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A one-act dramatic play The Bird's Relative

by Idries Shah



KashfisChildren.org

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CAST

(Narrators 1-3 can be read by more than three students so that many will get a chance to perform.)

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Narrator 3

The Merchant

The Pet Bird

Jungle Guides

Birds of all sorts

Bird's Relative

The Script

Narrator 1: There was once a rich merchant, whose prized possession was an extremely intelligent cockatoo.

Narrator 2: The beautifully feathered bird occupied pride of place in the merchant's equally splendid house, where it was routinely shown off to guests of the highest social standing.

Narrator 3: One day, when the man was about to embark on an overseas trip, he said to the bird:

The Merchant: In this upcoming voyage I will be visiting your homeland. Is there anything that I can bring back for you?

Narrator 3: Without a second thought, the bird asked for its freedom.

The Pet Bird: FREEDOM! (*The Pet Bird can make squawking sounds or any sound the actor thinks of.*)

Narrator 1: The bird had no trouble making itself understood to the merchant because, as I have already explained, it was an exceptionally clever bird. Said the merchant:

The Merchant: I simply couldn't bear to live without you. So please ask me for another favor.

Narrator 2: Cocking his head to one side, as birds of its kind often do, the feathered captive thought for a moment.

The Pet Bird: If you can't give me my freedom, perhaps you would be kind enough to go to the jungle where I was captured and tell my relatives what has become of me.

Narrator 3: Delighted to be able to grant a favor that was within his power, the merchant agreed.

(*The Merchant sets off on his journey.*)

Narrator 1: And sure enough, after a lengthy sea voyage ... and having enlisted an army of local guides, (*Enter several Guides carrying boxes. The Bird's Relative and other birds gather around.*)

Narrator 2: the merchant finally made it to the exact place where his pet had been captured. And here he lost no time in calling out:

The Merchant: Friends! I have come to inform you that a relative of yours, a fine-looking cockatoo, now lives with me and is my very favorite possession.

Narrator 3: His words were hardly spoken, when a wild bird, just like his own, fell senseless out of a tree and onto the ground at his feet.

(The Bird's Relative falls to the ground, remaining motionless.)

Narrator 1: Correctly assuming that this must be a relative of his own treasured bird, the merchant did all he could to save the unfortunate creature.

Narrator 2: He blew gently into its nostrils. He massaged its tiny feet. He fanned its crested head.

Narrator 3: But nothing revived the bird. And the merchant was soon forced to accept the lifeless body for what it was.

Narrator 1: With a heavy heart, he made the long journey home, back to the comfort of his very own sitting room, where he was reunited with his favorite pet.

(The Pet Bird returns to his "cage.")

Narrator 2: The bird asked the man whether he brought good news of its relatives.

Narrator 3: Admitted the Merchant:

The Merchant: Not really. I told some birds, whom I took to be your relatives, that you were my favorite possession in the whole world. But as soon as I did so, a bird, that looked just like you, fell dead at my feet.

Narrator 2: He went on to describe in detail how he had attempted to revive the wild bird but, alas, he had eventually been forced to admit that there was nothing he could do.

Narrator 3: And at this point, the merchant's story was ended by a thud, as his beloved pet bird collapsed, in exactly the same manner as its relative.

Narrator 1: And no amount of blowing in its nostrils,

Narrator 2: ... massaging its tiny feet,

Narrator 3: ... or fanning its crested head would revive him.

Narrator 1: And soon, the merchant was forced to conclude that his bird had died of shock, having heard of his relative's sudden end.

Narrator 2: Mournfully, he placed the bird's lifeless body on the windowsill, where it instantly revived, and flew into a nearby tree.

Narrator 3: From the tree, perched just out of reach, the bird said:

The Pet Bird: What you failed to understand when you were in the jungle was that by faking his death, my relative was sending me instructions on how to behave in order to end my captivity.

All the Narrators: And off flew the bird, free at last.

The End

TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR THEATER

Teachers may want to use this script as an excellent way to allow students to learn the story, while promoting reading fluency. Students learn to read with expression and to practice such attributes of fluency as pausing, inflection and intonation. Reading the scripts aloud to students promote listening skills as they follow along silently and listen for spoken cues. Having students take on character roles helps them understand literary elements, such as motivation and characterization. The scripts provide a great opportunity for student cooperation, and they are an enjoyable way to teach reading fluency.

1. Using the Script

- a. Use the script as you would any reading material and make sure students are familiar with any new words. Your students should be familiar with the story and the vocabulary before they engage in this activity.
- b. Tell students that different combinations of readers will take turns reading the “play.”
- c. Assign the first set of readers and give them time to practice their roles and feel confident. Encourage them to read with expression.
- d. When the first readers are ready, you may want to have them stand where all students can see them. They may also read from their seats. Coach the readers to look up occasionally from their scripts and to make eye contact with the audience and other characters/readers as they read their lines.
- e. Have other sets of readers take turns at reading the script.
- f. If you have the resources, make a copy of the two-page script for each of the characters in the cast and mark the parts for that character. If this is not possible, have the student actors read their lines from the books, without marking, of course.

