules'

Theatre is unique amongst art forms as it requires collaboration from both the audience and the actors to make it work. Therefore it is important that discussions before your visit cover how to act responsibly in a theatre, as this can dramatically alter the experience for both your children and other members of the audience. In these discussions it is helpful to think about how you act can affect other people's enjoyment of the performance, and the actors' ability to carry out their job. Often people will have paid a lot of money to see a show, so it is worth discussing how they might react to a performance being disturbed, and think about creating your own guidelines for your visit. There are no hard and fast rules for how to behave in a theatre. For example, laughing at almost any time in a pantomime would be strongly encouraged, but laughing at inappropriate moments and putting off the actors could be very disruptive in another play. What is and isn't appropriate is something you will have to decide with your class.

Things to do:

Research the following theatre terms with your class and make a glossary.

You may want to add some extra ones of your own:

- | | |
|------------------|----------------|
| • Box Office | • Backstage |
| • Front of House | • Foot lights |
| • Tickets | • House |
| • Stalls | • Offstage |
| • Interval | • Entrance |
| • Stage | • Exit |
| • Auditorium | • Curtain call |

Games

Things to do:

When the actors and the director first get together to rehearse a play, the director will often start off with getting the actors to play games to help them to get to know each other and to work together as a team.

The following are some suggestions of games you can play to get everyone working as a team.

- **Perfect Circle:**

Actors work together and form a perfect circle. Once it's formed, they must break away, run and touch the wall, and then come back to form the perfect circle again. Do the exercise again, (form the circle, break away and return) - this time without speaking.

- **Group Jump:**

Students in the circle jump together and then land. They must land at the same time. At first, students will want to use a count down to achieve the jump and land. Once they try this, the circles must try to achieve the unison jump and land without speaking. Next, they must try to land without making any noise with their feet. Finally, how high can they jump and still land quietly and in unison?

- **Manhole cover:**

Everyone in the circle must bend down in unison and together lift a huge manhole cover to shoulder height. The manhole cover is as big as the circle. Keep the aspects of mime in mind: consistency, shape, weight. One side of the circle can't get ahead of the other.

- **Objects:**

In small groups, actors create an object that is called out. All members of the group must participate. Possible objects: washing machine, lawn mower, photocopier, sofa, Christmas tree, wheel barrow, sprinkler system, snow blower, grandfather clock, rocket ship.

- **One Word Storytelling:**

A traditional improvisation game where small groups tell a story one word at a time. An excellent listening and focus activity because the story has to make sense. Think up some possible story titles before you begin.

- **Walk Together:**

A great exercise for encouraging group sensitivity. Everybody finds a space in the room. On a given signal, everyone starts walking, using all the space in the room. On a second signal, everybody stops. Now, that was easy. Do this a couple of times, then without talking, everybody must decide to start walking at the same time - and then to stop as a group at the same time. This obviously will require some practice! With sensitivity, it can be done.

- **Count to 20:**

This is one of the simplest, yet most challenging drama games. Sit or stand in a circle. The idea is for the group to count to twenty, one person saying one number at a time. Anybody can start the count. Then a different person says the next number - but if two or more people happen to speak at the same time, counting must start again from the beginning. It is possible to get to twenty if everybody really concentrates - but try and be relaxed as well.

Try doing it with and without eye contact

Other variations you can try include members of the group facing outwards and closing their eyes (difficult!) or counting back from twenty to one.

Costume Design

Things to talk about:

- 1 Books can give you a picture in your mind of what a character looks like and what sort of personality they have by describing them to the reader. Theatre doesn't describe; it shows. How would you show an audience in the theatre what the characters in *Fantastic Mr Fox* look like and what types of personalities they have?

Things to do:

- 1 Imagine you've been asked to create the costumes for one of the farmers. Choose one part of their costume, e.g. the trousers, and draw as much detail as you can for them. What material would you choose and why? How large or small would they be and why? What colour? What shape? Each time you make a choice, ask yourself what that choice is telling the audience about your character. Stick examples of the materials you might want to use onto your design. You might also want to make notes on your sketch to explain some more about your costume.
- 2 You can draw the whole costume in this way, attaching small swatches of material and making notes to make your ideas as clear as possible to someone looking at your design.

More information:

www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/d/designing-stage-costumes/

www.theatredesign.org.uk/

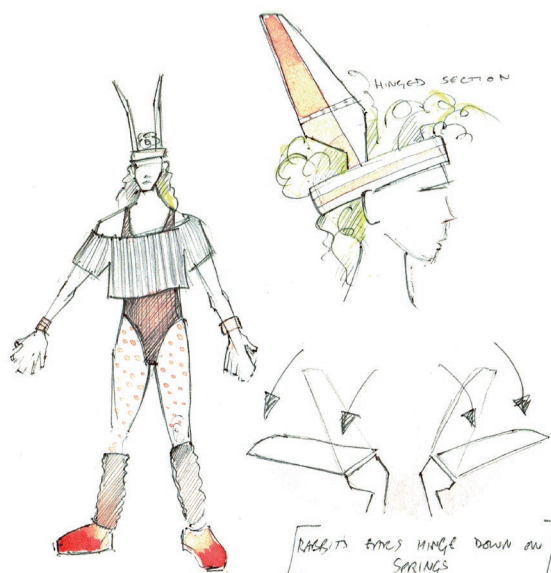
More things to do:

- 1 Make animal masks. There are lots of templates and designs on Pinterest: <https://uk.pinterest.com/>
- 2 Set design - how would you go about recreating the world of the story? How would you show the underground and the above ground scenes? There are lots of resources and ideas to inspire creativity on the internet for theatre set designs.





