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Directing Earth, Fire, and Water With a 5th Grade Class

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DIRECTING EARTH, FIRE, AND WATER WITH A 5TH GRADE CLASS

Lucy Bryson



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Directing *Earth, Fire, and Water* with a 5th Grade Class
by
Lucy Bryson

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements of the CSU Honors Program

for Honors in the degree of
Bachelors of Science and Education
in
Theatre Education,
College of Education,
Columbus State University

Thesis Advisor Brenda May et al Date 5-6-08

Committee Member Kimberly R Garcia Date 5-6-08

CSU Honors Program Director Juan M. Ariz Date 5-06-08

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Index

Proposal.....	2
Script.....	7
Ward.....	12
Analysis.....	15
Costumes and Props.....	30
Blocking.....	33
Light and Sound Cues.....	51
Program.....	57
Post Mortem.....	60
References.....	64
DVD.....	Back Cover

Proposal

The value of arts education in our schools is on the rise. Many studies have been conducted in the recent past supporting this rise. The College Board reports that students since 1999 exposed and involved with arts education score higher on the SAT. (Americans for the Arts) As a result theatre education is on the rise. Traditionally drama programs have only been established in secondary schools; however, middle and elementary schools are beginning to add drama programs to their curriculum. These programs vary from school to school. Some are very performance based using class time to choose a play, audition, rehearse, and put on a play for an audience. These classes use hands on experience to teach students the basics of drama and play production as opposed to traditional lecture classes. Other classes may combine lecture, activity, and smaller performances to cover the same material. The purpose of this thesis is to successfully produce and direct a 5th grade play which will give the students the opportunity to learn about theatre through hands on experience within the rehearsal process. This experience will add an additional realm to my formal education and expand my creative process by working with a class of 5th graders instead of a traditional high school class.

Directing always presents interesting challenges. First the director must choose a script suitable for the age group, the audience, and the school. Then an extensive analysis must be written and researched. This research will include past productions, outside references made in the play, other versions of the script, the playwright, and if the play is an adaptation, the original work. A concept is chosen by the director and the parts are cast in an audition. After this the director must create and give blocking, the staging, in rehearsals. Finally props, costumes, set, lights, and sound are added. In a professional setting, these last elements would be handled by another member of the production team.

In an educational setting this is rarely the case. The director must gather, make, and put together these technical elements.

Producers always have their work cut out for them. In a professional setting, they oversee the entire production from fundraising to hiring to casting to rehearsals to curtain. In an educational setting they are rarely present – the producer is encompassed in the director. The producer sees that the paper work is all in order – advertisements, royalties, and programs. This behind-the-scenes job is the backbone of any production.

The process will be loosely based on the philosophy and method of Winifred Ward, the mother of Creative Dramatics. Ward not only created and coined the term Creative Dramatics but founded the Evanston Children's Theatre and the organization that has become the American Alliance for Theatre and Education. (Y.Y.) Ward had many philosophies about education and theatre. I have implemented as many I could into this process. The philosophies that I will use include: children should have the opportunity to choose, deliberate, and evaluate; anyone can do Creative Dramatics; and playmaking should be literature based. Ward also encouraged ensemble work. I have not been able to use any of her methods while working in previous theatres and am anxious to see the differences in the final product.

The play I chose for this 5th grade class is *Earth, Fire and Water*. It is an adaptation of a Chinese legend by Irene N. Watts published in the book *Just a Minute*. It is a story of a people oppressed by an emperor with a short temper and unpredictable mood swings. Within the community there lives a widow whose husband has been killed at war (fighting in the emperor's army against men they did not know) on the same day as her fourth child, a daughter, is born. In addition to her husband's unfortunate death,

she is considered unlucky because daughters and the number four are unlucky. The widow declares she will not allow her family to starve. A ghost comes and secretly bestows gifts to the children – the gift of all knowing, the gift of strength and farming, the gift of friendship with fire, and the gift of control over water. As a result the sons and daughter are able to provide well for their family. One day Moon Li, the daughter, is tending her geese and sees the emperor coming to shoot her geese for dinner. She warns the geese and saves their lives. However, this makes the emperor angry and he has her thrown in jail. A fierce tiger is thrown into the cell with Moon Li. Instead of the blood bath expected, they become friends. The emperor declares the prisoner will burn. Luckily her brothers come to her rescue. They switch places setting Moon Li free and using the gifts from the ghost to withstand the fire and later switching to escape drowning. The emperor drowns instead and the villagers rejoice in their newly found freedom.

This piece was chosen for several reasons. It is a story the 5th graders have read in a previous class. They are familiar with and enjoy the story. The script is well written. (Many scripts I have been exposed to written for this age group are often poorly written and the students do not enjoy working with such scripts.) Because this is adapted from a folk tale, it is well grounded and classic. This particular script is easily an ensemble show so each student will have many parts and fully involved with everything happening onstage. It also has enough parts for every student in the class. Overall I believe *Earth, Fire and Water* is the best choice for this class.

Scheduling is crucial to the success of a play. You do not want to allow too much time for rehearsals because the play will be boring if they rehearse too much. On the

other hand, if you do not rehearse enough the cast may not be prepared for the performance. There is a balance, but it is different for each show and cast. I have prepared a tentative schedule for *Earth, Fire and Water* as follows:

Week 1: Playmaking (introduce the story, read through the script, give time to act out the play without using scripts, and informal auditions)

Week 2: Blocking (staging the play)

Week 3: Working (running the play to work out potential problems and adding lights and sound)

Week 4: Show! (dress rehearsal and show on Tuesday February 26, 2008)

In order to fully document this experience, I will produce filmed samples of rehearsals and final performance along with an analysis of the piece, research, prop and costume lists, sound and light cues, any publicity paperwork, and a post-mortem paper describing my final thoughts on the final project. The first video will be of the final day of playmaking. (I narrate the story and the students act it out. I do not direct this – they are creating the staging through trial and error learned from previous times playing.)

These documents are crucial in showing the progression of the rehearsal process and final product. The problem I am solving in this thesis is how to take a script and transform it into a work of art with a 5th grade class. The correct solution cannot be found. There are infinite ways to produce a play and I can only do one at a time. The experiences from this project will change and further my understanding of how to produce a play while the students gain the experience of putting a play together.

