



# Old Jake's Skirts

by José Cruz González

Based on a book by C. Anne Scott

Directed by **Graham Whitehead**

Musical Direction by **Ric Averill**

Scenic Design by **Gregory Jaye**

Costume Design by **Liz Ihlenfeld**

Lighting Design by **Michael Eddy**

## The Cast

Maureen Dias

Beau Heckman

Adam Jacobson

Matthew Proschold

School Tour: February to June, 2005

This production is sponsored by:



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America West Airlines Education Foundation

Arizona ArtShare

Arizona Commission on the Arts

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Tucson/Pima Arts Council

Preview Guide for Parents and Teachers to  
Childsplay's Production of

# Old Jake's Skirts

We hope you find this guide helpful in preparing your children for an enjoyable and educational theatrical experience. Included you'll find things to talk about before and after seeing the performance, classroom activities that deal with curriculum connections and education standards, and resource materials.

## The Story:

Jake is a cranky old farmer whose only friend it seems is his old dog Shoestring. He has his rituals including a drive to the local store to pick up his predictable grocery list as well as plenty of excuses as to why he can't sit a spell and socialize. On this particular visit, he and Shoestring come across an old trunk in the road. He puts it in the back of his pick-up and leaves a lost-and-found note at the store. Time goes by and no one claims the trunk. Curiosity gets the best of him and he finally opens the trunk only to discover skirts-- lots and lots of calico skirts! Being superstitious Jake wonders, in opening the trunk, did he set loose a new host of mischievous spirits? Every year he is visited by a plague--there was the Year of the Crows, the Year of the Twisters, and the Year of the First Baptist Church of Quail's Good Samaritan Ladies' Committee. This, it seems, will be the Year of the Storms. As the big storm hits, he enlists the help of the skirts to sop up the water that has leaked into his shack. As he cleverly uses the skirts to aid him around his farm, color begins to slowly creep back into his world. When he meets the little girl who shares the secret to these skirts, he finds hope and takes the first step to connecting with his community. This tale of gentle humor is both homespun and heartwarming, accompanied by toe tapping, live bluegrass music performed by a single musician!

## A Word About Theater Etiquette...

Whether going to the theater or having theater come to you, there are a few important things to communicate to your students before seeing a play. Since this may be the first live theater experience for some of your students, please take a moment to discuss the following pointers prior to seeing the performance.

- ◆ Stay seated during the performance.
- ◆ Remember that the performers can hear and see the audience just like the audience can hear and see the performers. Be respectful to the performers and other people in the audience by not talking during the performance.
- ◆ Appropriate responses such as clapping or laughter are always welcome!
- ◆ Please, please, please turn off all cell phones and leave your cameras at home!

## Things to Talk About Before the Performance...

**Talk About the Book!** Read the book *Old Jake's Skirts* by C. Anne Scott and illustrated by David Slonim. Pay special attention to the illustrations. Talk about the characters and what's happening in the illustrations. What do you think the play will be like? How many actors do you think it will take to tell the story?

### Talk About the Playwright!

José Cruz González has been the Playwright in Residence at Childsplay since 1997. His plays include *Lily Plants A Garden*, *The Red Forest*, *September Shoes*, *Always Running*, *Mariachi Quixote*, *Cousin Bell Bottoms*, *Two Donuts\**, *Salt & Pepper\**, *The Highest Heaven\**, *Manzi (The Adventures of Young César Chávez)*, *The Magic Rainforest (An Amazon Adventure)*, *Marisol's Christmas*, *La Posada*, *Harvest Moon*, *Calabasas Street*, *Spirit Dancing* and *Odysseus Cruz (\*plays developed with Childsplay)*. Mr. González has written for PAZ, a new series produced by Discovery Kids for the Ready Set Learn! block on The Learning Channel. He is a graduate of the University of California, Irvine, where he received his MFA in Directing. He teaches theatre at California State University at Los Angeles. José's next project with Childsplay will be an adaptation of *Tómas and The Library Lady* by Pat Mora.

