

MYTHMAKERS

TOURING THEATRE



2016 SEASON

4 – 18 MARCH
MR NANCY

4 – 18 NOVEMBER
THE EEL AND SINA

AUCKLAND
THEATRE
COMPANY

MYTHS AND LEGENDS: SPECIAL STORIES



Myths and legends are imaginative tales that try to explain how the world works and how people should behave. These stories often offer creative answers to “why?” questions about the way things are: why does the sun rise and set? Why do spiders make webs in the corners of the ceiling? Why are there earthquakes?

Although the stories may be about the real world, myths often have magical, supernatural or ‘larger-than-life’ elements. Some myths and legends are based on real events, but these are always embellished to make them more exciting and relevant to the audience.

Some common features of mythical stories:

- * talking animals
- * gods and demi-gods (half god, half human)
- * magical characters, like giants or fairies
- * heroes and villains with super-powers
- * humans with exaggerated characteristics (extremely cunning or stupid, particularly beautiful or ugly)

TELLING TALES: MYTHS AROUND THE WORLD

Different countries and cultures have different myths. People use whatever is around them to build characters and situations for their stories. Some characters are iconic types, and they turn up in multiple stories from countries. For instance, most cultures have a well-known trickster figure – a character that gets ahead by outsmarting others.

ANANSI (West Africa)

Anansi is a trickster spider god. He shape-shifts from spider to human form. In the Anansi legends the trickster outsmarts three fierce animals to capture them for the Sky God in return for the god’s box of stories. In another tale, Anansi outsmarts Death by hiding in the rafters of his house where Death cannot reach him – which is why spiders spin their webs in the corners of the ceiling. (You’ll see these tales retold in *Mr Nancy!*)

LOKI (Scandinavia)

Loki is a mysterious trickster god who taunts and picks fights with other gods, particularly his brother Thor (yes, the one with the magic hammer). Loki uses his cunning to get himself out of trouble – sometimes by helping the gods, and sometimes by siding with the giants or other

enemies. In some stories, Loki is a shape-shifter, who can turn into a horse, a fish or a fly. Loki and Thor stories are still alive in popular culture today – you may recognise the names and key features from the Marvel comics and recent movies.

MAUI (New Zealand)

Maui is a demi-god hero who finds his own ways to reshape the world. He uses courage and cleverness to achieve impossible goals, like stealing fire from the goddess Mahuika, or trapping and making the sun travel more slowly across the sky. When his brothers refuse to give him bait for fishing, Maui uses his own blood, and fishes up whole islands – including the North Island of Aotearoa, Te Ika a Maui (Maui’s fish). But Maui is not immortal: when he tries to steal immortality from Hine-Nui-Te-Po, the story ends badly...

TALL TALES TOLD



TRADITIONS

Before there was writing, people shared myths by telling them out loud. Great story-tellers have always used their voices and bodies to make stories exciting so that people will remember them. Bringing a story to life keeps that story alive in people's minds, so that it can be told again and again. That's how myths have been passed down from ancient times to today.

Like mythical characters, old stories can shape-shift! It's a bit like the game Chinese whispers: lots of little changes make the final story totally different from the original. Different story-tellers can argue about "what really happened" and tell competing versions. Old stories get updated to make them clearer or more relevant to a modern audience.

DRAMATIC MYTH-MAKING

Theatre is all about live story-telling. Myths and legends are ideal tales for theatrical performances, because mythical stories are so dramatic – full of adventures, magic, and unforgettable characters.

Theatre is different from books, movies, TV and YouTube because it happens right now in front of people. The performers can talk directly to the audience, and ask for opinions or ideas. Or they can just listen and look carefully, and judge what you are enjoying the most. Either way, the

audience helps to shape the story: jokes that get big laughs get stretched out to keep the audience laughing; favourite actions get repeated; suggestions from the audience get woven into the story.

Theatre-makers have lots of story-telling 'tools' that they can use to keep people interested:

- ✱ MOVEMENT
- ✱ SOUND
- ✱ COSTUME
- ✱ SET
- ✱ LIGHTING

However, you don't need all of these to create a great performance. Our Mythmakers performers don't use expensive equipment, instead, they do a lot with their bodies, voices, and ordinary objects – rubbish bins, rags, chairs – that could be found in any classroom or household. Most importantly, the performers interact with their audience, and show by example how creativity and imagination can easily set the scene and bring a story to life without specially designed set or costumes.

