

Song and Dance Man

Written by Karen Ackerman

Illustrated by Stephen Gammell

Classroom Favorites



Teacher's Guide by Jennifer Lee Richards

A Perma-Bound Production

Synopsis

When his grandchildren come to visit, Grandpa puts on a vaudeville show just like in the "good old days, the song and dance days." With his tap shoes, bowler hat and gold tipped cane to aid him, Grandpa turns the attic into a stage full of wonder.

Author Biographical Sketch

"Karen Ackerman makes her home in Cincinnati, Ohio. She has written several children's books including *Flannery Row: An Alphabet Rhyme*, a Parent's Choice Award selection which was illustrated by Karen Ann Weinhaus. Ackerman's book, *Theo's Vineyard* was illustrated by Mary Helen Wallace and her book, *A Brighter Garden* was illustrated by Tasha Tudor. Ackerman is also a playwright and a poet."

Illustrator Biographical Sketch

Stephen Gammell, the illustrator of the book, was born February 10, 1943, in Des Moines, Iowa. He attended high school and college in Des Moines and now resides in St. Paul, Minnesota with his wife, Linda, who is a photographer.

Gammell is both an author and illustrator of children's books. He also worked as a free-lance illustrator for various periodicals in New York during the early 1970s.

"Gammell's father was an art editor with Meredith Publishing, creators of popular magazines, including *Better Homes and Gardens*."

Gammell remembers, "A big part of my childhood was spent drawing. Practically every night my father would bring home a new variety of pencil and paper. These great piles of paper of many thicknesses and colors were better than any toy. Father also supplied me with magazines like *Colliers* and *Saturday Evening Post*. I remember being impressed by their illustrations and cutting them up to make scrapbooks. While I had no notion what an artist was, I did have an awareness of illustration from an early age."

Critic's Corner

Besides earning the Caldecott Award for *Song and Dance Man* in 1988 and the Caldecott Honor award in 1986 for *The Relatives Came* (by Cynthia Rylant), Gammell has had other awards given to his work.

Gammell illustrated the book, *Where the Buffaloes Begin* by Warne, a *Boston Globe*-Horn Book Award Honor Book for Illustration, it was also one of the *New York Times* Best Illustrated Books, the *New York Times* Outstanding Books of the Year, and received the Parent's Choice Award from the Parent's Choice Foundation, all in 1981. In 1982 the book was nominated for the American Book Award in the Picture Book category and became a Caldecott Honor Book.

Gammell's illustrations for *Old Henry* by Joan W. Blos was a *Boston Globe*-Horn Book Award Honor Book for Illustration in 1987.

Gammell has also illustrated another one of Cynthia Rylant's books, *Waiting to Waltz: A Childhood*, a collection of poems named an ALA Notable Book in 1984.

About his preferences in styles of work, Gammell says, "I am inspired by text which gives me the freedom to interpret. I don't like being tied to a specific historical time period, style of architecture or costume. I like texts which take place anytime, anywhere. For this reason, I enjoy elements of fantasy in a story, and turn down anything that is too literal. A careful look at my work tells the way I 'interpret' a text. I take a poetic approach. The events I depict could easily be portrayed in a number of different ways."

Objectives

1. To learn about vaudeville shows
2. To discuss family member relationships
3. To realize the value of entertainment

Comprehension/Discussion Questions

1. Discuss what kind of art medium Gammell uses for the illustrations.
2. Notice that the socks Grandpa is wearing on the cover of the book are not the ones he is wearing in the story. Notice also the back of the book shows the three children dressed in their pajamas. After reading the story, discuss why the children might be in their pajamas. (Maybe they spent the night at Grandma and Grandpa's.)
3. Discuss why the title is "jagged." (It almost looks like it is tap

dancing.) Notice the little lines Gammell draws around an object or person to make it look like it is moving. Notice this is done in comic strips and comic books also. Is this realistic?

