

**theatre  
for young  
america**

# STUDY GUIDE

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An educational supplement to the live production of  
**JACK AND THE BEANSTALK**



This program is presented in part by the Missouri Arts Council, a state agency, and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, which believes that a great nation deserves great art.



## SETTING AND STYLE OF JACK AND THE BEANSTALK

Theatre for Young America has chosen to set its play version of JACK AND THE BEANSTALK in a playground that is also a construction site in the downtown of a big city. This may seem unusual to the audience at first, but once the play has started we hope the concept will be a lot of fun. One of the reasons our Artistic Director chose to set the play in this location is to demonstrate how theatre is something that can be enjoyed in any setting—you don't have to have a fancy stage or be in a real theatre. The actors and the audience use their imaginations to bring the story to life. Also the Artistic Director wants you to watch for the innovative ways the actors make use of the objects around them to further the plot of the story. For example, one actor uses plasterer's stilts to create the illusion of being a big giant. Another actor puts a mop on his head to become the giant's wife. Making use of what is available in one's own environment to create a character or a whole play can be a fun game or exercise on any day, anywhere. Theatre teachers often call this "found object transformation." See the exercise later in this guide to warm you up for the style of the play or to play after seeing the play.

## SYNOPSIS OF THE PLOT

A group of kids are playing on the playground of a park in a big city. After deciding to act out JACK AND THE BEANSTALK, they begin to look around the area to see what they can use as props, scenery, or costumes to help with their enactment. The story follows fairly closely to the well-known fairytale plot. There are a couple of additions to add interest to the story. First, there is a neighboring princess who has lost all her fortune so now she is penniless so Jack and his mother care for her. It seems Jack's poor mother has run out of food so she tells Jack to go to the farmer's market to sell their cow. The cow no longer gives milk so if they sell her, they can buy some food because they are hungry. In fact this whole neighborhood is poor and in need of food—including some knight buddies of Jack's. On his way to market with the cow Jack meets a strange merchant who offers to trade the cow for some "Magical Beans." Jack is intrigued by this offer because he is young and excited to see what might grow from "Magical Beans" so he agrees to the trade and hurries home to tell his mother. She is angry that he got only beans and not money and throws them on the ground. They go to bed that night without eating any dinner, but Jack, who is an optimistic dreamer, sneaks out to give those beans a proper planting in the ground.



Jack wakes up early the next morning to find that the beans have already sprouted and have grown into a beanstalk that grows into the clouds in the sky. For this beanstalk the actors actually use a garden hose! Being adventurous, Jack climbs that beanstalk into those clouds. On the way he meets a fairy who wants to tell him to look for a giant up ahead who stole money, a hen that lays golden eggs, another hen that cries tears of diamonds, and a golden harp all from the neighborhood where Jack's family now lives. With this news, Jack searches for the castle with the giant. He finds it along with the giant's wife and a cook living there! The giant's cook makes Jack some breakfast, but then the giant wakes up and comes in to get his breakfast. He says, "*Fee, Fi, Fo, Fum. I smell the blood of an Englishman. Be he alive or be he dead, I'll grind his bones to make my bread.*" Evidently, the giant likes to eat people! The giant's wife and cook help hide Jack in the oven. After

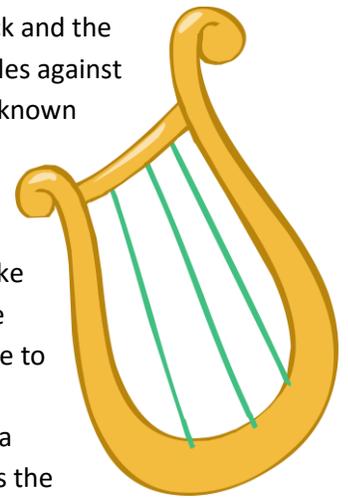
breakfast, the giant asks his wife and cook to bring him his bag of money. They do and he counts it, but then leaves it on the table. Jack grabs the money and runs back down the beanstalk with the giant yelling at him. Jack returns to his mother amid much cheering of their friends. These friends have been harvesting beans from the giant beanstalk so all are happy about the food and the money.

Jack is still an adventurer it seems. The next day Jack returns to the giant's house via the beanstalk in hopes of getting more of the stuff that belongs to his neighbors. Again, he hides in the oven while this time the giant is having one of the hens lay golden eggs in the kitchen. The giant again smells Jack. (*Fee, Fi, Fo, Fum, etc.*) Again, with the help of the castle friends, Jack takes both the hens with the golden eggs and the diamond tears before the giant can catch him.

