

# The Nightingale



A Dance-Theater Performance  
Adapted from the Story by Hans Christian Andersen

Welcome to Cuesheet, a performance guide published by the Education Department of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, DC. This Cuesheet is designed to help teachers prepare students to see the performance of *The Nightingale*.

This Cuesheet introduces various aspects of theater and dance as well as pertinent vocabulary.

**FYI** For Your Information comments provide background for teachers.

## What's in Cuesheet?

What is the Story About?, page 2

Reproducible Page:  
Story Map, page 3

How is the Story Told?,  
pages 4–6

Reproducible Page:  
A Good Audience,  
page 7

Observation and  
Analysis; Resources,  
page 8

# What is the Story About?

## Story Map and Synopsis

Reproduce and distribute to students the Story Map on page 3. Read the following synopsis to students as they follow along with the map.

- 1 The Emperor of China receives a gift of three poems from the Emperor of Japan. The third poem explains that the most ‘exquisite’ treasure in China is the Nightingale.
- 2 This message angers the Emperor because he doesn’t know what a Nightingale is. He sends two Courtiers to find this ‘exquisite treasure.’ A Servant helps them find the Nightingale and bring it to the palace.
- 3 The Emperor loves the Nightingale’s song. The little bird is forced to give up her freedom and live in the palace.
- 4 The Emperor receives another gift. It is a Mechanical Nightingale decorated with jewels. He loves the mechanical bird’s song more than the Nightingale’s song. The Nightingale sadly returns to the forest.
- 5 After the mechanical bird breaks, the Emperor realizes how much he misses the Nightingale. He becomes sad and sick. Death comes to take the Emperor away. But the Nightingale returns and helps the Emperor chase Death away.
- 6 The Emperor realizes how much he loves the Nightingale – but now instead of keeping her confined in the palace, he gives the Nightingale her freedom. The Emperor too, leaves the palace and, for the first time, experiences the beautiful world.”

### Vocabulary:

exquisite – beautiful

Courtiers – those who serve the Emperor; attendants in the royal court

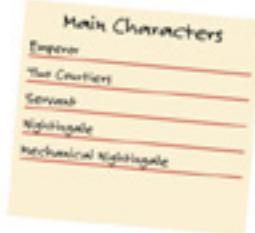
Mechanical Nightingale – a wind-up toy bird  
confined – imprisoned



### Language Arts

#### Who are the Main Characters?

Ask students to recall the story’s main characters (*the Emperor, two Courtiers, a Servant, the Nightingale, the Mechanical Nightingale*). List the characters on chart paper, keeping the list for use with other *Cuesheet* learning activities.



### Geography

#### Where are China and Japan?

To prepare students for understanding the references to the Emperors of China and Japan, point out the two countries on a map or globe. Explain that the two countries are in the continent of Asia and that today they are no longer ruled by Emperors. On the teacher’s list of Main Characters, add “Setting: China.”



### FYI for Teachers

#### The Nightingale

The nightingale is a small bird (about six inches/ 15 centimeters) of the thrush family that lives in western and central Europe. The nightingale is plain in appearance – it has a brown upper body with a gray mottled breast. This shy bird is most at home deep in woods and hedges, especially along streams. The nightingale is known for its strong, varied, and musical voice. Its song serves a dual purpose: it attracts females for mating and communicates to other birds that its territory is being defended.

# The Nightingale Story Map

Follow this story map to learn about *The Nightingale*.



# How is the Story Told?

## Communication

### Narration and Dance

Explain to students that in *The Nightingale*, the Servant narrates the story with words and song. No other characters speak. Instead they use dance to help tell the story. On the teacher's list of Main Characters, write 'narrator' next to the Servant; next to each of the other characters write 'dancer.'

#### Vocabulary:

narrates – tells

Main Characters	
Emperor	Dancer
The Courtiers	Dancers
Servant	Narrator
Nightingale	Dancer
Mechanical Nightingale	Dancer
Setting: China	

### Telling the Story with Movements

Tell students that you will narrate a summary of *The Nightingale* and they will add movements. Explain to students that they will imitate your movements.

Once upon a time, there was a powerful Chinese Emperor. **[show strong muscles]** He was told he had a treasure in his kingdom – a Nightingale! **[slowly and smoothly flap arms like wings]** The Emperor's Courtiers looked for **[turn head right and left]** the Nightingale **[smoothly flap arms]** and brought it back to the palace. The Emperor listens **[hand to ear]** to the Nightingale's song **[smoothly flap arms]** and loves it. **[hands over heart]** He keeps the Nightingale **[smoothly flap arms]** in the palace. One day the Emperor receives a wind-up mechanical bird. **[short, jerky arm motions]** The Emperor enjoys the song of the wind-up mechanical bird **[short, jerky arm motions]** so much that he ignores the Nightingale. The Nightingale sadly flies back to the forest. **[frown, smoothly flap arms]** One day, the wind-up mechanical toy bird breaks. **[short, jerky arm motions and freeze]** The Emperor realizes he misses **[hand on heart]** the Nightingale. **[smoothly flap arms]** The Emperor gets sick. **[stick out tongue]** The Nightingale **[smoothly flap arms]** returns to help the Emperor fight off Death. **[cut an X in the air]** The Emperor thanks the Nightingale by letting her fly away free. **[smoothly flap arms]**



Costume design for the Nightingale by Jane Schloss Phelan

### Non-Verbal Communication

## A Wind-up Mechanical Bird

Remind students that in *The Nightingale* one dancer pretends to be a wind-up Mechanical Nightingale.

