



ALADDIN

Teacher Guide

Production Notes

Milwaukee Youth Theatre's production of ALADDIN is one of the stories from the book *The 1,001 Nights (or The Arabian Nights)* and adapted for the stage by Robert Neil Porter and Pioneer Drama Service.

The 1,001 Nights (The Arabian Nights)

Where did the enchanting story *Aladdin and the Magic (or Wonderful) Lamp* come from? The story of Aladdin is probably the most popular of the tales included in the collection *The 1,001 Nights* that dates back to medieval times. The earliest tales came from India and Persia and in the 9th or 10th century Arabian stories were added, along with stories from Iraq, Egypt, Turkey, and of Jewish lore. The stories from *The 1,001 Nights* are filled with romance, suspense, flying carpets, scimitars, sultans, genies, sorcerers and viziers. Interestingly *Aladdin* was not part of the original collection. The original collection of stories came together during the golden age of the Islamic Empire, during the Abbasid Dynasty, roughly 750-1258. Many of the stories tell of genies (or jinn), sorcerers and legendary cities and lands, but some depict real people, events and locales. One such real character is Harun al-Rashid (763-809) a Abbasid caliph born in what is now Iran who ruled during the peak of the Islamic Golden Age. This golden age is when prosperity, math, science, art and music flourished. Another real character is Jafar al-Barmaki (767-803), Harun's vizier, or top minister. Many of the Arabian tales occur in Harun's opulent court and the stories were carried to other lands by traders and soldiers. The stories officially spread to the rest of the world beginning in 1704 when a Frenchman, Antoine Galland, who was an archaeologist and Orientalist (which means he studied Near Eastern and Far Eastern cultures, history and languages), translated and published *Les Mille et une nuit: Contes Arabes (A Thousand and One Nights: Arabian Tales.)* As there were only 300 tales in the collection, Galland sought to add stories to the book. He had special assistance from Hanna Diyab, a Syrian traveler from Aleppo. They met in Paris in 1709. Diyab provided 16 more tales including *Sinbad the Sailor*, *Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves* and *Aladdin*. Over the next half century, Galland's translation was retranslated into other European languages, including English, German, Dutch, Italian, Danish, Russian and Greek which helped begin a Western fascination with all things from the Middle and Far East. *The Arabian Nights* stories were popular and continue to

be popular today. People who have never even read *The Arabian Nights* still know something about Ali Baba's secret password "Open, Sesame," and know of Aladdin, his magic lamp and the genie that grants wishes.

Pre-Show Discussion and Activities

1. Read *Aladdin* and other tales from *The Thousand and One Nights*.
2. Aladdin and the other tales from *The Thousand and One Nights* were meant to be told aloud. Story telling was a popular pastime and storytellers told stories in coffeehouses throughout the Middle East, in cities such as Damascus, Baghdad, Aleppo and Cairo. Have students learn other stories from *The 1,001 Nights* (Tales of the Arabian Nights) and then explain their stories to their classmates.
3. Where is the Middle East? Provide maps of the Middle East and have the students color in the different countries included in this region. The city of Baghdad was the capital of the Abbasid Dynasty.
4. Helpful Vocabulary:
 - a. Sultan – Muslim/Middle Eastern Sovereign, King, Ruler.
 - b. Allah – The one and only god in the Islamic faith.
 - c. Genie/Jinn– In Arabian and Muslim mythology Jinn are intelligent spirits, able to appear in human and animal forms. Jinn are taken seriously and regarded as real beings by a large segment of the world's population. In Aladdin the Genie grants wishes, but in Arabian and Muslim mythology they are not wish-granting servants. This is a western idea.
 - d. Magician – One with magical powers such as a sorcerer or wizard.
 - e. Fortune Teller – One who can predict a person's future.
5. Explore the culture, clothing and foods of the Middle East during the Middle Ages through library books or other resources, such as websites.
6. Aladdin makes wishes through the Genie. Have a discussion with your students, or a writing assignment, about what wishes they would make. How can the students make their wishes come true? Role play where students act out situations in which they meet a genie and make a wish or wishes.

Post-Show Discussion and Activities

1. If you read the story *Aladdin* with your students, discuss how the story differed from MYT's live production. Students may also have seen the 1992 Disney animated version of *Aladdin* or seen the live action movie released in 2019. How did the play differ from the movies? Were there any parts of the story or movies that you would have liked to see on stage? Was there anything that happened in the stage production that did not happen in the story or the movies?
2. Discuss the difference between the character and the actor. Which **character** was your favorite, and why? Which **character** was your least favorite, and why? How did the actors portray feelings on stage?
3. Discuss the technical elements of the show with your students. For example, how did the costumes help transform each actor into his or her respective character? How did the set help bring you into the world of the play? How did the sound design affect your experience of the play? How could you tell the play

- takes place in the Middle East and in the Sultan's Palace?
4. Discuss how the depiction of the Princess and other female roles reflect the culture and time period in which story takes place. In the play, Princess Balmyra complains about the lack of things she gets to do and her lack of freedom. How is that resolved by the end of the play? How are the lives of girls and women different today compared to the time of the play?
 5. Compare similar fairy tales to *Aladdin*, such as *Cinderella*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Little Mermaid*. How do these female characters compare to Princess Balmyra? What are the plot similarities?
 6. In the play Aladdin gets his wishes, but keeps the magic lamp and the genie a secret from Princess Balmyra. What are the consequences of that action? How does Aladdin win the Princess through his own merits?
 7. Discuss Greed and Generosity: What is greed? Which characters in the play are greedy? How does their greed lead to difficulties? How does Aladdin, Princess Balmyra, the Sultan and Sultana switch to being generous by the end of the play? How does greed create problems in our own lives? How can we learn to practice generosity instead? Brainstorm ways to be generous. Ideas include sharing of time, toys, food, money. Students could do a role playing activity in which they act situations of being generous to others.
 8. Come up with a Generosity project for your classroom or school, such as helping another class, a food drive, a coat drive, etc.
 9. Read books about being generous. Here are some ideas:
 - a. *Pine and the Winter Sparrow* by Alexis York Lumbard
 - b. *Thank You Omu* by Oge Mora
 - c. *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein
 - d. *Stone Soup* by Jon J Muth
 - e. *Under the Lemon Moon* by Edith Hope Fine
 - f. *Sam and the Lucky Money* by Karen Chinn
 10. Have the students write their own stories or poems or draw a picture about being generous.

