



The Singing Mermaid

Education Pack



How did Little Angel Theatre start?



John Wright, the founder of Little Angel Theatre, was born in South Africa in 1906. He travelled to England in 1935 and worked as an assistant stage manager for the Ballet Rambert while studying at the Central School of Art and Design. During this time he saw a puppet performance by Podrecca's Piccoli and became hooked. John made his very first puppet in 1938.

In 1961 John and his troupe found a derelict temperance hall in Islington and transformed it into a theatre, designed for the presentation of marionette shows. It opened on Saturday 24th November 1961. This was to be the first purpose built puppet theatre the country had seen for many years and the only one with a permanent long string marionette bridge constructed backstage. The bridge was designed for puppeteers to stand on while they manipulate long stringed puppets who perform on the stage below leaving the audience unable to see the puppeteers. The original bridge is used to this day. The theatre has a traditional 'proscenium arch' and seats 100 audience members.

John Wright died in 1991 but the work of the theatre continued apace with family, friends and supporters working tirelessly to continue in his footsteps to make sure John's legacy would delight generations to come.

“Over the next 30 years, the Little Angel team created and performed over 30 full-scale shows”

About The Singing Mermaid

The Singing Mermaid is based on the book by Julia Donaldson and Lydia Monks.

The show is a co-production between Little Angel Theatre and Royal and Derngate.

“Royal & Derngate, Northampton is the main venue for arts and entertainment in Northamptonshire, with audience members and participants last year numbering more than 474,000 in Northampton and beyond. As one of the major producing venues in the country, we were named Regional Theatre of the Year by the inaugural Stage 100 Awards in 2011, an accolade for which we were nominated again in 2016.

We offer a diverse programme of drama, music, dance, comedy and film, as well as our award-winning Made in Northampton productions: shows originated, cast, built, rehearsed and premiered on our stages.”

The Singing Mermaid

Did you ever go to Silversands on a sunny summer's day? Then perhaps you saw the mermaid who sang in the deep blue bay.

The singing mermaid is tempted away from her home at Silversands to join the circus. The audiences love her but the poor mermaid, kept in a tank by the wicked circus owner Sam Sly, soon longs to return to the freedom of the sea. Will she ever escape?

First published in 2012 The Singing Mermaid is one of over 60 children's story books that Julia Donaldson has had published.

The book is illustrated by Lydia Monks. Julia and Lydia have worked together on 23 publications. Julia's rhyming text and fun characters work perfectly with Lydia's bright engaging illustrations.

Puppetry is the perfect medium for a story set under the sea and in the circus. Puppetry can take you deep into the ocean, to meet swimming fish and scuttling crabs without the need to get wet! Puppets can also breathe fire and walk on their hands along a tightrope, something most actors might struggle with!

Through beautiful puppetry and performance, and with music by Barb Jungr (We're Going On A Bear Hunt), Little Angel Theatre collaborate once again with Royal & Derngate (Moominsummer Madness, 2014), to bring Julia Donaldson and Lydia Monks's enormously popular story, The Singing Mermaid, to life.



Author Study - Julia Donaldson

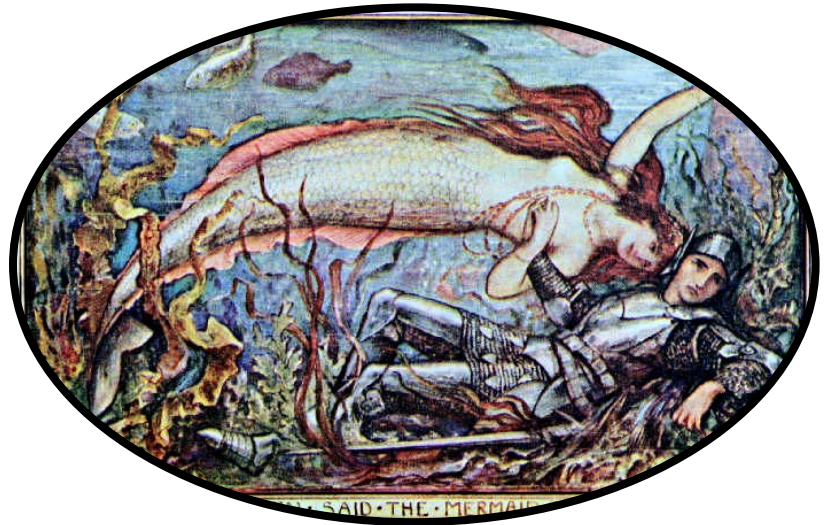
Julia Donaldson is one of the most popular children's authors writing today and has won many awards for her much loved books including *The Gruffalo*, *Room on the Broom* and *The Snail and the Whale*.