- ⑥ Ask students to imagine the jerky, machine-like motions of a wind-up mechanical bird. Invite students to demonstrate how it might move its head, arms/wings, and legs. Discuss how wind-up toys eventually slow down.
- ⑥ Tell students that when you “wind them up,” they will move like a mechanical bird. Explain also, that when you clap your hands once, they will lose energy and slow down. When you clap twice, they will stop and freeze in position.
- ⑥ “Wind up” some students and ask others to observe. When the students freeze ask the observers to describe the movement qualities they observed. After all groups perform, ask how it felt to move like a machine, which movements were easy to do, and which were difficult.
- ⑥ Remind students to watch the movements of the dancer at the performance who pretends to be the mechanical bird. After the performance, invite students to discuss their observations.

## An Asian Theater Convention

*The Nightingale* uses an Asian theater convention – actors who are dressed in black and are assumed to be invisible to the audience.

Explain to students that in *The Nightingale* some dancers (not the main characters) are dressed in black. These dancers help create the setting. For example, they hold branches to suggest a forest, and twirl sticks with long blue ribbons to suggest a river. They are dressed in black so the audience won't notice them too much.



The Nightingale (left) is puzzled by the awkward Mechanical Nightingale. In contrast, the Emperor (seated) and his two Courtiers consider the new gift quite beautiful. The narrator (right) observes and comments on all the events.

## Costumes Give Clues

Explain to students that costumes give clues about when and where a story takes place. In *The Nightingale* the story takes place hundreds of years ago in a palace in China. Before the performance, remind students to watch for ways the costumes remind them of China.

Main Characters	
Emperor	Amir
Two Courtiers – Funny	Amir
Servant	Narrator
Nightingale	Amir
Mechanical Nightingale	Amir
Setting: China	

The Emperor's Courtiers do many funny things. (On the teacher's list of Main Characters, add “funny” next to the Courtiers.) Explain to students that their costumes are designed to add to the humor. After the performance, invite students to draw the Courtiers' costumes.

## Props Help Tell the Story

Explain to students that props are objects used by the dancers to help tell the story. Invite students to imagine the following props and how they might be used in *The Nightingale*. Assign small groups the task of looking for one of these props during the performance. After the performance, discuss how the props were used and by whom.

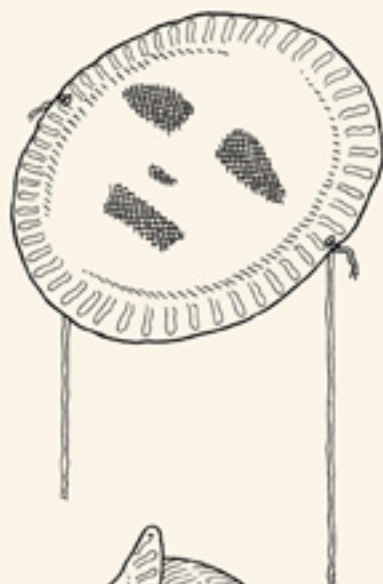
- ⑥ a scroll (*The Emperor reads the poems from a scroll held by the Courtiers.*)
- ⑥ 4 small hand-held triangular flags (*waved by the Courtiers*)
- ⑥ a jeweled necklace (*gift given by Emperor to the Nightingale, then to the Mechanical Nightingale*)
- ⑥ the Nightingale's feather (*given to Emperor by the Nightingale*)
- ⑥ a long baton holding a red silk flag (*Emperor's symbol of power*)

## An Unusual Mask

Remind students that in *The Nightingale*, Death tries to take the Emperor away. But the Nightingale helps the Emperor defeat Death. Explain that three dancers, dressed in black, together pretend to be Death. One dancer wears a white mask. Instead of wearing it over her face, she wears it flat on the top of her head. It can be seen only when she bends her head down.

Using a mask you have created (see below), show students how the mask is worn. Help students each make a mask for the death character. Invite students to practice moving their heads to make their masks “appear” and “disappear.” After the performance, invite students to talk about their reactions to the death character.

Materials: white paper plate (one per student) with a hole punched on two sides; black crayons or markers (one per student); yarn to tie the plate on the head.



### Make a Mask

**1** On the underside of the hole-punched paper plate, draw dark shapes for eyes and mouth. Thread a piece of yarn through each hole and secure with a knot.