Script of *Earth, Fire, and Water*

Scene 1: The Village

Ensemble 1: Long ago in a poor village called Dragon Pool in the Province of Gansu, in China, the people were afraid of their ruler.

Ensemble 2: Imprisonment and death were a part of everyday life, and no one knew from moment to moment who would suffer next.

Ensemble 6: Life was cheap.

Ensemble 3: A widow lived there with her four children, who all looked like each other.

Moon Li: Mother, why must I dress like my brothers? People will think I'm a boy.

Widow: Because it is safer so.

Li 1: I am the eldest son, Li 1.

Li 2: I am the second son, Li 2.

Li 3: I am the third son, Li 3, and this is my sister, Moon Li.

Moon Li: I have never seen my father. He died when I was born.

Li 1: He died fighting in the Mandarin's army, against a people he did not know.

Scene 2: Night Ghost

Widow: I remember the whispers of the women when my daughter was born.

Ensemble 2: A girl child, and four is an unlucky number.

Ensemble 1: The number of death and misfortune.

Widow: The day she was born, I remember with sadness her father's death, and I fear for the future.

Ensemble 4: They will surely starve.

Widow: We will not go hungry! We will manage to survive. I hold my daughter, the moonlight on her face. I will call her Moon Li.

Ensemble 5: Then out of the walls there appeared a ghost.

Widow: Aaaa, Kuei, a ghost!

Ghost: Yes, do not be afraid. On this night, as the soul of your husband leaves this earth and a new soul is born, there is both sorrow and joy. I bring you gifts. (to Moon Li) I give you understanding of all things. (To Li 3) The heat and flame in the heart of the fire will be your friend. (To Li 2) I give you the strength of the earth, even as my foot stamps on the ground like this. (To Li 1) The secret of the tides, the ebb and flow of water is yours to know, like your own breath. Use these gifts wisely.

Scene 3: The Days Pass By

Li 1: I fish for food, I know the river tides. I can empty a pool in one gulp and fill it again with one breath like the torrent from the mountains when the snow melts. No one knows I can do this.

Li 2: I work in the fields with the village oxen, their strength is my strength, and no rock in the ground is stronger than the strength of my arm. No one knows I can do this.

Li 3: I can plunge my hands into the fire and they do not burn. Fire is my friend. The fires I build keep us warm all through the long winter. No one knows I can do this.

Moon Li: I watch over the sheep and the geese for the village. The animals are my friends.

Scene 4: The Ruler

Ensemble 5: Long days of work, quiet days.

Ensemble 2: Long days of fear, waiting for the ruler to strike, and his soldiers to threaten.

Mandarin: I am the ruler. This is my land and everything upon it belongs to me. Tonight there will be a banquet to celebrate my victories. Let us hunt.

Ensemble 1: And so they set off.

Ensemble 6: But the hunt was not for wild game, for the ruler had seen Moon Li with her geese.

Mandarin: Those plump birds will be better than scrawny wild geese. The boy can do nothing.

Seize him and bring him to the cage. I have a very hungry tiger who needs exercise.

Scene 5: Understanding of All Living Things

Ghost: Understanding of all living things.

Mandarin: Guard the boy well. Tomorrow we will have a public execution!

Scene 6: The Strength of the Earth

Ensemble 1: That night while her mother prayed, Moon Li waited in her cage, but her brothers planned their sister's escape.

Ghost: The strength of the earth.

Scene 7: The Fire

Mandarin: Build a great pile of wood and kindling here in the square. The people shall be made to watch one who defies me burn to ashes.

Ensemble 5: Poor woman, to lose her son like this.

Ensemble 1: Will this cruelty never end?

Ensemble 3: Quiet, or we'll be next. We need not look.

Ensemble 6: If we ignore this, as we have always done, who will be next?

Ensemble 4: May her other children comfort her.

Widow: How can he live in those flames?

Ghost: The flame in the fire is your friend.

Moon Li: We must trust in each other – don't be afraid.

(Li swap)

All: Aaii, aiaa!

Ensemble 2: A miracle!

Ensemble 1: He steps unharmed from the ashes!

Ensemble 5: He is a fire ghost!

Moon Li: See, Mother, he is unharmed.

Mandarin: Seize him! We will take him to the river – man the boat! We will throw him into the deepest part of the Yangtze, and there shall be an end to this defiance.

Scene 8: The Secret of the Tides

Ensemble 3: When the boat carrying Li 1 reached the middle of the river, the Mandarin spoke.

Mandarin: Here is the deepest part of the river. The currents are too strong to swim in. Throw him overboard! He shall not survive this time.

Ghost: The ebb and flow of water like your own breath.

Ensemble 1: Li 1, who could gulp the river in one breath, opened his mouth and swallowed the water, so that the ship capsized and the Mandarin and his men fell in the mud, and slipped and pushed and roared for help.

Ensemble 6: Then Li 1, who had reached the shore, knelt on the river bank and all the water gushed back into the river.

Ensemble 4: The waters are rising. They will be drowned!

Ensemble 5: And the tyrant and his men were all drowned.

Ensemble 2: The people made songs, and in times of trouble the still whisper them, to get through the bad times.

All: We saw from the Yangtze River's banks,
Tyrants whimper as they sank.
The strength of the soil,
The warmth of the flames,
The gift of water will bless our toil,
While Moon Li's compassion our land reclaims.

Winifred Ward and Playmaking

Winifred Ward was born in 1884 and passed away in 1975. She began her career focusing on singing and speech. Ward worked in London in speech therapy and founded the Kingdon-Ward school of speech therapy. After this Ward taught at Northwestern University for 30 years and it is there she launched her influential role in children's theatre. As her methods and philosophies formed and began spreading throughout the theatrical community she was deemed the mother of Creative Dramatics. As well as developing this method she started the Children's Theatre of Evanston and a national Children's Theatre Conference. This conference has grown into AATE, the American Alliance for Theatre and Education. (Y.Y) Ward is the author of *Playmaking for Children*. This book outlines her methods developed working with children in the Evanston area. Her influence has branched and is popular among educators today. She has influenced important figures in children's theatre such as Sara Spenser, Charlotte Chorpenning, Clare Tree Major. (Oxford Companion to American Theatre)

One of her major contributions to children's theatre is playmaking. The Playmaking method is founded in education. She believed in using "the natural interests of the children as a point of departure for learning." (Kase-Polisini 124) This supports educating the whole child, which is one of her philosophies. Her method is literary-based. The leader should take extreme care in selecting a story with literary merit which will catch the interest of the children. The idea behind this method is to allow children the opportunity to make decisions.