- Julia was born in London in 1948 and grew up in Hampstead.
- Julia loved poetry as a child and this went on to feature in most of her books later in life which often include rhymes.
- Julia studied Drama and French at Bristol University. During her time there she acted in shows and learnt the guitar.
- She met her husband, Malcolm at University and they wrote and performed songs together.
- Julia sent a tape of some of her songs to the BBC and between 1974 and 1978 she wrote regularly for the programme *Play Away*, her songs being performed by actors and musicians on the programme. She also wrote occasional songs for other TV shows including *Play School*. Some of her songs – "The Luck of the Game", "Funny Face" and "A Squash and a Squeeze" – were recorded at this time for BBC albums.
- In 1983 the family moved to Bristol. Julia became a volunteer in her sons primary school, hearing the children read aloud. She devised short plays with groups of children which would then be performed to the entire class. She noticed that this approach seemed to build confidence in reading aloud as well as being enjoyable, and Donaldson stored the plays in a drawer for future use.
- In 1991 Donaldson was contacted by Methuen Publishing to ask if the words of her song "A Squash and a Squeeze", which she had written for the BBC's *Playboard* programme in 1975, could be made into a picture book for children. The book was published in 1993, with illustrations by a German artist Axel Scheffler, who was living in London.
- In 1995 Julia came across a version of a Chinese story about a little girl who escapes being eaten by a tiger by claiming to be the fearsome Queen of the Jungle and inviting him to walk behind her. She then hit upon the idea of the tiger becoming a monster whose name would end in O (to rhyme with "doesn't he know"). "Gr" sounded suitably fierce as the start to the monster's name, and filling in the middle with "uffal" the name Gruffalo was born.
- *The Gruffalo* text was sent to the publishers in 1995. Julia also sent it to Axel Scheffler and asked him to create some illustrations. Within days Macmillan Children's Books made an offer to publish *The Gruffalo*, which was illustrated by Scheffler and published in 1999.
- Since then Julia has published many more books, won awards, been Children's Laureate (2011), and has created performances and plays of some of her books to encourage children to act out stories and improve their reading.



All About Mermaids

- A **mermaid** is a mythological (made up) creature with a female human head and upper body and the tail of a fish.
- Mermaids are said to live mostly in the water, although sometimes they are known to come out and sit on the rocks above the sea.
- The word is a compound of mere, the Old English word for "sea", and maid, a woman. The male equivalent is a merman.
- Mermaid myths state that mermaids sometimes sing to sailors to enchant them, distracting them from their work and causing them to walk off the deck or run their ships aground.
- In Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, it is said that they forget that humans cannot breathe underwater and take them to their underwater Kingdoms to try and rescue them.
- The first known mermaid stories appeared in Ancient Assyria, ca. 1000 BC. The goddess Atargatis loved a shepherd and accidentally killed him. She was so sad she jumped into a lake to become a fish, but the waters would not let her beauty be hidden. Because of this, she took the form of a mermaid.
- Mermaids were noted in British folklore as unlucky omens. Mermaids can be a sign of bad weather and a warning to any sailors who see one that a storm is brewing.
- The most famous mermaid is Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale *The Little Mermaid* (1836), which has been translated into many languages and is known all over the world.



There is a statue of this mermaid in Andersen's home town of Copenhagen which is visited by many thousands of people every year.



