



The Rime of the Ancient Mariner & Christabel

Inclusive drama activities

This resource has been developed for use across the range of ability, with multisensory activities suitable for children who have special educational needs, and adults who find it easiest to access poetry through action and experience.

We make explicit links between Christabel and the Ancient Mariner, but you can do either poem independently.

We selected verses from the poem, rather than trying to do all of it. We use a lot of drama, acting the poem out.

We use as much of the actual language of the poem as we can. Sometimes in dialogue you may want to use simpler words, but keep to the rhythm.

Encourage people to join in with well known phrases (*the ice was here... water water...*), and strong rhyming words.

Use art workshops and outings to create the resources with your group – drawings, paintings and photographs.

Before you begin: Read each poem until you are familiar with it. Think through which verses to use and which you might omit. Look at the resource and check which activities go with which verses. You may think of other activities yourself – or you can workshop it as we did, with your group and get their ideas. Print out a copy of the poem and annotate with your cues.

Talk about the poems with your group first:-

It's about an old sailor with a terrible story to tell. It's about a voyage to icy places. It's about a magical bird. It's about a mistake when someone does something very wrong and what happens.

It's about a young girl who finds a mysterious stranger in the wood, who puts a spell on her. It takes place at night in a castle and a forest.

Show the pictures, and practise some of the sounds and actions you will use during the poem.

Dealing with fears

Some people may find these poems extremely frightening. It's important to think carefully about the needs of your group – we must not underestimate the sheer power of poetic imagery and language. Try reading it through to people before you work on it, and allow people to opt out if they are not happy.

THE ANCIENT MARINER

Resources

- Musical instruments
- Silky fabric of different colours –green, white, blue, purple, gold, red.
- Shadow puppets or images that you make to display on sticks: sun, albatross, ship
- Large dice (fabric, can be bought or made with a box or foam)

The first activities represent some of the images and actions that recur in the poem and provide the atmosphere.

Sun and moon

The sun has a mysterious role in the poem, signalling each time that something strange will happen. The moon is associated with both death and the gentle sleep and uprising of the dead mariners.

Use a torch, light projections or sun/crescent moon images made of gold/silver paper fastened to a long stick. Move the image right to left, up and down as indicated by the poem. Everyone must point, look, and move in synchrony with it – rising up and swaying. Play appropriate music as you do so.

Wind and storm

Use musical instruments and fans to enact the storm. Move in synchrony with it.

Snakes

The snakes are first seen as threatening then as beautiful natural creations. Use long lengths of nylon fabric coloured white, gold, blue and green (sari material works very well). Twist these and make them writhe in a dance. Music is first spooky, then beautiful. People can try to make their way over the “snakes” making sure that they do not get caught between them. As the Mariner blesses the snakes at the end of the poem, people can dance with the fabric.

Sleep and rain

Everyone mimes sleep and then waking from sleep and moving their limbs in a dance. Use a rain maker and water spray. Mime drinking when you are very thirsty and show how you feel when your thirst is quenched.

Trees and Birdsong

Towards the end of the poem, the souls of the mariners make music which reminds the poet of the woods of his Somerset home. This is a lovely link with *Christabel*, which begins in the wood. You could have an expedition to take some pictures locally of trees and listen to birds. Use bird instruments, CDs of bird song or the RSPB soft toy birds which make the appropriate songs.

The next set of activities move the narrative along:-

Stop short!

Some of the group take the role of the Mariner, some of the group are the walkers. Go round the room. At intervals the "Mariners" stop the walkers in their tracks using any strategies they can – stepping in front, holding up a hand, grabbing arm or shoulder. Leaning forward they whisper "I've got a story to tell you!". If you want to ham it up, make some long grey beards that people can wear!

Setting sail

At the beginning of the poem, all is joyful expectation at the start of the voyage. You can dramatise coming on board, and then assign everyone their tasks. The following game is adapted from a well known "wide game" – Port and Starboard.

Preparation: talk about the jobs that have to be done on a ship. Get the group to think of gestures and actions to represent these. One person acts as the leader and gives commands. The rest of the group must carry these out:-

Port – *look/move to the left*
Starboard – *look/move to the right*
Swab the decks
Climb the rigging
Telescope
Haul the sails in
Salute the Captain
Dance the hornpipe

Establish the movement of the ship with gentle music and or wave sounds.

This activity is repeated at the end of the poem when the dead mariners take over sailing the ship. This time, do the actions in slow motion, with ghostly music and fixed expressions.

