



MONKEY AND THE MONK

LEARNING RESOURCE for STUDENTS and TEACHERS

Prepared by Kate Stones

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Monkey and the Monk

Introduction

What is *Monkey and the Monk*?

Monkey and the Monk is a fun, family performance based on the ancient Chinese story of Monkey, made famous in the 1980s by the Japanese TV show, *Monkey Magic*. The show is being produced by The Castlemaine Theatre Company and directed by Kate Stones, to be performed at the end of this year. It will be colourful and comic, and feature original music by Charles Affleck and Patrick Killeen. Mount Alexander Shire has supported the project to allow the CTC to incorporate an education program, including this resource, and two free workshops at Castlemaine Library. Local artists have been commissioned to write original music and choreograph dance sequences, a local filmmaker is making a documentary about the project, and students from local youth-based organisations **The Castlemaine Youth Theatre** and **The Omioikiri Karate School** are collaborating with us to create the show.

The storyline follows the progress of four Pilgrims as they journey from China to India to bring back Buddhist scriptures, for the edification and enlightenment of the people of China.

Tripitaka is the hapless human monk who has been selected by Kwan Yin, Goddess of Compassion, to perform the arduous task, and he is joined by three mystical characters who protect him along the way. These are Monkey (Sun Wu K'ung, King of the Monkeys), Pigsy, (a pig monster), and Sandy (a fish monster).

Along the path, the Pilgrims argue and tease each other, help the locals to defeat demons, and meet countless challenges. Through this process they learn about themselves and each other, and become the best of friends. Although the foundation of the story is based on the interwoven relationship between Buddhism and Daoism in China, it is in fact a deeply human, satirical story of rising to a great challenge, mutual support and friendship.



Illustration by Lin Zheng, Fei Chang Fu, Xin Kuan and Zhang Xiu Shi, from *Monkey and the White Bone Demon* adapted by Zhang Xiu Shi translated by Ye Ping Kuei and Jill Morris, Puffin Books 1984

Curriculum Links

Asian focus in the Arts – the story of Monkey is relevant to a number of different Arts subjects including Drama, Art, Studio Art, Dance, Media Arts, Music and Literature.

- It supports the focus of the Australian Curriculum in its **aim** towards an '**understanding of local, regional and global cultures, and their Arts histories and traditions**'.
- It addresses the **general capability** of '**intercultural understanding**';
- and the **cross-curriculum priority** on **Asian and Australia's engagement with Asia**.

Wellbeing and personal resilience – throughout the story of Monkey the characters meet a number of personal challenges that mirror the everyday challenges of life. The story interweaves three Eastern philosophies, but it is an essentially human story. The issues tackled include:

- understanding and facing consequences
- meeting challenges
- working together to achieve something that is too big to achieve alone
- understanding difference
- overcoming personal fears
- finding non-violent solutions

This is a great story to engage **boys**, as the Pilgrims are male, representing a variety of expressions of masculinity – independent, resourceful, street-smart (Monkey), compassionate, disciplined (Tripitaka), loyal, affectionate (Pigsy), poetic and philosophical (Sandy).



Yen Kong rehearsing Monkey and the Monk, Castlemaine Theatre Company, 2015

History

Most people in the West are familiar with the story because of Monkey Magic, but few are aware of the ancient origins of the tale. Originally called *The Chronicles of The Journey to the West*, (or rather more ominously 'The Tale of Woes Dispersed on Journey West'). The 'West' in the case of this story is India – West of China, not to be confused with our global notion of 'The West' – incorporating Europe and North America. In the original version the Pilgrims have to negotiate eighty-one 'ordeals' of adventures – eighty-one being the magical number of nine times nine. Subsequent versions select particular adventures to feature.

