

MAR 21 - MAR 29

ages 6 - 12 and FAMILIES



HAMD RAHMANIAN'S

SONG OF

THE NORTH

created, designed and directed by
HAMD RAHMANIAN

PASADENA
PLAYHOUSE



SCHOOL TO STAGE
RESOURCE PACKET

WELCOME TO

PASADENA PLAYHOUSE

Pasadena Playhouse is a place where people have gathered for over 100 years to experience bold and important theater. We are one of the most prolific theaters in American history with a legacy of profound theatrical impact and courageous new work.

As the state theater of California, **our mission is to enrich people's lives through theater, community programs, and learning.** Through our Youth & Family Programming, we are committed to making theater arts accessible for young audiences and their families. Thank you for helping us reach the next generation of budding artists!

Pasadena Playhouse Youth & Family Programming would not be possible without the generous support of Helen and Will Webster Foundation, Rose Hills Foundation, L.L. Foundation for Youth, LA County Department of Arts and Culture, Dwight Stuart Youth Fund, East West Bank, Fitzberg Foundation, Jess & Palma Morgan Foundation, Apriem Advisors, U.S. Bank, Georgina-Frederick Children's Foundation, and Pasadena Showcase House for the Arts.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

About the Show	<u>p. 4</u>
Before the Show	<u>p. 8</u>
At the Show	<u>p. 11</u>
After the Show	<u>p. 12</u>

The content in this School to Stage Resource Packet aligns with...

California Common Core State Standards

Reading.Language: 4, 5, 6

Writing: 4, 5, 6

Speaking & Listening: 4, 5, 6

Language: 4, 5, 6

California Arts Standards for Theater

Creating, Performing,
Responding, Connecting

California Arts Standards for Visual Arts

Imagine, Plan, Make
Investigate, Perceive, Analyze



WHAT IS THE SHOW ABOUT?

Song of the North is an epic, multimedia reimagining of the *Shahnameh*, combining shadow puppetry with projected animation to tell the epic tale of Manijeh, a fierce heroine from ancient Persia – a world of wartorn kingdoms and mythical beasts – who must use all her strengths and talents to rescue her beloved, Bijan, from a perilous predicament and help prevent a war.

WHAT ART FORMS WILL WE SEE?

Song of the North is an epic, multimedia reimagining of the *Shahnameh*, combining shadow puppetry with projected animation to tell the epic tale of Manijeh, a fierce heroine from ancient Persia – a world of wartorn kingdoms and mythical beasts – who must use all her strengths and talents to rescue her beloved, Bijan, from a perilous predicament and help prevent a war.