Trapped in the ice

Use large sheets of white card. Four people (or 8 with two holding each card) act as the ice and move gradually in on the “ship” from each corner of the room to trap the others. Everyone is hemmed in and imprisoned. Make the ice noises – growling, creaking.

What’s that?

A person can act as the albatross or you can use white fabric length or a bird image on a stick. Albatross music is bird song – flute or whistle.

The albatross hides behind one of the icebergs. Everyone in the ship competes to spot it and point it out first. The albatross appears and then disappears. Finally it chooses a position between two of the icebergs and whistles imperatively. At this point, the crew line up and push their way through the “split” to the accompaniment of a thunder crack (thunder drum or cymbals)

Play a game of follow my leader – everywhere you go, the albatross must follow. Or do mirror actions – pair up with one person acting as the albatross touching hands and move in synchrony.

Crossbow

Dramatise the action of the Mariner.

Divide into two groups. One group is pleased that the albatross is dead, one group says no. Call out, *yes, no, good bad*. It is the sailors who think it is right who prevail (which is why bad fortune follows them)

Becalmed

Everyone moves around the room. At the sound of a drum beat, everyone must stand stock still for as long as they can.

Dramatise the poem by thinking how we talk if we are thirsty. Have everyone join in “water, water”.

We used the white fabric which was our “albatross” and folded it around our Mariner’s neck.

The ghost ship

Repeat *What’s that?* – this time with a black cloak or deaths head mask, white mask and gold wig for Life in Death (note : some people may be very frightened by this). Three boat images – one small, bigger , large (or project an image). Use a simple drum beat to accompany the boat coming nearer.

Life in Death and Death play dice for the mariner’s soul. Use a large fabric dice and let people take turns in throwing it – six times in all. Life in Death wins (ie the Mariner himself will not die but is condemned to live out his life in punishment).

Whistle three times. The light goes out as narrator says At one stride comes the dark.

Death moon

As the mariner or narrator points to each person, a drumbeat sounds and they drop as if dead. Use musical instruments to make the whizzing sound.

Blessings

Use the moon picture again, and red fabric or a red light projection (cellophane over torch) to create the red sea. Reprise the snake dance, but this time with beautiful music.

As the mariner looks at the snakes he sees them as beautiful natural creatures rather than sinister and slimy. Gentle music as he blesses them. The fabric falls from his neck.

Homecoming

In art sessions, create images, photos or projections of people's own homes. Repeat *What's that?* using these images. The task is to spot your own house – familiar landmarks that tell you you have come home

Tell the tale. The mariner has to tell his story to everyone he meets. Work in groups to brainstorm key moments from the tale and present these as – tableaux – significant lines from the poem – art image. Then play the stop short game from the beginning of the poem. Now the groups stop each other and act or present their key moments for others to guess.

Talking points

The Ancient Mariner is not just an atmospheric and dramatic narrative, but a profoundly moral work of literature, and we need to reflect this with our group. There are several talking points in the poem when you can stop the action, and brainstorm in small groups the meaning of what is going on.

Why do people do bad things?

Why does the Mariner shoot the albatross?

Why is he forgiven in the end?

Why does he have to tell the story over and over again?

How do we feel when we have done something wrong?

What do we think about snakes? Can we ever see them as beautiful?

CHRISTABEL

This strange poem can be enjoyed as pure Gothic fun. Coleridge never managed to finish it, but it caused an immense stir at the time. It works best when dramatised.

Assign roles to individuals or groups. Sir Leoline, Geraldine, Christabel and Bard Bracy. You might want to have fun being the toothless mastiff bitch who plays quite a significant role. In our version the Ancient Mariner also appears at the end of the story!

Resources

Musical instruments

Fabric – white and green

Images – tree, moon, fire, cross

Character work

Sir Leoline – likes ordering people around; *purple*

Christabel, his daughter – young and virtuous – prays - *white*

Geraldine, a temptress – beckons seductively, bats eyelids, hisses- *green*.

We made her look like Life in Death, with a blonde wig and red lipstick

Bard Bracy – the narrator aka Coleridge? – dreamer, reader, *red*

The dog – pants, howls, sleeps, barks- *brown*

Devise some characteristic sounds and gestures for each of these –

Walk round the room pretending to be a character – react to each other, see if you can guess who people are being.