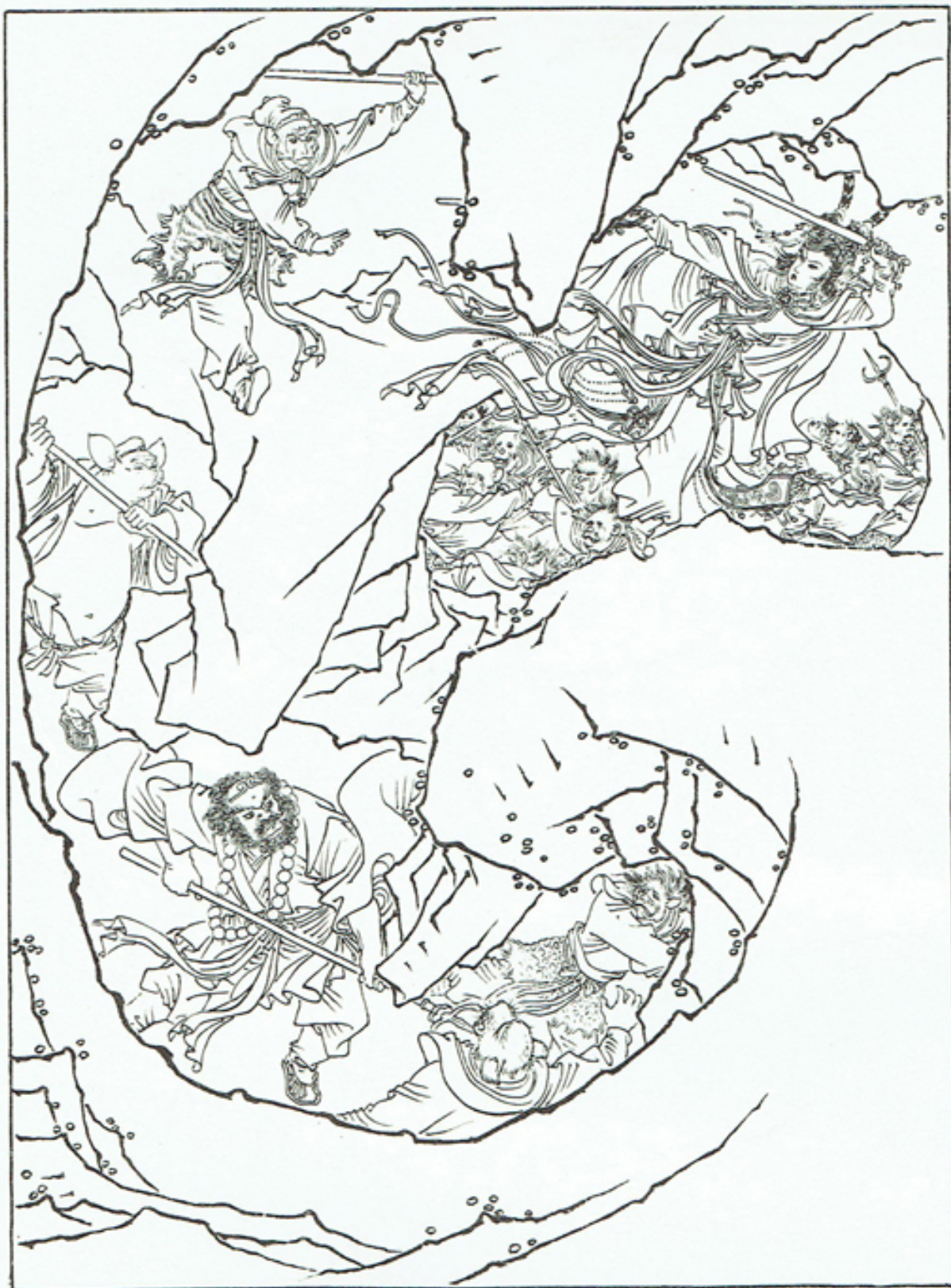
Basis in fact

The story evolved from the history of a real person. This was the priest, famous in China, Xuanzang (596?–664 CE, his name is sometimes written Hsuan Tsang). During the Tang dynasty, which lasted from 618–907 CE, Xuanzang travelled overland from China to distant India to find Buddhist scriptures and return with them. At this time the Tang Emperor Taizong had proclaimed it illegal to travel across the Western borders of China, and if caught, Xuanzang faced criminal arrest and execution. In spite of the dangers, the priest undertook the journey, which lasted for nearly seventeen years (627–644). Upon his return, far from being arrested, he immediately gained imperial recognition and support. The Emperor invited him to live in the Tang capital, Chang'an (modern day Xi'an), and the pilgrim spent the remaining twenty years of his life translating Indian Buddhist texts. He gave the Chinese people in their own language seventy-five volumes (1,341 scrolls) of Buddhist writings, a feat of translation that has never been surpassed, before or since.