The process of Playmaking typically follows this routine:

1. Warm-Up (typically a theatre game that will tie into the lesson)
2. Tell the story

3. Go over the story and discuss the plan – sequence of events, who will play each part, what might the scene look like in real life, ect.

4. Play the story

5. Evaluate (What did the children like about that run? What didn't they like? What do they want to change?)

6. Re-play

7. Repeat steps 5 and 6 until children are happy with the result.

Hodge Analysis

I. Given Circumstances

A. Environmental facts:

1. Geographical location:



The colored region on the map of China shows the province of Gansu. However, I have not been able to locate a village called Dragon Pool. There is a Black Dragon Pool Park.

The Province of Gansu is still a province in China. Historically it was important because of its location within China. It served as cross roads for travelers which may be how the oral story of this play came to be passed down. It also makes sense for it to be set in a place well known, especially when you tell it while you're in Gansu. It would have helped the story survive.

2. **Date:** “Long Ago” is all the playwright leaves us. I think this frees the audience and everyone involved from trying to think of what was going on in history then. It keeps everyone thinking about the story, not the history.
 3. **Economic Environment:** Simply put – the rich are very rich and the poor are very poor. I have not been able to find any evidence of currency – families probably made or bartered for everything they needed. Some sort of tax must have been paid to the Emperor to support his army. Money is not really discussed in the world of the play, other than the concern of starving.
 4. **Political Environment:** The Emperor is the ultimate power. He is unpredictable and harsh. The people walk on egg shells. Everything depends on the mood of the Emperor.
 5. **Social Environment:** It is a world where everyone is equally in danger except the Emperor. Everyone, including guards, fears him. Because of this every person is somewhat equal. A widow is worth less because she lacks a husband. Men dominate society. Men are providers for families and women without a husband are inconsequential.
 6. **Religious Environment:** Ancestor worship was prevalent in Ancient China. The dead were buried with sacrifices, sometimes human. It was the head of the family’s responsibility to make sure the sacrifices to ancestors were frequent. Perhaps the ghost is believed by the family to be an ancestor.
- **Not many given circumstances have specifics. I believe this is used by the playwright to keep the center of attention on the story and not unimportant information.

B. Previous Action: A woman has had three boys and one baby girl. Her husband is killed fighting in a war for the emperor.

C. Polar Attitudes:

Widow: Determined, sad, scared → overjoyed, confident, happy

Li Brothers: Unaware, hard working → confident, proud

Moon Li: Innocent, scared → loving, free, trusting

Villagers: Scared, Beaten Down, Judgmental → Free, excited, joyous

Emperor: powerful, unrelenting, mean → None...he dies...

II. Dialogue

A. Choice of Words:

The choice of words used in the play is a result of the age group this play is intended for. There are no words that are not easily understood. Also because it is very presentational, the wording reads very much like a story book for children. It is all stated in simple, to the point, and clear words. There is relatively little description. Often full sentences are not used - short fragments often describe the general mood of the scene. I believe the author chose to use these words because they create the illusion of a story being told without many specific characters. It allows the script to be more flexible and the story told as simply as possible. It forces the audience to focus on the story being told.

Note: My initial assumption about the choice of words being obviously simple enough for the age group was somewhat incorrect. I had several students ask what the meaning of some words. Luckily it only hindered their understanding of the

play briefly. Because we worked for so long without scripts the plot and meaning was thoroughly understood by all students. The specific words were addressed to their satisfaction and we carried on with rehearsal.

B. Choice of phrases and sentence structure/Structure of lines and Speeches:

There are many phrases repeated throughout scenes. It brings uniformity to the characters – illustrating the group to which they belong. The Li siblings all have similar patterns in speech. The clearest examples of this are their introductions and explanations of gifts from the ghost. These repeated phrases are to emphasize very important facts to the audience. It creates not only more opportunity for the children to have lines, but guarantees the audience's understanding of the story.

Most of the lines are short phrases. This gives the actors less to worry about as far as speaking and memorization. They should have a relatively easy time memorizing the lines which enables them to spend more time concentrating on their character development and blocking. (Also, with less to worry about they will have more fun too.)

C. Choice of Images:

Strong detailed images are not prominent in this play. Enough description is given to set the scene, but never more than necessary. We are told in one scene we are at a river. But that is all. No time is wasted describing the color of the water or the beautiful greenery lining the banks of the river. The blocking and direction must create the detail – or suggest the detail. The fine details are left to the reader's imagination and this extends to the actors, director and audience. I think this is a

beautiful way to write a children's play because it encourages imagination and creativity from all involved.

D. Choice of peculiar characteristics:

There is nothing in the text that suggests peculiar characteristics. This creates a sense of cohesiveness within the play. The characters all read like a piece of a narrative and once again the details are left to the actor and director to fill in the blanks. This will allow freedom to the actors to make choices without being tied down to the text specifics.

E. The sound of the dialogue:

The sound of the dialogue has both a poetic and children's story ring. When the short lines are strung together it reads like a narrative poem only with several voices. This brings some beauty and grandeur to the script. It rolls off the tongue and is easy to listen to. It creates a natural rhythm to the play. When I read it aloud alone it gives me a sense of reading a children's book to a child. The author targeted this piece for a young audience and that feel has been achieved in the sound of the text.

III. Dramatic Action

A. Titles of the Units

1. Introductions
2. The Mean Queens of Gossip
3. The Gift Giving
4. The Explanation
5. The Hunt
6. The Emperor Strikes
7. Here Kitty, Kitty, Kitty
8. If You Don't Succeed at Once...
9. Bustin' Out
10. The Forced Audience
11. Only a Miracle to Some
12. Try, Try, Try Again.
13. What Goes Around, Comes Around.
14. Tying Off With a Pretty Bow.