### Talk About Page to Stage!

Adapting a book for the stage is an interesting project and, in this case, a team project. For *Old Jake's Skirts*, Childsplay assembled a group of 5 actors, 2 directors, a playwright and a musician/composer. The book was read aloud and discussed and some scenes were chosen to play out. After exploring scenes, the playwright went away and began writing, making sure he used as much of the written story as possible. The only element added to the story was music and song. After writing, improvising, re-

writing, and much discussion, the working script was created. It was decided that there would be a live musician who would play several instruments as well as play some of the characters. Models of things like Jake's truck, his cabin, and the store would be used to change the perspective from real life sizes to miniatures at various points in the story, and four actors would portray all of the characters. A staged reading (limited staging with scripts in hand) with audience feed back was the last step before putting the play into our 2004-05 season!

### Talk About Bluegrass Music!

The musical accompaniment in *Old Jake's Skirts* is based on the bluegrass tradition. According to the International Bluegrass Music Association, as the early Jamestown settlers began to spread out into the Carolinas, Tennessee, Kentucky and the Virginias, they composed new songs about day-to-day life experiences in the new land. Since most of these people lived in rural areas, the songs reflected life on the farm or in the hills and this type of music was called "mountain music" or "country music."

The invention of the phonograph and the onset of the radio in the early 1900s brought this old-time music out of the rural Southern mountains to people all over the United States.

The Monroe Brothers were one of the most popular duet teams of the 1920s and 1930s. When the brothers split up as a team in 1938, both went on to form their own bands. Since Bill Monroe was a native of Kentucky, the Bluegrass State, he decided to call his band "Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys," and this band sound birthed a new form of country music.

Bill's new band was different from other traditional country music bands of the time because of its hard driving and powerful sound, utilizing traditional acoustic instruments and featuring highly distinctive vocal harmonies. This music

incorporated songs and rhythms gospel, work songs and "shouts" of black laborers, country and blues music repertoires. After experimenting with various instrumental combinations, Bill settled on mandolin, banjo, fiddle, guitar and bass as the format for his band.

Most believe that the classic bluegrass sound jelled in 1946, shortly after Earl Scruggs, an innovative 21 year-old banjo player hit the scene. Scruggs wrote and recorded "Foggy Mountain Breakdown" which was used in the soundtrack for the film *Bonnie & Clyde*.

By the 1950s, people began using the term "bluegrass music." Bluegrass bands began forming all over the country and Bill Monroe became the acknowledged "Father of Bluegrass Music."

In 2001, the soundtrack for the Coen Brothers movie, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* attracted wider audiences for bluegrass and traditional country music.

Bluegrass music is now performed and enjoyed around the world. Bluegrass bands today reflect influences from a variety of sources including traditional and fusion jazz, contemporary country music, Celtic music, rock & roll ("newgrass" or progressive bluegrass), old-time music and Southern gospel music--in addition to lyrics translated to various languages.

### Talk About Storytelling!

Throughout the play *Old Jake's Skirts*, various characters serve as storyteller (or narrator). Storytelling is an ancient art form. It is an oral tradition. Human beings have told stories as long as they've had language for communication. Stories were often used to explain the unexplainable: life and death, nature, and the spiritual world, for example. Stories were handed down from one generation to the next. As stories passed from one teller to another they gradually changed and were, in many cases, written down thus preserving their content.

## Things To Talk About and Do After the Performance...

► All plays have three P's: *People* in a *Place* with a *Problem*. Where does the play take place? Who are the people? What are the problems?

► How is the play similar to the book? Different? How does Jake change from the beginning of the play to the end?

### The Arts:

#### Music:

\*Listen to various bluegrass artists and try to identify the instruments that they use.