**3** Demonstrate how to bend the head down to make the mask visible to the audience.



**2** Place mask on top of head (like a hat) and tie under chin.

## Listen for These Lines

Explain to students that you will read to them some important lines the narrator says in the performance. After reading aloud the quotations below, familiarize students with the vocabulary and discuss the meaning of the quotations:

*“The Emperor never walks in his garden. Never looks out of his window. Never leaves his Palace. ‘Why should I,’ he thinks. ‘I have all an Emperor could desire.’”*

*“The real Nightingale was unpredictable. Her song was too free. You could never calculate what would come next.”*

*“With the mechanical bird, all is definite. There are no surprises.”*

Remind students to listen for each of these lines during the performance. Ask students to wink at the person seated next to them when they hear each of the lines.

### Learning from *The Nightingale*

#### Living Treasures

The Emperor receives a poem telling him the Nightingale is “most exquisite treasure” in his kingdom. Why would a Nightingale be called a treasure? Ask students to write a poem describing a living “treasure.”

#### Feeling Safe

The Emperor only feels safe inside his palace. The Nightingale helps the Emperor become willing to explore the outside world. When were you afraid to go somewhere unfamiliar? Did anyone help you overcome your fear? If so, how?

#### A Good Audience

This activity prepares students for showing good manners at the theater.

- Copy and distribute Activity Page 7 and read aloud with students.
- After the performance, invite students to discuss the audience’s and their own behavior.

## Key



Actors



Audience



Clap



Laugh



Listen












Look








Television

## A Good Audience

When you  at a performance, it is different from watching a  show. At a performance, you are in the same room as the .

The  are affected by what you, the , do.  can do their best when the people in the   and  quietly.

 to the narrator tell the story.  at the actors.  at the costumes and the props.

At funny moments, it is okay to . If you enjoy the performance,  when it ends.

# Observation and Analysis

## Watching the Action

During the performance, there are many things for which students should be alert. Assign small groups of students one of the following items. After the performance, invite groups to describe their observations and share their responses to the questions.

## Look for...

- ⓐ the times the Emperor approaches the garden but never goes into it. Why is the Emperor afraid to leave the palace?
- ⓑ the Emperor's reaction to the Nightingale's song, the first time he hears it. Why does he react this way?
- ⓒ how the Emperor tries to imitate the Nightingale's graceful movements and the Mechanical Nightingale's short, machine-like movements. Which movements are easier for the Emperor?
- ⓓ how the Emperor is finally able to dance with the Nightingale. What does this dance say about them?
- ⓔ the end, when the Emperor follows the Nightingale outside the palace. What happens to the lighting on the stage? Why?

## FYI for Teachers

**Hans Christian Andersen**  
Andersen (1805–1875) was a Danish writer who produced over 100 fairy tales that are appreciated throughout the world. Andersen's use of the idioms and constructions of spoken language made his writing style unique. Some of his fairy tales include "The Ugly Duckling," "The Princess and the Pea," "The Emperor's New Clothes," and "Thumbelina."

## After the Performance

### An Adaptation

Explain to students that *The Nightingale* is based on a story by Hans Christian Andersen. "Based on" means that some of the story's characters, settings, and events remain the same and some are different. Read a version of *The Nightingale* to students. Invite students to compare and contrast it with *The Nightingale* performance. (see Resources)

## After the Performance

### Remembering The Nightingale

Ask students:

- ⓐ Did you enjoy seeing *The Nightingale*? Why?
- ⓑ How well did the dancing tell the story? Help you understand the characters' feelings?
- ⓒ Describe the music. In what ways did the music help tell the story?
- ⓓ How did the costumes and scenery show that the story takes place in China?



### Hans Christian Andersen Medals

The International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) awards the Hans Christian Andersen Medal every two years to a living author and illustrator whose complete works have made a lasting contribution to children's literature. For more information, go to [www.ibby.org/Seiten/04\\_andersen.htm](http://www.ibby.org/Seiten/04_andersen.htm)

## Resources

You and your students may want to read:

Andersen, Hans Christian. *Andersen Fairy Tales*, illustrated by Lisbeth Zwerger, translated by Anthea Bell. New York: North South Books, 2001.

Andersen, Hans Christian. *The Nightingale*. Illustrated by Lisbeth Zwerger, translated by Anthea Bell. New York: North South Books, 1999.

You may want to go online:

For a storytelling version of Andersen's original fairy tale, *The Nightingale*  
[www.pacificnet.net/~johnr/cgi/aesop1.cgi?hca&a61](http://www.pacificnet.net/~johnr/cgi/aesop1.cgi?hca&a61)

You and your students may want to listen to:

*Andersen's Fairy Tales* by Hans Christian Andersen, Naxos Audio Books; Audio Cassette and book ISBN: 9626345128

## The Kennedy Center

James A. Johnson  
Chairman

Michael M. Kaiser  
President

Derek E. Gordon  
Vice President, Education

### The Nightingale

Conceived and Choreographed by Dana Tai Soon Burgess • Written and Directed by Mary Hall Surface • Music by David Maddox

Cuesheet is funded in part through the support of the U.S. Department of Education, the Kennedy Center Corporate Fund, The President's Advisory Committee on the Arts, and the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation.

Special thanks to Rosalind Flynn and Suzanne Pratt for their work on the 1997 Cuesheet, *The Nightingale*.

### Cuesheet

Writer: Lynne B. Silverstein • Design: Paul Dupree Communications, Los Angeles

© 2001, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts