

**DON QUIXOTE IN HOLLYWOOD**

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GUIDE PART I — AUTHOR'S NOTES**A note to teachers from Wim Coleman**

(also on the back cover of the book)

Versions of the plays in this book were previously published in *READ* magazine, an outstanding publication widely used in classrooms, grades six through ten. Check out *READ*'s website at www.weeklyreader.com/archive/37.

I call these “Classroom Plays” because they’re not specifically intended for the stage; they’re meant for students to read at their desks in the classroom. However, I’d be eager to hear about in any formal Readers Theater performances or full productions, especially for contests. The plays may be performed royalty-free. My only request is that directors/teachers let me know about such performances, and also to send me any available photographs, reviews, and notifications of awards.

The plays are freely reproducible for your students. I ask that you not share these books with other teachers for further reproduction. If you find this book useful, please encourage others to buy it.

Two of the plays are adaptations of literary classics. “The Lost World” is loosely based on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s novel of the same name; “The Sea Cook” is adapted from parts of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*. “Don Quixote in Hollywood” is a playful variation on Miguel de Cervantes’ world classic. “Sequoyah and His Talking Leaves” is historical and biographical. “La Llorona” is an original reworking of an ancient Mexican legend.

I want to thank my wife and collaborator, Pat Perrin, for the layout and design of this book, plus its annotations. My daughter, Monse, carefully compared these versions of the plays with those published in *READ*; a fluent Spanish speaker, she also gave me desperately needed help with passages of “La Llorona.” Finally, I want to thank the editors at *READ*—especially Debbie Nevins—for the opportunity to write these plays and for permission to reprint them here.

- On the following pages—author’s notes for each play.
- Guide Part II, p. 7—reading comprehension notes and answers to questions from the book.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Don Quixote in Hollywood

The creations of Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616), Don Quixote and his faithful friend Sancho Panza are among the most famous characters in literature. Cervantes introduced them in the first part of his massive novel *Don Quixote*, published in 1605; the second part was published in 1615. The work was a huge international success. William Shakespeare, Cervantes' greatest contemporary, co-authored a play based on an episode in *Don Quixote*—although the play dealt with characters other than the Knight of the Mournful Figure and his long-suffering squire. In 2010, The Arden Shakespeare published a play entitled *Double Falsehood*, believed to be a rewritten version of this lost play.

Don Quixote's adventures have delighted readers for 400 years. His name even has found a place in everyday language. The adjective "quixotic" (pronounced kwix-AH-tick) means foolishly romantic and impractical. Moreover, "tilting at windmills" is a common expression for attempting the impossible. My play introduces students to the origin of this phrase.

While "Don Quixote in Hollywood" transplants the mad knight into our own present-day world, the play is true to some of Cervantes' central themes and questions. For example, what is the boundary between fiction and reality? In my play, Don Quixote and Sancho discover that a book has been written about them. In the second part of Cervantes' novel, the characters make similar discoveries. First, they learn that they have appeared in Part I of *Don Quixote*. Later, they find out (as did Cervantes, to his dismay) that a second part has been written by an anonymous writer trying to cash in on the success of Part I. Through his characters' reactions to this spurious work, Cervantes masterfully ridicules his unknown rival's version. Don Quixote and Sancho become all the more vividly alive as they contemplate their own presence in works of fiction.

Students who enjoy the adventures of Don Quixote and Sancho might be interested in the work of another 17th-century Spanish author, Calderón de la Barca. My classroom adaptation of his 1636 play *Life Is a Dream* will be available in another volume of these plays. Calderón's drama also deals with the conflict between illusion and reality.

—Wim Coleman

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The Lost World

In this free adaptation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's 1912 novel *The Lost World*, I've simplified the original's plot a great deal. For example, there is considerable back-story in the book; before the action even begins, Challenger has made an earlier trip to the plateau. After finding the late Maple White's drawings and diaries, Challenger journeyed there himself. He returned with scanty evidence to London, where nobody believed his story of having found a lost world full of prehistoric life, prompting him to plan his second journey. To clarify the plot, I've portrayed this as Challenger's first trip to the plateau.

The explorers' climb to the plateau is a lot less complicated in my version, and I've eliminated a lake filled with fascinating prehistoric creatures. Also cut is a passage involving a tribe of South American Indians at war with the ape-men.

When Conan Doyle wrote his novel, female characters weren't common in adventure stories, so he made his expedition all male. By 1925, when the silent movie version of *The Lost World* appeared, attitudes had changed, and audiences would have been disappointed by the absence of a woman. The movie added Paula White, whom I have borrowed for this version. I've portrayed her as the brilliant and adventuresome kind of heroine we've come to expect in such stories today.

Working on this adaptation, I researched the dinosaurs, making sure that Conan Doyle's descriptions didn't contradict currently known facts. Paleontology has changed tremendously since Conan Doyle's time, when dinosaurs were thought to be slow, cold-blooded, and dim-witted. Even so, Conan Doyle made surprisingly few mistakes, and even made some remarkably good guesses. For example, pterodactyls really did live in rookeries (breeding grounds)—something that was not known in Conan Doyle's time.

I hope this little play rekindles interest in Conan Doyle's scientist-adventurer George Edward Challenger, the hero of four other novels by the same author: *The Poison Belt*, *The Land of Mists*, *The Disintegration Machine*, and *When the World Screamed*. Poor Challenger has always lived in the shadow of Conan Doyle's other great creation, Sherlock Holmes—despite the fact that Conan Doyle himself liked Challenger better!

—Wim Coleman

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Sequoyah and His Talking Leaves

The name Sequoyah may have meant “Sparrow,” “Principal Bird,” or “Sand Hill Crane.” Or it may have come from the word *sikwa*, meaning hog. In any case, he was seldom called Sequoyah during his lifetime, even by his fellow Cherokee. He was more often known as George Guess—his last name probably a mistaken version of “Gist,” his father’s name. Many Cherokee of his time went by English-sounding names.

Sequoyah was illiterate when he began to invent his syllabary, making his achievement all the more amazing. He is also widely believed to have spoken no English. Possibly he understood English, but because of his lifelong Cherokee pride, simply refused to speak it. Many of his symbols came from the Roman alphabet, used in English spelling. Since he didn’t know how the original letters were supposed to sound, he chose his own sounds for them at random.

Sequoyah’s syllabary made him world famous in his lifetime. He became an honorary member of literary societies in faraway London. More important, his syllabary punctured the widespread belief among white Americans that Native Americans were incapable of civilized thought. By promoting unity among the far-flung Cherokee people, it also helped insure their survival during terribly difficult times. Today, the Cherokee syllabary is barely used, and few Cherokee speak their native language. However, the Cherokee still thrive in North Carolina and Oklahoma. According to the 2000 U.S. census, they are the most populous of all recognized Indian tribes in the United States.

—Wim Coleman

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The Sea Cook

While playing with his young stepson Lloyd in 1881, Robert Louis Stevenson drew a map of a fanciful Caribbean island. He and Lloyd began to make up many adventures that took place there. Soon, these adventures took the shape of a story, which became Stevenson's first successful novel—the endlessly popular *Treasure Island*. Stevenson originally planned to give his book the title of this play: *The Sea Cook*.

A play this short can't closely follow Stevenson's wonderful adventure story. It leaves out many of the book's most exciting episodes, including Jim Hawkins' early encounters with buccaneers at his mother's inn, his meeting with Ben Gunn on the island, and his deadly fight with the pirate Israel Hands on board the *Hispaniola*. Instead, the play strings together scenes focusing on the book's most famous character—the treacherous but somehow irresistible buccaneer Long John Silver.

Stevenson had a model in mind for this most famous of all fictional pirates. It was his friend, the writer and editor William Henley, a man with an overpowering personality who had to get about on a crutch. "I will now make a confession," Stevenson once wrote to Henley. "It was the sight of your maimed strength and masterfulness that begot John Silver.... Of course, he is not in any other quality or feature the least like you; but the idea of the maimed man, ruling and dreaded by the sound [of his voice], was entirely taken from you."