B. Breakdown of action (verbs)

1. All: to introduce
2. Widow: to defend
Ensemble: to jeer
3. Widow: to grasp
Ghost: to give
4. Li Brothers and Moon Li: to divulge

5. Ensemble: to tell

Moon Li: to rescue

Emperor: to gloat

6. Emperor: to punish

Moon Li: to accept

Guards/Soldiers: to obey

7. Tiger: to eat

Moon Li: to befriend

Emperor: to revenge

8. Tiger: to play

Moon Li: to play

Emperor: to put off

Guards: to guard

9. Moon Li: to wait

Li Brothers: to bust out

10. Villagers/Ensemble: to sympathize

Widow: to bury

Moon Li: to hold steady

Li Brothers: to coil

Emperor: to challenge

11. Villagers/Ensemble: to exclaim

Widow: to crumble

Li Brothers: to trick

Moon Li: to comfort

Emperor: to finalize

12. Villagers/Ensemble/Widow: to watch

Li Brothers: to mock

Moon Li: to watch

Emperor: to teach

13. Villagers/Ensemble/Widow: to declare

Li Brothers: to teach

Moon Li: to declare

Emperor: to fall

14. All: to glorify

IV. Characters

A. Desire

Moon Li wants to live freely.

Li Brothers want to support.

Widow wants to provide.

Ghost wants to protect.

Emperor wants complete power.

Guards want to gain favor from the Emperor.

Village People want to live.

B. Will

Moon Li is willing to sacrifice her freedom for others. She is in a situation that she must hide to survive. She has little will to fight for her own freedom.

Li Brothers are willing to go to great lengths to protect and provide for their family. They support the family easily enough with their gifts, but go to great lengths to rescue Moon Li.

Widow is willing to do what it takes. The brothers support the family, but she still maintains the house and does what she can to help. Before the children were given the gifts by the ghost, she supported the family in the father's absence.

Ghost is willing to give strengths to the children, but not do the work for them.

Emperor is willing to do anything to maintain and gain power. Sacrificing the lives of his people is not a concern. The people's lives are not worth anything to him. He personally will not do anything, but has his guards carry out his dirty work.

Guards are willing to carry out any of the Emperor's demands to ensure their safety and good standing.

Village People are not willing to do anything about their position. They have watched all rebellions crushed by the Emperor and his guards. It is not worth the risk. They live in fear.

C. Moral Stance

Moon Li is a believer in love. Her gift of understanding all living things helps her to love everyone. She most likely practices some form of Ancestor Worship with her family.

Li Brothers believe in fairness. They work hard and receive the benefits. They believe in the value of family and the importance in sticking together as a family. They most likely practice some form of Ancestor Worship with the family.

Widow believes in the strength of family.

Ghost believes in rewarding and comforting.

Emperor believes he is the ultimate being on Earth. He believes in his invincibility.

Guards believe in family. They value their families over the other villagers. They trade the lives of the villagers for the safety of their family.

Village People believe in family and safety. They follow orders to stay alive. They believe in survival.

D. Decorum - The script does not specify physical traits for any character.

Moon Li: still and glowing, commands attention without gimmicks,

Li Brothers: loud, fun loving, rowdy, serious, hard-working, loving

Widow: quiet, able bodied, slower moving than her children

Ghost: fast, nimble, light footed, flowing

Emperor: strong, sure footed, decisive in movement, head held high

Guards: strong, uniform

Village People: (each villager should have different physicality that includes)
graceful, clumsy, energetic, loud, quiet, strong, weak, meek

E. Summary list of adjectives

Moon Li: quiet, peaceful, loving, compassionate, open

Li Brothers: proud, loving, smart, fun, giving, goofy

Widow: calm, loving, looking for peace, caring, concerned

Ghost: mysterious, giving, careful

Emperor: unconcerned, hateful, greedy, un-accepting

Guards: hard, worn, tired, proud

Village People: beaten down, tired, weary, scared, hopeful, seeking joy

V. Idea

A. Meaning of Title: The title chosen for this play is extremely interesting. The other adaptations of this folk tale have very different names than the play. One book is *The Seven Brothers* by Paul Goble and the other *The Five Brothers* by Claire Huchet Bishop and Kurt Wiese. It is interesting the author chose to use the elements as the title instead of identifying the brothers in the title. The brothers become the focus and the “main” character when the title names them specifically. The play points out the gifts given to the brothers, not the brothers. I think this makes the story more about the family and the villagers instead of just the brothers. Also the elements of their gifts are three major elements. Fire, earth, and water are extremely important elements. They are three of the five feng shui elements used to create harmony or destruction in buildings. The title continually focuses our attention back to the family, specifically on the brothers.

B. Philosophical Statements in the play: none

C. Implications of the action: The emperor is unconcerned about his people other than obeying him and providing man power for his army and war. The Li family father is sent to war and is killed leaving his family with no way to support themselves. A ghost comes and gives the children a way to earn money for the family. The emperor’s greed and need to make an example of Moon Li leads to his death. The people are free.

VI. Tempos (By Scene)

1. Medium/Slow
2. Starts out a little faster than 1, but slows down when Ghost appears
3. Medium
4. Little faster than 3
5. Medium/Slow
6. Speeding up from 5.
7. Medium/Fast
8. Fast/Medium

VII. Moods (for each beat in the play)

A. Mood adjectives

1. Laying it flat out
2. Condescendingly, rebelliously
3. Unreal
4. Warmly
5. Mousy
6. Unjust anger
7. Confidently
8. Defiantly
9. Secretly
10. Sadly

11. Slyly
12. Macho
13. Excitedly
14. Closure

B. A mood image

1. is like catching a friend up on the ball game at the end of the 7th inning.
2. is like finally standing up to the playground bully.
3. is like finding a tree that grows money.
4. is like telling a new friend a big secret.
5. is like sneaking around your principal when you're late to school.
6. is like being grounded for life because you helped an old lady across the street and missed the bus.
7. is like waiting for a werewolf to jump out at you in a haunted house.
8. is like getting the same problem wrong twice on the board in class.
9. is like doing a magic trick.
10. is like being powerless to help a friend.
11. is like making a sack of homework disappear in front of the teacher.
12. is like getting to the end of a video game.
13. is like a plot twist in the last 10 minutes of a great movie.
14. is like the flash forward part of a movie. (The part where it tells you what happens to the characters later/after the plot ends.)

