



The Star Tram

WORKSHOPS

STORY:

The Star Tram

COUNTRY:

Latvia

AGE:

6 - 12

Year 1 - 6 - 8 age

Year 4 - 9 - 12 age

MATERIALS:

Blackboard, pictures of Riga panoramic view, black cardboard, pastel chinks, various attributes, clothing for the show

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Understanding and discussing the text, sharing personal experience.

Viewing various images of the Riga panorama in order to identify the most important buildings/ sculptures and to raise awareness and the pride of Latvia - historical heritage of Riga that has occurred over eight centuries.

Developing fine motoric skills by drawing the fireworks.

METHODS:

Idea spider.
Working with the text.
Text analysis.
Discussion/conversation on the text.
Answers to questions.
Practical work.
Role playing.
Performance demonstration.
Children's' evaluation of own work.

AUTHORS:

Association "Creative Ideas"

The Star Tram

Author: Juris Zvirgzdiņš

All night long Dacīte was tossing from one side to another, now she felt cold, now it was hot, suddenly her little blanket curled like a real spider web, now it fled completely to her feet. Mikus, her beloved teddy bear; who usually slept beside her on the pillow, now rolled to the floor with a loud bang, but when raised, blinked his black button eyes with reproach.

Finally the morning came. The house was quiet, very, very quiet. Her parents slept as if they expected a normal day today, but Dacīte knew that THE BIG FESTIVITY had finally come! Everybody in her nursery group was talking about it, there had been a drawing contest, in which Dacīte and her best friend, Ingrid, shared the first and second places. Ingrid drew with watercolors the Latvian flag and three gold stars, although it is not so easy at all, but Dace drew the panorama of Riga, with all the church towers and a festive salute.

Dacīte tiptoed into the bathroom and washed herself, even washed her ears, and brushed her teeth. What does it matter if no-one sees her? But how about Mikus? He was looking at her with his bright button eyes.

Mom and Daddy were still snoring in their bedroom.

How can they sleep so long on such an important day? Of course she could drop some object on the ground with loud bang - as if by accident, but what exactly? No, better not! What if her parents get angry? Such things have happened before, and Dacīte wouldn't like it at all.

Finally they woke up, all of them breakfasted together - eating hot toasts with cheese and drinking cocoa. Dace also placed a honey bowl in front of Mikus, but the bear did not eat anything, maybe he was excited - WILL THEY GO, or WON'T THEY, SHALL THEY take him along - or maybe NOT?

Dacīte was browsing through the books. One was too thick, another one too thin, even the one which she and Mikus liked most of all - the one about the cat's mill, that had been read and reread, today did not interest her at all... Every now and then she ran to the window. After all, she must see if it still raining. Maybe the rain has stopped?

So the day passed and the evening arrived. AT LAST! Dacīte could not endure it any longer. She ran into her parents' room. Unbelievable - even on this day both of them sat at their computers.

- Well, what's on your mind now, my big daughter? - dad turned his head.

- Shall we go? - Dacīte nearly started to stotter in excitement.

- To go where? - dad asked.

- Well, to watch the f-i-r-e-w-o-r-k-s! On the embankment! You promised me! - and she burst into tears.

- I don't know, maybe ... - Daddy looked at Mom

.

- But you promised me! - Dacīte insisted.

- You know, I wanted to do some more work...

You could feel that the situation was very uncomfortable for Dad. It could always be seen. Dacīte looked towards Mommy.

- Dacīte, you know ... - Mommy was looking for words. - Maybe we should better stay at home. Recently You were quite ill...

- I was ill, but now I am in good health! Yet I go to the kindergarten! And today there will be the fireworks! - this time she could pronounce such a difficult word quite easily.

- But we can watch fireworks on TV, and just imagine - there will be a huge crowd, an awful lot of people...

It was obvious that the parents did not intend to go anywhere at all.

- Then I'll go alone! - Dacīte declared. Of course, she realized that she would never be allowed to go out alone so late in the evening.

Now it would be the right time to forget that she is already a big girl, and to start bitterly weeping, but...

And then the doorbell rang - even twice! It's Granny!

Dacīte rushed to the door. Indeed, it was her dear granny!

- Were you crying?

Yes, you could never hide anything from Granny.

- Well, just a little ... You know, they're not going anywhere...

- There, there... We'll see to that! - she stroked her granddaughter's head.

Whatever the granny was telling to her parents, it

emained a secret. A moment later she returned and said: - We are both going! Get dressed fast!

Dear, sweet Granny! Dacīte jumped up with both feet in the air; if she had had four feet like Mikus, she would jump with all four! They are going!

While her Granny with her parents were drinking tea, Dacīte had already put on her jacket, Mikus was stuck into the pocket, but so that he could see and hear everything. This time, even the laces of her boots seemed to have tied as if by themselves.

