# Mermaid Song Study Guide

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Information to Grow Students’ Understanding & Appreciation of

Mermaid Song

(based on Hans Christian Andersen’s The Little Mermaid)

About the Author:

While many children are familiar with Walt Disney’s “Little Mermaid,” the original story was written nearly 200 years ago by Hans Christian Andersen. Andersen was born in 1805 to a poor family in Denmark. His father was a shoemaker and his mother was a washerwoman, but they introduced him to puppet shows, theatre and folklore, which fascinated him from the time he was young. He loved to read, even as a young child, a habit which certainly inspired his life of writing.

Mr. Andersen received little education. In 1816, his father died when he was just 11, and Mr. Andersen was forced to go to work. For a short time he was apprenticed to a weaver and tailor, and then worked long hours at a factory. Andersen finally got the opportunity to go to school when he was 16, though he struggled in school since he was older than the other students. He was teased by other children because of his tallness and awkwardness, and this may be why his most memorable stories, like *The Ugly Duckling* and *The Little Mermaid*, depict characters who long to be changed in some way to find happiness.

Though he always wanted to write for adults, Mr. Andersen’s fame rests on his collection of Fairy Tales and Stories, written between 1835 and 1872. In addition to *The Emperor’s New Clothes*, you may be familiar with *The Princess and the Pea*, *The Snow Queen*, *The Nightingale*, and *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*. With these collections, Hans Christian Andersen became known as the father of the modern fairytale.

Perhaps he got his wish, since he is famous for stories that appeal to adults as well as children, with their timeless themes of longing to fit in with others.
and listening to your own heart and not the voices of others.

After trying but failing to be an actor, Mr. Andersen was able to get assistance to attend college, after which he began his career as an author. He enjoyed both national and international success during his lifetime, and was invited to tour and read bits of his stories extensively in Europe, Asia and Africa.

Mr. Andersen fell in love many times, but he never married or had children. His tales inspired other writers including Charles Dickens, who wrote *A Christmas Carol* and was a friend; and C.S. Lewis, author of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

Hans Christian Andersen wrote more than 300 fairy tales before his death at age 70 after falling out of bed. The city of Copenhagen, where he lived in his adult years, has a statue of a mermaid inspired by his story which has become an international symbol -- just like the Statue of Liberty represents New York to the world.

His stories have been translated into more languages than any other books, except for the Bible. 

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**Who Turned that Fairy Tale into a Play?**

Gay H. Hammond is Director of WonderQuest and Resident Dramatist of the Gainesville Theatre Alliance. Repeat WonderQuest patrons will recognize her as the playwright who wrote and directed last year’s *Pecos Bill* and as the lady who gives away a T-shirt to a lucky student at each performance.

Ms. Hammond has written nearly 40 plays, for both children and adults. She loves children’s literature (she is really good at making different voices for characters when reading aloud) and she loves to write plays for children. Some of her favorite plays include *Sophie and the Pirates*, *Stone Soup* and *The Briar Patch*. She loves to play with words and has been the Wordsmith and Emcee for the Hall County Literacy Spelling Bee for over 20 years!

Ms. Hammond has an MFA in Playwriting from Spaulding University, and because of her work and artistic eye, WonderQuest was named the 2009 WINNER of the Southeastern Theatre Conference’s Sara Spencer Award for Excellence in Child Drama.
So, once the decision is made about which play to perform, what next? How does the play go from storybook to a make-believe world on stage?

One aspect of taking the story from page to stage is designing scenery that helps the audience to feel like they are looking into the story. WonderQuest was fortunate that professional scenic designer Kristina White was interested in the project. Ms. White worked with GTA and WonderQuest when she was a student at the University of North Georgia. As a senior in the Theatre Dept., she designed the set for WonderQuest’s 2012 production of *Alice in Wonderland*. Since graduating, she has designed sets for several theatres in Atlanta and been a set painter for several movies and TV shows that were filmed in Atlanta. She also has a baby -- Fiona!

The first thing a designer does is read the script to help them get a sense of what is needed to tell the story visually, whether they are working on lights, the set, costumes, props or sound. The next step is to do research, finding out about history that relates to the story and looking
for pictures in books and online that can inspire the colors and shapes for the set and costumes -- helping the audience forget they are in a theatre and “travel” with the actors into the story.

After reading the script and talking with the director, Ms. White studied images of oceans, castles, shipwrecks, keeping key theatre elements in mind: different levels for characters to stand on, numerous places to enter/exit, and any special needs of the story. For *Mermaid Song*, we need an undersea kingdom, the ability for actors to move around as though they’re swimming, and a palace on land.

