THE MAN WHO PLANTED TREES

Puppet State
Theatre
Company

Hello!

Dear Teacher,

The State Theatre in New Brunswick, New Jersey welcomes you to *The Man Who Planted Trees*, from Scotland's Puppet State Theatre. The story of one man's (and one dog's) mission to reclaim a barren wasteland, the show touches on themes of altruism, patience, persistence, and caring for the environment.

These *Keynotes* provide information and activities to help you prepare your students for the performance and make connections to other areas of the curriculum.

Look for the tree symbol next to activities and discussion topics.

Enjoy the show!

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> "*The Man Who Planted Trees* is a book I have always loved. Having read the story again and again, I know it is true—not true in the literal sense of course, but each of us in our own way can and must try to leave the earth a better place than we found it—we must leave a gentle footprint behind us."
>
> —Michael Morpurgo

The Man Who Planted Trees has also been called *The Story of Elzéard Bouffier—The Most Extraordinary Character I Ever Met*, and *The Man Who Planted Hope and Reaped Happiness*. After the performance, ask your students what title THEY would give the story.
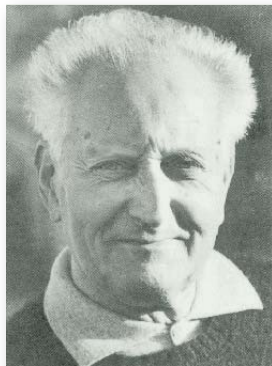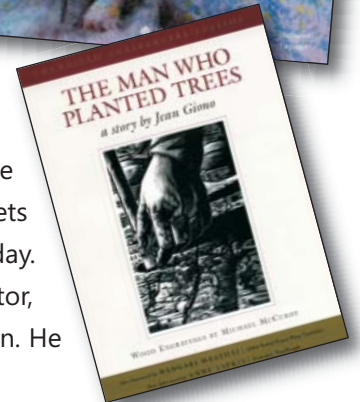
The Lorax, by Dr. Seuss, also deals with the theme of preserving our natural environment. The two books make an effective compare-and-contrast exercise for students.

The Man Who Planted Trees is a short story by French author Jean Giono (zhon jo-NO), first published in 1953. It is the fictional tale of a man named Elzéard Bouffier (el-zay-ARD boo-FYAY). After losing his wife and son, he retreats to a remote part of France and becomes a shepherd. His only companions are his sheep and his faithful dog.

The barren landscape is ravaged by wind and forsaken by people and animals. There are no trees left to enrich and protect the soil, shelter the wildlife, and provide shade, fruit, and wood for people. All by himself, Elzéard sets out on his life's work: planting one hundred acorns each day.

We learn Bouffier's story through an anonymous narrator, who first encounters him in 1910 while hiking in the region. He stays awhile with the shepherd and learns about his tree-planting mission. Ten years later, the narrator returns to this peaceful spot to recover from his experience in the First World War. He is amazed to discover that Bouffier's trees have begun to mature and that the land is starting to revive. Over the course of thirty more years, the narrator continues to visit his friend and to observe the gradual transformation of the landscape. Laboring without interruption in complete anonymity, Bouffier plants so many trees that the valley becomes a fertile, green home for plants, animals, and humans.

The government authorities have no idea that the miraculous change is the result of one man's patient dedication, until the narrator reveals the truth. He visits the elderly Bouffier one last time in 1945, at the end of World War II. Two years later the man who planted trees peacefully passes away.

Meet Jean Giono

Jean Giono, the son of a cobbler and a laundress, was born in 1895 in Manosque, a town nestled at the foot of the Alps in southeastern France. As a boy, he spent summers with a shepherd family, inspiring a love of nature that infused much of his writing. Though Giono's formal education ended with middle school, he continued to read the great works of literature. He was called up for military service in the First World War; the horrors he witnessed there led him to become a pacifist. He was imprisoned in 1937 and again in 1944 for speaking out against war. During his lifetime, Giono traveled very little and rarely left his native village. In 1930, he gave up his job at a bank to devote himself to writing stories, essays, poetry, plays, film scripts, translations, and more than thirty novels, many of which were translated into English. He died in Manosque in 1970.

The Story, in Brief

While hiking through Provence, France, Jean, the play's narrator, meets a shepherd and his chatty dog, who spend each and every day planting trees. Over thirty years—through two world wars—they carry on patiently with their task until the barren landscape is transformed into a lush, green valley.

Adapting the Book

In 2005, Puppet State Theatre Company came across Jean Giono's tale of a tree-planting shepherd. They were struck by the beauty and simplicity of its message, and the inspiring lesson about persistence in the face of many setbacks. They decided to adapt it for their company.

Taking a story off the page and bringing it to life onstage requires good problem-solving skills. In *The Man Who Planted Trees*, the main character lives in silence and isolation. He does the same thing every day for thirty years: he plants trees. From these elements, how do you create an interesting and entertaining play that will hold the audience's attention?

The Puppet State creative team searched the book for clues to help them tell this slow and gentle story in a theatrical way. They noticed that Jean Giono mentioned that the shepherd had a **DOG**. This was the key: the shepherd would remain silent, but the dog—his friend and confidant—could accompany the audience on the journey and tell us all we needed to know. In the play, the dog continually interrupts the narrator with silly comments and antics.

Another problem for the team to solve was how to show the passing of time over the story's thirty-year span. Here, too, the dog was the key. As the story moves forward in time, the dog ages before our eyes: his fur becomes gray, his movements become slow and less lively.

After reviewing the story, ask your students: Were you inspired by the shepherd's story? How?

If dogs could really talk, what would their voices sound like? Have students create their own dog puppets out of socks, buttons, fur fabric, felt, scissors, and fabric glue. (Templates and instructions for making a simple dog puppet can be found at: www.dltk-kids.com/animals/mbagdog.htm

Have students experiment with different voices until they find just the right one for their dog. Pair them up to create short scenarios about why we should plant trees. Have them act out their scenes with their dog puppets.

The Man Who Planted Trees is a multisensory experience. Besides watching and listening, the audience will be able to smell and feel parts of the story.

Ask your students to close their eyes and imagine they are in their bedroom. What sounds do they hear? What does it smell like? What does the floor feel like beneath their feet? If they put out their hands, what do they touch? What feelings or emotions do they get? Have students call out their impressions while you write them on the blackboard.

Go through the same process, this time imagining their kitchen, classroom, a forest, the beach, the mall, the moon, etc. Have students compare and contrast their responses to the different environments. Which was their favorite? Why?

This exercise can also be adapted into a movement activity, with students moving through the room imagining themselves in different imaginary environments: different temperatures, smells, sounds, weather, surfaces, etc.

The Man Who Planted Trees uses a wide range of theater techniques. During the show, pay careful attention to the following:

- **NARRATION** — As in the book, there is a narrator who tells the story directly to the audience. In the play, he's given the name "Jean," representing the voice of the author. Jean also talks to the dog.

- **PUPPETS** — Except for the narrator, all the characters in the story are played by puppets. The two puppeteer-actors are visible throughout the performance.

- **SOUND EFFECTS** — Pre-recorded music and sound effects help bring the audience into the world of the play.

- **SETS AND PROPS** — The set and props are small and very simple, in keeping with the charming, intimate atmosphere of the performance.

- **MULTISENSORY EFFECTS** — Surprising elements allow the audience to feel and smell the story as well as see and hear it.

Provence (pro-VAHNS), the setting for *The Man Who Planted Trees*, is a region in southeastern France. Bordered by Italy and the Mediterranean Sea, it has a warm, dry climate and a rugged landscape. Its famous lavender fields blanket the countryside with their purple blooms and perfume the air from late June to September.

Why Plant Trees?