SHADOW PUPPETRY

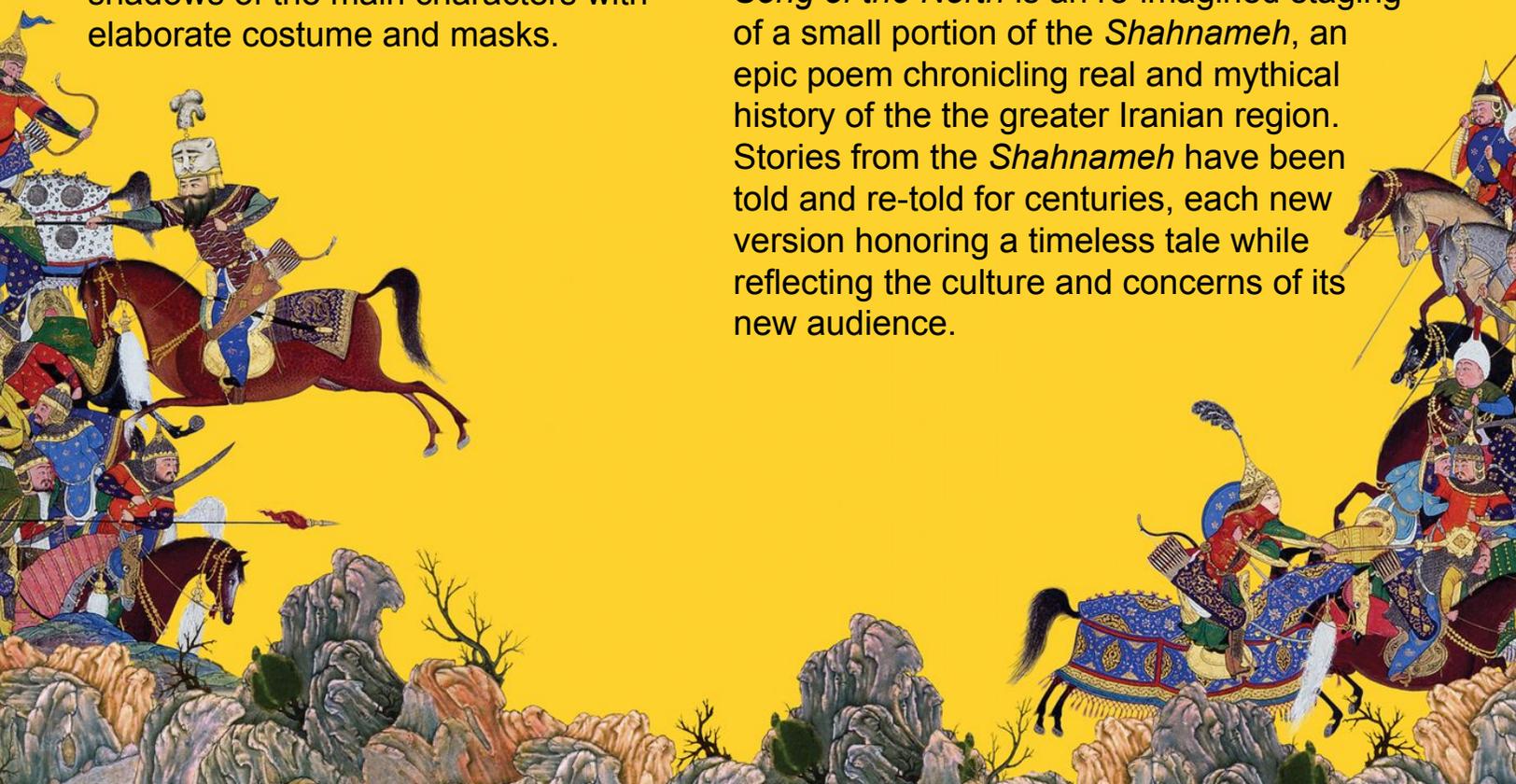
Song of the North is brought to life through a cast of 483 handmade puppets and a nine-person ensemble of actors/puppeteers. When the performers aren't manipulating the puppets on-screen, they are creating lighting effects, prepping shadow scenography, or casting human-size shadows of the main characters with elaborate costume and masks.