4. Notice the way Gammell draws shadows on the cover of the book, page 7 and when Grandpa is dancing in the attic. Notice the pictures in the living room of the house are blurry. One does show a man with a bowler hat and a moustache. Who could that be? (*pages 1-2*)
5. What nicknames do the students have for their grandparents? Are they Grandma and Grandpa? Some names you've probably heard are Nana, Papa, Grams, Gramps, and Grandad. If there is a story that goes with the reason the grandparent has their nickname, share the story.
6. Before reading page 5, notice on page 4 the clock says 5:02. Is it P.M. or A.M.? Why? What could the children be coming at this time for? (*Supper*) What do the students call the last meal of the day, supper or dinner?
7. What did the children and their grandparents have for dinner? Do the students have special meals only at their grandparents? Maybe a special treat, or favorite dish? Share stories and maybe recipes, or tastes even!
8. On page 6 Grandpa says, "I wonder if my tap shoes still fit?" while smiling. Is he kidding? Does he know they still fit and is just teasing? What do the students think?
9. How many of the students have an attic at their home? What all is in it? Have they been in their grandparents' attics? What are they like?
10. Notice on page 6 the little boy takes off his checkered shirt. Could it be hot going up to the attic? (*Heat rises.*) Based on the clothing the children are wearing, what time of year might it be? (*It looks like fall to me.*)
11. Notice the "scribbly" way Gammell illustrates the walls and ceilings of the house. Is this realistic?
12. How old would Grandpa probably have been during the "song and dance days" when he was in vaudeville acts?
13. Before reading past page 8, ask students what they think is in the trunk. Were any of them right? Do any of the students' families have trunks? What is in theirs, or what is it used for? (*to take to camp?*)
14. Notice the attic ceiling looks almost "wiry," could those lines represent cobwebs, perhaps? (*pages 7-8*)
15. Notice how Gammell makes the objects Grandpa is getting out of the trunk on page 9 seem to be in mid-air or moving. Is this realistic if Grandpa would probably be taking them out one by one?
16. Notice the antics of the children on page 10. Which students have ever played "dress up" before? Where and how? Share stories.
17. How did the children know about the "bright lights twinkling and the piano player nodding his head along with the music? Did Grandpa explain it to them? What were the shammy and the powder used for?
18. Discuss whether or not the students like pages 13 and 14. Is 13 supposed to be Grandpa's shadow? Would a shadow show the outlines of Grandpa's clothes, such as his tie, like shown on page 13?
19. Why do children "forget that it's Grandpa dancing"? Have the students ever forgotten where they were while concentrating on something else?
20. Discuss the descriptive language Ackerman uses to describe Grandpa's tap dancing such as, "silvery tap(s)." Do the students get clearer pictures in their heads of the story because of the descriptive language?
21. How many students know what a banjo is? Have they ever heard one, or know someone who can play one?
22. On page 15 it says that Grandpa's voice "is as round and as strong as a canyon echo." Discuss this simile.
23. Notice that things such as the boxes the lamp is on, appear to be shaking when Grandpa is singing. (*page 15*)
24. What are the three pictures on page 16 supposed to represent? Notice the "striped Grandpa" especially. Have the students ever seen a book illustrated like this before? Would they have given this book a Caldecott Award? Why?
25. Why is Grandpa's show, "better than any show in TV"?
26. Who is narrating the story? Is it the older boy or girl, or the younger boy? Is it Karen Ackerman telling about her childhood? (*Reread page 4*)
27. Why are Grandpa's eyes watering? Have any of the students laughed so hard their eyes watered? Share stories. Why does Grandpa slap his knee? Have any of the students ever done that when they thought something was funny? Have they ever seen anyone else do it? Have any of the students ever laughed so hard it felt like the room was shaking? Have they ever gotten the hiccups because they were laughing so hard?
28. Notice that Grandpa is referred to as "the song and dance man" on page 16 and 18. Is this because the children forgot it was Grandpa on page 13? Notice though that "Grandpa" gets the glass of water on page 20 and stays "he" or "Grandpa" for the rest of the story.
29. Do the students really think Grandpa would have tried to scare the hiccups out of the children? How would he have done it?
30. Why were the silk hat and the gold tipped cane saved until the

