



# Playhouse Tales of Christmas

## Guidelines for Supervising Teachers

**Preparing for Your Visit:** It is strongly recommended that supervising staff should arrange a pre-visit to familiarise themselves with facilities at the Museum. Complimentary tickets are available on request in order to assist with planning and risk assessments. A Hazard Identification Sheet is also provided to help you with your risk assessment.

### Practicalities:

- **Where to go and how to get there:** Playhouse Tales of Christmas takes place in the Masonic Hall in the Town. To get there take the tram from the Entrance in either direction for the Town. Once in The Town, make your way to The Masonic Hall beside Barclays Bank, where you will be met by a member of staff.
- **Arriving on Time:** Please ensure you arrive at The Masonic Hall on time. If you are booked on the first session it is advisable to go straight to The Town. In the event of a late arrival every effort will be made to accommodate the full time of the activity, however, due to other bookings this may not be possible.
- **What to Bring/Where:** Pupils will need appropriate clothing. Whilst the activity will take place indoors, Beamish is an open air museum and the weather is likely to be cold and possibly wet. Please ensure all children wear sturdy shoes, winter coats, hats and gloves.
- **Toilets:** There are toilets in The Masonic Hall.
- **Health and Safety Information:** A Hazard Identification Sheet is provided to advise you of any possible risks or hazards.
- **Access:** An Access bus is available and can take any members of your group with access needs into The Town. There is a lift from street level into The Masonic Hall. If there is anyone in your group with access needs please contact the Bookings Officer on [bookings@beamish.org.uk](mailto:bookings@beamish.org.uk) or telephone on 0191 370 4026 and they will be able to advise you.

### Objectives of Activity:

This activity will introduce children to the world of Edwardian/Victorian theatre at Christmas time. Children will:

- Find out about the traditions of pantomime.
- Plan a short piece of theatre, including the performance, sound effects, costume and stage management.
- Perform a short piece of the story of Cinderella to an audience.
- Watch the other parts of the play being performed by the rest of their class.

### Outline of Activity:

The group will be met by Beamish staff who will lead the session. Using our large toy theatre and the set and characters of Cinderella, children will be introduced to the theatre and how it works. We will also find out about the history and traditions connected to Pantomime.

The class will then be split into smaller groups of 5 or 6. Each group will take part of the story of Cinderella and develop and embellish their act before practicing and performing it to the rest of the class. The children will take on different roles in the performance, either as narrators, sound effects or stage managers. The groups will:

- Decide on how to perform their scripts, using their creativity to entertain the crowd with pantomime features e.g. encourage audience participation such as booing the villain.
- Decide on the scenery and characters they are going to use.
- Decide on the accompanying sound effects using a range of percussion instruments.
- Narrators will get dressed up in costume from the period.
- Practice their performance, thinking about expression and how they entertain.
- Perform their act on the large wooden toy theatre.

Each group will perform part of the Cinderella story which together will tell the whole tale.

### **Background Information**

A trip to the theatre has long been a traditional part of Christmas celebrations. For 200 years, children have been going to the pantomime in the festive season. The pantomime that we see today has its roots in the mummer's plays, Music Hall entertainment, and the Italian tradition of improvised theatre, Commedia dell'arte, with elements going right back to the ancient Roman midwinter feast 'Saturnalia'. There are several features that come together to make the unique experience of Pantomime. Audience participation, the focus of the story on one of a handful of traditional tales and the use of comedy, dance and song are all essential. There is also the tradition of men playing the women's characters and vice versa e.g. the Dame (played by a man) and the principal boy (played by a woman) and that of the villain entering stage left and the hero entering stage right, which dates to the medieval mystery plays.

### **Toy theatres**

Also known as Juvenile Dramas, these were at the height of popularity in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century which reflected the enthusiasm for theatre going at the time. The toy enabled people to bring to life the world of theatre entertainment in their own homes. When a new play opened, publishers would send artists to sketch the actors and scenery and record the script to enable the production of toy theatres for sale. These were sold by the sheet, a penny plain or two pence coloured.

The toy theatres worked by the player sliding the characters and scenery in as required. A script was provided for players to read and adapt to their own use.

### **Curriculum Links**

The activity links strongly with the literacy curriculum, particularly in the following areas:

- to be familiar with, and re-tell the fairy story of Cinderella
- to perform a play, speaking audibly and fluently whilst considering how to use intonation, tone and volume to make the meaning clear to the audience
- to take it in turns and listen to one another's performances
- to work collaboratively to put together part of a performance

**Contact Us:** If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact **Simon Woolley** on 0191 370 4011 or e-mail [education@beamish.org.uk](mailto:education@beamish.org.uk).