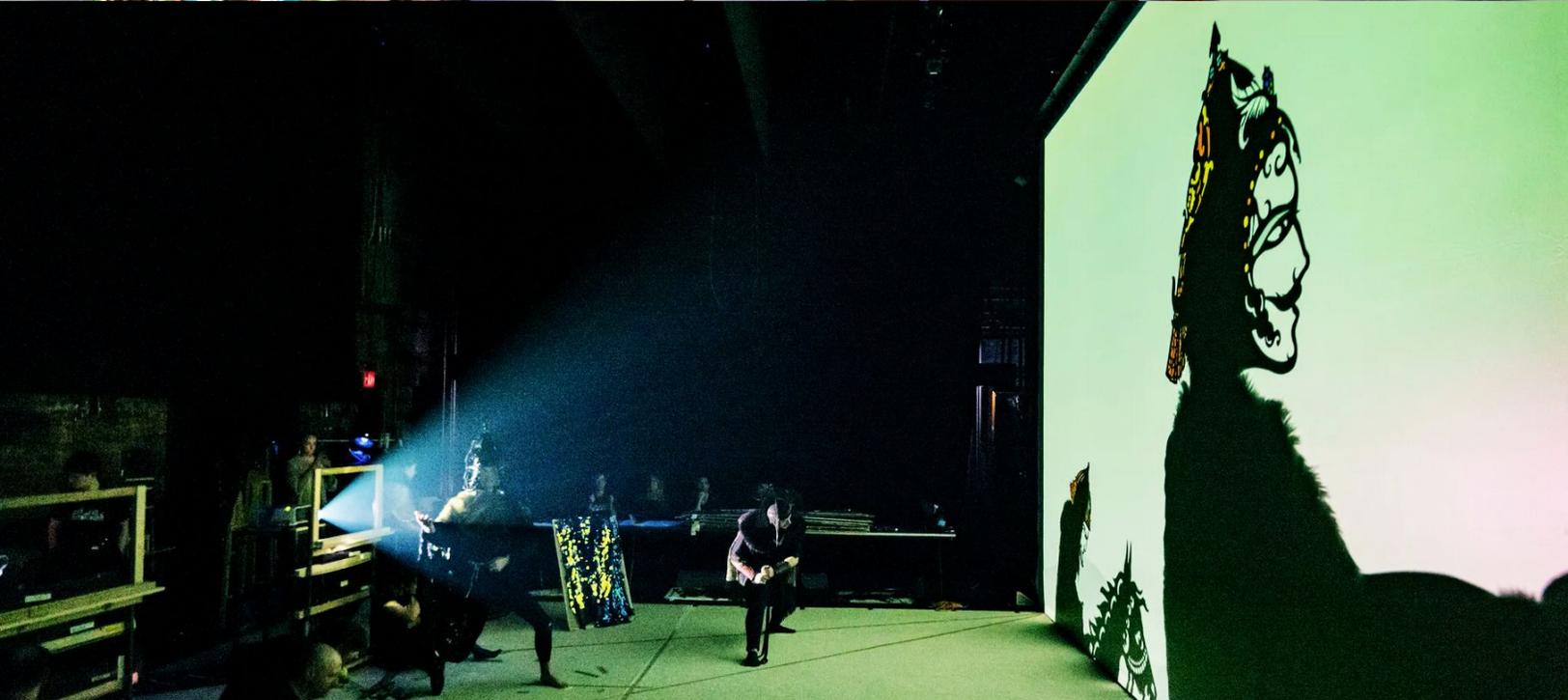
ANIMATION

The performers in *Song of the North* cast their shadows upon animated backgrounds projected upon a 20' x 30' screen. Lush forests, desolate deserts, and immaculate palaces – the show comes to life like an animated movie, expect its performed live!

ADAPTATION

Song of the North is an re-imagined staging of a small portion of the *Shahnameh*, an epic poem chronicling real and mythical history of the the greater Iranian region. Stories from the *Shahnameh* have been told and re-told for centuries, each new version honoring a timeless tale while reflecting the culture and concerns of its new audience.