Costume and Props

Students provided their own black clothing. Those who do not have this I will provide a selection of black turtleneck shirts. Overall, most of the students brought their own. I also provided red strips of material (we called them scarves) for every cast member except one. The only student without a red scarf was Susie who played the ghost – she had white strips of fabric tied on a hair tie worn on her wrists.

I chose to dress them all alike to reinforce the idea of an ensemble. This demonstrated again that no one character was more important than another. Also, a result of the students gathering their own costume helped bring a sense of ownership to the group. They contributed in more than just acting.

The scarves added an extra way for ownership and creativity for the students. They were given the scarves and time to decide how each character would wear the scarf. Because several students played more than one part we used the scarves to indicate the different characters. The class worked together to come up with ideas as to how they could wear the scarves to indicate the different characters. I was pleased to see this transfer into the show and rehearsal – the students readily helped each other get scarves in place in between scenes.

I also decided to cut the suggested props from our production. At first the students were not receptive because they felt I was making it too simple. However we discussed it and I explained my reasons for not wanting props in our show, other than the scarves. We had no set onstage for the play, so there was no place to hide props if we decided to use them. It would involve actors needing to exit and enter when there is no logical place to do so. I really liked the idea of all the students being onstage the whole time for a couple reasons. First, I never had to worry about a student getting into

something potentially dangerous backstage. Secondly, I felt like equal stage time further supported the idea of an ensemble. After I made my case the students supported the choice and were eager to use their imagination instead of traditional props.

Blocking/Director's Script

Key to Characters

Z – Ensemble (with notation of what number ensemble member)

W – Widow

1 – Li 1

2 – Li 2

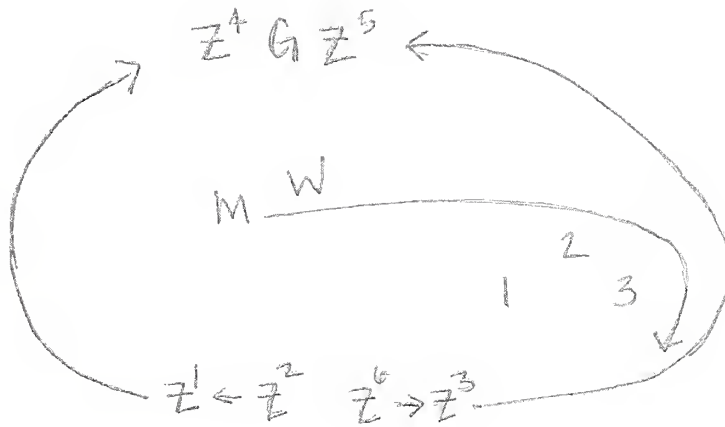
3 – Li 3

M – Moon Li

G – Ghost

E – Mandarin (Emperor)

T – Tiger



- A Whole cast enters & bows to audience
- B $Z^{1,2,6,3}$ X to join semi circle of Z
- C 1, 2, 3 ↑
- D M ↑ & X to 3 (DR)

Earth, Fire, and Water

Scene 1: The Village

Ensemble 1: Long ago in a poor village called Dragon Pool in the Province of Gansu, in China, the people were afraid of their ruler.

Ensemble 2: Imprisonment and death were a part of everyday life, and no one knew from moment to moment who would suffer next.

Ensemble 6: Life was cheap.

Ensemble 3: A widow lived there with her four children, who all looked like each other.

Moon Li: Mother, why must I dress like my brothers? People will think I'm a boy.

Widow: Because it is safer so.

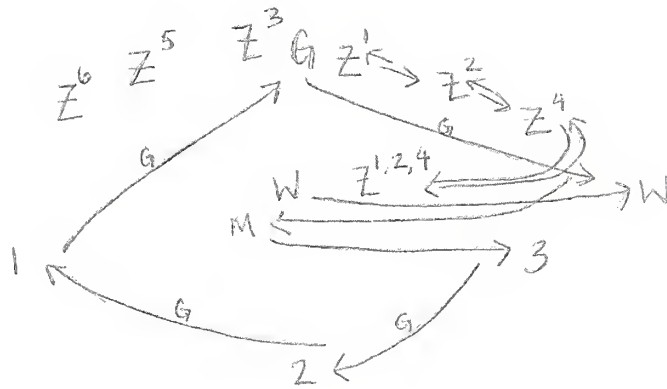
Li 1: I am the eldest son, Li 1.

Li 2: I am the second son, Li 2.

Li 3: I am the third son, Li 3, and this is my sister, Moon Li.

Moon Li: I have never seen my father. He died when I was born.

Li 1: He died fighting in the Mandarin's army, against a people he did not know.



- A $Z^{1,2,4}$ X to W
- B $Z^{1,2,4}$ X to \cap (semi circle), W X SL ∇
- C G enters
- D G X to W
- E G X to 1, 2, 3 ∇ M
- F G X back to \cap

Earth, Fire, and Water

Scene 2: Night Ghost

Widow: I remember the whispers of the women when my daughter was born.

A

Ensemble 2: A girl child, and four is an unlucky number.

Ensemble 1: The number of death and misfortune.

Widow: The day she was born, I remember with sadness her father's death, and I fear for the future.

Ensemble 4: The will surely starve.

Widow: We will not go hungry! We will manage to survive. I hold my daughter, the moonlight on her face. I will call her Moon Li.

B

C

D

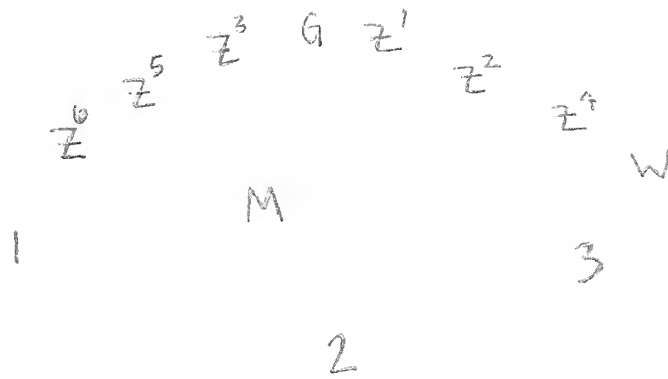
Ensemble 5: Then out of the walls there appeared a ghost.

Widow: Aiaa, Kuei, a ghost!