The interweaving of Indian and Chinese culture and religion

The pilgrimage from China to India represents an interweaving of culture and religion between the two great Asian States. China's religious and cultural focus is derived from a blending of three ancient philosophies: Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism. Buddhism and Daoism developed at around the same time, around 500-600 BCE, Buddhism in India, and Daoism in China. Lao-Tzu is the famous Daoist teacher and author of key Daoist texts, the *Tao Te Ching*, and the *I Ching*. Buddhism and Daoism both place an emphasis on the idea of the 'void', or 'emptiness', and the idea that physical form is ever changing, and therefore illusory, in contrast to a more rationalist and concrete version of reality, more common in the West. These two philosophies encourage freedom from desire, as a way to achieve balance and happiness. Confucianism was based on the teachings of a man called Kong Qui, who was given the Western name of Confucius, a word originating from the Latin 'confundere' meaning mingling or melting together. The story of *The Journey to the West* is full of allegorical references to the Buddhist teachings of non-violence, of non-attachment to the realms of the senses, and to transcendence of the self through processes of letting go.

There is a strong case to suggest that the character of Monkey himself is in fact based on the older Hindu Monkey God, Hanuman, who features in the Hindu epic story, *Ramayana*, sharing similar traits of courage, prowess in battle, intelligence, resourcefulness and the ability to fly.



The three fought fiercely and put the demons to desperate flight.

Traditional style illustration by Chao Hung-pen and Chien Hsiao-tai from *Monkey Subdues The White Bone Demon*, adapted by Wang Hsing-pei, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1976

The story evolves and is written down for the first time

Upon Xuanzangs' return to China and the Tang Court, he became a folk hero. However, his story, in its telling and re-telling soon departed from historical events and took on a character all its own. Over nearly one thousand years it was spread by word of mouth, in fragments of text, fiction, poetry, and drama. It was finally written down in complete form during the sixteenth century (The Ming Dynasty) in four volumes. The author of the story is widely assumed to be a man called Wu Ch'eng-en (1500-1582), however the text remains technically anonymous. The novel is characterised by humour and political satire, with Heaven represented as an overblown bureaucracy. The story combines beauty and absurdity, profound philosophy and nonsense, folklore, history and poetry.

Traditional Chinese performance

From the 13th century onwards these legends have been represented on the Chinese stage. It is a favourite subject of Chinese Opera, a performance form focusing on stylised movements, acrobatics, hybrid dance and physical comedy, incorporating elaborate costume and make-up.



A traditional performance of Monkey by The Beijing Opera Company

Translation into English

The first definitive English translation of the epic story was by scholar Arthur Waley in 1942. He managed to distil the original four volumes down to one 336-page novel. Waley began his relationship with Asian culture as Assistant Keeper of Oriental Prints and Manuscripts at the British Museum. He was largely self-taught and never travelled to China or Japan. A second complete translation was published in 1983, written by Chinese American scholar Anthony C. Yu. Yu was more faithful to the original text and was the first person to translate the songs and poems that were an integral part of the story. His original translation was in four volumes, however he wrote an abridged version in 2006.

Japanese Pop Culture brings Monkey to England, Australia and New Zealand

The story of Monkey was brought to a broad international audience in the 1980s via a Japanese TV series entitled *Monkey Magic*. Filmed in North-West China and Inner Mongolia, the series was produced by Nippon TV. Originally titled *Saiyuki*, the series was dubbed into English by the BBC and screened in the UK, Australia and New Zealand. It featured funky music by the Japanese band *Godiego*, which became an iconic cult soundtrack for Generations X and Y. The

English dubbing actors spoke in exaggerated and generalised Asian 'accents', which at the



Pigsy, Tripitaka and Sandy in the Nippon TV series, *Monkey Magic*.



