

Growing Wings is a full day storytelling program with Stuart Stotts which explores issues of becoming an adult in our culture. Using folktales, personal stories and accounts of other cultures' rites of passage, students engage on a personal level with their own hopes and fears about growing up. They also gain an appreciation of other cultural practices. Growing Wings is designed specifically for middle school and high school audiences, taking into account the unique demands such audiences place on a performer. For thousands of years, stories of coming of age have helped guide children into becoming adults. Perhaps told at first around a campfire, or in the laps of a family circle, these stories helped illuminate the challenges and rewards of growing up. Without being overtly didactic, stories served as vehicles for positive values through the victories of heroes and heroines. Some of these tales are familiar, such as Medusa or King Arthur or even Jack and the Beanstalk. There are thousands more, though, from every land, all offering insight and guidance.

Many cultures had, along with the stories, specific rituals for all children to become adults. Sometimes these rituals were simple and gentle, and sometimes they were arduous and even offensive to our modern sensibilities. But they did provide concrete pathways to adulthood. Through the use of story and ritual, cultures were able to make responsibilities and expectations of adults very specific and clear. However, in our culture, the transition from child to adult is long, ill-defined, mysterious and often never internally completed.

Growing Wings begins in the morning with a small group of students working with the artist. These students will assist the artist in the assembly program which follows. This 45 minute assembly incorporates stories, descriptions of cultural practices, percussion and the participation of the student group. The afternoon can be devoted to classroom visits. These visits can be used for discussion of the material presented about rites of passage, for further stories or for explanation of storytelling techniques. A three page discussion sheet and bibliography is sent ahead of time for teachers, so that they can prepare students for the program if they desire. A sample schedule might look something like this.

†9:00 Work with small group of not more than ten students

10:30 Assembly performance

12:30 Meet with classroom

1:30 Meet with classroom

2:15† Meet with students interested in storytelling techniques

Of course, schedules will vary according to a particular school's interests.

Growing Wings offers an excellent opportunity to begin or to continue a dialogue between adults and adolescents about growing up. Stories can make a bridge for both sides to cross. Growing up has always been fraught with danger, but perhaps never more so than in our time. This program can play a part in helping students to make this age-old journey, in our modern times.

A copy of this handout may be useful to work with these ideas before or after a presentation.

The performance *Growing Wings* by Stuart Stotts is a presentation of stories from folklore in which the hero or heroine comes of age through a significant challenge. It also includes samples of initiation rites from archaic and modern cultures around the world. It is not a lecture, but it is hoped that students will gain some understanding of the process of becoming an adult, as well as that some cultures have very specific prescribed methods for this transformation. The following discussion questions can be used as followup to the performance, or can be used as an introduction to the topic before the performance. The bibliography is a list of books I have used in developing this presentation. They may be helpful for teachers who wish to read more about the topic of rites of passage.

Please feel free to contact me with questions or ideas about the performance, or about your outcomes in discussion.

Questions for students

What does it mean to become an adult? What are the privileges and responsibilities that go with it? What are the privileges and responsibilities of being a child? It may be helpful to make a list on the black board.

How will you know when you are an adult? Who will tell you?

Are you ready to be an adult now? If not, what do you need to know or accomplish?

Can you think of someone that you knew when they were a child who you now consider an adult? Perhaps someone seven or eight years older than you. Talk about when you noticed the difference?

Why did you decide that they were adults? This work might be done in pairs, with each person taking turns answering the question for two minutes.

What are some feelings that you have about becoming an adult, and why? There will probably be a whole range of emotions and reasons.

Teachers may wish to relate a personal story about when they first knew that they were an adult. Students are looking for guidance about this from people who have been there already. It is a part of every initiation that the novices are given specific instruction, often in the form of storytelling, about what the expectations of the new position in the society are.

Are there things that the students are curious about what it is like to be an adult? This can be an opportunity to share openly the mixed bag of experiences that being grown up is.

Refer back to the stories that were told. Is there one that students could imagine themselves being a character in? Which one, and why? Students could write about being that character, or draw a picture from the story.