E

Ghost: Yes, do not be afraid. On this night, as the soul of your husband leaves this earth and a new soul is born, there is both sorrow and joy. I bring you gifts. (to Moon Li) I give you understanding of all things. (To Li 3) The heat and flame in the heart of the fire will be your friend. (To Li 2) I give you the strength of the earth, even as my foot stamps on the ground like this. (To Li 1) The secret of the tides, the ebb and flow of water is yours to know, like your own breath. Use these gifts wisely.

F



- A 1 ↑
- B 2 ↑
- C 3 ↑
- D M ↑

Earth, Fire, and Water

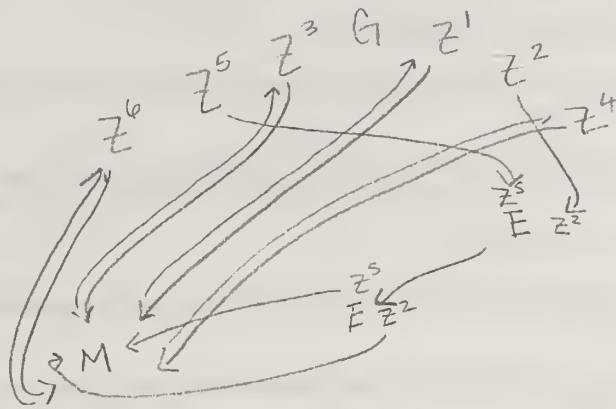
Scene 3: The Days Pass By

Li 1: I fish for food, I know the river tides. I can empty a pool in one gulp and fill it again with one breath like the torrent from the mountains when the snow melts. No one knows I can do this. A

Li 2: I work in the fields with the village oxen, their strength is my strength, and no rock in the ground is stronger than the strength of my arm. No one knows I can do this. B

Li 3: I can plunge my hands into the fire and they do not burn. Fire is my friend. The fires I build keep us warm all though the long winter. No one knows I can do this. C

Moon Li: I watch over the sheep and the geese for the village. The animals are my friends. D



A $Z^5 \& Z^2$ X to E \rightarrow become the Mandarin's guards

B $Z^{0,3,1,4}$ X to M \rightarrow become geese

C E, $Z^5 \& Z^2$ X C

D E \downarrow on one knee, prepare to shoot a bow, M signals for geese to fly away

E \uparrow , $Z^5 \& Z^2$ X to M $\&$ take her C

Earth, Fire, and Water

Scene 4: The Ruler

Ensemble 5: Long days of work, quiet days.

A

Ensemble 2: Long days of fear, waiting for the ruler to strike, and his soldiers to threaten.

B

Mandarin: I am the ruler. This is my land and everything upon it belongs to me. Tonight there will be a banquet to celebrate my victories. Let us hunt.

Ensemble 1: And so they set off.

C

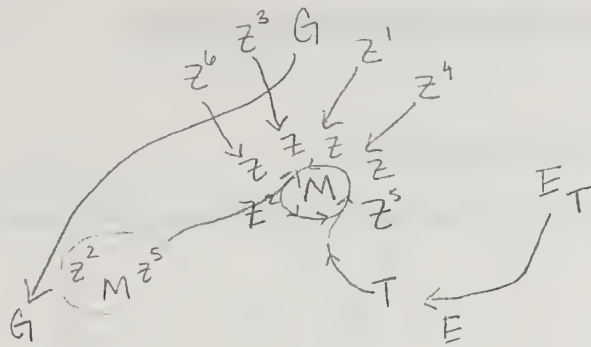
Ensemble 6: But the hunt was not for wild game, for the ruler had seen Moon Li with her geese.

Mandarin: Those plump birds will be better than scrawny wild geese. The boy can do nothing.

D

Seize him and bring him to the cage. I have a very hungry tiger who needs exercise.

E



- A All \hat{z} x center to create jail, G x DR
- B $z^{s \& z}$ lead M into jail
- C E leads T into cell
- D T circles M
- E M makes signal to T, T & M start to play
- F E exits

Earth, Fire, and Water

Scene 5: Understanding of All Living Things

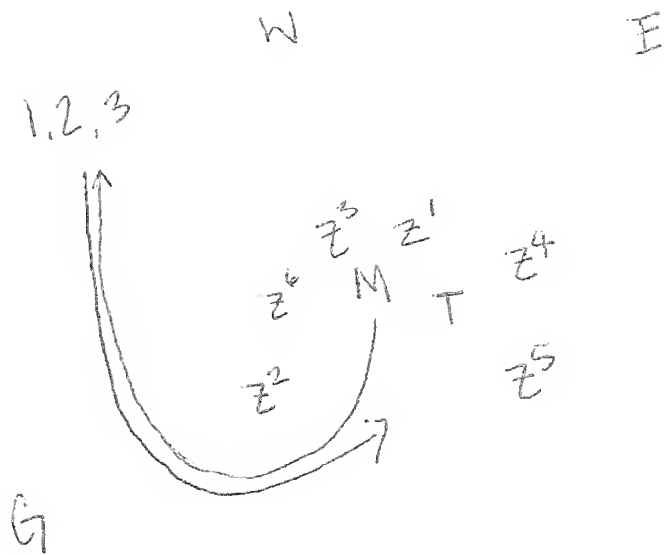
Ghost: Understanding of all living things.

Mandarin: Guard the boy well. Tomorrow we will have a public execution!

A-D

E

F



- [A] 1, 2, 3 come to front of cell, 2 opens the cell door (pantomime)
- [B] 1, 2, 3, M, T exit to \cap

Earth, Fire, and Water

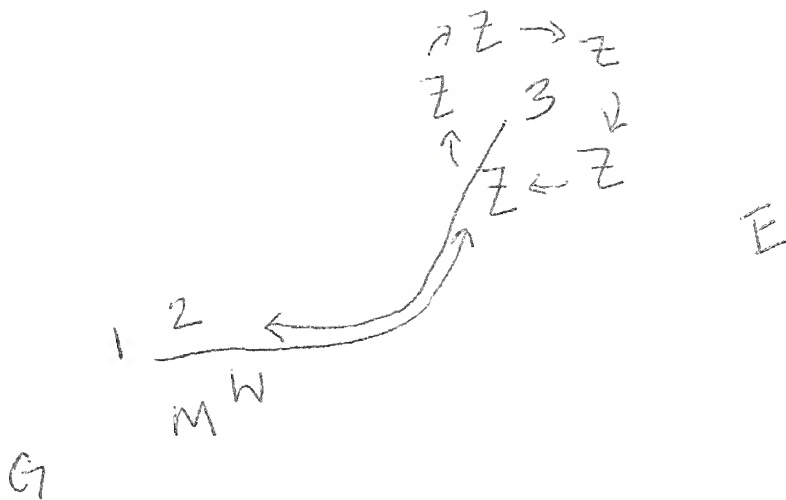
Scene 6: The Strength of the Earth

Ensemble1: That night while her mother prayed, Moon Li waited in her cage, but her brothers planned their sister's escape.