- finale? Discuss Grandpa's use of dramatics when he lowers his eyes. Why does he do that? (*To get the audience's attention and make the finale special?*)
31. What does it mean, "and the sounds coming from them are too many to make with only two feet"? (*page 22*)
 32. Notice the "rainbow-like" colors on the ceiling on page 21 and the arch of colors around Grandpa on page 24. Plus on page 22 the diagonal blue line and the blotches of color on page 23. Are these realistic illustrations? How do these illustration features affect the story? What is the arch around Grandpa on page 24 supposed to symbolize? (*Sort of the end or the finale, like a rainbow is for a rainstorm.*)
 33. Grandpa gets "all out of breath." Have the students ever been all out of breath? Share stories.
 34. Why does Grandpa gently wrap up his shoes? Do the students have a belonging that they treat with similar care? Where did they get the treasured item? Share stories.
 35. Notice the mirror reflection on page 25.
 36. What would the students wish they could have seen that happened before they were born? Why wouldn't Grandpa trade a million good old days for the ones he spends with his grandchildren?
 37. Have the students ever had experiences that they wish they could repeat that they know they never can? Share stories. (*Like winning a race that's for a certain aged child or attending a camp they have outgrown.*) Discuss Grandpa's feelings about his vaudeville days. Do the students think he misses them?
 38. Notice where the dedication page is in the book. Is this a traditional place for it to be? (It's usually at the front of a book.) Why is it here?
 39. Ask the students how this book makes them feel. Discuss age differences that exist in family members and the fact that old people were actually young once like the students are now. Have them try to understand what it would feel like to be old in this time period while knowing the changes that have occurred over the years. What changes would they like or dislike if they were an older person?
 40. Do the students think that Grandpa has probably done a show like this for the children before? (*Reread page 4*) Do they think he will do it again?
 5. Research what vaudeville acts were, the time periods they were popular (1880's - 1930's), how they developed, and what caused their downfall.
 6. Predict what the book will be about by looking at the cover.
 7. Learn how to tap dance and perform magic tricks. Have a professional tap dancer visit the class, see a film that has tap dancing in it, and/or listen to a tape recording of someone tap dancing.
 8. Find bowler and top hats for the students to try on or make some out of papier mâché. Have a vaudeville-like show on a stage or in your classroom and invite another class to be the audience. Be sure to give them a little history about vaudeville and the book *Song and Dance Man*.
 9. Get a pair of suspenders for the students to try on.
 10. Have students share stories about their grandparents. Prepare questions together that students could ask during an interview with their grandparents, or an older person, to find out what that person's past has been like. Have them come back with a tape recording or a written transcript to share with the class. Did any of the students find similar information? Have students research the decade their grandparents were born in. When students are interviewing grandparents or senior citizens have them ask what that person misses about their past.
 11. Have students imagine they are senior citizens and have them write down or tape record answers to the interviewing questions they created. Have them keep this to give to their grandchild.
 12. Have some of the students' grandparents or some local senior citizens visit the class. Have the students visit a retirement home that houses senior citizens.
 13. Have the students invent first and last names and ages for the characters in the story.
 14. If the students have attics in their homes, have them go explore them. Have them write down or draw items they find there, and have an adult join them to explain to them some of the objects. Have students share their findings with the class.
 15. Research the department store that is named on the hat box on page 8. Show the students a hat box. Have they ever seen one? Research hats that have been worn in the past decades. Try to find some for the students to try on.
 16. Have a "dress up" day where the students bring in clothes that can be used as costumes.
 17. Notice the posters on the wall on page 7. Make some that are similar, or some to advertise the class show.

Student Activities

1. Read the book to and/or along with your students.
2. Research the Caldecott Awards.
3. Read other books by Ackerman and/or Gammell.
4. Read other fiction and nonfiction books about tap dancing and/or grandparents or older people.