—Wim Coleman

AUTHOR'S NOTES

La Llorona

The story of La Llorona—the Weeping Woman—is one of the oldest and most haunting legends of Mexico. There are almost as many versions of the story as there are people who tell it. Just how old it is or when it was first told is hard to say. It bears striking resemblances to the pre-Columbian myth of the goddess Cihuacoatl, and also to various European classical myths, including those of Lamia, Niobe, and Medea. So perhaps, when the Spaniards conquered the Amerindians in what is now Mexico, traditional stories from the New World and the Old World got mixed together, giving us the legend of La Llorona.

The story of La Llorona has become mixed with that of La Malinche, the Aztec woman who interpreted for the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés, became his mistress, and gave birth to his son. According to one tradition (probably untrue), La Malinche turned murderously vengeful when Cortés left her for a Spanish lady. So the story of La Llorona is often considered to be a parable of Mexico's troubled history, especially the bitter meeting of Aztecs and Spaniards.

Today, the story continues to spread throughout the Americas. It is told by people of Mexican descent and heritage as far north as Montana and as far south as South America. To many people, it is more than a story, and La Llorona is quite real. Countless people claim to have heard, seen, or even met the Weeping Woman. And in Mexico, children are warned not to go out at night for fear that La Llorona might take them away. Above all, children are cautioned to stay away from streams and rivers after dark.

The verses sung by the Cihuateteo and Gabriel are from the popular Oaxacan folk song “La Llorona,” which has been recorded many times by various artists, including Joan Baez. It is also used at the end of the 2002 movie *Frida*.

—Wim Coleman

GUIDE PART II — READING COMPREHENSION

Alongside the main text, boxes of various shapes and colors display important information or reading comprehension questions related to that play. Note that each type of information is always presented in the same kind of box.

BASIC INFORMATION

These boxes appear at the beginning of each play:

source of the story and copyright information on the play

previous publication information

cast of characters in the play

105 READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

These boxes alongside the main text include questions related to that part of the play.

The questions cover details and main ideas, vocabulary in context, figurative language, and inferences (in multiple-choice test-prep style) plus discussion prompts.

Each type of question always appears in the same type of box. You can simply go through the questions numerically or direct students to look for just one kind of question by identifying the box shape and color.

inferences, conclusions

figurative language

details and main ideas

vocabulary in context

discussion starters

ABOUT THE ANSWERS

The discussion starters, of course, have no single “right” answer. These are simply prompts for talking about each play. Answers to the multiple choice reading comprehension questions appear on the following page.

READING COMPREHENSION—ANSWERS

Below are answers to the multiple-choice questions that appear alongside the main text.

Don Quixote in Hollywood	The Lost World	Sequoyah and His Talking Leaves	The Sea Cook	La Llorona
1. c	23. c	41. d	62. d	83. b
2. b	24. a	42. c	63. b	84. a
3. a	25. discussion	43. a	64. d	85. c
4. d	26. d	44. d	65. b	86. discussion
5. a	27. discussion	45. discussion	66. c	87. d
6. discussion	28. a	46. a	67. b	88. d
7. b	29. a	47. d	68. d	89. c
8. c	30. c	48. c	69. discussion	90. a
9. c	31. d	49. discussion	70. discussion	91. c
10. a	32. b	50. d	71. d	92. b
11. d	33. c	51. a	72. discussion	93. d
12. a	34. d	52. c	73. c	94. a
13. discussion	35. d	53. b	74. c	95. c
14. b	36. c	54. b	75. discussion	96. c
15. c	37. b	55. discussion	76. c	97. c
16. discussion	38. c	56. b	77. discussion	98. discussion
17. discussion	39. b	57. a	78. d	99. b
18. d	40. discussion	58. c	79. b	100. d
19. b		59. c	80. c	101. discussion
20. d		60. a	81. b	102. discussion
21. b		61. a	82. discussion	103. b
22. discussion				104. c
				105. a