

The Man Who Wanted To Live Forever

This is an international folk legend, a version of which is retold in a book by Selina Hastings (Walker Classic Tales), ISBN 0-7445-2077-0, £4.99.

Story outline

Once upon a time there was a man called Bodkin who wanted to live forever because he enjoyed his life. He went to visit the Wise Old Woman who sends him to the Old Man of the Forest. He tells Bodkin that he will live until the last tree is cut down but Bodkin realises that will happen one day and as he wants to live forever, he goes to the Old Man of the Lake who will live until he drinks the whole lake dry. This is not long enough for Bodkin, so he goes to the Old Man of the Mountain who will live until the mountain stands no more. Bodkin settles for that and stays for hundreds of years. However he begins to long for his old village and wants to return. The old man warns him it will have changed and says that whatever happens Bodkin must not get down from his horse. Bodkin agrees. His old village has gone and in its place is a modern city which confuses and saddens him. On his way back he meets an old man with a wheel broken on his loaded wagon. Many pairs of old shoes have fallen from it, onto the road. The old man begs Bodkin for help. Bodkin hesitates first but then dismounts to help mend the wheel. He asks the old man who he is and why he carries hundreds of worn-out shoes. The old man smiles and tells Bodkin, 'I am Death and these are all the shoes I have worn out running after you.'

Drama activity 1 : Voice collage

“There was once a man called Bodkin, and his home was a small village, which lay beside a river in a sheltered valley surrounded by green and gentle hills.”

Opportunity to add authentic detail to the existing description by speaking in role as if you are in the environment, saying what you can see, hear, feel and smell.

Geography activity: Map-making

Plot the setting on to a collective pictorial map which can be added to as the drama progresses.

Drama activity 2 : Still image/improvisation/freeze frame

“Bodkin enjoyed everything about his life: he was young, he was healthy, he loved his family and many friends, and he found the world a wonderful place.”

In groups of about 4, make a still image that shows a happy moment in Bodkin's life.

- at home
- at work
- with friends

Drama activity 3: Performance carousel:

Each group brings the scene to life for a few moments and then holds it still again, by freezing the action

Discuss with your group what it is that makes Bodkin happy at these moments. What are the inner feelings of happiness due to?

Literacy activity:

List them and decide which situations and feelings can last for a moment, for a while and forever.

Literacy activity:

Write a short diary entry that Bodkin puts in his diary, about the moment portrayed in the happy scene.

ICT activity:

These moments could be recorded using a digital camera. This would provide a visual record and reference point for reflection later.

Drama activity 4 : Collective voice/teacher in role

“One day he went to see the Wise Woman of the village, who lived in a cave beside the river. “I want to live forever,” Bodkin told her. “Can you tell me what I should do?”

The class together are the wise woman of the village and they talk to Bodkin (Teacher in role) offering advice and thoughts collectively.

Drama activity 5: Teacher in role/working in role

The teacher as Bodkin tells them that he is going to leave the village to find a way of staying alive forever. Each person decides their relationship to Bodkin, as someone who cares about him. Bodkin shakes each person’s hand to say farewell and they say something to him which they want him to think about before he goes.

Drama activity 6: Thought-tracking

Bodkin passes by each person one more time and they speak aloud their in role thought at what is possibly the last time they will ever see Bodkin.....and then they turn away.

Drama activity 7: Narrative story-telling

Bodkin goes on a journey to try to find someone who can help him to live forever. Teacher reads or tells the story of how he visits the man in the forest and the lake with no luck.

Who else might he go to see? Where else might he go?

In turn each person has the opportunity to tell a part of his imaginary journey, clapping when they want someone else to take over. The storyteller may add characters Bodkin meets, places he visits etc.....but no-one will be able to help him.

Drama activity 8: Decision alley/speaking objects

Should Bodkin go back? The class make themselves into a tunnel of trees, which Bodkin can pass between on his journey. Each tree speaks in turn. One line tries to persuade him to turn back and the other gives him reasons he should go on. Bodkin can move forward or backwards depending on the strength of the reason given.....and then walk on through !

Drama activity 9: Physical Theatre/teacher in role/thought-tracking

Together each person in turn enters the drama space as an object that Bodkin will see when he enters the castle of the old man of the mountain. Each person says what object they are and says something about themselves. Bodkin then enters and passes each object, which says what it is thinking as Bodkin passes by.

Drama activity 10: Collective or communal voice/teacher in role/improvisation

The class is the old man of the mountain. The teacher is Bodkin asking if he may live with him forever. The teacher asks questions of the old man about his life.

Drama activity 11: Image theatre/movement/dance drama

Many years have passed. In groups of about 4, create the images that Bodkin repeatedly dreams. These can be realistic or surrealistic. They start as still images and come to life through repeated movement. They can represent past, present or future (or a mixture).

Drama activity 12: Collective or communal voice/teacher in role/improvisation

The teacher as Bodkin decides to return to his home. Hundreds of years have passed since he left.....it is now the year 2001.....or even later! The class as the old man warn him of the problems he might encounter in returning. The old man tries to persuade him to stay.

Drama activity 13: Still image/improvisation/freeze frame

The old man gives Bodkin his special horse that will keep him safe and bring him back to the castle, as long as Bodkin does not dismount.

In groups of about 4, create a scene that Bodkin will witness from his horse when he re-enters the place he used to live. The scene depicted through a short improvisation must be one that will be completely outside the experience of Bodkin.

Drama activity 14: Performance carousel/ thought-tracking

As the teacher as Bodkin passes by each group (on the horse) their scene will come to life. The rest of the class will then speak Bodkin's thoughts before he moves on to witness the next scene.

Drama activity 14: Hot-seating

The teacher as Bodkin is asked questions by the class about his thoughts, feelings and future actions, now that he has been back home and found that all has changed.

Drama activity 15: Collective or communal voice/teacher in role/improvisation

The class speak as the old man with the broken cartwheel. The teacher is Bodkin. They must try to persuade the teacher to get off the horse.

Drama activity 16: Image theatre/Performance carousel

Let us imagine that at the moment Bodkin faces death, his life passes before him as a series of images. What might those images be? In groups of about 4, list some key images in Bodkin's life. Now decide together on the most important image and present it with a spoken caption. The images will be time sequenced for order of presentation by the teacher.

Drama activity 17: Voice collage

Let us imagine that at the moment Bodkin faces death, he imagines he hears voices from the past. Each person decides on one sentence he hears from his past. With eyes closed the voices are heard.

Drama activity 18: Voice collage with movement and still image

If Bodkin was to have an epitaph on his gravestone, what might it say? In turn each person passes the dead body of Bodkin and says the epitaph aloud.

Patrice Baldwin