Jack just can't resist traveling up that beanstalk one more time. On his third visit up the following day, Jack finds the harp made of gold. The giant smells Jack again. (*Fee, Fie, Foe, Fum, etc.*) Just as Jack is heading back home with the golden harp, the amazing harp sings and plays itself, which alerts the giant that the harp is being taken away. The giant chases Jack with the harp down the beanstalk. Jack chops down the beanstalk and the giant tumbles to the ground. All the neighbors celebrate Jack and the wealth, which he bravely brought back for his family and friends. The merchant returns the cow to Jack and his mother. The whole neighborhood celebrates their good fortune.

## HISTORY OF THE ORIGINAL FAIRYTALE

The story of Jack and the Beanstalk has been around for since ancient times. Why is Jack and the Beanstalk a timeless favorite? Perhaps it is because the story symbolizes our own struggles against what seem to be incredible odds. This tale traces its roots back to England. The oldest known printed version dates back to 1807 by Benjamin Tabart. Probably the most famous version is the one Joseph Jacobs put in his collection *ENGLISH FOLK AND FAIRY TALES*, published in 1890. The addition of the harp, money, and hen having been owned previously by Jack's family is one of the early adaptations of the story so as to not to make Jack a thief. Some people think this is a good addition since it explains Jack's theft of the giant's things while others (including the publisher of the tales, Joseph Jacobs) do not like to see this added. Our Artistic Director wanted the version where the valuable things had originally been stolen from Jack's family and friends by the giant. One early version has a fairy tell Jack about this when he gets to the top of the beanstalk on his first visit. That is the version our Artistic Director chose to have in our play for you. Valerie Mackey, TYA Artistic Director, wrote the adaptation herself and Danny Cox wrote the original music for the TYA play. The basic tale is still told all over the world even today. You can read the story and its variations in fairytale book collections and see and hear cartoons and readings and movies of variations of the story on YOU TUBE on the Internet.



## SCIENCE CONNECTION

Jack's beanstalk grew overnight from the beans! That would be magical for plants to germinate that quickly and to grow so tall. Try an experiment yourself. Plant several kinds of seeds following the directions on the seed envelope or you can use beans in small paper cups with soil and put the cups in some sunlight and water them. How many days did each type of seed or bean take before it began to germinate and grow?



## CREATIVE DRAMATICS EXERCISE of TRANSFORMATION OF OBJECTS

As you will see in the play the actors use what they can find in the park for costumes, props, and set for the play. There are fun exercises to work on your imagination to help the actors learn how to do this. Here is one from Viola Spolin's book IMPROVISATION FOR THE THEATRE. You could call it the PASS THE BELT GAME. Students and leader sit in a circle on the floor or in chairs. The leader presents a belt and talks about how through an actor's imagination this object can become many other things. The leader then handles it in such a way that it changes shape into something else. The group guesses what the leader intended the belt to become. If they cannot guess, the person who has created the object tells what he created. The belt is passed on to the next person. They need to do a short act with the object to help make it clear. Some transformations the students might do are snakes, headbands, worms, eyeglasses, watches, handcuff, and many more creative things. Keep going in the circle until ideas have been exhausted. Students may pass one time if nothing comes to their mind. If they will hold it and look at it and work with it, usually something will spring to their imagination. Other objects may be used for variation, such as a scarf or pencil or some other object that happens to be in the class that day,

### ART PROJECT

Create picture of yourself climbing a beanstalk. Draw what you would hope to find up in those clouds that you could take back to your home like Jack did.



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND WRITING PROMPTS

- Have you read a version of the Jack and the Beanstalk story? How was it different from the play? (contrast) How was it the same? (compare)
- What can we learn from watching this play? Describe other ideas you had while watching the play?
- Did Jack make a good trade for the cow? What would have been different if he traded the cow for money instead of beans?
- Jack made three trips up that scary beanstalk. Would you have gone back up that beanstalk after your first trip? Why or why not?
- What moment of this play was most exciting for you? Explain why?
- If you could be one of the animals or objects like the harp in the play, which would you pick and why?
- If you could be one of the characters in the play, which would you pick and why?
- What "giant" things do you encounter in your life? How can you, like Jack, face your "giant" and overcome it?
- Discuss what you liked about the play? What would you have liked to have seen done differently in the play?