Ghost: The strength of the earth.

A

B



[A] Ensemble becomes the fire & each step out for their line

[B] 3 & 1 swap \rightarrow 3 walks to family & 1 walks toward the people once 3 is hidden.

[C] Z^{all} sit

Earth, Fire, and Water

Scene 7: The Fire

Mandarin: Build a great pile of wood and kindling here in the square. The people shall be made to watch one who defies me burn to ashes.

A

Ensemble 5: Poor woman, to lose her son like this.

Ensemble 1: Will this cruelty never end?

Ensemble 3: Quiet, or we'll be next. We need not look.

Ensemble 6: If we ignore this, as we have always done, who will be next?

Ensemble 4: May her other children comfort her.

Widow: How can he live in those flames?

Ghost: The flame in the fire is your friend.

Moon Li: We must trust in each other – don't be afraid.

(Li swap)

All: Aaii, aiaa!

Ensemble 2: A miracle!

Ensemble 1: He steps unharmed from the ashes!

Ensemble 5: He is a fire ghost!

Moon Li: See, Mother, he is unharmed.

Mandarin: Seize him! We will take him to the river – man the boat! We will throw him into the deepest part of the Yangtze, and there shall be an end to this defiance.

B

C

z^3 z^5
1 ~~E~~

G
→ z^1 z^2 z^4 z^4 M W 2 3

- [A] All except G, E, z^3 , z^5 , 1 sit on edge of stage, link arms & sway
- [B] G joins on edge of stage
- [C] Water drops → all bow down
- [D] All in boat fall, 1 stands
- [E] Water sits up
- [F] z^3 , z^5 , 2 stand up

Earth, Fire, and Water

Scene 8: The Secret of the Tides

Ensemble 3: When the boat carrying Li 1 reached the middle of the river, the Mandarin spoke.

A

Mandarin: Here is the deepest part of the river. The currents are too strong to swim in. Throw him overboard! He shall not survive this time.

Ghost: The ebb and flow of water like your own breath.

B

Ensemble 1: Li 1, who could gulp the river in one breath, opened his mouth and swallowed the water, so that the ship capsized and the Mandarin and his men fell in the mud, and slipped and pushed and roared for help.

C

D

Ensemble 6: Then Li 1, who had reached the shore, knelt on the river bank and all the water gushed back into the river.

E

Ensemble 4: The waters are rising. They will be drowned!

Ensemble 5: And the tyrant and his men were all drowned.

Ensemble 2: The people made songs, and in times of trouble the still whisper them, to get through the bad times.

F

All: We saw from the Yangtze River's banks,
Tyrants whimper as they sank.
The strength of the soil,
The warmth of the flames,
The gift of water will bless our toil,
While Moon Li's compassion our land reclaims.

Light and Sound Cues

Lights and Sound

House Light Up, Pre-show music playing

Ms. Bryson introduces the play and curtain opens.

Lights: Fade House, Bring up Sub 1 and 2

Music: "Gong"

Scene 1: The Village

Ensemble 1: Long ago in a poor village called Dragon Pool in the Province of Gansu, in China, the people were afraid of their ruler.

Ensemble 2: Imprisonment and death were a part of everyday life, and no one knew from moment to moment who would suffer next.

Ensemble 6: Life was cheap.

Ensemble 3: A widow lived there with her four children, who all looked like each other.

Moon Li: Mother, why must I dress like my brothers? People will think I'm a boy.

Widow: Because it is safer so.

Li 1: I am the eldest son, Li 1.

Li 2: I am the second son, Li 2.

Li 3: I am the third son, Li 3, and this is my sister, Moon Li.

Moon Li: I have never seen my father. He died when I was born.

Li 1: He died fighting in the Mandarin's army, against a people he did not know.

Lights: Bring Sub 1 down to 75%

Music: "Gong"

Scene 2: Night Ghost

Widow: I remember the whispers of the women when my daughter was born.

Ensemble 2: A girl child, and four is an unlucky number.

Ensemble 1: The number of death and misfortune.

Widow: The day she was born, I remember with sadness her father's death, and I fear for the future.

Ensemble 4: They will surely starve.

Widow: We will not go hungry! We will manage to survive. I hold my daughter, the moonlight on her face. I will call her Moon Li.

Ensemble 5: Then out of the walls there appeared a ghost.

Widow: Aiaa, Kuei, a ghost!

Ghost: Yes, do not be afraid. On this night, as the soul of your husband leaves this earth and a new soul is born, there is both sorrow and joy. I bring you gifts. (to Moon Li) I give you understanding of all things. (To Li 3) The heat and flame in the heart of the fire will be your friend. (To Li 2) I give you the strength of the earth, even as my foot stamps on the ground like this. (To Li 1) The secret of the tides, the ebb and flow of water is yours to know, like your own breath. Use these gifts wisely.

Music: "Gong"

Lights: Sub 2 to 50% and Sub 3 to full

Scene 3: The Days Pass By

Li 1: I fish for food, I know the river tides. I can empty a pool in one gulp and fill it again with one breath like the torrent from the mountains when the snow melts. No one knows I can do this.

Li 2: I work in the fields with the village oxen, their strength is my strength, and no rock in the ground is stronger than the strength of my arm. No one knows I can do this.

Li 3: I can plunge my hands into the fire and they do not burn. Fire is my friend. The fires I build keep us warm all through the long winter. No one knows I can do this.

Moon Li: I watch over the sheep and the geese for the village. The animals are my friends.

Music: "Gong"

Lights: Sub 2 to 50% and Sub 3 to 50%

Scene 4: The Ruler

Ensemble 5: Long days of work, quiet days.