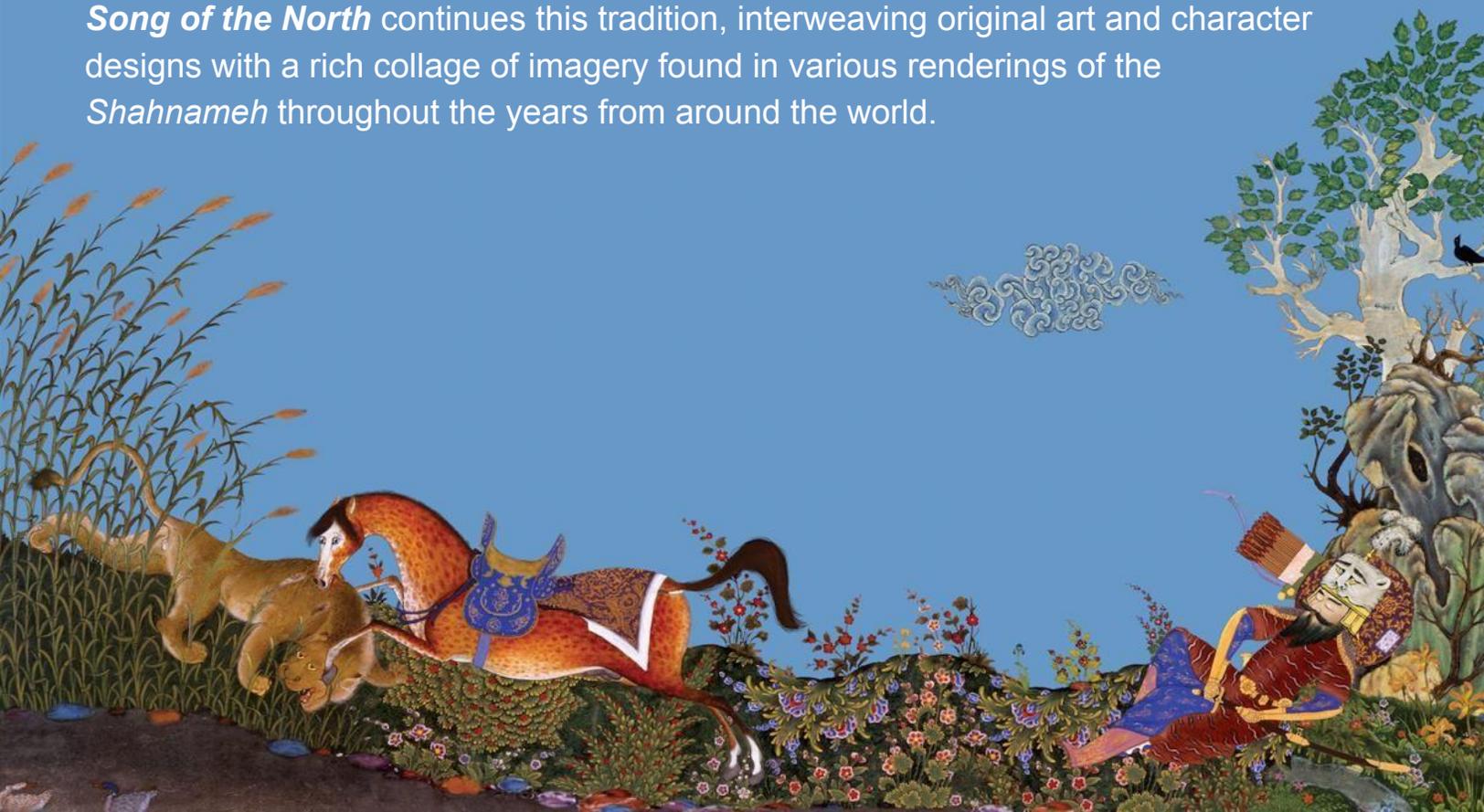
WHAT IS THE *SHAHNAMEH*?

The *Shahnameh*, also known as *The Book of Kings*, is an epic poem written by the Persian poet, Abolqasem Ferdowsi of Tous, from 977 and 1010 CE. It is the longest epic poem written by a single author, chronicling the mythological, heroic, and historical eras of pre-Islamic Iran in fifty-thousand rhyming couplets. (Twice as long as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined!) It features 62 stories told over 990 chapters, including the story of *Bijan and Manijeh*, which Hamid Rahmanian has adapted into ***The Song of the North***.

A literary masterpiece, the *Shahnameh* has been heralded as a cornerstone of Iranian cultural heritage for hundreds of years, preserving the Persian language while serving as a bridge between modern Iran and its illustrious history. Even in the twenty-first century, the mythological figures and heroes of *Shahnameh* continue to converse with their people, a resonance palpably felt in the streets of cities all over Iran today, where citizens rally for freedom and self-dignity. The legends of *Shahnameh* serve as poignant reminders of the flourishing strength, wisdom, and traditions of the Iranian people.