After discussing the pictures with the director, Ms. White created several drawings of her ideas, then a model and final plan for building a set that is the perfect size for our stage (using lots of math she learned when she was your age!). She also had to choose colors for the set that would create the right story atmosphere, but allow the costumes to stand out against it. Our set-building team began work on the set in June and moved it to the theatre in early September.
Costume Designer Jeannie Crawford, who has become a REGULAR for WonderQuest audiences, began her work in the summer as well. You may have seen her work in last year’s production of *Pecos Bill* or in *The Briar Patch*, and *James and the GIANT Peach*.

Ms. Crawford began by researching the many characters in *Mermaid Song*, looking through pictures from children’s books, classic paintings, actual FISH and mermaid make-up ideas. While the talking fish in the movie are inventions of Disney studios and not in the original story, there will also be some special creatures in *Mermaid Song*, and Ms. Crawford is designing them.

One of Ms. Crawford’s talents is the ability to determine special textures and colors that help communicate a character’s body and personality. When she has an idea of what a character should look like, she goes to fabric stores and often at second hand shops, moving quickly through the aisles until the right color and texture sort of “jump out” at her. She’s also wonderful at designing costumes from different periods in history, so with all of her previous experience, she easily created designs for WonderQuest’s mermaid, her human boyfriend and the sea.
witch who works magic to trade tail for legs.

Ms. Crawford is a color expert and fiber artist, so she pays close attention to how the costumes will contrast with the colors of the set (a blue merman would not show up well in a blue ocean!). She also thinks about how the fabrics she chooses MOVE onstage -- as that movement of clothing and headpieces is an extention of an actor’s body to communicate the story.

How would you design the story? What would your mermaid be wearing?
Where Mermaids came from...
...and other topics to discuss and write about

Teachers: You can combine language arts studies AND prepare for the play by discussing and having your students write about some of these themes of the MERMAID SONG (Little Mermaid) story.

All sea-faring cultures have mermaid legends, some going back thousands of years. A mermaid is a mythical creature that is half woman and half fish. The name comes from ‘mer’ meaning sea. The male version is called a merman. What other sorts of mixed beings can you imagine? What would you call them and how would they behave? (How about a half human/half cat?)

Many popular tales identify mermaids as magical, evil creatures who would sing to men on ships or shores nearby, practically hypnotizing them with their beauty and song. Sailors who heard would rush out to sea and be drowned. Other stories have depicted mermaids as good-but-dangerous fish-people who didn’t understand that humans could not breathe underwater and accidentally drowned sailors as they pulled them down into the depths of the sea. If you were a sailor, would you want to see a mermaid or not?

A manatee is a slow-moving, vegetable-eating mammal, that looks a little like a seal but mostly just floats and eats. After leaving from Spain in August of 1492, Christopher Columbus wrote in his ships log about seeing mermaids, but they were almost certainly manatees. He reported seeing three mermaids in the Caribbean Sea in January 1493. He said they “came quite high out of the water”, but were “not as pretty as they are depicted, for somehow in the face they look like men.” Why do you think he thought these creatures were mermaids?

In our story, King Mestor does not want his young daughter Anemone to go to the surface because humans are known to be dangerous fishermen who eat what they catch in the sea. Is there something your parents don’t want you to do because it’s dangerous? How would
Anemone’s story end differently if her father’s fears for her came true?

Mermaids are such admired characters that there are thousands of mermaid swim suits, sweaters, dresses and even full-body sweaters that people can buy, as well as special hairstyles and hair-coloring designs. What color would you make your mer-hair?

Anemone trades something precious (her voice) for what she wanted (legs). What are some other examples of people who make trades for something important to them? What a person on a diet sacrifice, and what do they get? What do Olympic athletes want, and what to they trade? What do firefighters want and what do they trade to accomplish it?

There is a saying that goes “The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.” It means that often we think that what someone else has is better than what we have, but in reality what they have may be just different, but not better. What does Anemone, the little mermaid, think is better than what she has? What are some good differences in the life she wants to choose? Are there bad things about it?

Mermaid Legends & Lore

With nearly three-quarters of the Earth covered by water, it’s not surprising that, centuries ago, the oceans were believed to contain many mysterious creatures, including sea serpents and mermaids.