RETELL OPTION: Children might also use this script as a guide to retell the story in their own words or act out the story in their own way.

2. Staging the Play

- a. When students have become familiar with the script from several readings, you may want to create a full stage performance with costumes, props, and an audience of students, parents, and teachers. It is always a good idea to allow more rehearsal time when applying extra touches such as costumes or movement.
- b. In planning a performance, encourage students to think about the expressions and movements characters might make. For example, have students think about how people look and move when they are mad, happy, angry, or nervous.
- c. Have students practice facial expressions. If the character is the Merchant, have students practice looking proudly at his prize possession. If the character is the Bird, have them practice pretending to be dead, and they may want to “ham it up” by winking at the audience or some other comic action the students think of. You might have a mirror around for the students to practice making their “faces.”
- d. Encourage them to create a “voice” for their character.
- e. Encourage students to act creatively (even to “ham it up”) with the script to increase the entertainment value of the performance, keeping in mind that the most important purpose of this script is to give students a chance to build their reading fluency.
- f. Establish a “stage” area in the classroom, moving and using tables, desks, and chairs and using the floor as needed and as safety allows.
- g. Use these simple tips to keep the performance smooth and entertaining:

- ❖ Make sure readers are positioned within view of all members of the audience. It is important that the audience can hear lines and see movements and expressions. If you choose to place all the readers in front of the audience at once, it is helpful to have them stand in a semicircle so that each reader can be seen by all the other readers and by the audience.
- ❖ Suggest where readers should stand so that they do not block the audience's view of other readers.
- ❖ Remind students that they should be looking at, talking to, and reacting to the other readers/characters. However, the narrator may face and speak to the audience.
- ❖ As an alternative to having all the readers stand together in the performance area, you may want to direct the performance by having readers enter and exit off to the side before and after delivering their lines. Having readers move in and out of the performance area will require more rehearsal time.

3. Ideas for Props

(Props are optional and can all be constructed out of cardboard, construction paper, feathers, pieces of cloth, and other common items.)

- 1. The Merchant's Splendid House & Sitting Room:** Have the students paint a mural depicting the Merchant's house and sitting room. (See "Making a Mural" below for ideas.)
- 2. The Bird's Cage:** The cage can be a chair or two placed together, or a cage constructed from a cardboard box. (See "Costumes & Props" below for ideas.)
- 3. The Merchant's Ship:** Students can decorate a cardboard box to look like a ship. If the box is large enough, the merchant can stand inside as if "sailing."
- 4. The Merchant's Supplies:** Have students decorate several cardboard boxes depicting the Merchant's supplies for his voyage.
- 5. The Jungle & Trees:** Have students paint a mural depicting the jungle. They can draw and cutout a tree shape or two to place with the mural.
- 6. Make-Up & Masks:** The students may want to use theatrical make-up or add feathers to their costumes to look like the Pet Bird and other birds. (If theatrical make-up is not available, use water-based face paints.) They may want to make a mask for the Pet Bird or for other birds in the jungle. (See more ideas below in EXTRAS: Costumes & Props.)

Extras: Costumes and Props

The face and head command the most attention, so a hat, mask, or makeup can work as an entire costume. Make sure that students obtain permission before borrowing items from other people. It's best not to let them cut, paint, or modify any clothing items unless you bring in articles of clothing specifically for that purpose.

Students will have their scripts in hand while performing. So, when choosing props, keep in mind that objects which require two hands may not be practical. Encourage students to use their imagination as they transform everyday objects into props.

For The Bird's Cage: Students simply can use two chairs pushed together as the bird's cage, or they can construct a cage using a large cardboard box, with holes cut for bars, and a door with a "lock" drawn on it.

For The Merchant's Ship: Another large cardboard box can be decorated and painted to depict a sailing ship. Add several smaller boxes to depict the Merchant's supplies and merchandise.

Trees: Draw and paint several large trees to tape on walls or scatter around for the "jungle" and outside the Merchant's window, for instance.

For Masks: Have students draw a mask large enough to cover their faces, yet has eyeholes for viewing. Cockatoos, for instance, may only need a beak for a mask. The beak can be made by rolling a sheet of construction paper into a cone shape and taping, stapling or gluing the cone shape together. Secure strings on each side of the “beak” so the students can tie them onto their face. Or the students can construct a bird mask using a paper plate and a paper cup (for the beak). They can draw and cut out “feathers” from construction paper and tape them onto clothing to represent wings. Again, encourage students to use their imagination for the masks and other costumes.