18. Research shadows. Has Gammell portrayed them correctly? Can they be colorful? Try to draw shadows of objects or people.
19. Count the steps that are shown going to the attic. Do the students' homes have steep steps going to their attics? Count them. Which student has the most steps leading up to their attic?
20. Smell cedar chips and research to find out what they are used for.
21. Make a list of what "old saved things" Grandpa had in his trunk that are shown in the story. Make some up that he could have had in there.
22. Bring in a trunk for the students to each put an item that they would want to show their grandchildren that would represent part of their childhood. Have students talk about the object they chose before placing it in the trunk.
23. Make vests (maybe out of paper bags) and matching bow ties to wear in the class show.
24. Play a piano, have someone come play piano for the students, or listen to a recording of some piano music, preferably "song and dance" type music. Research songs of the 1880's - 1930's and learn the words to some. Use these in the class show. Have songbooks so the show can be a sing-along too.
25. Act out the whole story, or just page 12 when the children cheer Grandpa on and page 19 when Grandpa tries to look surprised when his hanky keeps growing.
26. Create more dialogue for Grandpa. How does he explain the "song and dance days" to the children? (*Reread page 10*)
27. Use a lamp to show the students how Grandpa made spotlights. Use this type of lighting for the class show.
28. Listen to a tape recording of rain falling, preferably the sounds of it falling on a tin roof. Research about tin roofs, are they made very often anymore?
29. Research canyons and echoes. Find some place for the students to make echoes.
30. Learn the song, "Yankee Doodle Boy" and find out how it differs from the song, "Yankee Doodle."
31. Teach students how to wink. Play the game, "Wink Murder" where you sit in a circle facing one another. Each person takes a folded slip of paper from the center of the circle and secretly looks at it, folds it up and returns it to the middle. The person who picks the piece of paper that reads "killer" needs to "kill" all the other people by secretly winking at them one by one without the others seeing. The "killed" players need to help to try and keep the identity of the killer a secret so they shouldn't "die" immediately, but wait until a few seconds after the killer has winked at them. The more dramatic the dying scenes the more fun. Play until all the players have had a turn being the killer.
32. Research silver dollars and bring some to class.
33. Have canes for the students to use when they are dancing in the class show.
34. Research banjos, try to get someone to come play one for the students or teach them how to play it, or listen to a tape recording of one being played.
35. Try to flip a bowler cap like Grandpa did on page 17.
36. Make and eat "elephant floats" using elephant-shaped animal crackers to add to the soda and the ice cream.
37. Have a joke-telling contest.
38. Make a list of ways the students have heard of or tried to get rid of the hiccups. Research the hiccups.
39. Research silk. How common are silk hats now days?
40. See which student can stand still the longest.
41. Have each of the students take a deep breath like Grandpa did. (*page 21*)
42. Have students try to spin and jump in the air like Grandpa did. (*Maybe go outside.*)
43. Kneel down like Grandpa did when he ended his performance. Have students act out what they would have done if they had just seen Grandpa finish his act.
44. Give out hugs.
45. Whisper like Grandpa did on page 27.
46. Research the concept of a million. Count a million objects. Research what happened a million years ago. Research what happened a million days ago. What day, month and year will it be a million days from today? What do the students think that day will be like?
47. Read the dedication for the book. Who are the people mentioned?
48. Listen to a recording of and learn the words to the song, "Mr. Bojangles" written by Jerry Walker and sung by many artists including, Bob Dylan, Neil Diamond, or the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band.

Bibliography

ed. Commire, Anne, *Something About the Author: Facts and Pictures About Authors and Illustrators of Books for Young People*, Vol. 53, 1988.

Book jacket for *Song and Dance Man* as published by Alfred A. Knopf, 1988.

Vocabulary Test

Some of the words in *Song and Dance Man* were homophones, words that sound alike and may be spelled the same, but have different meanings.

Circle the correct letter(s) beside the words that were used in the story and tell what page(s) you found the word(s) on. Be prepared to read at least one sentence you found the homophone in aloud.

1. Page _____

- a. trunk - a nose of an elephant
- b. trunk - a large piece of luggage

2. Page _____

- a. float - to stay on top of water
- b. float - a drink made with ice cream and soda

3. Page _____

- a. too - a lot more
- b. two - a number representing a pair of an item
- c. too - also

4. Page _____

- a. corn - a vegetable
- b. corn - a bump on a foot

5. Page _____

- a. whole - all of something
- b. hole - an empty space

6. Page _____

- a. down - the opposite of up
- b. down - a bird's feathers

7. Page _____

- a. light - when something weighs only a small amount
- b. light - a lamp, or overhead bulb
- c. light - a stage spotlight

Comprehension Test

Circle the correct answer for each of the questions listed below.

1. Grandpa danced while wearing
 - a. tennis shoes
 - b. ballerina slippers
 - c. tap shoes.

2. Grandpa kept his "old things saved" in
 - a. a hat box labeled "CRONIN'S"
 - b. a leather-trimmed trunk
 - c. a paper bag.

3. While Grandpa and the children were in the attic, Grandma was downstairs
 - a. making supper
 - b. ironing
 - c. reading.

4. Grandpa used to perform his show
 - a. at rodeos
 - b. on a vaudeville stage
 - c. in other people's attics.

5. The last hat Grandpa wore during his act was a
 - a. black silk top hat
 - b. bowler hat
 - c. baseball cap.

Answer Key

Vocabulary Test

1. b: pages 6, 21, and 25.
2. a or b: on page 18 the joke depends on how you interpret the word "float."
3. a: page 16, b: page 13, 18, and 22, c: page 19.
4. b: corns on page 11.
5. a: page 19.
6. a: page 27.
7. b: pages 5 and 28, b or c: page 21 for lights that are really lamps, but they are being used as stage spotlights, c: lights page 10.

Comprehension Test

1. c
2. b
3. a
4. b
5. a



**PERMA-BOUND
VANDALIA ROAD
JACKSONVILLE, ILLINOIS
62650**

**PHONE
1-800-637-6581**