- Greek mythology contains stories of the god Triton, a half-man half-fish who rules the sea.
- In the 1600s, a Dutch story claimed that a mermaid entered Holland through dike (a system of walls that keep the sea water out), and stayed on land, learning to speak Dutch and do household chores (imagine her making beds!)
- Knowing people’s fascination with mermaids, circus inventor P.T. Barnum and once created a mermaid booth where people paid to peek at a sleeping mermaid. They were probably disappointed when what they saw fake mermaid he had made that was part monkey, part fish.

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<td>ELA1W1, ELA1LSV1</td>
<td>ELA2W1, ELA2R2</td>
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The assignments on this page address these core area Georgia Performance Standards.
This section is for lower grades

1. If Ms. Octopus has 8 legs, each with one finger at the end of each leg, and she has 3 rings on 6 of her fingers and just 2 rings on the other 2 legs, how many rings does she have?

2. The teacher of a school of fish has 32 fishy-students in her class. Five of her students are out with the flu on Monday, and after they recover, 1/4 of her students are home sick on Thursday. How many fishies have been present for all five days of the school week?

3. Each time the tide comes in, it leaves starfish on the beach. Sunday’s high tide left 18 starfish on the beach; the next day twice as many were left. On Tuesday a surfer came along and threw 1/3 of the starfish back into the water, but on Wednesday, the number of starfish on the beach doubled. How many starfish were on the beach on Wednesday?

4. The shark brothers are very good about brushing their teeth, but they leave the water on when they’re brushing so lots of water goes down the drain. When they leave the water running, 6 quarts go down the drain every 60 seconds. If big brother leaves the water on for 5 minutes, the middle brother brushes with the water on for just 20 seconds, and little brother comes in and leaves the water on for another 2 minutes, how much water has been wasted all together?

5. Some fishermen go out in their boat, hoping for a big catch. When they pull up their net, they have 127 lbs of fish, but a 30 lb. turtle escapes from the net, and the fishermen throw back 2-16 lb. rocks. How many pounds of fish did they end up catching?

6. Two mermaid sisters have a competition to see whose hair is longer. The oldest has hair that is 165.8 cm long, and her sister’s hair measures 127.3 cm. What is the difference in length?

7. How much larger is a 5’x 9’ cave than a 2.5’x 9’ underwater cave?

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This section is for upper grades

1. If Ms. Octopus has 8 legs, each with one finger at the end of each leg, and she has 3 rings on 6 of her fingers and just 2 rings on the other 2 legs, how many rings does she have?

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The assignments on this page address the core area Georgia Standards of Excellence listed.
On our planet, waves happen when our earth spins and water is pulled by gravity across the geological formations of the ocean floor. You can observe the same kind of energy moving through water by making an “Ocean Bottle” to observe and enjoy! Walk through the scientific method to guess how your Ocean Bottle will behave, then experiment with movement and observation.

**How to Create an Ocean in a Bottle**

**Ingredients:**
- Clean jar or clear water bottle (labels removed)
- Funnel
- Sand
- Water
- Blue food coloring
- Baby oil (canola or sunflower are okay)
- Treasures and/or creatures: tiny shells, a cork “boat”, a penny, beads

1. Using a funnel, spoon some sand into a clean jar or water bottle.
2. Add water until ½ full. Add 1 drop of blue food coloring or more until you like the color.
3. Add a few shells to your “ocean,”
4. Add baby oil until almost full. Leave a small space for air at the top.
5. As an extra option, consider making a little “boat” from a cork that fits through the top opening of your bottle. Watch how the cork bobs on the waves, just like a surfer or sailor.
6. Optional - Adult helpers can use a hot glue gun to put glue around the lid before closing for a more permanent seal.

Turn your ocean on its side and watch the waves go back and forth. Watch the sand gently move as the waves go by, and notice that some things stay on top and others fall to the bottom.

*Why does this happen?*
*What do you think will happen when you shake up the bottle?*
*Write down your hypothesis*
*What happens to the sand? What happens to the treasures?*
*Does all the sand move as the waves move or just a little at a time?*

Your ocean in a jar is too small to mimic the tidal patterns of the real ocean but will offer a great opportunity to see the effects of energy in motion.

**Hypothesis:**
a proposed explanation for some event or problem

**Scientific Method:**
1. Ask a question
2. Gather information
3. Make a hypothesis
4. Do an Experiment
5. Analyze results and draw a Conclusion
6. Communicate Results

**Ocean Facts:**
- Over 70% of the Earth’s surface is covered water.
- Marine habitats include oceans and seas, which both have saltwater.
- There are five oceans across the planet and -- Can you name them?
- Marine habitats can be very different from each other depending on how warm the water is.
Circle the names of the animals in the word search. Then circle the animals below that are mammals (who breathe air).

