

VISIBLE FICTIONS

JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS



State TheatreNJ.org
Keynotes

welcome aboard!



The State Theatre in New Brunswick, New Jersey welcomes you to the school-day performance of *Jason and the Argonauts*. Join Jason and his crew as they sail to the other side of the world to find the Golden Fleece, battling monsters, a sleeping dragon, clashing rocks, and other obstacles on their journey. Scotland's Visible Fictions brings the entire adventure to life in a most ingenious and entertaining way.

These *Keynotes* will give you useful information about the production, background on the story, classroom activities, and resources for further exploration. We encourage you to use this guide before and after the show to enrich your enjoyment and understanding of the performance.

Teachers are encouraged to visit the following websites for additional classroom resources:

[Sydney Opera House](#)

[New Victory Theater](#)

[Visible Fictions](#)

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The State Theatre, a premier nonprofit venue for the performing arts and entertainment.

about the show

“In this production, Jason makes both a physical journey to another land and a personal journey of self belief and self esteem. Together, Jason and his team of Argonauts negotiate and overcome different problems.”

—Visible Fictions



This production of *Jason and the Argonauts* comes from Visible Fictions, a company from Glasgow, Scotland. They tell this epic tale of ancient Greece using just two performers, a wooden cart, some simple props, and music and sound effects. The actors are dressed in ordinary clothing, and behave like a couple of teenagers acting out their favorite adventure story. Throughout the performance, you’ll see them switch back and forth between acting the story, joking around with each other, and talking to the audience. By using plain, everyday language and a fun, playful attitude, they remind us that tales of heroes, villains, monsters, and journeys of self-discovery belong to every generation. The names and costumes may be different, but stories such as *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* are true descendents of Jason and his band of superheroes.

Creative Team for *Jason and the Argonauts*

Director:	Douglas Irvine
Writer:	Robert Forrest
Designer:	Robin Peoples
Music:	Daniel Padden
Performers:	Robbie Jack, Tim Settle

During the performance, try to notice all the elements of the production:

- Directing - Where the actors stand and move, how they use the props. How well the audience can understand what’s going on.
- Writing
- Scenery, furniture, and props
- Costumes
- Lighting - Color, brightness or darkness, special lighting effects.
- Music and sound effects
- Acting



The story



King Aeson of Iolcus is murdered by his power-hungry half-brother, Pelias. To secure his hold on the throne, Pelias threatens to find and kill Aeson's son, Jason. (When he was a child, Jason was sent away to be educated by Chiron, a centaur.)

Jason grows into adulthood. One night, his father visits him in a dream and reveals that he was murdered by Pelias. Jason sets off for Iolcus to avenge his father and take his rightful place as king. On his journey, he helps an old woman across a river. She turns out to be the goddess Hera in disguise; for his kind deed, Jason receives her protection.

Jason arrives in Iolcus and confronts his uncle. To get rid of him, Pelias sends him on a dangerous and seemingly impossible sea voyage to the other side of the world—to the kingdom of Colchis—to bring back the Golden Fleece. Pelias promises to give up the throne to Jason if he succeeds in his mission. Jason assembles his crew, each with a special talent or skill. Their ship is called the Argo; the sailors are called Argonauts.

Meanwhile, in Colchis, Princess Medea tells her father, King Aeëtes, that she has had a vision of Jason coming to Colchis. Aeëtes is suspicious of Jason's intentions.

On the voyage, the Argonauts are attacked by a terrible sea monster and a flock of birds with arrow-like feathers. The ship stops at Salmydessus, where Jason rescues King Phineas from the Harpies—creatures with the body of a bird and the head of a woman. Phineas tells Jason that to get to Colchis, he must sail through two gigantic rocks that crush anything that tries to pass between them. With the aid of a little dove, the Argo manages to make it through safely.

At Colchis, Jason is arrested by King Aeëtes. Medea, who has fallen in love with Jason, promises to help him if he will marry her. Together, they slay the dragon that guards the fleece and set sail on the Argo.