The *Shahnameh* has also inspired centuries of stunning visual artistic expression. As early as the 14th century, wealthy Persian patrons were commissioning elaborately illustrated manuscripts of the epic poem, and later, paintings, murals, lithography, and ornamental designs on pottery, lacquer boxes, dishware.

Song of the North continues this tradition, interweaving original art and character designs with a rich collage of imagery found in various renderings of the *Shahnameh* throughout the years from around the world.



THE WORLD OF THE *SHAHNAMEH*, THEN AND NOW

The *Shahnameh* is set within the Persian Empire, which, at its height of power, stretched from India to the Balkan peninsula.

While its borders varied over the centuries, the heart of the Persian Empire was always found on the **Iranian Plateau**, where modern-day Iran still stands today.

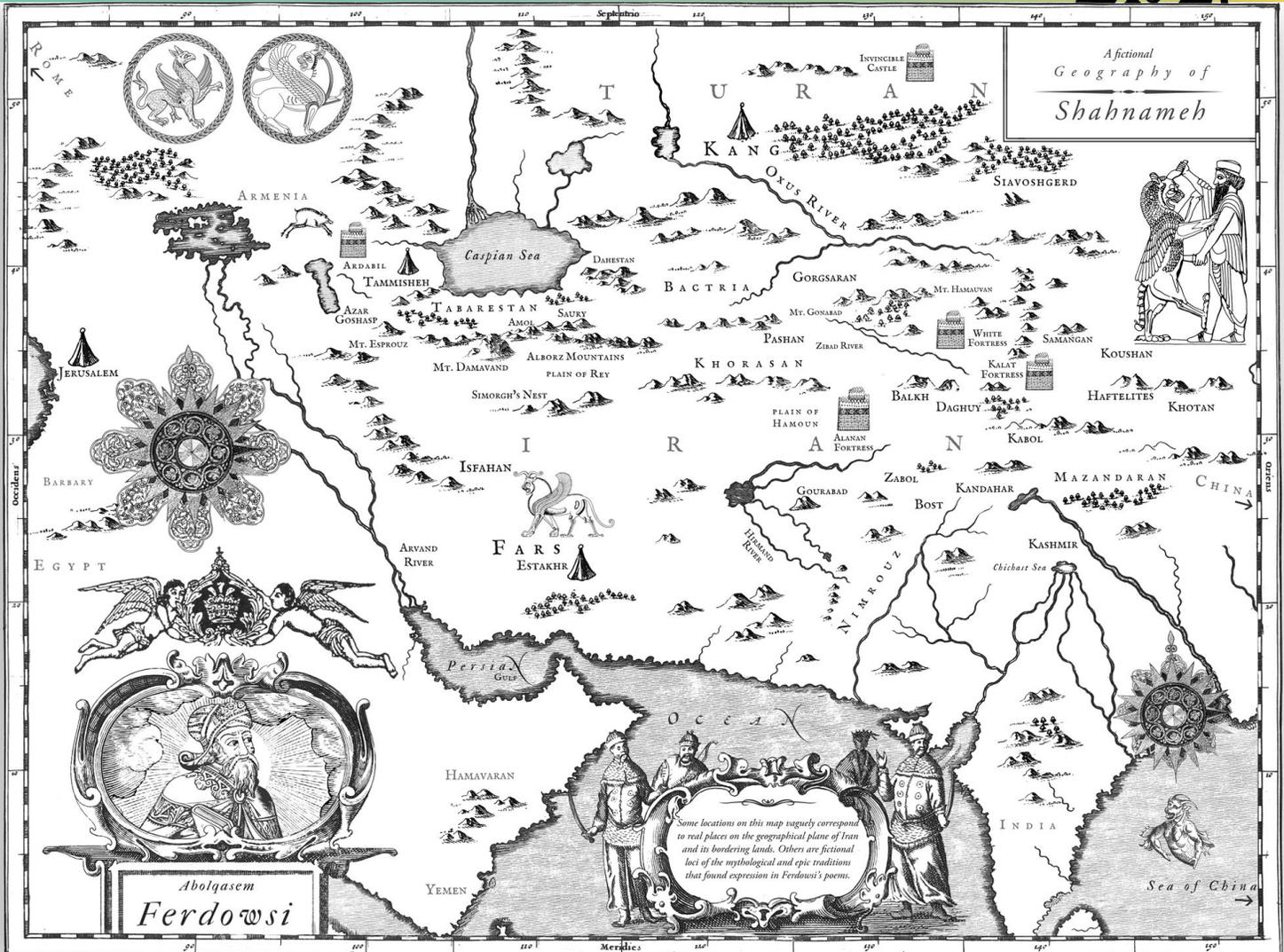


Illustration by Hamid Rahmani

In Ferdowsi's epic, this region was also home to rival kingdoms, including Turan, where Manijeh's father rules. Today, the kingdom of Turan is no more, but the Turan plain is a desert basin that stretches across Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan.



CURRENT MAP

A portrait of Hamid Rahmanian, a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a red jacket over a white shirt. He is looking slightly to the left. The background is dark with some blurred lights and shapes.

MEET THE ARTIST

Hamid Rahmanian is an Iranian-born American multi-disciplinary artist who has worked primarily in cinema, illustration, and shadow theater. His work draws on traditional Iranian visual forms, paired with contemporary techniques such as digital design and multimedia staging.

Hamid began his career in America as an animator at Disney, working on films like *Tarzan*, *The Emperor's New Groove*, and *Dinosaur*. After leaving Disney, Hamid embarked on a lifelong project of adapting and sharing the *Shahnameh* with audiences in America and around the world. He has created a 600-page illustrated edition of the epic poem, a 12-hour audio-book, and several pop-up books, as well as multiple live shows, including *Song of the North*, as well as several animated films designed to accompany live symphony performances inspired by Ferdowsi's work.