"The creation of a
thousand forests is in
one acorn."

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

How did Elzéard's tree planting benefit local people, plants, and wildlife? How does *The Man Who Planted Trees* relate to you, to us, to our school, to the local community, to our nation, to the world?
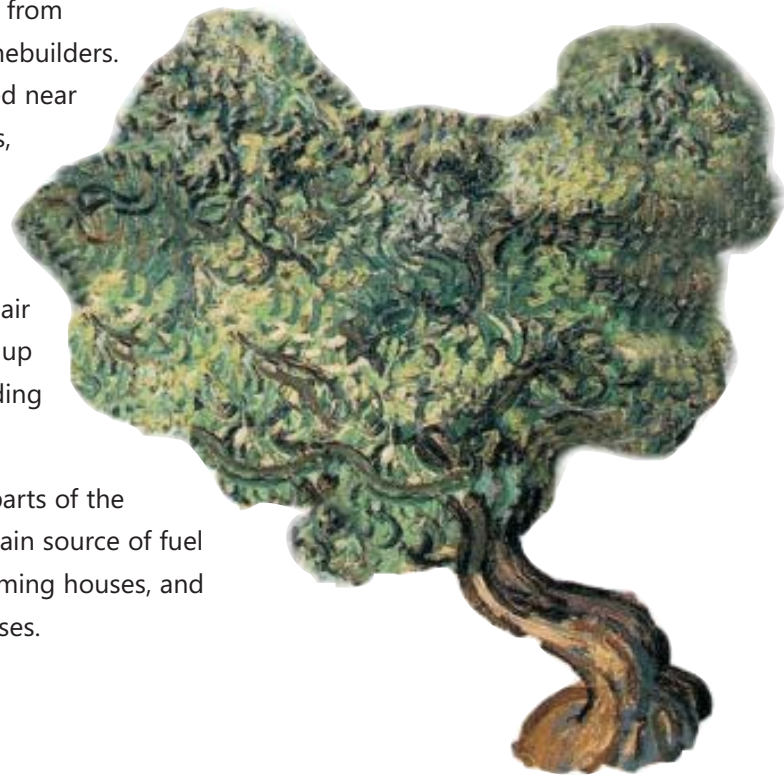
"The oak trees Elzéard planted in 1913 were now as tall as I was," the narrator tells us. Different tree species grow at different rates. How long would it take an oak tree to grow as tall as you? A maple? A pine? An apple tree? A redwood? A baobab?

In the story, the forest planted by Elzéard comes under the protection of the government. What is the government's responsibility to protect our natural resources?

Check out the North Carolina Forestry Services' interactive diagram to learn about the different parts of a tree.

Trees are an essential part of our ecosystem. Here are some of the many ways in which they help keep our planet safe and healthy.

- **CLEAN WATER** — The hair-like root fibers of trees help filter groundwater by trapping and filtering pollutants and contaminants. A mature tree can take up and release up to 400 gallons of water every 24 hours.

- **CLEAN AIR** — Trees produce oxygen, absorb carbon dioxide, and capture particulates (dust, pollen, etc.). Mature trees create enough oxygen in a day to support a family of four.

- **SOIL PROTECTION AND NOURISHMENT** — Tree roots prevent erosion by holding soil in place so it cannot be easily blown away by wind or washed away by water. Without trees, heavy rains can wash soil into streams and rivers, spreading pollution, destroying habitats, and increasing the risk of flooding. When trees die, they break down into nutrients that enrich the soil.

- **HABITAT FOR WILDLIFE** — Trees and forests provide homes for many different species of animals.

- **HABITAT FOR HUMANS** — Trees make our world a more beautiful and happy place. Parks and forests are great places to stay active by hiking, backpacking, bird watching, etc. Studies show that hospital patients who can see trees outside their windows recover more quickly than those who look out on pavement and buildings.

- **NATURAL SOURCE OF MEDICINES** — Trees provide substances used in medicine; for example, Taxol, a drug extracted from the bark of the yew, is used in treating cancer.