Masaaki Sakai, the actor who played Monkey in *Monkey Magic*, album cover c.1973

time, became an essential part of the humour, although contemporary re-workings of the story aim for a more respectful cultural approach.

Non-traditional stage productions

Ever since *Monkey Magic*, there have been productions of the story in America, the UK and Australia. These have drawn on local culture and

artistic collaborations. Recent Australian productions include *Journey to the West* by Theatre of Image (currently touring) and *The Tale of Monkey*, adapted



Jamie Hewlett's drawing of Monkey

by Bryan Nasan, and performed by the Grin and Tonic Theatre Company in 2002. A large production was staged in 2013 in the USA titled *Monkey: Journey to the West*, a collaboration between Chinese actor Chen Shi-Zheng, composer Damon Albarn and animator Jamie Hewlett (creators of the animated pop band *Gorillaz*).



The cast of the Theatre of Image production *Journey to the West*, currently touring

Character Profiles – The Four Pilgrims

Monkey

Symbolically Monkey represents the mind, or as Arthur Waley puts it in his introduction 'the restless instability of genius'. Monkey is ambitious, fearless, aggressive, street-wise, fun-loving, anti-authoritarian, and iconoclastic. He begins his journey as something of a megalomaniac, however along the way he learns to control his violent impulses and become a noble, wise and protective force. His desire for literal immortality (fame, adulation and eternal life) parallels Tripitaka's search for spiritual enlightenment for the good of all beings.



Tripitaka

Tripitaka is an earnest young monk. He takes his Buddhist teachings very seriously, spending many hours in meditation. He has a strict policy of non-violence, in contrast to Monkey. All is peace and tranquility for Tripitaka until he is called on the spiritual quest that becomes his destiny. It is then that the cracks begin to show, and Tripitaka is beset by fear and anxiety, which makes him reliant on his companions for protection. He is relentlessly controlling and pedantic, not hesitating to use torture to control Monkey's wildness. However it is Tripitaka's vision of spiritual service that is the driving force of the journey West. His name means 'three baskets' – a reference to three baskets of scriptures, the earliest recorded Buddhist teachings.

Pigsy

Pigsy was originally a Marshall in one of the armies of the Daoist Heaven. He was punished for flirting with The Mistress of the Moon, and sent to earth in the form of a Pig Monster. Pigs in Chinese culture are associated with family life and abundance. Pigsy pretends to be gruff and tough, but in fact he is a softy. He loves the idea of having a home and a family, and wants nothing more than to be cosy and comfy, well fed and loved. He is rather greedy and lascivious at times. Along the road he discovers that family can be found in the most unexpected places.



Sandy

Sandy is the most illusive of the four pilgrims, and that suits his character as a slippery Fish Monster. Sandy, like Pigsy once held a respectable position in Heaven, yet he was punished for his clumsiness by being transformed into a human-eating Fish Dragon. Sandy is a philosopher and poet, but he is often depressed or melancholic. He is a sensitive soul who learns the value of the skill of telling a good story.

Chinese Culture in Central Victoria

The Chinese community has had a presence and an impact on Central Victoria for well over a hundred years, establishing itself during the Gold Rush. Most of the diggers from China started arriving in Australia from about 1855, but there were Chinese diggers at Forest Creek in 1852. Forest Creek was the name first given to the area now called Chewton, the site of the largest find of alluvial gold in Australia. Many Chinese had previously been working in the Californian goldfields in America. Diggers from China looked very different to Europeans and Americans. They dressed differently and their language sounded very different. Because of this they often experienced racism on the Goldfields. Their presence on the Goldfields was also resented because they were very hard working and worked very well in large teams. Often they would take over old diggings that had been abandoned by Europeans, and retrieve more gold. Chinese diggers were able to afford to travel to the Goldfields because their passage was paid for by brokers – money lenders who remained in China. However this money had to be repaid, and the diggers had to work off the debt they owed to the broker once they got to the Goldfields.