BEFORE THE SHOW

ACTIVITY

SHADOW PLAY

Introduce the elements of shadow puppetry to your students through collaborative exploration and project-based learning.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Flashlights (one per group – cell phones are great!), a blank wall or piece of paper, Whatever objects are on-hand (water bottles, pencils, backpacks – all cast shadows!)
Optional: Craft supplies paper, scissors, tape, sticks.

1. Begin by sharing photos from this packet (or the [show trailer](#)). Ask your students what they notice about the show and how they think the visual effects are created. Guide the conversation to shadow puppetry!
2. What is shadow puppetry? It is the art of blocking light with objects, puppets, or your own body to create characters or scenes on a screen, harnessing light and shadow to tell stories.
3. Divide your class into groups of 4 or 5. These are your Shadow Teams. Provide each group with a flashlight and encourage them to explore how shadows change in the light. *How do we make objects grow or shrink in size? What happens when we move our flashlight around an object?* Invite students to experiment with their own shadows, as well.
4. Once groups have explored the basics, task them with layering their objects and bodies to create new visual stories. Encourage them to experiment with surprising transformations and spatial relationships. *Can they make a human body appear smaller than their tiniest object? Can an object transform into something unexpected?*
5. Task each group to create a short performance, inspired by an epic title. We recommend teachers offer a small selection of titles (for example: *A Tragic Encounter*, *The Magical Adventure*, or *An Unwanted Surprise*) but students can come up with their own, as well.
6. Invite each group to share their story with the class. Celebrate all the amazing creations!