Medea and Jason arrive in Iolcus with the Golden Fleece. Pelias is shocked at Jason's success, but refuses to give up the throne as he had promised. He draws his sword and challenges Jason to fight. Reluctantly, Jason faces off against his uncle, killing him. With Medea as his queen, he takes his rightful place as king.

Fleece is the woolen coat that covers a sheep. In many ancient folk traditions, fleeces were associated with magic, power, and prosperity. This might explain why Jason would be sent to get the golden fleece and why Aeëtes did not want to give it up.



This synopsis details only the events that are in the play. Jason and his Argonauts had many more adventures during their journey. Are there any characters and events you think should have been included in the performance? Does the play make sense even without them?

After you've seen the play, choose a part of Jason's story that was left out. Write a script for the scene and create a staging in the same style as the play. Here are some ideas:

- Hylas and the water nymphs of Mysia
- The dragon's-teeth warriors
- The Sirens
- Talos, the bronze man

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Did Jason and Medea live happily ever after? That's a whole other story...

who's who

THE ARGONAUTS:

Jason - The hero of the story, son of King Aeson of Iolcus. Aeson was murdered by his half-brother, Pelias, who later sends Jason on a dangerous voyage to the other side of the world to find the Golden Fleece.

Euphemus - Helmsman of the Argo and a terrific swimmer.

Hercules - The strongest man in the world. He thinks he should be the captain of the Argo.

Hylas - Handsome, wise, and a skilled warrior.

Lynceus - A man with amazing vision who can see through trees, walls, and even under the ground.

Mopsus - An expert on animals and plants. He understands the language of birds.

Polydeuces - A skilled boxer.

Orpheus - A legendary musician and poet.

OTHER CHARACTERS:

Aeëtes - King of the Colchis and Medea's father.

Aeson - Jason's dead father, who appears to him in a dream.

Ceto - A terrifying sea monster.

Chiron - A centaur (half-man, half-horse) who raised Jason after Jason's father was murdered.

Dragon - A mythical creature who guards the Golden Fleece. He never sleeps.

Harpies - Half-woman, half-bird; screeching creatures sent by the gods to torment Phineas.

Hera - Queen of the gods. She appears to Jason as the old woman he carries across the river of blood.

Medea - A princess with magical powers, daughter of Aeëtes, and one of the guardians of the Fleece. She falls in love and runs away with Jason.

Pelias - Jason's uncle, who murdered Jason's father and had himself crowned king.

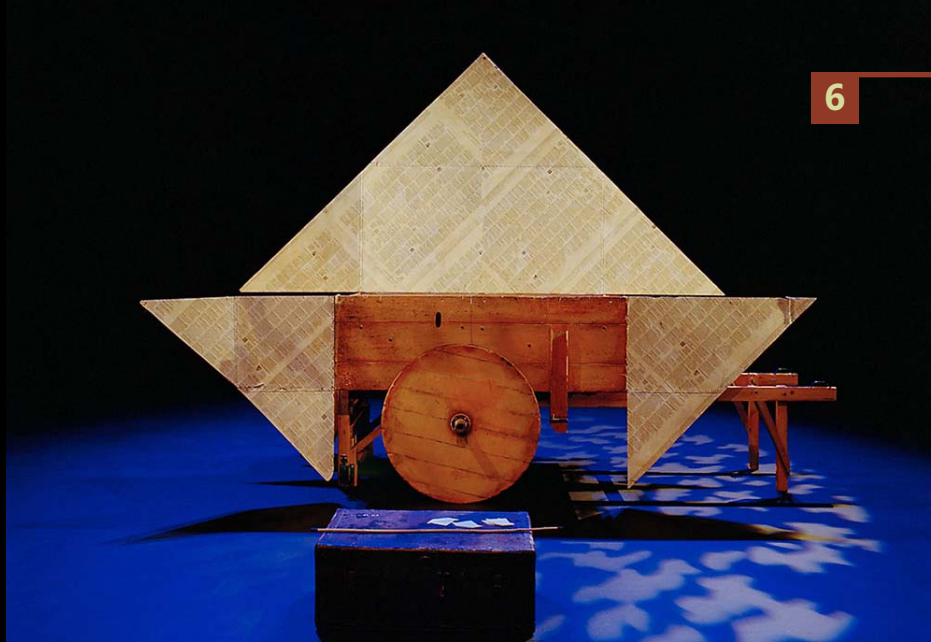
Phineas - A king who was blinded by the gods as punishment for his ability to see into the future. His other punishment is to be constantly attacked by the Harpies, who don't allow him to eat.