- **ECONOMY** — The forest industry provides jobs for many people, from cabinetmakers to homebuilders. When trees are planted near homes and businesses, they conserve energy by keeping buildings cool. Landscaping with trees can reduce air conditioning costs by up to 50 percent, by shading windows and walls.

- **ENERGY —** In some parts of the world, trees are the main source of fuel for cooking food, warming houses, and running small businesses.

"For the human character to reveal truly exceptional qualities, one must have the good fortune to be able to observe its performance over many years. If this performance is devoid of all egoism, if its guiding motive is unparalleled generosity, if it is absolutely certain that there is no thought of recompense and that, in addition, it has left its visible mark upon the earth, then there can be no mistake."

—*The Man Who Planted Trees*

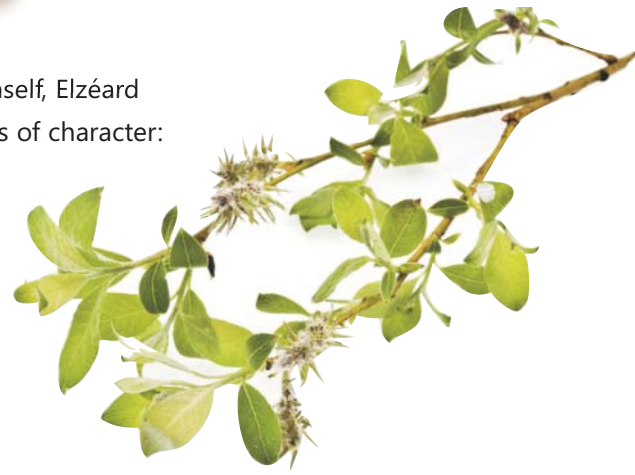"Someone's sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago."

—Warren Buffett

"It's the little things citizens do. That's what will make the difference. My little thing is planting trees."

—Wangari Maathai

In creating an entire forest all by himself, Elzéard Bouffier displayed some special qualities of character:

- **ALTRUISM**

- **DETERMINATION/PERSISTENCE**

- **GENEROSITY**

- **PATIENCE**

- **SELF-DISCIPLINE**

- **SEEING THE "BIG PICTURE"**

Can you think of any others?

Define the terms above and give examples from *The Man Who Planted Trees* that demonstrate these qualities. Then give examples from real life. How can these qualities help you achieve your goals?

What motivates people to do things for others when they have nothing to gain themselves?

In the story, representatives from the government believe that the forest has sprung up *naturally*. The narrator and his friend the forest ranger never reveal the truth. Why do you think they chose to keep Elzéard's accomplishment a secret? Did they make the right choice?

Describe a situation in your life where you went out of your way to help someone— or where someone went out of his or her way to help you.

In Kenya, *The Man Who Planted Trees* helped inspire Nobel prize winner Wangari Maathai in a huge tree-planting project. Research her life and accomplishments and write a paper about her impact on environmentalism in Africa.

Get involved in a community-service project. Here are some of the things you can do: organize a clothing or food drive, visit a nursing home, volunteer at a soup kitchen, plant a community garden, form a litter patrol, or plant a tree!

A World at War

> "The shepherd had seen nothing of [the wars]. He was thirty kilometers away, peacefully continuing his work, ignoring the war of '39 as he had ignored that of '14."
>
> —*The Man Who Planted Trees*

Why would Jean Giono's war experiences make him write a book like *The Man Who Planted Trees*?

Do you agree with Giono's decision to protest World War II, even though many people in France supported it? Did his resistance make him unpatriotic?

Do the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have any effect on your daily life? Do you follow news of the war, or do you try to ignore it?

During the more than thirty years that Elzéard Bouffier spends patiently planting his trees, the world goes through two terrible wars. In his quiet and remote corner of Provence, he does not take any notice, but goes right on with his work. There is not much impact on Elzéard's forest, either. During World War II, the government starts cutting down some of the oak trees, but the location is so far from roads and railways that it proves to be impractical.