FANTASTIC
MR. FOX



RABBIT



MOLE



BADGER



Costume designs
by Tom Scutt

Follow Up Exercises and Ideas

Things to do:

Limericks - in the book, local children sing the following verse (a limerick) to taunt the three farmers:

'Boggis and Bunce and Bean
One fat, one short, one lean.
These horrible crooks
So different in looks
Were nonetheless equally mean.'

Make up your own limerick about yourself.

Alliteration

The Roald Dahl website has a downloadable lesson plan for Fantastic Mr Fox, all about alliteration:

www.roalddahl.com/docs/Lesson1FantasticMrFo_1435151288.pdf



Quick curriculum connections

- **ENGLISH** - Reading. Comprehension. Writing - composition
- **SCIENCE** - Animals, including humans. Living things and their habitats, food chains
- **ART AND DESIGN** - development of creativity and ideas
- **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY** - use a variety of creative and practical activities to give knowledge, understanding and skills needed to engage in an iterative process of designing and making
- **GEOGRAPHY** - human and physical geography, land use, economic activity (farming)
- **MUSIC** - perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression. Develop an understanding of musical composition, organising and manipulating ideas within musical structures and reproducing sounds from aural memory.
- **PHYSICAL EDUCATION** - develop competence to excel in a broad range of physical activities



Foxy Facts

- Foxes are one of the most well known wild animals in the UK. They are native to Britain.
- Foxes are a little bit bigger than a cat
- Foxes can live up to 14 years
- The latin name for fox is "Vulpes Vulpes"
- Foxes can live anywhere, in towns or the countryside
- Foxes eat just about anything, including berries, worms, spiders and small animals such as mice and birds. If they live in the city, they eat rubbish that people leave out. If they have extra food, they hide it in a small hole and eat it later when they are hungry.
- A fox's home is called a den or an earth. It can be a hole in the ground or elsewhere, such as under a garden shed. Hunters often try to scare foxes out of their dens by sending in dogs so that the hunter can then shoot the foxes. Sometimes the foxes remain in the den and are injured or killed by the dogs.
- The fox is a distant relative of the wolf
- Foxes are mostly active at night
- Foxes have amazing hearing - they can hear a watch ticking 40 yards (120 foot) away
- Foxes use 28 different types of calls to communicate with each other
- A fox can run 30 miles per hour
- Foxes are members of the dog family. A female fox is called a "vixen", a male fox is called a "dog fox" or a "tod" and baby foxes are called "pups", "kits" or "cubs". A group of foxes is called a "skulk" or a "leash".
- Foxes are the only type of dog capable of retracting their claws like cats do. Foxes also have vertical pupils that look more like those of cats than the rounded pupils that other dogs have.
- There are many different types of foxes, and they are the most widespread species of wild dog in the world. Foxes live just about everywhere - in the countryside, cities, forests, mountains and grasslands. Arctic foxes live in cold climates far north, and fennec foxes live in the North African desert.
- When fox pups are born, they are unable to see, hear or walk, and their mother must take good care of them. When the pups are young, their father hunts and brings food back for the family.
- Sadly, some people continue to hunt foxes. In 2004, a law was enacted in England and Wales to ban hunting foxes with dogs. However, hunters can still hunt and kill foxes by other means. Fox hunting with dogs is still legal in many other places, such as Ireland, North America and Australia.
- Grey foxes who live in North America are the only type of dogs who can climb trees!
- Foxes show great caring, adaptability and intelligence when raising their young. The Daily Mail reported in May 2009 that a baby fox cub was caught in a snare for two weeks before being rescued by the RSPCA. He was unable to escape and was badly injured. He survived only because his mother brought him food while he was trapped.
- Did you know that foxes have whiskers on their legs as well as around their faces, which they use to help them find their way?

Other links and resources

Official Roald Dahl website:

www.roalddahl.com

So You Want to Work in Theatre Design?:

www.theguardian.com/money/2007/sep/22/graduates.workandcareers2

Theatre Set Design on Pinterest:

uk.pinterest.com/kevinbwilkins/theatre-set-design/

10 Best Theatre Designs, The Guardian:

www.theguardian.com/stage/gallery/2011/may/22/set-theatre-design-in-pictures

Mask Making:

www.activityvillage.co.uk/mask-crafts

Drama Games:

www.dramatoolkit.co.uk/drama-games

Jobs in Theatre:

ccskills.org.uk/careers/advice/any/theatre/