#### Visual Art:

\*As a class, design and build a scarecrow. Think about using a broomstick as a base. Decide what it will wear and how it will be stuffed. Make it big/small enough so that you can use it in the dance activity below.

\*The trunk contains several calico (a coarse and brightly printed cloth) skirts. Create your own calico print skirt out of paper or cardboard. Use crayons, markers or colored pencils to create the pattern. Then, hang them all on a clothesline in your classroom!

\*Old Jake whittles little figurines out of wood as a hobby. An easy alternative to carving wood is to create your own soap sculptures! Go to the back page for an internet link on soap carving.

#### Dance:

\*Using the scarecrow that you created as a class, choreograph a dance similar to the one Jake does. Choose music, decide on the moves, and then take turns dancing with the scarecrow!

#### Theater/Creative Drama:

\*Create a story sitting in a circle. Choose a subject or title for the story you will create. One person begins by making up the first sentence of the story. The next person picks up the story thread and continues by adding a sentence. The next person adds one and so on until the tale comes to a resolution. Focus on working together as a team to create a

story that has a beginning, middle and end and that makes sense!

\*In groups of 4, choose a scene from the play that you can play out in class.

### Language Arts:

Thinking about how the play ends, what do you think happens next? Write the next chapter of Jake's life, starting with the final scene of the play.

### Science:

Jake marks his years by the plagues that visit him. This was the Year of the Storms. What makes one year stormier or drier than another? Look at the history of weather in Arizona. Which year had the most rainfall? Which year had the least? We are currently in a drought in Arizona. When water is scarce, what can we do to help conserve it? Come up with a water conservation plan for your school! Offer water saving tips and create posters that you can display around the school!

### Social Studies:

Jake is a man who spends a lot of time alone with only his dog to talk to. Is he lonely? Is he bored? While some people choose to live like this, others truly have a problem with loneliness and boredom. Think of the men and women in the military. They are away from the comforts of home and the people they care about. Some of them have very tedious and boring jobs. Send mail or email to our troops to help them feel less lonely and bored. Go to the back page for links for sending mail to the military.

### Math:

In teams, create 3 story problems based on the characters and situations in *Old Jake's Skirts*. Then, trade with another group and see which group can solve the problems first! Here's an example: Jake had 17 skirts. He cut 3 of them up into rags, used 2 to dress the scarecrow and one for neckerchiefs. How many does he have left? Try to dramatize some of the story problems in

class! For other examples, go to [www.abcteach.com](http://www.abcteach.com).

### Foreign Language:

If *Old Jake's Skirts* took place in another country (like Mexico or France), how would it be different? Choose a country that you would like to set the story in. Research which crops Jake might grow, car he might drive, what the weather might be like, what kind of music and dance there might be, what type of dog he'd most likely have, which religion he might be, and anything else you can think of. How would the title be translated into that country's language?

### Workplace Skills:

Jake lives in a community but is not actively involved in it. By the end of the play, he makes a change and there is hope that he will be involved with his church and the circle of folks who chat at Eb's store. Map out your family's involvement in your community. List each member of your family and which community groups/activities they are involved in (things like church, scouts, PTO, Rotary, volunteering, sports, etc.). Talk about other ways that you can become involved in your community.

### Health/P.E.:

Explore the history of folk dancing in America. Which dances are best suited for bluegrass music? Learn to contra or square dance!

### Technology/Computers:

Old Jake's dog, Shoestring is a bloodhound. Using the internet, research the bloodhound breed. Look for descriptions of the breed including size, color, weight, life expectancy, personality, etc. Find pictures that you can print out. Can you find any cartoon bloodhounds? Display your findings on a wall in your classroom. Now, create your own bloodhound characters! Choose a name for your dog and decide how it would move and what kind of voice it would have. Share your dog character with the rest of the class.