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Bibliography

Anthropological, Psychological and Sociological† Perspectives

Coming of Age in Samoa by Margaret Mead. A widely read ethnography which includes information on initiation patterns in Samoa among adolescents.

Primitive Secret Societies by Hutton Webster. New York, Octagon Books, 1968. A cross cultural survey of male initiation rites.

The Rites of Passage by Arnold van Gennep, translated by Monika Vizedom, University of Chicago Press, 1960. Provides a widely used framework for discussing rites of passage.

The Men from the Boys Ray Raphael. University of Nebraska Press, 1988. Perspectives on male initiations in American Society, with an excellent introduction on initiation rites world-wide.

The Circle of Life by Cohen Publishers 1991. A photographic essay book documenting rites of passage of all ages of life from many different cultures.

Do or Die Leon Bing Harper Collins, New York 1991. A excellent journalistic look at the gangs of Los Angeles, the Crips and the Bloods. Offers some perspective on the rites of passage offered by participating in gangs.

La Vida Loca: Gang Days in LA. Luis Rodriguez. About the author's days as a gang member in L.A.

Boy Into Man, A Father's Guide to Initiation by Bernard Weiner, Transformation Press, 1992, Box B197 Bonview St, San Francisco, 94110. One family's approach to creating ritual.

Iron John, a book about men Robert Bly Addison Wesley, 1990. A discussion of a symbolic initiation process in a fairy tale, with extensive focus on the effects of lack of initiation in American men.

The Prince and the King, Michael Gurian G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1992. A mythopoetic approach to inner work for grown ups to create their own initiation process.

Rites and Symbols of Initiation, Mircea Eliade. Harper and Row 1975. A collection of lectures about initiation around the world.

Betwixt and Between edited by Mahdi, Foster and Little. Open Court Press, 1987. A collection of essays about initiation patterns around the world.

Single Story Books

Stone Fox by John Reynolds Gardiner, Thomas Y. Crowell, N.Y. 1980. A boy enters a race to save his grandfather's farm, taking on the adult role of caring for another.

The Education of Little Tree by Forest Carter. The growing up of a Native American boy.

Little Water and the Gift of the Animals by C. J. Taylor, Tundra books, 1992. A Native American boy who can talk with animals learns from them a secret of how to cure his people.

Night Flying Woman by Ignacia Broker. Minnesota Historical Press. An account of the coming of age of a native American girl in the late 1900's.

Star Boy by Paul Goble Bradbury Press 1983.† A Native American story.

Story Collections

Clever Gretchen and Other forgotten Folktales by Alison Lurie, Thomas Crowell, 1980.

The Woman in the Moon by James Riordan, Dial Books for Young Readers. A collection of folk tales depicting strong female characters

Tatterhood and Other Tales a collection of folk tales depicting strong female characters. edited by Ethel Johnston Phelps, The Feminist Press, 1978

The Storytelling Stone Myths and Tales of Native Americans Edited by Susan Feldman, Dell Publishing 1965

The Juniper Tree and Other Tales from Grimm volumes 1 and 2 selected by Lore Segal and Maurice Sendak Farrar Straus and Giroux New York 1973. A collection of stories from the Grimm brothers.

World Folktales by Atelia Clarkson and Gilbert B. Cross, Scribner's and Sons, New York 1980. Folktales with corresponding discussions of folk motifs and references to other similar stories from different cultures.

Grimm's Fairy Tales several editions available.

The Maid of the North by Ethel Johnston Phelps, Holt Rinehart and Winston. A collection of folk tales with strong female characters.

Womenfolk in Fairy Tales by Rosemary Minard, Houghton Mifflin Co. 1975. A collection of folk tales depicting strong female characters.

Storytelling and Role of Mythology

Stories in the Classroom by Bob Barton and David Booth 1990 Heineman Press.

Just Enough to Make a Story by Nancy Schimmel

The Power of Myth Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers

Children Tell Stories by Hamilton and Weiss, Yellow Moon Press, 1992. An excellent guide to teaching students to tell stories.