Tales of the Night

This animated feature film tells six different fables set around the world and across time – from Tibet to medieval Europe to the Country of the Dead. Each story is chosen, designed, and performed by three people working in a small theatre. The computer-based animation is notable for its silhouetted figures and bright, colorful set design.

Recommended for ages 6+

Themes: folklore; cross cultural understanding

Director(s): Michel Ocelot | **99 min** | **Animation** | **2006** | **Country:** France | **Language:** Dubbed in English
Official film website: www.michelocelot.fr

SET THE STAGE | THOUGHT-STARTERS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Silhouette animation has a long history. The most important pioneer in the field was German animator Lotte Reiniger, who invented a technique in the 1920s that involved cutting shapes from sheets of lead and cardboard and animating them frame-by-frame. She was inspired by Chinese shadow puppetry in which silhouetted figures made from leather or paper are manipulated by puppeteers moving rods to music. The figures move against translucent cloth screens, which are illuminated from behind.

WORDS TO KNOW

- **Fable:** A short story (often about animals) that is intended to teach a lesson.

- **Silhouette:** A picture of something that depicts dark shapes on a light background; often used to refer to a picture of a person's face from the side.

- **Silhouette Animation:** Animation in which the characters are only visible as black silhouettes. Usually made by backlighting cardboard cut-outs and partially inspired by shadow play.

For more film terms, refer to the PCFF Film Glossary (pcffri.org/FilmHub).
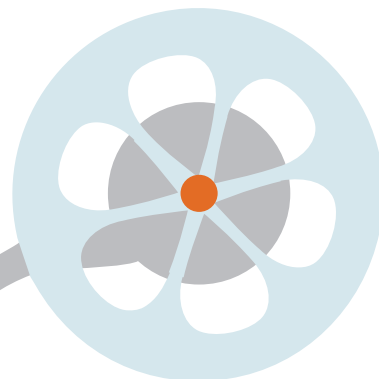
TALK ABOUT IT | DISCUSSION

- Who are the recurring characters and what are their roles in the film? What do they do to produce the tales?

- There are six tales in this film. What connects them? What lessons do the tales teach? How are the tales visually or narratively similar?

- Several of the stories in the film question old, long-held societal beliefs. In the story set in the Aztec city of gold, for instance, a visitor helps the people question religious sacrifice. What are some other beliefs that the tales call into question?

- Many of the stories involve magic or fantastical elements. What is the benefit of using magic or fantasy as a storytelling device?

- This filmmaker made unique aesthetic choices. He chose to make all the characters black silhouettes. Look back on a scene from the film and pause the frame. What do you notice about the way the figures are depicted? What features are missing? How does it affect the mood and narrative of the film? Is it easier or harder to identify with the characters because they are silhouettes?

Clues and Cues

Pay attention while watching

- How do the animation style and the shape of the silhouettes change as the film moves from culture to culture?

GET CREATIVE | EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Activity Reel
FOR USE WITH ANY FILM!

Call The Shots
Storyboarding, framing & more!

Promote A Movie
Create a poster, trailer & hype!

Be A Film Critic
Write a review & ask questions!

Soundtrack Remix
Set the tone: new music, dialogue & sound!

Make A Movie
Tell your own story!

For Activity Reel details, downloadable storyboard template and more, visit the the Film Hub website: www.pcffri.org/FilmHub

- **Writing Prompt**
  Do you agree with the moral lessons taught in this film? If you had one moral lesson to teach young kids today, what would it be and why?

  Develop a list of morals or lessons that a fable could teach (for example, "Always listen to your parents" or "Eat healthy food"). Choose one moral or lesson that is really important to you. Then come up with two characters. Remember, typically fables use animals to represent human traits. Choose two animals with opposing characteristics (such as a wolf to represent slyness and a bunny to represent innocence). Next, pose a problem for your characters and resolve it through your story. Finally, choose an ending but remember one of the characters must learn a valuable lesson or moral.

  Alternate option 1: Write a fable in comic book form.

  Alternate option 2: Write a fable in script form.

- **Shadow Puppets**
  Materials: Paper, scissors, popsicle sticks, flashlight
  Create your own shadow puppet theatre based on fables. Follow these steps: Cut figures from paper, attach them to popsicle sticks, create backgrounds out of decorated paper or cloth, manipulate the puppets to music against the background, turn off the lights, and shine a flashlight behind the background to create silhouettes. Explore the effects of light on the puppets and the background. How does the scene play differently with or without light shining through? This interactive website provides information on how to make shadow puppets:
  artsedge.kennedy-center.org/interactives/shadowpuppets/shadow_puppets.html

MAKE CONNECTIONS | ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources complement the film and inspire further discussion or programming.

BOOKS

- **Aesop's Fables for Children illustrated**
  by Milo Winter.
  This edition features 130 classic tales along with illustrations and an audio recording.

- **African Folk Tales**
  edited by Hugh Vernon-Jackson and illustrated by Yuko Green.
  Eighteen traditional African folktales for children 8-14 years old.

- **Favorite North American Indian Legends**
  edited by Philip Smith
  Native tales for children 8-14 years old.

FILMS

- ◉ **Azur & Asmar** (2006)
  Two brothers separated at birth unknowing of their connection become rivals while searching for a fairy.

- ◉ **The Secret of Kells** (2009)
  An animated story blending magic, fantasy and Celtic mythology about the power of imagination and faith to carry humanity through dark times.

- ◉ *Indicates PCFF festival selection*

LOCAL CONNECTIONS

- **Len Cabral, Providence-based storyteller for kids:**
  www.lencabral.com

- **RISD young artists programs, including animation:**
  ce.risd.edu/programs/young-artist-program

BEYOND THE FILM | RELATED INTERNET LINKS

- **Background information on silhouette animation pioneer Lotte Reiniger:**
  www.animationschooldaily.com/?p=1644

- **Interactive background information about shadow puppetry:**
  artsedge.kennedy-center.org/interactives/shadowpuppets/shadow_puppets.html

- **Aesop's Fables:**
  read.gov/aesop/