Create a pantomime

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Christmas is almost here and with it comes panto season. Pantomimes are staged performances of well-known tales that use audience interaction to make the show fun and entertaining for all.

Who's who?

There are lots of roles in pantomime. The playwright writes the script (the words and movements the actors should perform) and the director brings the script to life by telling people how to perform. You will also need actors and maybe a "stage hand" (someone who works offstage) or "props manager" (props are objects that actors handle on stage) to help organise everyone. If you have a small group, it's fine to double up on jobs.

Main characters

If you choose to put on a performance of a traditional tale, you'll already have what we call archetypal characters (those that fit the mould for goodie, baddie, jester, sidekick and so on). These might be magical fairies, greedy kings, evil witches or loving princes. Pantomimes use these types of characters because the audience already understands the role they play in a story, and they are easy to exaggerate and have fun performing.

Writing style and conventions

A playwright's script will include the words each actor should say, as well as stage directions (see the next tip for more information). Pantomimes have their own script conventions (things we see in most pantomimes) and these might include the phrase, "It's behind you!" or "Oh no it isn't; oh yes it is!" They often include a short sing-along, lots of jokes and silliness – but they always have a happy ending where the goodies win.

Make sure your script has plenty of jokes.

Staging

The playwright should include stage directions (performance instructions) in the script that include where actors should stand and where and when they get on and off the stage. It might include other instructions such as "laughs loudly" or "sits down on the toadstool". Stage directions are usually written in italics or in brackets to separate them from speech.

Staging your pantomime might involve costumes, gathering props and making someone responsible for managing these things "backstage" during the performance. Making props and painting a backdrop can be fun but don't worry if you don't have time as it's also fine to mime the object in your hand and leave some things to the audience's imagination.

Performance

The best part of putting on a pantomime is performing it. Whether you are doing it in your school hall at break time or for your grandparents at the weekend, make sure you have told everyone when and where the show will start.

It's always good to open the show with a sing-along and ask your audience to clap to the music. This will get the show off to a great start. You can even encourage their involvement throughout by chucking sweets into the audience or getting them to shout "Boooo!" at the baddies.

Whatever happens, don't worry if it all goes wrong. Make sure the audience are laughing along with you and enjoying your "comedy of errors".

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