In Greek, the name Jason means "healer." But in the story, Jason sometimes finds himself in a situation where he ends up killing rather than healing. Can you name some of these instances? How does Jason feel about killing? What reasons does he give to justify his actions? Can you find any examples in the story where Jason acts as a healer?

With your class, discuss whether it is ever acceptable to take a life (human or animal). Are there any situations where it might be better to kill than not to kill?



How does this production change the way you see the story of *Jason and the Argonauts*?



- How can you tell the entire story of *Jason and the Argonauts* in a little over an hour?
- How do you tell an epic tale, filled with battles, monsters, and dozens of characters, with just two actors and little else? How will the audience be able to tell all the characters and locations apart?
- Most importantly—how do you make an ancient story come to life for modern audiences?

These were the main challenges for the creative team for *Jason and the Argonauts*. Working together, the playwright, director, actors, and designers (sets, costumes, lighting, and sound) came up with some truly creative solutions.

Finding the Heart of the Story

Given the task of telling the story in only an hour, the playwright had to decide which parts were absolutely necessary, and which ones could be left out or shortened. For example, he could include SOME of the obstacles the Argonauts encountered on their voyage, but he didn't need to show ALL of them for the audience to understand that Jason was a strong, determined leader.

Setting the Scene

If you don't have much scenery and furniture to work with, how do you create a ship? A throne? A dragon's cave?

The star of the show (after Tim and Robbie, of course) is an ingenious wooden cart, which can be moved around the stage, turned on its side, and separated into several pieces. There are flaps, extensions, and other elements that transform it into just about anything you can imagine.

As you watch the show, look for other special effects and stage tricks that help the audience visualize the story.

Playing Multiple Roles

In this production, just two performers play as many as 15 different characters. Sometimes both of the actors play the same character. In some places, they even trade off a character right in the middle of a scene!

During the show, look for the actors using their bodies, voices, and a few props and costume pieces to morph from one character to another.

Toy Story

The production team found another creative solution for bringing more characters into the story: using modern action figures to represent some of the Argonauts.

Why would they choose to use the action figures? Do you think it was a smart solution? Why?



character building

After 20 years of living isolated in the mountains, Jason leaves the protection of his teacher Chiron. Out in the wide world, he quickly finds himself forced to be a leader: taking his Argonauts to the end of the world, battling monsters, and fighting for peace and freedom. On his journey, he learns that life presents many challenges, many choices, and many questions.

Below are three conversations that Jason has: one with Hercules, one with Hylas (two of the Argonauts), and one with Medea (the princess he marries). Based on the conversations, what conclusions can you draw about what sort of person Jason is likely to become?

Choose one set of questions on the right and write an essay comparing and contrasting your opinion with the opinions expressed in the scene.

HERCULES (to Jason):

You seem to think you were born to this quest—your destiny. Well, I was born to be the strongest in the world. But it took years of study and training to get there. Destiny doesn't come easy.

JASON (to Hylas):

Hercules seems to think I could miss my destiny. Lose it, even. How can you lose your destiny? It's what the gods have planned for you.

HYLAS:

Is it like a map that the gods draw and simply hand to us? A map that's easy to follow? Where's the freedom in that? And I think the gods and you love freedom. Maybe destiny's more like an idea they plant in us... something to aspire to...something that's there to win.

JASON:

That might be lost.

MEDEA:

You're afraid.

