

Created by
THÉÂTRE À L'ENVERS



STUDY GUIDE

Our Mission

Théâtre À l'Envers wants to create original theatre shows based on a research and experimentation process that focuses on blending different artistic and theatrical forms (puppetry, shadow theatre, mask theatre, video, music, dance). We develop our shows by alternating creative work periods with series of public performances of the project in order to build from the audience's feedback.

About Woânda

Woânda, a play with actors, puppets and shadows, is Théâtre À l'Envers's first production and the result of two years of research and exploration.

During the fall of 2005, over a three months period, the creators gave regular workshops on drama and shadow theatre to two classes of 4 to 6 graders of the Saint-Isaac-Jogues School in Montreal. These workshops enable the artists to develop a direct relationship with the target audience. In april 2006, several groups of adults and children (including those mentioned above) attended performances of the work in progress, presented as part of an artistic residency offered by the Maison de la culture Villeray – Saint-Michel – Parc-Extension.

On January 30, 2007, Patricia Bergeron, Lynn Katrine Richard and Joëlle Tougas founded Théâtre À l'Envers (TAE). In February of the same year, the company won the contest Mon accès à la scène, organized by La Fondation du maire de Montréal pour la jeunesse, in collaboration with Maison de la culture Villeray-Saint-Michel – Parc-Extension and Cirque du Soleil.

In July 2007, Théâtre À l'Envers received its first grant from Canada Council for the Arts to support the production of Woânda and was soon joined by co-producer Théâtre Quatre/Corps. A second residency at Maison de la culture Villeray–St-Michel–Parc-Extension concluded on October 21, 2007 with the premiere of the play.

Woânda was performed more than twenty times during seasons 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 and selected to participate in La Relève en tournée, a Loto-Québec tour for young artists supported by La Fondation du maire de Montréal pour la jeunesse, in collaboration with Réseau Accès Culture.

In 2008, Entrées en scène Loto-Québec 2009's jury choose Théâtre À l'Envers to showcase Woânda at the Bourse RIDEAU 2009 event, held in Quebec City in February 2009. An extract from the show was performed for theater programmers, which resulted in a 60 shows tour across Québec for the 2009-2010 season. This tour was also supported by Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec. In 2013-2014, The Conseil des arts de Montréal on tour supported the most recent tour of Woânda on Montréal's territory.

In the fall of 2019, with a grant from the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec and the British Council, Woânda was presented in French and in English, 18 times in 12 different cities during a tour in England set up by Théâtre À l'Envers in co-production with Théâtre Sans Frontières (England) with a team of performers from Quebec, Nova Scotia, England and Scotland.

Credits

Written and directed by
Patricia Bergeron

Translated by
Maurice Roy

Original idea by
Patricia Bergeron
Lynn Katrine Richard
Joëlle Tougas

Cast
Patricia Bergeron, puppeteer
Mariève Bibeau or Mariflore Véronneau, as Laura
Richard Fréchette, Jean-Léon Rondeau and Paul Stewart, as Grandpa
Maryse Poulin, musician

Stage Manager
Jacinthe Plamondon

Set Design
Fanny Bisailon-Gendron

Costume Design
Sophie Brosseau

Make-Up
Aurélia Boullen

Puppet Design
Mélanie Charest
Daniel Auclair

Sound Design
Maryse Poulin

Lighting and Shadow Theatre Design
Lynn Katrine Richard

Production Manager and Shadow Theatre Design
Joëlle Tougas

Play summary

What could possibly happen when a frog decides to take up residence in the pipes of a bathroom? A lot of commotion... especially when the frog, Woânda, comes face to face with Laura, the child who lives in the same house!

Laura is a lively and spontaneous little girl whose mother is seriously ill. To numb her sorrow, Laura takes refuge in painting: with her brushes full of colors, she fills canvasses with her emotions. But her world is turned upside down the day she loses her lucky charm, a ring given by her mother, down the plug hole of the bathroom sink.

Laura's search for the ring takes her through a whirlwind of twists and turns that combine dream with reality, laughter with tears and fears with friendship. And, of course, Woânda the frog becomes Laura's invaluable ally.

Puppets, shadows and video projections create Laura and Grandpa's world at home, as well as the mysterious world of pipes, dreams and imagination that Laura explores with Woânda. The unusual friendship she strikes up with the frog helps Laura to deal with the uncertain emotions she experiences. Above all, Laura learns how to overcome her fear of the unknown and to look positively towards the future and all it holds.

Trailer on Vimeo : <https://vimeo.com/332424459>



Photos: Michel Pinault



After the show

Here are some questions to help the children to remember visual details about the play:

Which characters have we met in this play?