When already standing on the doorstep, they could hear Mommy's admonition to both of them not to get lost in the huge crowd of people. And then, holding Granny's hand, Dacīte stepped into the elevator. In a few minutes they had reached the busstop.

Then, like appearing as a bolt from the blue, a tram stopped at the edge of the pavement. It was the same wonderful old tram that Dacīte had once travelled on. But - something quite impossible! There were not any tram rails here, trams usually run along rails and hold onto wires or maybe even onto heaven using such long horns like butterflies...

Through the front door of the tram, the driver stuck out his head, and the head was embellished with such a

huge silvery white beard, that Dacīte had only seen in movies and books. Some strange characters shone in the beard. In a singing voice he urged to climb the wagon: - Come on, come, pretty folk-maid... Dacīte didn't really hear the end of the song.

Then the driver called louder, but in the same singing voice:

- Everybody is welcome! Please, step in!

Some passengers were already sitting in the wagon, and also several children sat on their lap. Then the door was closed and the miraculous journey began.

Now and again the tram stopped and one or more persons stepped in.

- Have a look! - Granny put her hand on Dacīte's shoulder.

- There goes Bille and her grandmother! They always and everywhere go only on foot!

- Bille? - Dacīte could not understand.

- Bille is a little girl, just like you, only from the book by Vizma Belshēvica*. You will manage to read it when you go to school.

*Vizma Belshēvica (1931-2005) was a famous Latvian poet, writer and translator; stories about the girl Bille are semi-autobiographical books.

Bille grew thoughtful. Why should she wait a whole year to read a book about a little girl with the word like bell, if she can already read? She will go to the library and pick up the book already tomorrow!

The tram stopped, a man in a black, long coat with a hat on his head stepped in.

- Aleksandrs Čaks* himself! - tram driver announced.

The passengers gasped - the Poet himself!

- Doesn't the young lady recognize me? - The poet approached Dacīte.

Dacīte was silent. Most probably she had seen the face, but where exactly? Then the Poet took off his hat.

- Just like an electric bulb, right?

- Yes, I do recognize! You have a monument at school. But there is only the head there...

- Well, here I am now in person!

- You know, no one will believe that I've met you ... Dacīte whispered shyly. Čaks unbuttoned his coat, took a small paper pad and a black pen from his inside pocket. Having asked what is Dacīte's name, he wrote

*Aleksandrs Čaks (1901-1950) was a famous Latvian poet and writer; in his works, he shows his deep love for Riga, the capital city of Latvia.

something in the pad and handed it to the girl together with a pen. Dacīte looked at her Granny first. May I take it? But the Granny just nodded.

- Thank you... Dacīte whispered and put both treasures in the inner pocket of her jacket and carefully pulled the zipper closed.

Then the tram stopped again, and another man came in.

- This is Kārlis Skalbe, - Granny quietly whispered to Dacīte.

- Karlis Skalbe! The very person who wrote the book "The Kitty's Mill"!

The writer sat down just opposite them.

Why hadn't she understood that? It was THE WHITE KITTY looking at her from the writer's pocket.

- May I caress it? - Dacīte stretched out her hand.

- Of course, you are welcome! - Karlis Skalbe gave her a kind smile.

Dacīte caressed the kitty. The kitty (how white and fluffy it was!), examined the girl and launched its grinding melody: - MUR, MUR, MURR.

Mikus began to fidget in the girl's pocket, it meant:

- Let me out!

Dacīte pulled Mikus out and reached it towards the kitty. Both of them sniffed one another, then joined their paws, both seemed to be fond of each other.

The tram stopped, and the driver said: - DESTINATION!

Everyone got out. There was a slight drizzle. The flag of Latvia was rolling heavily in the castle tower. At the foot of the high wall, the flames of small candles were fluttering in the wind. Mommy was right, Dacīte thought, there was an awful lot of people. She clung closer to her Granny's sleeve.

- Look, there comes Rainis and Aspazija! - Granny turned Dacīte towards the Old Town, but they were too late, both poets were lost in the crowd of people.

Several people on the platform were making speeches, but it was difficult to hear them, the wind from the river Daugava carried the words far away.

The music sounded, everyone started singing the Latvian anthem "GOD, BLESS LATVIA!"

Granny and Dacīte also sang.

Suddenly Dacīte heard a familiar voice: - Look up, look in the sky! It was the tram driver and behind him ... oh, dear me!

Just above the Daugava, high in the sky, through clouds some misty figures were moving hither - gray men, children and wives.

- These are our heroes, all, who have fallen for the freedom of Latvia. Riflemen in Freedom Battles, national partisans, the exiled ones, who never returned to their Native land... There is Colonel Kalpaks, Elza Ziglevica, she fell from the enemy bullet right here at the bank of Daugava in November 1919, there is Hermine Purina, who gave life, guarding the Latvian border from the Red Army attack in 1940, on the night from 14th to 15th June. Everyone who died with the word "Latvia" on their lips ... The ones touched by the Eternity... Aleksandrs Čaks lowered his head paying his respects to them... Do remember them all!