Art Materials: water (washable) paints, paint brushes, foam brushes, sponges, paint cups & trays, art paper roll, pencils, markers, glue, scissors, chalk, rulers, finger paints, construction paper or other heavy paper, several medium and large cardboard boxes (if using)



Students may wish to use their art and other drawings from previous lessons.

Making a Mural: Allow enough space in the room for several students to work at once on the large art roll (the mural can be as long as your “staging” area) that is taped to the wall (or laid out on the floor). Or, you may want to section off parts of the larger roll of art paper for several students or groups to work on at once. Or, cut sections of the paper roll for each student or group of students to work with at their desks or on the floor.

Depending on your staging space, you may want to do several murals: One for the beginning scenes (the Merchant’s splendid house), one for the middle scenes (the Jungle), and one for the ending scenes (the Sitting Room with a window and a tree outside). Allowing time during the performances for changing scenes is another possibility, but this takes coordination and rehearsal, so make sure your rehearsals include this activity.

THIS WILL TAKE MORE THAN ONE DAY TO COMPLETE. YOU MAY WISH TO DECIDE WHERE YOU ARE GOING TO KEEP THE MURAL SO THAT IT REMAINS INTACT AND CAN DRY BETWEEN CLASSES.

Here are some suggestions on making a mural:

1. Discuss some possible ideas for the mural they will be creating. Here are some suggested ideas:

The illustrations in the book include many designs and illustrations of windows, people, furniture, and objects; perhaps the students want to emphasize these elements in the mural. They may want to use their own drawings for ideas for scenes of the story.

The elements of the story take place in several areas: the Merchant’s house and sitting room, the sailing ship, and the jungle. Perhaps the students want to create a mural that replicates all of the places in which the story occurs.

2. You may want to organize students into three groups: one group for scenes or designs from the first part of the story; one for the middle part; and one for the ending of the story. Have the students or group of students brainstorm ideas for a mural.

3. Once they have decided on the idea for the mural, students or groups of students can lightly sketch their designs onto drawing paper at their desks. Using these sketches, ask student or group to show their designs to the class and have the class discuss the elements and where to add them to the mural. Let this be a cooperative effort. Make sure that all students have a part in the design of the mural, whether it’s sketching, painting, planning.

4. Allow 4-6 students at a time to take turns coming to the mural to sketch the design and later to paint. Older students may direct younger students.

5. Some painting can be done with sponges, others with paint brushes. Let the students make these choices. One idea using sponges is having students dip them into one or more colors of paint and press them onto

the paper, creating a different texture than brushstrokes. Students may want to create “stencils” by drawing a design (such as a tree branch) on thick paper, cutting out the design, and use sponges to stencil the design onto the mural.

6. Ten minutes before class ends, have students help with the clean-up.

Clean-Up

1. Assign students to wash brushes and sponges.
2. Assign students to collect the newsprint or plastic sheeting (re-use if possible).
3. Assign students to cover paints, rinse out plastic cups or trays.
4. Store mural or individual pieces of it so that it will dry without disturbing other classroom activities.

Other Ideas for Activities

Some suggestions for making the set:

Architecture/Furniture: Have the students look at book’s illustrations of the architecture, such as the shape of the windows, and at furniture and other elements to get ideas for their murals.

Jungle: Have the students discuss what their ideas of a “jungle” are, and have them sketch several elements of their ideas, such as trees, plants, and jungle animals and birds. Encourage them to research where in the world most jungles are located.

Costumes: Students may want to make up several costumes using items of clothing that are specifically designated for this use. Have them discuss the dress as depicted in the story, by explaining much of the clothing is those worn by people from Afghanistan and other Central Asian areas. These include items such as hajibs and turbans (head coverings) and kaffiyehs (large scarves) and decorated tunics. Then have the students make up the costumes for their parts in the play. They can take turns explaining them to the classroom.

Birds: Have the students research what cockatoos look like and their habitat. Have other students research other birds which live mostly in forested areas, such as jungles. They can present their findings to the class. They can also draw and cut out feathers to decorate their bird costumes.

Follow-Up

There will be opportunities to recall and use the story with your students. For example, whenever you notice a student not heeding your advice, or trying to “run before he/she can walk,” remind him/her about the story *The Bird’s Relative* and how the bird learned how to gain his freedom. You may want to say:

“When I heard you just now, it reminded me of the story we read called *The Bird’s Relative*. Can you guess why I thought that?”

“Do you remember the Bird who learned from the story a Merchant told him about the bird’s relative? Do you think you forgot just now how much stories can help us learn? Why do you think so?”

Go back to the story from time to time, weeks or months later, to see if your students can remember and retell the story in their own words or act out the story in their own way. You and your students may find more meanings, concepts and insights from it as time goes on. Remember, these stories can be enjoyed and be useful for people of all ages.