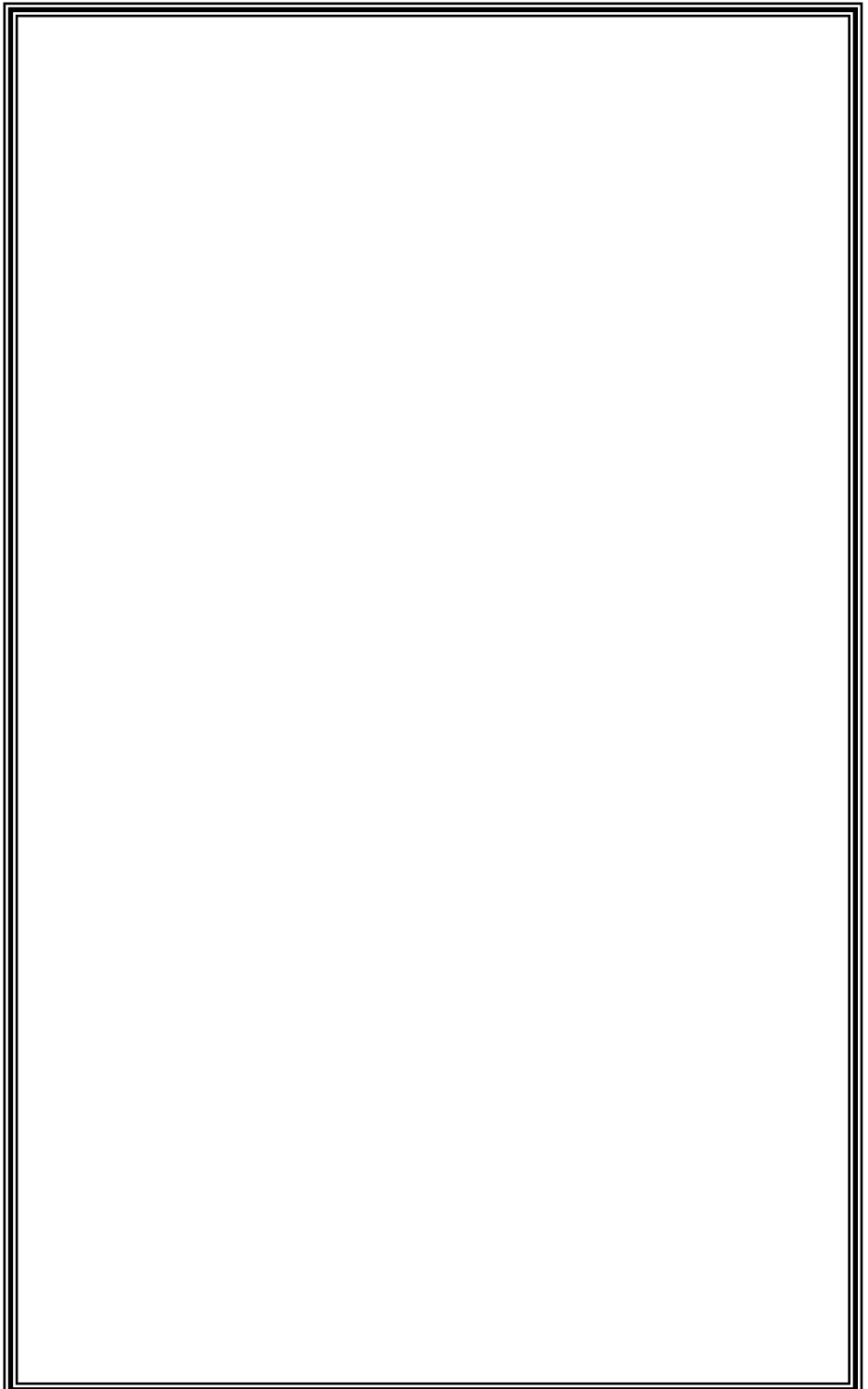


In the Circus we meet Annie the Acrobat, Ding and Dong the circus dogs, a Juggler, a Fire Breather and a Clown.

Think of a character that you would like to see perform in a circus.

What can they do? What do they look like? What costume do they wear?

Draw a picture and write about them here.



Roll up!