- blue whale
- urchin
- hermit crab
- coral
- shark
- harp seal
- starfish
- sea turtle
- squid
A Fork in the Fairy Tale Road: Taking the road less traveled

Fairy tales have happy endings -- or at least modern ones do. Some of the original stories, compiled by the Brothers Grimm or written by Hans Christian Andersen, are thought to be cautionary tales for adults rather than children, where people can see the ill effects of selfishness, judgement or... stepmothers (they’ve had a bad name for along time!)

Many tales have been softened over time, making them happy tales that show children that good things come to those who deserve it. The term “fairy tale ending” is synonymous with HAPPY.

But is there another road to happiness? What if you want to be less predictable, or to teach that the prince is not the answer to the problem? What if the Snow White decided to open a bed and breakfast and stay in the forest?

Choose a fairy tale but make the story ZING by taking an unexpected route with a different ending. Play with your imagination, be funny if you can. Be Steven Spielberg and create suspense. Tell what happens with several characters, not just the main one. Some possibilities for your new story endings:

• What if Cinderella’s slipper fit one of the icky sisters? What would Prince Charming do? How does Cinderella cope with it? What about the Fairy Godmother?
• What if the Little Mermaid went on land and decided she was more into dancing than getting married? How would it affect her family? What if there was something odd about her feet?
• How would things play out if Snow White had met a traveling circus rather than seven stationary little men? What would skills would she learn? Who might be her magical helpers rather than forest animals? (it’s still a fairy tale after all).
Answer the following story problems by writing a number sentence (ex. 2+ ___ = 10) showing how you solved the problem.

1. Charlie the crab found 74 seashells on the beach and gave Sammy seagull some of his shells. He has 41 seashells left -- how many did he give to Sammy?

2. When the youngest mermaid’s birthday cake was about to be served, you were told that you could have 0.6, 60%, 3/5 or 6%. Which 3 will give you the same size portion?

3. It’s Conch Crush season (sort of like football!), and there is room in Giant Clam Stadium for 1000 sea creatures to watch, with 2/5 of the seats for the visiting team. This week the Clams are playing the Moray Eels, so only clams and eels are coming to see the game. If the stadium is 3/4 full at halftime, and there are 200 eels at the game, how many hometown clams came to cheer for their team?

4. The recipe for salt carmel slush requires 2 1/4 cups of cream for 5 fish friends to eat together. You need slush for 8 friends. How much cream will you need?

5. At Dolphin’s birthday party, he had 7, 8-slice pizzas and 41 slices were eaten. What fraction of pizza is left?

6. There are 150 sea turtles born every minute; how many are born every hour, every day and every year?

7. An ad in the Sunfish Sentinel states that 4 out of 7 orca whales recommend CHOMP toothpaste. If 1,200 orcas were surveyed, how many would recommend CHOMP? (800)
Dear Teachers~

We know some of your students have NEVER been to a live performance, so discovering the difference between this and a movie is part of the learning experience. Please discuss the items on this page with your students so they will know what to expect and what is expected of THEM. Thank you!

Theatre Etiquette...

Theatre is a partnership between the actors on stage and the members of the audience. It is a two-sided communication process. An actor's goal is to give pleasure to his or her audience. A responsive audience reciprocates the cast's energy, which in turn encourages the actors to give even more back to that audience. The better the audience, the better that performance will be!

Each performance is unique — like snowflakes, no two are ever the same. Each performance's life lasts only in the memories of its participants. Many young people have never attended a live theatre performance and may have questions as to how they should conduct themselves. Listed below are answers to the most common questions asked by new audience members.

How is a live performance different from a movie?
The work is LIVE. The action that you see is happening right now, with people just like you. You should treat the performers the way that you would want to be treated if you were on the stage with a lot of people watching you. Wouldn't you want them to listen and to pay attention? To laugh when you were funny, and applaud when they like what you were doing? Also, in our beautiful theatre space, no gum, drinks or food are allowed!

Do I have to stay in my seat and be as quiet as possible?
Not necessarily. You shouldn't have personal conversations during the play, but you do not have to be completely quiet. If something funny is happening on stage, then you should laugh. If the characters ask you a question, then you should answer!

When should I clap my hands?
In a live play, you should ALWAYS applaud whenever the show is especially spectacular or entertaining, even in the middle of the play — remember that applause is the way that you show the actors you like what they are doing! Also, you should applaud when the play is over, and when the actors take their bow. Most of all, HAVE FUN!