Sir Leoline says

Think of all the activities that have to be done in the castle

Sweep the floors

Cook the dinner

Lay the table

Make the beds

Raise the drawbridge

Ring the bells

Christabel in the wood

A scary walk in the forest. Half the group act as “trees”, half as Christabel. Christabels must make their way through the forest to the oak tree at the end of the room. The trees must make rustling, creaking noises as the rest of the group move amongst them. They can also hold out and wave leaves and soft fir branches. When people are used to doing this in the light, try doing it blindfold, with the trees helping to move the person towards the oak tree. When Christabels have reached the oak, groups swap roles.

Geraldine

Christabel hears someone groan and looks for her. You can make this a hiding game – Geraldine hides behind people pretending to be trees and Christabel has to find her.

Geraldine is actually a demon figure. You can show this by – having her wear snake green under a white cloak; bringing out a plastic snake when Christabel is not looking; making hissing sounds.

Christabel should ask the audience at this point what they think – surely she should take this poor lost maiden home? Audience advises yes or no./ Christabel decides yes.

To the castle

Geraldine follows Christabel. Every so often she hisses and produces the snake. Each time she does this, the audience shout “look behind you” – but when they do, Geraldine is all innocence.

There are several warning sounds and sights for Christabel. At each point, Geraldine stops and Christabel reassures her:-

The dog howls
The church bell rings
The flames on the hearth leap up
See if you can think of others – protective aspects of the castle that seek to warn Christabel.

Geraldine and Christabel have to move very quietly so as not to wake anyone in the house. Ssh. They go to sleep in Christabel’s room.

The dream

At the other end of the castle, Bard Bracy is dreaming. He sees Christabel menaced by a snake. Act this out by having Geraldine wrap Christabel up mummy fashion in a long strip of green fabric. You can do this in pairs if you like (and if you have enough fabric!)

The spell

We found that this worked really well as a rap. Work particularly on the sibilants – all the s’s and sh’s which give the feeling of the snake:-

At the touch of this bosom/ there worketh a spell
Which is lord of your utterance,/CHRISTABEL
You know tonight /and will know tomorrow
The mark of my shame/ and the seal of my sorrow
But this is alone in (echo: *this is alone in*)
Your power to declare (echo: *power to declare*)
That in the dim forest (echo: *in the dim forest*)
You heard a low moan (echo: *heard a low moan*)
And found a bright lady/surpassingly fair
And brought her home with ye
In love and in charity
To shield her and shelter her from the dank air
(Repeat, getting quieter each time)
To shield her and shelter her from the dank air
To shield her and shelter her from the dank air
To shield her and shelter her from the dank air

(note, in this case we did simplify the wording as the original thou heardst is a bit hard to fit in, but do stick with it if you have folk who can cope)

This spell means that Christabel can’t speak any of her growing doubts about who Geraldine is. Every time she tries to say “Geraldine is a snake..” what comes out is a hiss – so it is almost as though Christabel herself is turning into a serpent.

Morning

Signalled by a chime of bells – Geraldine and Christabel wake up and go to the hall. On the way, Christabel tries to tell the audience that Geraldine is a s—but the sound freezes on her tongue.

The only words that come out are nice ones – brainstorm these

Sweet

Sincere

Super

Slim

Sensitive

Smiley

Geraldine can then say “yes, I am soooo s....”.

Geraldine says

Geraldine meets Sir Leoline who instantly falls in love with her. Show this by making him transfixed, so he does whatever she tells him: Reprise the activity from the beginning, with Christabel and Sir Leoline doing all the actions.

The interruption. Sir Leoline invites Geraldine to stay. Christabel says NO an Sir Leoline is angry with her. Freeze as a tableau.

Prime a member of the audience to ask what happens next. Look in your book and see that the poem does not finish. Brainstorm together what might happen next.

Ending

In our version, we called for the Ancient Mariner, because he has a way with snakes. We debated – should Geraldine/Life in Death/snake be blessed or cursed? We agreed to bless her. The Ancient Mariner blessed Geraldine, who restored Christabel by unwrapping the green fabric.

In blessing Geraldine, the Ancient Mariner was also freed from his obligation to tell the story over and over again. He is now home in the woods in Somerset where he longed to be.

We ended with a joyful dance.

Acknowledgements

This resource was prepared as part of a project developed by the Unlimited Company of Storytellers with Learning Disabilities, with a grant provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund. We would like to acknowledge the generous assistance of Peter Stiles and Tim Martin from the Brewhouse theatre.

The members of Unlimited who helped to develop and perform Christabel were:

Jem Dick
Heather Dickinson
Fiona Green
Nicola Grove
Jane Harwood
Isobel Herdon
Louise Lyle
Brian Marshall
Steve Maris
Robin Meader
Joel Reboul

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