- Laura, a young girl;
- Grandpa, her grandfather;
- Laura's mother (shadow);
- Woãnda, the frog, who lives in the sink pipes.

Who are the characters that we hear about without seeing them?

- Laura's mother;
- Laura's father.

Where do the different scenes of the play take place?

- in the bathroom;
- in Laura's bedroom;
- in the "world of pipes" (the pipes of Laura's house);
- at the hospital (suggested through shadow theatre when Laura says farewell to her mother);
- outdoors (under the rain, suggested through shadow theatre);
- in Laura's dreams (or nightmares).

What were the important objects in the play?

- the lucky charm ring;
- the tools used by Grandpa (wrench, magnet, fishing rod, coat hanger, plunger);
- Woãnda's accessories from inside of the sink (flippers on the clothes line, Olympic medal, bag);
- stuff found into the sink drain (long seaweed, fish, key);
- Laura's medical accessories (glasses, stethoscope, little stick);
- Laura's paintbrushes;
- an umbrella.

Activity

Draw an important moment of the play.

Ask the children to pay particular attention to the characters present in the action they have chosen, where they take place and props used on stage at this moment.

A discussion about grief and mourning

Laura, the play's main character, lives through grief, both big and small. Here are some questions likely to make children think about the concepts of grief and mourning.

What does it mean to "mourn for somebody"?

To feel and show sadness because somebody has died; (to feel sad because something no longer exists or is no longer the same) – Oxford dictionary

Do you think that we can feel the same when we lose something? When we have to give upon a project that is important for us?

What is Laura's big moment of grief?

The death of her mother.

What is Laura's small moment of grief?

The loss of her lucky charm ring.

What are the emotions Laura feels with these losses?

Anger, sorrow, acceptance (she transforms mommy into "the brightest star in the sky").

Is there any sadness that a child of your age is likely to face?

- the loss of a loved one (parents, grandparents, other);
- the loss of a pet;
- parents' divorce;
- the loss of a friend (school change);
- the loss of a precious object;
- failure at school (bad grade, etc.);
- others...

Activity

Ask the children to write, in a letter to Laura, what they wish to tell her after seeing the play. Stress that Laura is mourning somebody very dear to her: their letter can be of great comfort.

Shadow Theatre

At what moment was shown shadow theatre in the play?

- when Laura's mom give her a ring;
- in Woanda's world of pipes;
- during Laura's nightmare;
- when Laura's mother dies;
- when Laura swirls with her umbrella in the rain.

What do you think the shadow represented?

- dream, imagination, emotions, all the invisible "things" eyes can't really see...

Activity

Create a short sequence of shadow theatre.

Material :

- Blank sheets divided in 4 parts
- An overhead projector
- A large white sheet (as screen)
- Cardboard (recycled cereal boxes, for example)
- Wooden supports, straws or sticks
- Transparent film sheets and transparency markers
- Scotch tape

Step 1

Team the children into groups of four or five. Each team has to include a narrator, a stage director (an external view) and two or three puppeteers. Each team gets a blank sheet divided in four squares.

Step 2

Think of a storyline, in a comic strip format. Each storyline has to include at least four actions, to be drawn successively in each of the four squares of the blank sheet:

- The initial situation.
- The "hook" of the story (a disturbing event that disrupts the initial situation).
- The development (event or series of events that build the dramatic tension)
- The resolution

Take the time to explain those notions to the children and give some in-class examples.

Step 3

Draw the setting of the story on a transparent sheet (refer to the comic strips previously drawn).

Step 4

Cut the characters' silhouettes out of cardboard and glue a support on each of them.

Step 5

Rehearsal: place the transparent sheet on the overhead projector, and make the silhouettes move. The narrator can describe the action, since there is a limit to what a cardboard cut-out silhouette can express.

The stage director watches the action from the other side of the screen (as if he/she was the audience) and gives advices to his/her puppeteer teammates to make the performance more interesting and easy to understand for the audience.

Step 6

Present the shadow theatre sequences to the class.

Suggestion to start off:

You can ask the children to imagine Woânda's adventure to get back to her family and the complications she could encounter on the way.

N.B. : If you don't seem to have enough time to prepare the shadow theatre sequences, you can conclude the activity by asking each team to present their comic strips to the class.

Théâtre À l'Envers' founders are available to facilitate shadow theatre workshops. For schools in Quebec, it is possible to fund this in-class activity through the Culture à l'école program.

See links below for more informations:

<https://cultureeducation.mcc.gouv.qc.ca/repertoire/30382> (Artist: Patricia Bergeron)
and <http://www.theatrealenvers.ca/TAE/ateliers/>

We would be delighted to receive children's creations (or some pictures of them).
If you wish, you can mail it to us at: info@theatrealenvers.ca

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