Design a poster for your circus



Handprint Fish Puppets

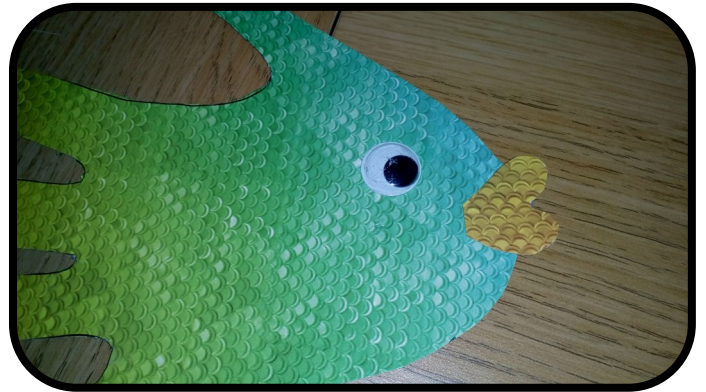
Make your own shoal of puppet fish!



1. Draw around your hand on to card and cut it out.

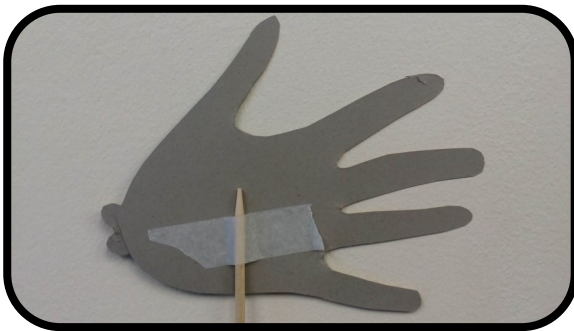


2. Stick on a googly eye or an eye cut out of paper. Cut a heart shape out of paper and stick on to make lips.



3. Decorate your fish with sequins, glitter, scraps of paper or fabric, whatever you have available!

4. Stick the fish onto a chopstick, skewer or lolly stick.



5. Enjoy making your puppet fish swim!

If you have a few fish puppets can you make them swim in a shoal following each other?

Can they swim fast? Can they swim slow?

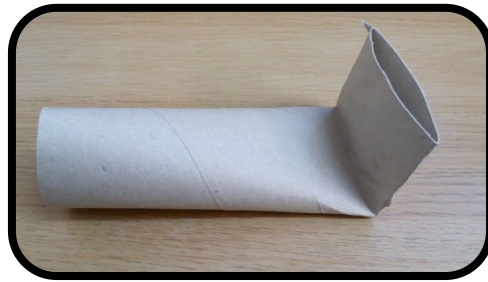
What patterns do they make as they swim?



Mermaid Puppet

Make your own mermaid or merman puppet!

1. Using a kitchen paper roll fold and flatten one end.



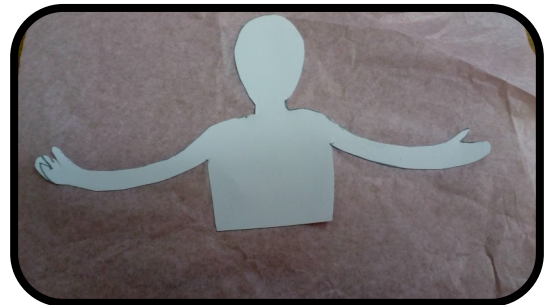
2. Cut a triangle shape out of the folded end of the tube to make the end of the tail.



3. Cover the tube with tissue paper or paint it so that 2/3rds is the colour of the tail and the rest is the colour of the skin.



4. Draw around the template of the head and arms (see next page) or draw your own. Paint it or cover it with tissue paper to match the skin. Insert the body into the tail and secure with glue.