Their journey to the Goldfields was very long and arduous. They had walked from their home in the villages to the city of Canton (most of those diggers who came to Australia had a journey of about 3 days walking to get to Canton from the Sze Yap region – that's about the same as walking from Melbourne to Castlemaine, which is what they had to do when they arrived here). Then they had to take a 'river junk' boat up the Pearl River to Hong Kong. Ships bound for Australia and America left from Hong Kong. Conditions on the ships were overcrowded and often the passengers were not allowed to come up on deck for the whole journey. The greedy brokers and shipping merchants crowded as many as they could onto the ships, and this meant that food and water were in short supply. The voyage to Port Philip Bay took about 3 months on average. In 1855 the Australian Government placed a tax on Chinese Diggers arriving in Port Philip. This forced the diggers to land in South Australia and walk all the way to the Victorian Goldfields, carrying their equipment with them. This was exhausting and many died.

A community of around 6000 Chinese lived in a large camp at The Five Flags area in Campbell's Creek. They were skilled market gardeners, providing the only reliable source of fresh vegetables on the Goldfields, which they sold to other local diggers and settlers. They established eating-houses, joss houses for prayer and ancestor worship, and they had their own doctors and scribes who would write letters home for them. Chinese doctors treated many European diggers as well.

Very few Chinese women came the goldfields. Gambling was a popular pastime for Chinese men. They played a game called Fan-tan, a game of guessing counter numbers, and also had a lottery.

A few Chinese men intermarried with European women and remained in the area, opening various businesses after the Gold Rush. Bendigo continues to have a significant Chinese population who are proud of their cultural heritage. The Bendigo Dragon Museum and the Bendigo Chinese Association maintain strong cultural links through education, traditional dance training, music, Dragon and Lion dancing. Bendigo hosts a large Chinese New Year celebration every year. The Bendigo Dragon Museum is home to the longest Dragon in the Southern Hemisphere.



Illustration by Lin Zheng, Fei Chang Fu, Xin Kuan and Zhang Xiu Shi, from *Monkey and the White Bone Demon* adapted by Zhang Xiu Shi translated by Ye Ping Kuei and Jill Morris, Puffin Books 1984

Points of departure for discussion and research

Research the following subjects:

- The Tang Dynasty in China
- The Monkey God Hanuman and The Ramayana
- The Life of Arthur Waley
- Joseph Campbell's The Hero's Journey
- Research Chinese history at The Dragon Museum in Bendigo

Discuss:

- What's the current climate in Bendigo regarding multicultural religious and cultural practice?
- Research the recent 'Believe in Bendigo' festival picnic (2 October 2015). What was its purpose?
- Explore the idea of **Pilgrimage**. What has its meaning been in the past? What is its meaning now?
- Make a comparison between Monkey's search for **immortality** and Tripitaka's search for **enlightenment**. How are they similar and different? Why do humans seek immortality? What are some contemporary examples of this quest?
- Where can you see Chinese culture represented in Castlemaine?
- Visit The Dragon Museum in Bendigo to find out more about Chinese culture, and its history in Central Victoria

Bibliography and References:

Anthony C. Yu, *The Monkey and the Monk* (abridged version), The University of Chicago Press, 2006

Arthur Waley, *Monkey*, first published in England by George Allen and Unwin, 1942

Wang Hsing-pei, *Monkey Subdues The White Bone Demon*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1976

Australian Curriculum: The Arts, Foundation-year 10, ACARA, 2013

Castlemaine Historical Museum

The Dragon Museum, Bendigo

The Bendigo Chinese Association

Monkey and the Monk will be performed at The Castlemaine Town Hall from 27 November – 13 December 2015. Performances will be Fridays at 7pm and Saturdays and Sundays at 2pm. Tickets will be on sale from November 6 at Maine Shoes and Accessories or online at trybooking. If you would like to make a group booking please contact Kate Stones on 0431 998 707.

The Castlemaine Theatre Company wishes to thank the Mount Alexander Shire Council for their support in the creation of this Learning Resource, and Regional Arts Victoria for their support of *Monkey and the Monk*.