Dacīte was grasping for breath, she was moved to tears. Mikus also held a tear on the cheek, but maybe it was just a rain blob...

The long-awaited fireworks started. Gorgeous flowers in all the rainbow colours flourished in the sky, the onlookers applauded and shouted "Hurrah" until the last rocket.

Then the misty images disappeared. Once again, the Latvian anthem was heard, and gradually all people dispersed. Only the candle flames kept fluttering, despite the wind.

Next morning, still quite sleepy, Dacīte could not remember how she and her Granny got home. Maybe by bus, or maybe they came on foot? What happened yesterday? And who can tell now - was it a dream or a reality?

Then Dacīte opened her eyes in surprise - Mikus was sitting on the bedside table at her sofa, next to the toy bear there was the block-note presented by Aleksandrs Čaks, but between the kitty's paws was a black fountainpen with the inscription MONTBLANC.

The radio in the kitchen which had not been switched off since yesterday was playing the anthem "GOD, BLESS LATVIA!"

ACTIVITIES

Step by step workshops

Setting:

The workshop in Latvia is implemented in November, when we celebrate national holidays – the Lacplesis day (a memorial day for soldiers who fought for the independence of Latvia) on November 11 and the Proclamation Day of the Republic of Latvia on November 18. In school and outside many events, concerts and exhibitions devoted to these national holidays take place. That allows to implement an integrated training.

Participants:

Facilitator, children of Year 1 and Year 4

Year 1 – 6-8 age

Year 4 – 9-12 age

Activity 1:

Year 1 and 4

Idea spider – star tram – each of the children express their thoughts what it might be (a tram carrying all sorts of famous people, a flying tram that rises to the stars, a gold-coloured tram, etc.)

Year 1 uses simplified expressions – a golden tram, glued with stars, flying in space.

Activity 2:

Year 1 and 4

Listening to the story. Each child writes down obscure/unclear words and expressions on the sheet of paper.

After listening to the story, children ask questions about what they heard.

The debate, discussion on text, revealing the experience and feelings of children: What national holiday was it? What do people usually do on this day? What did Dacite do on this day? Whom did she meet along the way? What do you and your family do on Latvia's birthday? Have you ever visited the fireworks display? What emotions did it create in you?

Year 1 children were asked comprehension questions: What was the main character of the story called? Who did Dacite live with? What was Dacite's toy friend called? Who came to visit the Dacite's family? Where did Dacite want to go? What holiday was celebrated on this day? Does your family celebrate this holiday? What do you and your family usually do on this day? How did Dacite and her grandmother go to the fireworks? Have you ever taken the tram? Who did Dacite meet in the star tram? (After this answer the facilitator tells who Caks, Krisjanis Barons, Karlis Skalbe are and what good things these

people have done for Latvia).

Activity 3:

Year 1 and 4

The facilitator prepares pictures with various panoramic views of Riga. Discussions about places which are specific only for Riga – Railway Bridge and Suspension Bridge, Church spires, Palace of Light, Presidential Palace, and many more.

Year 1 and 4 children are asked the following questions: Have you seen these places in Riga? Have you visited these places with your parents? Why do we need the Railway Bridge? Can you tell how many churches there are in Riga? How old might they be? What can you do in a church? Do you know what you can do in the Palace of Light (the National Library)? Who lives in the Presidential Palace?

Facilitators from other countries than Latvia have 2 options.

Option 1. Before the workshop, facilitator does a research about Riga. In the workshop facilitator shows children pictures with places in Riga mentioned in the story and does a short introduction to the Latvian culture (for example, national flag, clothes, the most popular meals, music, a little bit about history).

Option 2. Children perform same activities but with the city of choice from their own country. Also, after hearing the story about significant figures in Latvia, they can make a modified “Star tram” with famous people from their countries and describe how they celebrate their national holidays.

Activity 4:

Year 1 – draw the fireworks on black cardboard with pastel chalks.

Year 4 – draw a sketch on white paper – a particular building or complex of buildings in Riga. Then cut that building out with scissors and use it as a stencil, to draw on A3 black cardboard. The drawing is painted with pastel chalks. The children create the fireworks by drawing stripes of different colours, and then they blur them out by their fingertips on paper.

Activity 5:

Year 1 and Year 4

Arranging the exhibition. The works of children are exhibited.

Activity 6:

Year 4 children are assigned roles that each one will play from this story. They envision what props and outfit will be necessary to depict this story.

The best reader in the class reads the text, the rest of the children depict it using only motion, facial expression, and various attributes.

Year 1 children do not take part in this activity.

Activity 7:

Year 4 children demonstrate the performance of their staged movements to Year 1 children.