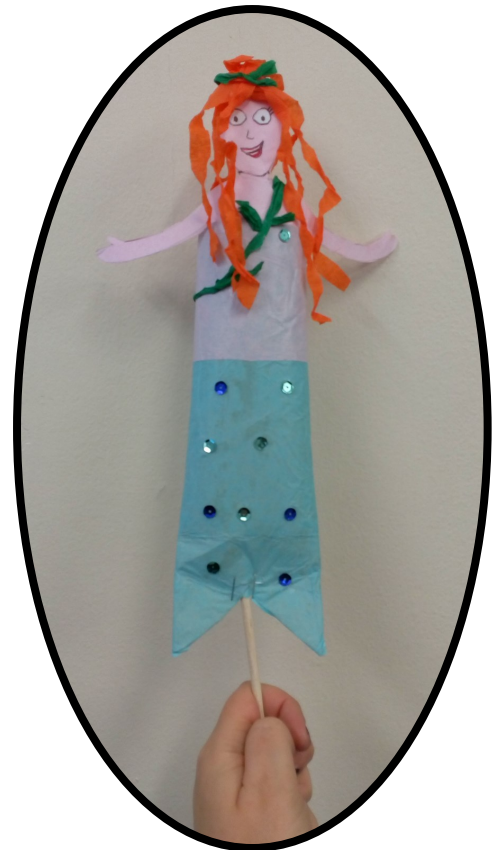
5. Add facial features and hair. You can use wool or crepe paper cut into thin strips for making hair.



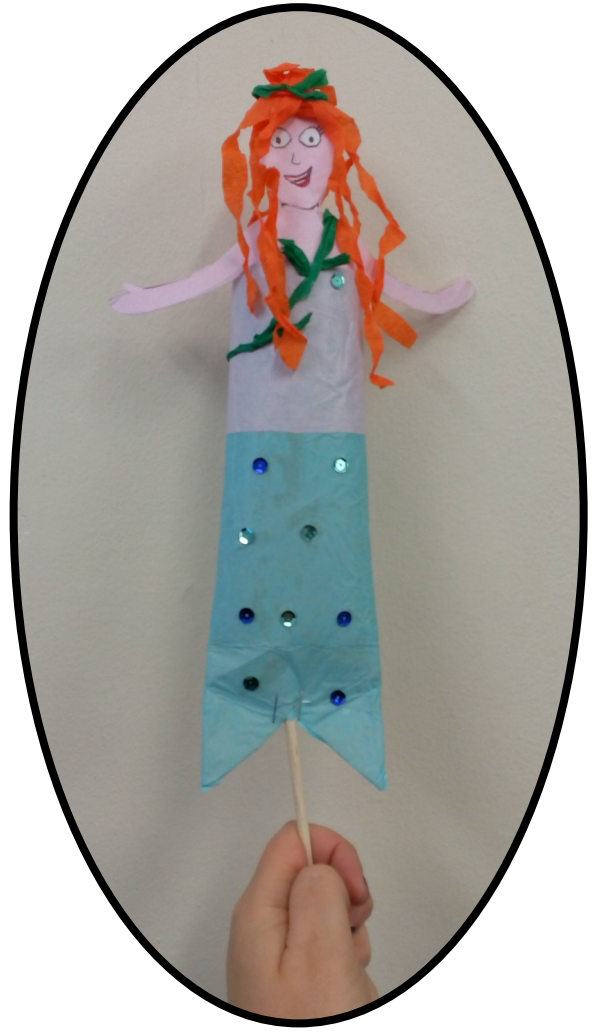
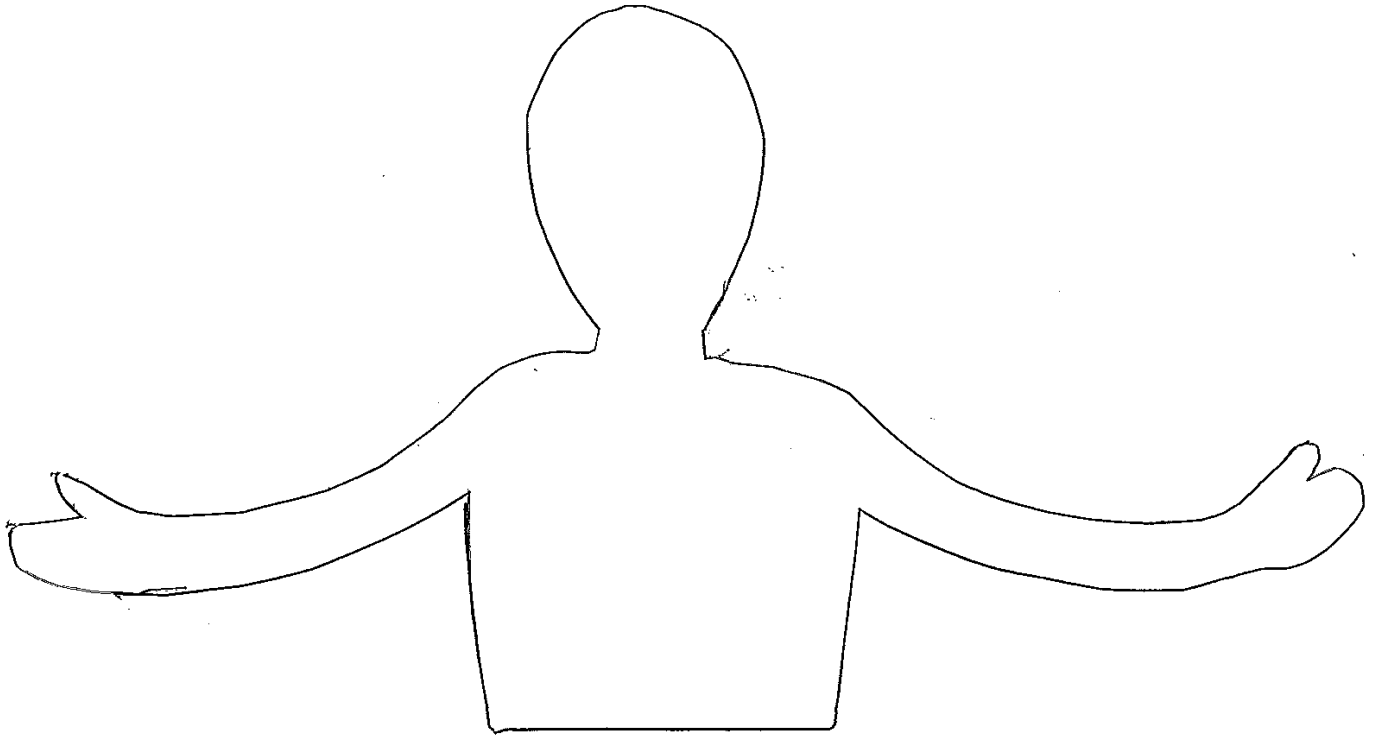
6. Decorate your puppet and then finally inset a chopstick, skewer or lolly stick rod into the tail and secure with tape, glue or staples.