## Hazard Identification Sheet – Playhouse Tales of Christmas

Location: The Masonic Hall, The Town

Potential Hazard	Who is particularly at risk	Context of hazard and steps to be taken by accompanying adults to prevent accidents	Risk of accident/dangerous occurrence High/medium /low	If high or medium what additional precautions or measures need to be taken to reduce risk to low
Slips and trips on uneven and wet surfaces/steps into the Masonic Hall	Children and adults	Museum staff will maintain a safe environment. Children should be advised to wear sturdy shoes for the visit, to always walk around the Museum and to use hand rails where provided.	Low	
Trips within hall e.g. on steps up and down from stage area, around chairs and furniture	Children and adults	Museum staff will arrange furniture and equipment to minimise trip hazards. Children must be supervised at all times by School staff to ensure safe, sensible behaviour. Museum staff will brief children at the start of the activity e.g. not to run, to take care on the steps.	Low	
Fingers caught in folding chairs	Children and adults	Museum staff will put up the chairs before the activity and take them down at the end. Children must be supervised at all times by School staff to ensure safe, sensible behaviour.	Low	
Pencils	Children and adults	All craft equipment used e.g. pencils will be age appropriate and use will be supervised by Museum or school staff to ensure sensible behaviour.	Low	
Toy theatre – parts falling on a participant, children bumping one another with characters, sliding handles in and out and when changing background scenes. Splinters from wooden equipment.	Children and adults	The toy theatre is a wooden version of the original cardboard Victorian toy theatres, scaled up 4 times. Whilst it comes in parts, it will be constructed by Museum staff before the activity starts. It has been designed to be sturdy and hold in place. Museum staff will ensure they have erected the theatre correctly and all adults must supervise children to ensure sensible behaviour with the characters and moving parts, with particular care when sliding characters on to stage or changing the scenery back drop. Wooden surfaces will be sanded.	Low	

Props and musical instruments	Children and adults	All props, musical instruments and costumes will be chosen to be suitable for children to use e.g. props will not be heavy and will not have sharp edges. Children must be supervised by school staff to ensure sensible behaviour throughout the activity.	Low	
Costume try on	Children	As part of the activity some children will have the opportunity to dress up in period costume, including hats, dresses and waist coats. The clothes go on over the top of children's uniforms. It is important costume does not drape on the floor, creating a trip hazard. School staff will need to support in the dressing up stage. Other children will have t-shirts to wear (e.g. Sound Crew and Stage Management). These go on over the top of normal clothes.	Low	
Fire in building	Children and adults	Beamish Museum staff will ensure that all fire exits are kept clear. In the event of the fire alarm going off, please follow instructions of Museum staff who will lead the group from the building to the muster station in an orderly manner.	Low	
Crowding and pushing whilst dropping off and picking up bags and coats	Children	Children will be asked to put their bags and coats on a bench at the start of the activity and collect them at the end. School staff will need to support Museum staff to ensure the arrival and leaving of the session are orderly and there is no pushing or jostling.	Low	
Group work – security issues	Children	During the visit children will be working in 5 groups of around 6 children (depending on the class size). All groups will stay within the main hall of the Masonic Hall. <b>Children must be supervised at all times by an adult from the school.</b> Beamish admits free supervising places at a ratio of 1 adult to 5 children for aged 5 and over and 1 adult to 3 children for under 5s. The general visitors will also have access to the Masonic Hall during the activity and will be attended to by a separate member of Beamish staff.	Low	
Toy cardboard theatre	Children	Children may be given a cardboard toy theatre to take back to school. This is not suitable for children under the age of 3 as it contains small parts once the characters are pushed out of the sheet.	Low	
Visitors taking photographs of the	Children	The Masonic Hall will remain open to other visitors for the duration of the activity. It is possible that other visitors, on seeing the activity around the toy theatre may stay to watch for a while and	Low	

children during the activity		may take photographs. Museum staff will remain observant and can ask visitors not to do so but it is not possible to prevent this completely whilst also focusing on teaching the session. If this presents a major problem, please inform our bookings team (0191 370 4026) so arrangements can be made.		
Winter weather – ice, snow, cold	Children and adults	Beamish is an open air museum. Please advise all participants on the trip to come dressed in warm clothing – winter coats, gloves, hats and sturdy shoes. Museum staff will keep paths clear and use grit to improve surfaces. Museum staff will advise teachers on the situation on arrival and react to conditions should they deteriorate.	Low	

**NB: It is advised that all participants wash their hands after the activity**

Date Reviewed: 10 October 2019

Author: Catherine Rice, Learning Co-ordinator