

JESSICA'S FRIENDS

Presented by

Judith O'Hare

YOU AND ME PUPPETS

74 Hillcrest Road, Reading, MA 01867

781-944-0965 e-mail jaohare@gmail.com

www.youandmepuppets.com

JESSICA'S FRIENDS is a participatory puppet play presented by Judith O'Hare of the YOU AND ME PUPPETS and your children. It is a full theater production that includes children from the audience who manipulate rod puppets and marionettes within the context of the story. It is designed for young children aged 3-9 and presents ideas and concepts that are part of the early childhood and early primary experience.

The story is about a princess who wants a friend. She "wishes" for a friend and her mother tells her that she will "command" someone to be her friend. BUT when her toys come to life, she learns from them that "You gotta be a friend to get a friend". You can't just "wish" for a friend or "command" a friend. You have to care and you have to share.

Jessica's bedtime is reminiscent of every child's bedtime with delay tactics such as, "I need a drink of water", "I need to go to the bathroom" and "Tell me a story". Jessica's mother tells her the story of The Three Billy Goats Gruff, which is dramatized by children from the audience with Judith O'Hare. The children easily manipulate the large flat rod puppets, and everyone in the audience is drawn into the story.

While Jessica is asleep her toys come to life. In their attempt to find her a friend they conjure up dancing marionettes and RAINBOW rod puppets. These puppets are manipulated by children within the context of the story. Jessica learns that at the end of a rainbow, sometimes your wishes come true. As she looks out over the rainbow she sees the children and asks them to be her friends. It is an interactive play that involves puppets, children, and the audience who end up singing with Jessica, "You gotta be a friend to get a friend, so why not be...e.. a friend."

The story includes a favorite story from children's literature, "The Three Billy Goats Gruff", and brings literature to life for and with children. Music is an important element in the story; it states the theme and it provides a subtle direction for the puppet manipulation.

The story offers an opportunity to discuss friendship and what it means to be a friend. 'YOU DON'T HAVE TO LOOK LIKE SOMEONE TO BE THEIR FRIEND, YOU HAVE TO CARE AND YOU HAVE TO SHARE.' Jessica learns that she can get a friend if she makes an effort and asks someone to be her friend. Her experience is similar to that of the children.

One of the most magical parts of the show is the involvement of the children. The production provides a positive experience for the children who are performing and for those who are in the audience. The children are always treated with care and respect. The experience builds self-esteem and often touches those children who most need to find success.

JESSICA'S FRIENDS has been performed at schools, libraries, hospitals, parks, day care centers and corporate parties. It speaks to children; it makes them laugh and think.

FOR THE TEACHER

While *JESSICA'S FRIENDS* is a simple story it contains many things to talk about for follow up in the classroom.

The first impressions of young children can be captured in a drawing or a short discussion. This story has many issues which bear further discussion and thought.

1. The children remember the song, "You gotta be a friend to get a friend." This little phrase opens up the discussion about friendship and it can lead to a discussion about sharing, stealing, hitting, drugs, name calling.... The toys tell Jessica, "YOU HAVE TO SHARE AND YOU HAVE TO CARE". Jessica says, "What does that mean?" The children can talk about what it means to them.

2. Wanda, the toy, says, "We look alike, right? Know anybody who looks like her?" The other toy responds, "You don't have to look like somebody to be their friend." This little exchange can lead to a discussion of differences. Can we be friends with someone who looks different? Or talks different? or comes from a different neighborhood? or religion? or ethnic group? etc.

3. Jessica is a princess; she has every book and every toy, and yet she isn't happy. Why wasn't she happy? Can people have lots of things and not be happy? What makes YOU happy? or sad?
This topic can be explored further with older children in writing and drawing.

4. For young children bedtime is a ritual; they recognize and enjoy this scene in the play. Ask them to share their bedtime rituals. Do they use the same delay tactics that Jessica used? Do they have any other delay tactics? Do they like bedtime stories? What are some of their favorites?
SUGGEST other bedtime stories that they can take out of the library.

5. The rainbow is a wonderful symbol in literature and in our lives. We love to see a rainbow after a storm and feel happy. What does a rainbow mean to the children? What does it mean to Jessica?
Children love to draw and sing about the rainbow. There are many other stories and songs that include a rainbow such as: "The Rainbow Colored Horse", and "Noah's Ark", and the song, "Somewhere over the rainbow" from "The Wizard of Oz".

6. Jessica is a character that the children can relate to. She becomes real for them. As a follow up to the play, ask the children to create other stories about Jessica. What will Jessica do tomorrow? What are her mother and father like? Who else lives in her castle? Does she have any pets? What are some other problems she has growing up?

7. For older children consider reading The Prince and the Pauper.

8. Many children are included in the production, and the children see that making puppets come alive is easy and fun. Since every child cannot be included in the performance, make puppets available in the classroom for the children to use for dramatic play or encourage them to make a puppet of their own.