## Old Jake's Skirts Booklist

Prepared with the help of Tim Wadham, Youth Services Coordinator for the Maricopa County Library District

### Curriculum Keys...



### Storytelling:

*Gooney Bird Greene* by Lois Lowry  
*Three By the Sea* by Edward Marshall  
*Three Up a Tree* by James Marshall  
*A Long Way From Chicago* by Richard Peck  
*A Year Down Yonder* by Richard Peck

### Perspective:

*Close, Closer, Closest* by Shelley Rotner  
*Plain Girl* by Virginia Sorensen

### Community:

*Old Henry* by Joan Blos  
*Family Pictures=Cuadros de Familia* by Carmen Lomas Garza  
*Prairie Town* by Bonnie Geisert  
*The Giver* by Lois Lowry  
*The Relatives Came* by Cynthia Rylant

### Rural Life:

*Ida Early Comes Over the Mountain* by Robert Burch  
*Come a Tide* by George Ella Lyon  
*A Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson

### Farming and the Elements:

*The First Four Years* by Laura Ingalls Wilder  
*Let the Hurricane Roar* by Rose Wilder Lane

All materials are available through your local library.  
Check it out!

## About Childsplay:

Childsplay is a non-profit professional theatre company of adult actors, performing for young audiences and families.

Our Mission is to create theatre so strikingly original in form, content or both, that it instills in young people an enduring awe, love and respect for the medium, thus preserving imagination and wonder, the hallmarks of childhood, which are the keys to the future.

We love to hear from our audience members!  
Send letters, drawings or reviews to:



Childsplay, Inc.  
PO Box 517  
Tempe, AZ 85280  
Call us at 480-350-8101 or  
1-800-583-7831 (in-state)

Email us at: [info@childsplayaz.org](mailto:info@childsplayaz.org)  
Web Site: [www.childsplayaz.org](http://www.childsplayaz.org)

## Interesting Internet Sites:

[www.bluegrass-museum.org](http://www.bluegrass-museum.org)  
-a history of bluegrass music

[www.bluegrasscountry.org](http://www.bluegrasscountry.org)  
-listen to bluegrass music online, anytime!

[www.storyarts.org](http://www.storyarts.org)  
-lots of storytelling activities

[www.abcteach.com](http://www.abcteach.com)  
-simply a great site for all aspects of teaching

[www.bloodhound-dogs.com](http://www.bloodhound-dogs.com)  
-a wonderful place to learn about Jake's dog, Shoestring

[www.gentlecycle.com/fun.htm](http://www.gentlecycle.com/fun.htm)  
-a "how to make soap sculptures" site

[www.svsu.edu/mfsm/educational/tourprogramSC.html](http://www.svsu.edu/mfsm/educational/tourprogramSC.html)  
-more soap carving instructions and tips

<http://anyservicemember.navy.mil/>  
-a place where you can send our troops an email

[www.wiredkids.org/emailtheworld/troops.html](http://www.wiredkids.org/emailtheworld/troops.html)  
-another link to send email to our troops



## Want to see Old Jake's Skirts in the theater??

Public performances are May 7-22 at the Tempe Performing Arts Center in downtown Tempe! Call 480.350.8119 for tickets and more information!

## Arizona Academic Standards:

Your visit to the theater as well as the preparation and follow up activities can involve many content areas from the Arizona Department of Education K-12 Academic Standards. Many of the suggested discussion topics and activities can be tied to several standards. For example, the Math activity on creating Story Problems can fulfill standards in the areas of math, language arts and the arts (theater).

To access the K-12 standards go to:

[www.ade.state.az.us/standards/contentstandards.asp](http://www.ade.state.az.us/standards/contentstandards.asp)

We are always looking for ways to help you prepare your students for their theatre experience and at the same time fulfill curriculum and standards requirements.

If you have any suggestions as to how we might improve in this area, please contact Katie McFadzen at

[kmcfadzen@childsplayaz.org](mailto:kmcfadzen@childsplayaz.org)  
or  
480.350.8105