

# Theatre IV CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE



## The Frog Prince

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### SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

This is the story of wishes and witches, and the people caught between them. Our narrator, Iron Henry, was once the faithful servant of the prince. But after the Prince was turned into a frog, poor Henry thought his heart would break. So he wears three bands of Iron around his chest to keep his heart from breaking and now works for Princess Irena.

One-day Irena drops her favorite toy, a gold ball, down a wishing well. Calvin, a frog pops up from out of the well and offers to retrieve the ball if she will be his friend and take him to the castle to live with her. But when he retrieves the ball she takes it and runs off to dinner and forgets her promise to him. At dinner, the frog appears and Irena is enraged that she must keep her promise. But her father the king reminds her that a promise is a promise and must be kept. That night Irena throws Calvin out the window! Don't worry, he is all right, in fact he now is a prince.

As luck would have it Irena gets the chance to be the prince's friend. A kiss from the princess will break the spell - and Princess Irena would like to be his friend.

Iron Henry concludes by saying "I'm not going to tell you they got married and lived happily ever after because maybe they didn't. But if you don't want to be alone forever, you have to start somewhere.



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### **FROGS & TOADS**

There are some simple, physical differences between frogs and toads:

- Frogs lay their eggs in clusters; toads lay them in long chains.
- Frogs have smooth, moist skin; toads have warty, dry skin.
- Frogs have strong, long webbed feet for swimming and jumping; toads have shorter hind legs for walking.
- Many frogs have long tongues to snap up food; toads have small tongues and grab at their food with their mouths.



### **FROG FACTS**

- The earliest known frogs appeared about 190 million years ago during the late Jurassic period.
- Frogs are members of the zoological class called Amphibia. Amphibians are cold-blooded vertebrate animals. They differ from reptiles in that they lack scales and generally breed in the water.
- Frog predators include snakes, birds and other small animals like hedgehogs.
- Most frogs have two bulging eyes; strong, long, webbed hind feet adapted for leaping and swimming; smooth or slimy skin; no tail; and lay their eggs in clusters.
- The most common frogs are the bullfrog, common frog, green frog, leopard frog, marsh frog, pickerel frog, and wood frog.
- Frogs are primarily aquatic, but some live on land, in burrows or in trees.
  - Frogs often rely on camouflage to protect them - their skin colors blend in to their environment!
  - A group of frogs is called an army. A group of toads is called a knot.
  - Some frogs have tongues that are long and sticky, rolling out of their mouths to catch bugs. There are about 10 species of tongueless, aquatic African frogs.
  - Large frogs have deep voices; smaller frogs have higher pitched voices.



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## FROG MYTHS

- Some Native American groups believed that frogs brought on the rain.
- In India, frogs were believed to personify thunder in the sky.
- In Japan, frogs are symbols of good luck.
- Some folklorists claim that if the first frog you see in the spring is sitting on dry land you will have a happy, tear free year. But if the first frog you see jumps in the water, you will experience misfortune. However, if the first frog jumps at you, you will gain many new friends; if it jumps away, you will lose some.
- Some people used to believe you could get warts from touching frogs or toads! Frogs and toads cannot give you warts!
- The fear of frogs is called Ranidaphobia. The fear of toads is called Bufonophobia. The fear of all amphibians is called Batrachophobia.



## BACKGROUND: THE BROTHERS GRIMM



**T**he *Frog Prince* is just one of hundreds of old German folk tales collected and published by two scholarly brothers in the early 19th century.

Between 1807 and 1814, the Grimm brothers, Jakob and Wilhelm, collected the tales mainly from friends and acquaintances who lived in and around Kassel, Germany. They worried that fewer and fewer people could tell the tales accurately, since many of the tales were passed down orally from generation to generation. Their goal was to preserve the tales in written form as an expression of the German culture and spirit. Jakob wrote, "It is high time that these old traditions were collected and rescued before they perish like dew in the hot sun or fire in a stream, and fall silent forever in the unrest of our days." The first volume of Grimm's Fairy Tales was published in 1812 and by the last edition of 1857, 210 tales had been collected.

The most famous Grimm's Fairy Tales include "Little Red Riding Hood," "Snow White," "Rumpelstiltskin," "Sleeping Beauty," "Cinderella," and "Rapunzel." If not for the visionary scholarship of the Brothers Grimm, we might not know any of these stories today.

Both Grimm brothers were born in Hanau, Jakob in 1785 and Wilhelm in 1786. They were educated at the University of Marburg, where they became interested in philology, the study of language as it relates to human culture and history. Jakob published an important book called *Deutsche Grammatik* (German Grammar), which for the first time set forth a

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**BACKGROUND: THE BROTHERS GRIMM** (continued)

strictly scientific grammar for all the Germanic languages. This work, in which language is considered not as something static but as something ever growing and closely bound up with the life and destiny of the people who speak it, proved revolutionary in the field of philology. The brothers also contributed pioneering work to a German dictionary which was not completed until after their deaths.

The brothers worked together in complete harmony. They spent all their lives under one roof, sharing books and other property, a happy partnership that even Wilhelm's marriage did not change. Wilhelm, the sicklier of the two, died in 1859 and Jakob died in 1863.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Irena wishes for a friend. But when the frog asks her to be his friend, she refuses. Why didn't Irena want to be the frog's friend? Why did she change her mind when she found out he was a prince? Was the frog the same friend when he was a frog? When he was a prince?
2. Why is it important to keep your promises? Why do you make a promise? How would you feel if someone broke a promise to you?
3. Iron Henry wears iron bands around his chest to keep his heart from breaking. Since a heart can't really break, what do you think it means to have a broken heart?
4. The king worries that he is not a good father. Do you think he is? Why? Does being a good father (or mother or brother or sister or friend) mean that you have to get everything right all the time?
5. What is the only thing Iron Henry ever wished for? Does his wish come true?
6. Is it hard to be a good friend? What makes a good friend?
7. What do you think happens to Irena and the Prince at the end of the story?

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## ACTIVITIES

1. Did you hear about the elephant who sat on a frog? He croaked! The frog and the King love to tell frog jokes. See how many jokes you know or can make up about frogs.
2. Remember the Froggy Mambo? Make you own frog band by creating frog puppets! Round up some old socks, glue, buttons, ribbons, and other bits of things and let your imagination soar! Put on a puppet show. Write your own music and dialogue. Have fun!
3. The play does not explain why the witch turned the prince into a frog. Write a short story about the day it happened. What did the witch look like? What did she say? What did the prince do? Why did he get turned into a frog?

## VOCABULARY

Profound  
Ironies  
Vegetarian  
Coincidence

Opposable Thumbs  
Peculiar  
Temporary  
Amphibian

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Frogs make very specific sounds. People around the world try to decipher these sounds. Here is a list of some different ways that other people think frogs talk:

Afrikaans: kwaak-kwaak  
Arabic (Algeria): gar gar  
Catalan: cruá-cruá  
Chinese (Mandarin): guo guo  
Dutch: kwak kwak  
English (USA): ribbit  
English (GB): croak  
Finnish: kvak kvak  
French: coa-coa  
German: quaak, quaak  
Hebrew: kwa kwa  
Hungarian: bre-ke-ke

Italian: cra cra  
Japanese: kerokero  
Korean: gae-gool-gae-gool  
Russian: kva-kva  
Spanish (Spain): cruá-cruá  
Spanish (Argentina): berp  
Spanish (Peru): croac, croac  
Swedish: kvack  
Thai: ob ob (with high tone)  
Turkish: vrak vrak  
Ukrainian: kwa-kwa