

The Enchanted Deer

a story from The Finn Cycle in Irish Mythology

Source of Story: 'The Names Upon the Harp' by Marie Heaney



A Drama suitable for 2nd/3rd/4th classes (Primary School)

Resources:

- The story of 'The Enchanted Deer' (there is a good version by Marie Heaney in the collection 'The Names upon the Harp')
- A large blanket
- A cloak
- Objects, pictures and information to give a sense of time and place for opening activity. For example - Some stones, some branches from trees, some dried leaves etc
- Coloured fabric – red/blue/black – large pieces.
- Slow and magical music to suit step 2 (suggestion: Tchaikovsky's - *Waltz of the Flowers*, from 'The Nutcracker' or a piece from Carolan's harp music)

Background

For a simplified summary of the story, follow this link: <http://irelandofthewelcomes.com/home/the-enchanted-deer/>

Theme : Love and Loss

Section One : Entering into the fictional world

1. **Creating the atmosphere:** In advance of the children entering the space in which the drama will take place, spread out the large blanket and place your chosen images/objects on the blanket. For the Hill of Allen, you can put something under the blanket to raise it up; for the fort, you can put the stones around in a circle.
2. As the children enter the room, play the music. Invite them to explore the objects/ pictures and to make suggestions/speculations about where the story will take place and what kind of a story it seems to be. A child might comment on the fort area – explain that this story is a myth (elicit understanding of myths) and that the fort is significant in the story. The name of the Fort is the *Fort of Almu* and it is a place where Fionn, the Fianna and the hounds live.
3. **Creating the space** – The *Fort of Almu* – invite the children to use fabric and furniture to create the fort. If there are things that are difficult to represent using fabric/furniture, the children can write these/ draw these on pieces of paper and place them into the fort.
4. **Becoming part of Almu** – children in groups or pairs become parts of the fort. They may become some of the aspects of the fort that they have drawn/created in step 3 e.g. a small group of children might become a fire – they could lift the red fabric and move their bodies as if they are flames.
5. **Teacher narration:** Having worked with each of the pairs/groups, the teacher now moves through the fort narrating what the children have depicted e.g. "Here is the sturdy entrance to the fort which is guarded by fearsome hounds"; "here is a fire around which the fianna tell stories at night"

Annie Ó Breacháin for ADEI 2014

6. **Storytelling:** Next, the teacher *tells (rather than reads)* the story up to the point where the deer turns into a woman (**first key moment**). For the part where the hunt of the doe is mentioned, encourage children to create a **soundscape** – we might hear the doe’s heart beating, we might hear the hounds barking loudly, the Fianna shouting etc.
7. **From deer to woman – Paired Movement :**
 Pair work (A and B) - images: one child takes the form of a deer, the other the form of a woman
 They stand facing one another. Teacher asks what movement would be necessary for A to transform into B? Children explore this for some time allowing for lots of interpretations (teacher can support).
8. Music is added and the movement from deer to woman is conducted around the classroom in the style of a **carousel performance**

Section Two: The body of the story

1. **Fionn meets Sadb for the first time:** The place is at the door of Fionn’s tent. Teacher in role as Sadb. Children in collective role as Fionn. In preparation for this scene, the children might discuss what they think Fionn might have said to the woman when he first saw her. The teacher can use the language taken directly from the second page of the story - *“I am the doe that you chased today and my name is Sadb. Because I would not give my love to the Dark druid, he put a curse on me. For three years now I have been hunted in the wild until one of his servants took pity on me and told me that if I could find Finn and the Fianna, the Dark One would have no more power over me and I would be free from enchantment.”* [we learn that she is the deer that the Fianna had hunted in the clearing, we learn that she was transformed into a deer by by an evil druid, but the druid’s spell ends once she is inside the Fianna camp]. Their conversation could extend further if the children are asked to think about each character’s motivation – what is Fionn/Sadb hoping for as they converse?
2. **Teacher narrates** about how they have fallen in love, so smitten was Fionn that he no longer went hunting, fighting or feasting. However, one day he was called to Dublin Bay to fight the Lochlann. It pained him to leave his beloved Sadb especially since she was now pregnant but duty beckoned. He warned her not to leave the fort. One day, Sadb spotted Fionn approaching the Fort. She knew that this day would come. She had been so lonely and worried whilst he was gone. She ran to greet him. However, her eyes had deceived her. The figure that looked like her Fionn was actually the dark druid and once outside the fort, Sadb was once again a doe.
3. **Next key moment** – Fionn arrives back from Dublin to Almu. Teacher becomes Fionn and looks at the Fort from outside saying “Things seem different here, there’s danger in the air”*. Remind children of the place they created earlier. How can they recreate that place but now with a sense of danger?
4. **Small group improvisation (4s/5s) :** Teacher invites the children to take on the role of Fionn’s warriors. Teacher tells the children that they witnessed what happened to Sadb . They have heard that Fionn is approaching the Fort. Within their small groups, they decide who will take the role of the warrior who has to give the bad news. Each of the other warriors help the one who is chosen to break the bad news with the wording (this can be written and edited) and

with the delivery. Encourage them to spend some time deciding *where* the meeting will take place. Will it be outside the Fort of Almu?/ at the well?/ near the fire?

5. **Teacher in Role as Fionn** approaches each group to hear the news. He questions them – but why? You were supposed to be taking care of her...how could you let her leave like that? All groups observe Fionn approaching the other groups – each scene is watched by all. (To encourage the children’s focus, teacher could challenge them beforehand by saying that groups will later be asked to sum up one of these improvisations each with just one word, so they need to watch and listen carefully.)

Section Three: Fionn’s Despair

1. Narrate that Fionn retired to his room
 - What **words** resonated with him?
 - What can he **hear** when he tries to take a rest?

At this point, the wording that the children in role as warriors have created is revisited. Words are chosen and an unplanned **sound collage** created . The children can gather around in a circle for this and say the words at various intervals repeating certain words or phrases. They choose when to say their words –e.g. *“he looked just like you, Fionn. He had your hair, your shape, She ran to embrace him. He looked just like you, Fionn. We’re sorry”*
2. **Out of Role Reflection** on the process in number one –children share insights into the experience of activity 1. What moments/sentences resonated with them and why.
3. What can Fionn **see** when he closes his eyes?
 - At this point, in small groups the children create **slow moving images** to music reflecting what Fionn sees. The words (from activity 1) are intertwined with the image to accentuate the aesthetic dimension.

Note: Ensure that words chosen are deliberately delivered (not muttered)

4. Remembering Sadb* – Developing a **ritual**

In role as the Fianna, children in small groups create a ritual to remember Sadb and the unborn baby. How can they be remembered? What would Fionn and the Fianna do to mark this sad occasion?

Things to remember about Ritual:

- a. Slow
- b. Often has repetition
- c. Very little dialogue

Each group of children perform their ritual for the other groups.

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* Not in original story i.e. possible moments.

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It is possible to develop this drama further. When working with children, I have continued to the point where Fionn meets Oisín (his son, Sadb's baby) –There are lots of opportunities for drama because the boy was raised in the wild with no language. It is interesting to develop that moment where Fionn recognises Oisín as his son and indeed to find out what became of Sadb.