Author Jean Giono served in the First World War and took part in the Battle of Verdun—the longest and one of the most devastating battles in history. The shock of what he saw and experienced stayed with him all his life. Returning home after the war, Giono began to embrace pacifism. As the clouds of World War II began to darken the horizon, he steadfastly resisted the growing public support for military action. He was jailed twice for his anti-war beliefs.

World War I (1914-1918)

Beginning in 1914, the First World War involved the allied forces of Russia, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Serbia, Belgium, Romania, Greece, and Japan. On the opposing side were Austria-Hungary, the German Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria. The United States entered the conflict on the Allied side in 1917, a year before it ended in an Allied victory.

Known as "the war to end all wars," World War I was one of the deadliest in history, killing an estimated 16 million people. (In comparison, there were about three million killed in the Korean War and approximately five million in the Vietnam War.) One of the horrors of World War I was the use of poison gas, which resulted in slow, painful death.

World War II (1939-1945)

"The war to end all wars"—World War I—did not live up to its name. Twenty years after peace was declared, Germany invaded Poland, sparking World War II, the deadliest conflict in human history. The Allied side included the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, the United States, China, Poland, France, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Belgium, the Netherlands, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Norway. The opposing side, known as the "Axis," included Germany, Japan, Italy, Hungary, Romania, Finland, Thailand, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Slovakia. The Allies declared victory in 1945.

Over 60 million people died in World War II—around 50 million of them civilians. Besides the war itself, the Germans carried out The Holocaust—the systematic genocide of Jews, Slavs, the Roma, and gay men.

Resources

> "Civilization tries to persuade us we are going towards something, a distant goal. We have forgotten that our only goal is to live, to live each and every day, and that if we live each and every day, our true goal is achieved."
>
> —Jean Giono

Books

For Younger Readers

The Curious Garden, by Peter Brown. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2009. Grades Pre-K-3.

How the Ladies Stopped the Wind, by Bruce McMillan. Houghton Mifflin Books for Children, 2007. Grades Pre-K-3.

Johnny Appleseed, by Stephen Vincent Benet and Rosemary Benet. Margaret K. McElderry, 2001. Grades Pre-K-3.

A Log's Life, by Wendy Pfeffer. Aladdin, 2007. Grades K-3.

The Lorax, by Dr. Seuss. Random House Books for Young Readers, 1971. Grades Pre-K-3.

The Man Who Lived in a Hollow Tree, by Anne Shelby. Atheneum/Richard Jackson Books, 2009. Grades K-3.

Planting the Trees of Kenya: The Story of Wangari Maathai, by Claire Nivola. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008. Grades K-3.

For Older Readers

Forests: More Than Just Trees, by Julie Kerr Casper. Chelsea House Publications, 2007. Grades 4-6.

The Life Cycle of a Tree, by Bobbie Kalman and Kathryn Smithyman. Crabtree Publishing Company, 2002. Grades 4-6.

Toby Alone, by Timothée de Fombelle. Candlewick, 2009. Grade 4 and up.

Internet

Puppet State Theatre Company
www.puppetstate.com

National Alliance for Community Trees
http://actrees.org

National Arbor Day Foundation
www.arborday.org

Project Learning Tree, an environmental education program for educators and students in grades PreK-12
http://plt.org

The Great War and the Shaping of the 20th Century, PBS program about World War I
www.pbs.org/greatwar

Video

The Man Who Planted Trees, an animated film by Frédéric Back. CBC Radio-Canada, 1987.

The War - A Film By Ken Burns and Lynn Novick. A seven-part series about World War II. PBS Home Video, 2007.

Music

The Man Who Planted Trees, by the Paul Winter Consort, with the voice of R.J. Lurtsema. The story is read aloud, set to music composed and played by the Paul Winter Consort.