JASON:

What? No.

MEDEA:

Of course you're afraid. You have to be afraid to be a hero.

JASON:

I don't understand.

MEDEA:

You've got to be afraid to be a brave. If you're not, you're just stupid. And you have to be brave to be a hero. So to be a hero, you have to be afraid.

What does the word "destiny" mean to you?

Do you believe you have the power to shape your own future?

What are some things you can do to improve your chances of having a great destiny?

Do you agree with Medea that you have to be afraid to be a hero?

Why does she say that you're stupid if you're not afraid to face danger? Do you think she's right?

In your opinion, what are the qualities that make someone a hero?

Who are your personal heroes? What do you admire about them?



The production Team



Putting a performance onstage takes many more people than just the performers. Each member of the production team contributes special talents and training. Some of the people behind the scenes:

DIRECTOR is the leader of the creative team. He or she tells the actors where to move onstage. The director also works with the designers to make sure the sets, costumes, lighting, and music all fit together.

CHOREOGRAPHER creates the dances.

COSTUME DESIGNER researches, designs, and supervises the construction of the costumes.

SET DESIGNER creates the designs for the scenery, including the backdrops, props, and furniture.

LIGHTING DESIGNER uses the color, intensity (brightness), and placement of the lights to create a mood for each scene.

STAGE MANAGER - supervises the technical crew during the performance, giving cues for music and lighting and when to raise and lower the curtain. The stage manager also tells the performers when to make their entrances onstage.

AND... YOU!

As a member of the audience, you are an important member of the team. Make sure you know your part:

- When you arrive at the theater, follow an usher to your seat.
- Before the show begins, turn off and put away all electronic devices, including cell phones, portable games and music, cameras, and recording equipment. Keep them turned off for the entire performance.
- Once the lights go down, focus all your attention on the stage. Watch and listen carefully to the performance.
- Attending a live performance in a theater is not the same as watching television at home. At the theater, talking, eating, and moving around disturbs the performers and other members of the audience. And please—no texting or checking messages during the show!
- When the performance is over, stay in your seat until your group gets the signal to leave the theater.





RESOURCES

BOOKS:

Greek Mythology Activities, by Marcia Worth-Baker. Teaching Resources, 2005. A teacher-written resource to build students' knowledge about ancient Greece and mythology.

Jason: Quest for the Golden Fleece, by Tim Seely, illustrated by Barbara Jo Schulz. Graphic Universe, 2007. For grades 4-8. The story, told in the form of a graphic novel, with glossary and other reference material.

Teaching and Dramatizing Greek Myths, by Josephine Davidson, illustrated by Fiona Starr. Teacher Ideas Press, 1990. The book is designed to inspire students' interest in mythology while building reading, writing, and speaking skills. Includes teachers' notes, vocabularies, activities, tests, games, and puzzles.

Voyage with Jason, by Ken Catran. Simply Read Books, 2006. For grades 5-8. The story of Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece, seen through the eyes of a cabin boy on the Argo.

VIDEO:

Jason and the Argonauts, directed by Don Chaffey. Sony Pictures, 1963. Rated G. With its memorable stop-motion animation by Ray Harryhausen, this is still the best film version of *Jason and the Argonauts*.

The Hero's Journey. Christopher Vogler discusses how certain themes from ancient mythology have shaped the stories we tell today. The example he uses is the film, *The Matrix*.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8AG4rlGkCRU>

The History Channel: Gods and Goddesses. A&E Home Video, 2006. Unrated. An overview of the gods and goddesses, along with academic interviews.

ON THE WEB:

Visible Fictions Official Website

www.visiblefictions.co.uk

BBC Primary History: Ancient Greeks

www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/ancient_greeks/

The Argonauts Soul-Searching Adventure

www.theargonauts.com/jasonandtheargonauts/whatisanargonaut.shtml#tale

The myth of Jason, the Argonauts, and the Golden Fleece, on Mythweb.com

<http://www.mythweb.com/heroes/jason/index.html>