Mythmakers shows are developed in a similar way to the old story-telling sessions. The performers and director take ideas and characters from the original myths, and look for ways to bring them together and make them lively and fun for today's children.

RECOGNISE SOME OF THESE STORY-TELLING STRATEGIES?

In *Mr Nancy*, the performers argue ("That's not what happened!") and tell several versions of the story, including modern references (like futuristic space battles!) that were not in the original tale.



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES: TELLING MYTHICAL STORIES

PRESENT A MYTH

Talk about the myths, legends and fairy stories you already know. What features of myth does each story have?

- ✱ How are the characters exaggerated or magical?
- ✱ What tricks are played during the story?
- ✱ What do the characters and / or the audience learn by the end of the story?

Is there anyone in your group who comes from a different culture? What myths can they share? (For example, lots of Asian cultures have wonderful myths about naughty monkeys, warrior kings, and magical dragons...)

Now bring it to life. In small groups, choose a short myth you already know, or find one you all like in the library or online. (If you get stuck for ideas, here are a few well-known New Zealand myths you could look up...)

- ✱ How the Kiwi Lost its Wings
- ✱ How Maui Slowed the Sun
- ✱ Maui's Giant Fish

As a group, work together to decide how to perform your mythical story in an interesting way. You might want to consider some of these suggestions:

- ✱ Use puppets for some or all of the characters
- ✱ Take turns to read or narrate the story while the rest of the group mimes out the action
- ✱ See if you can tell the whole story clearly with no words at all, just with bodies and sound
- ✱ Turn a well-known old myth into a modern story using a well-known style from nowadays:
 - A TV news show
 - A podcast
 - A rap song or other music video

Remember the story still has to be told so it is clear and makes sense – and everyone needs to play a part.

MAKE UP YOUR OWN MYTH

Now it's your turn! Time to create your own mythical story... Remember, your myth needs to answer a question about the world. Use your own question, or choose one of these:

- ✱ Why do dolphins swim so fast?
- ✱ Why are pohutukawa flowers red?
- ✱ Why does Auckland have so many mountains?
- ✱ Where do clouds come from?

A good story is strong, simple and easy for the audience to follow. Don't make your myth too complicated – choose one big idea and show it really clearly. Make the most of the magical / exaggerated characters: your myth should be fun to act and fun to watch!



CURRICULUM LINKS

MYTHMAKERS shows are designed for Year Levels 3 – 8, but may be suitable for older students too.

Suggested links include:

- ✱ English, Level 1- 4, Listening, Reading and Viewing: Purposes and Audiences (recognising that texts are constructed for different purposes); Ideas (understanding ideas within, across and beyond texts)
- ✱ Social Science, Level 1-4: Understanding roles in society; the importance of culture and heritage
- ✱ The Arts, Level 1-4, Drama - Communicating and Interpreting: Responding to elements of drama
- ✱ Key Competencies: Thinking, Relating to Others

ATC Education activities relate directly to the PK, UC and CI strands of the NZ Curriculum from levels 5 to 8. They also have direct relevance to many of the NCEA achievement standards at all three levels.

All secondary school Drama students (Years 9 to 13) should be experiencing live theatre as a part of their course work, Understanding the Arts in Context. Curriculum levels 6, 7 and 8 (equivalent to years 11, 12 and 13) require the inclusion of New Zealand drama in their course of work.

The NCEA external examinations at each level (Level 1 – AS90011, Level 2 – AS91219, Level 3 – AS91518) require students to write about live theatre they have seen. Students who are able to experience fully produced, professional theatre are generally advantaged in answering these questions.

ATC EDUCATION

ATC Education promotes and encourages teaching and participation in theatre and acts as a resource for primary, secondary and tertiary educators. It is a comprehensive and innovative education programme designed to nurture young theatre practitioners and future audiences.

ATC Education has direct contact with school students throughout the greater Auckland region with a focus on delivering an exciting and popular programme that supports the Arts education of Auckland students and which focuses on curriculum development, literacy and the Arts.

Auckland Theatre Company acknowledges that the experiences enjoyed by the youth of today are reflected in the vibrancy of theatre in the future.