with



Mermaid Template



About Little Angel Theatre

www.littleangeltheatre.com

Join our National Schools Partnership Programme

To broaden the reach of our schools engagement around and outside of London we are excited to introduce our **National Schools Partnership Programme**. This

is an opportunity for all schools, no matter where they are located, to engage in and enjoy our performances and educational material.

Visit our Website to find out more;

<https://www.littleangeltheatre.com/for-schools/schools-partnership-programme/>

Shows At Your School

We have a range of productions which tour into schools, some which are available as part of a tour and others which are available all year round. Enjoy the magic of Little Angel Theatre in your very own School Hall. [Find out more!](#)

Workshops

If it's a workshop you want, look no further! We have years of experience offering workshops for schools. Whether it is one of our curriculum focussed puppet workshops or you want a more bespoke offer, we have something suitable for all students. [Book a Workshop!](#)

Come to us

We have lots of exciting productions at our venues for you to see, as well as a huge catalogue of wonderful and free digital shows for you to watch in your classroom. [See for yourself!](#)

<http://www.juliadonaldson.co.uk/>

Julia Donaldson's official website

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ld1XkherDQI>

Reading of the book with visuals

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqC-3uywep4>

Interview with Julia Donaldson

<https://www.panmacmillan.com/authors/julia-donaldson>

Information about Julia Donaldson and ideas for activities linked to some of her books.

http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=little+angel+theatre&sm=3

Visit You Tube to watch trailers, clips and behind the scenes films of our shows past and present and see the puppets in action!

Education resource pack written by Sarah Schofield, additional contribution by Deanna Mathers, production photographs by Graeme Braidwood (Royal and Derngate).