Ensemble 2: Long days of fear, waiting for the ruler to strike, and his soldiers to threaten.

Mandarin: I am the ruler. This is my land and everything upon it belongs to me. Tonight there will be a banquet to celebrate my victories. Let us hunt.

Ensemble 1: And so they set off.

Ensemble 6: But the hunt was not for wild game, for the ruler had seen Moon Li with her geese.

Mandarin: Those plump birds will be better than scrawny wild geese. The boy can do nothing.

Seize him and bring him to the cage. I have a very hungry tiger who needs exercise.

Music: "Gong"

Scene 5: Understanding of All Living Things

Tiger stuff

Ghost: Understanding of all living things.

Mandarin: Guard the boy well. Tomorrow we will have a public execution!

Music: "Gong"

Scene 6: The Strength of the Earth

Ensemble1: That night while her mother prayed, Moon Li waited in her cage, but her brothers planned their sister's escape.

Ghost: The strength of the earth.

Music: "Gong"

Lights: All Full

Scene 7: The Fire

Mandarin: Build a great pile of wood and kindling here in the square. The people shall be made to watch one who defies me burn to ashes.

Ensemble 5: Poor woman, to lose her son like this.

Ensemble 1: Will this cruelty never end?

Ensemble 3: Quiet, or we'll be next. We need not look.

Ensemble 6: If we ignore this, as we have always done, who will be next?

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Widow: How can he live in those flames?

Ghost: The flame in the fire is your friend.

Moon Li: We must trust in each other – don't be afraid.

(Li swap)

All: Aaii, aiaa!

Ensemble 2: A miracle!

Ensemble 1: He steps unharmed from the ashes!

Ensemble 5: He is a fire ghost!

Moon Li: See, Mother, he is unharmed.

Mandarin: Seize him! We will take him to the river – man the boat! We will throw him into the deepest part of the Yangtze, and there shall be an end to this defiance.

Music: "Gong"

Lights: Sub 3 to 85%

Scene 8: The Secret of the Tides

Ensemble 3: When the boat carrying Li 1 reached the middle of the river, the Mandarin spoke.

Mandarin: Here is the deepest part of the river. The currents are too strong to swim in. Throw him overboard! He shall not survive this time.

Ghost: The ebb and flow of water like your own breath.

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The warmth of the flames,
The gift of water will bless our toil,
While Moon Li's compassion our land reclaims.

Program

Earth, Fire and Water

A Chinese Legend
Written by Irene N. Watts



Tuesday, February 26, 2008

Cast and Crew

Widow

Gabrielle Resnick

Moon Li

Jessica Lewis

Li 1

Jarrold Little

Li 2

Jack McGrory

Li 3

Tom Driver

Mandarin

Mary Ellen Blackmar

Ghost

Susie Hatcher

Tiger

Alexandra McCluskey

Ensemble

Abigail Hasty, Mary Ashby Ward, Frank Maae,
Ashley Price, Nicholas Teague



Sound

Andrew Burkus

Lights

Lucas Wolff

Director

Lucy Bryson

Post Mortem

I am very proud of what was accomplished in this process. Many things went extremely well and others were not at all like I planned.

The process was quite a challenge for many reasons. The week we were using playmaking to solidify the story we had a few upsets. First, several mornings we were locked out of our classroom because the cooperating teacher was late to school. I was proud of the way the students handled these situations. We spent those days in the theater without any materials. It worked, but it threw us all through a loop. Throughout the whole process we were subjected to randomly being kicked out of the theater because the cooperating teacher forgot to tell me that another class needed it. On these days we worked in the classroom as best as we could, or moved into the gallery. The gallery provided the room we needed but often many interruptions came with it.

I learned that sometimes kids freeze up because they are given words. The very students that were great, focused, and creative before lines were given out were the ones who had no spark onstage once they had a script. Some of the students were the exact opposite. I'm glad I got to see both sides of this – it changed the way I'd like to direct children from now on. In the future there, ideally, will be more of a balance between the two. The children need to feel the freedom of being onstage and creating without being caught up in either having a script or not. This became a challenge for me. I tried to get them back to that same level of fun they had when playmaking. Part of the problem was the fear of the actual performance. They tried, but I did not have the communication skills needed to coax them back to the free spirited first week.

I never gave the cast an off-book day. This is the only production I've ever worked on that did not have one. I explained to them they couldn't really do the motions

and blocking with a script in their hands. I never had to say anything to them about it. Within a day or two everyone was off-book. I don't think this will happen with all kids, but I was impressed.

In the past the cooperating teacher allowed students to run the lights and sound during the show. But that left three or four weeks of class in which they had nothing to do. I tried something new. I let two students run the lights and sound, but they also designed the sound and lights. They worked together to pick out possible sound effects and music from the stock collection in the classroom. The two boys would present their ideas to the class and me. Ultimately I told them what I liked or didn't like about what they picked, and we would go from there. The boys were very involved with the show from the beginning and felt like part of the group even though they weren't onstage. Both of them told me very early on before casting that they had terrible stage fright and would audition but they really didn't want to be in it. They both loved being involved with the playmaking because it was just the class. I think they were very happy with their involvement – especially when the whole cast kept talking about how awesome their jobs were. The class was very supportive of their designers.

If I had to do this over again knowing what I know now I would only change a few things. I would not have given them the script to read in the very beginning. I would have told them the story and we spring boarded from that point. I think the class began to focus on the lines right away. I would love to have had more time to build a stronger ensemble, but I was given a short amount of time to put the show together. We probably needed to work on projection and enunciation from the very beginning. Some of the actors were a little quiet on the day of the show. I would have made them bring their

portion of the costume in much further in advance. They were supposed to bring them two days before the show. Most of them did but some didn't bring it until the day of the show. One of the students didn't bring black pants ever – so he did the show in jeans and he was the only one not in all black. I believe the changes I would make if I were to do this again are minor and would not change the production in a major way.

Overall I am extremely proud of the process and product. We set out to do a play, have fun while doing it, and learn a little in the process. I know we accomplished that much. Not only did the cast accomplish this, but I did as well.

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Earth, Wind
& Fire

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Lucy Lunn Bryson **RW**

BASED Theatre ED

Spring 2008

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