Reflection Questions

- *How did your team bring your story to life?*
- *What's one thing another team did that surprised you?*
- *Why would people tell stories this way?*

ACTIVITY

An Epic Tale (Part I)

While plenty of stories have epic moments, only a select few get to be Epics, a narrative genre known for their lengthy tales of exemplary heroes overcoming insurmountable odds across many lands while learning deeper truths about the human condition – often with meddling gods, demons, or other supernatural elements thrown in.

With its scope, artistic ambition, and powerful stories, the *Shahnameh* is absolutely an Epic, held alongside *Gilgamesh*, *The Odyssey*, and *The Ramayana* (to name a few) as pillars of the broader storytelling tradition. But not all Epics are hundreds of years old...

1. Begin by asking your students what they know about the word *epic*.
2. Then, share the opening narration from *Song of the North*...

Narrator: *The ruling families on opposite sides of the tragic war are close relatives, torn apart by an ancient feud. But, during a brief truce, an unlikely love bloomed over the perilous borders. And it all started here, on the banks of the Oxus River, when destiny played its song across rival lands.*

3. Discuss with your students what feels *epic* within this opening set up. Through this conversation, introduce the genre of Epic storytelling. Ask your students if they can think of other Epic stories from history. Why do we think these stories stick around for some many centuries?
4. Return your students to the Shadow Teams and offer a new challenge: Just like the performers in *Song of the North*, can you use your materials and bodies to bring the show's opening narration to life in shadow?
5. Give your students time to brainstorm, experiment, and rehearse. Then share!



AT THE SHOW

Here's a quick note about what you can expect while you watch *Song of the North*.

Song of the North is a Cinematic Shadow Puppet show. Even though it can feel like a movie, it's performed live!

The Pasadena Playhouse is proud to present live theater that makes audiences (adults and kids, alike!) laugh, gasp, and cheer. In fact, many of our performers have shared that their favorite part about being onstage is hearing the audience react in real time!

Here are a few **DOs** to practice at the show...

DO: Laugh when something is funny!

DO: Clap when you see something amazing!

DO: Be respectful by not talking to your friends during the show.

DO: Stay in your seat unless it's an emergency.

And most of all:

HAVE FUN!



AFTER THE SHOW

This section offers activities and creativity pages for extension activities, asking students to reflect on the show and make connections to their lives and the world around us.



Performance Reflection

Spark a conversation with your students about what they saw, remember, and felt about the show, guided through illustrations.

Provide pieces of paper (or use one giant piece for the whole class!) and ask your students to draw a picture of their favorite part of the show. Then, ask students to draw a picture of themselves within or beside their favorite moment. Can your self portrait show how you felt about the show?

Now, use questions like these to spark a discussion...

What was your favorite part of the show?

What did you think about the puppets and masks?

What questions do you still have about the story?

What questions do you have about how they performed the story?

Fostering Critical Thinking

Art is meant to evoke feelings and spark dialogue! We encourage you to ask follow-up questions to your students' answers, nudging them towards answering *why* they felt the way they did, or *why* the artists made particular choices in the show. If it's helpful, try this prompt model:

Describe: *I noticed...*

Analyze: *I wonder...*

Interpret: *I think (or feel)...*

Evaluate: *I believe...*



ACTIVITY

An Epic Tale (Part II)

Building upon our pre-show exploration of Epic stories and all that we learned from the show, it's time to bring our own Epics to life.

1. Begin with a brief refresher on Epics. *What is an Epic story? What elements of Song of the North make it an Epic?*
2. After re-establishing these facts, confide in your students that, while these details are important, an Epic still needs to feel *epic*. And for that, we can break a story into 6 parts: *Setting, Hero, Objective, Main Obstacle, Big Question, and Stakes*.
3. By answering all 6 parts then linking them together into 1-2 sentences, we can create an epic breakdown for our Epic story. For example, here's how it all might look for Song of the North:

I. The Setting

In a war torn land,...

II. The Hero

...Manijeh, a fierce but naive Princess...

III. The Objective

...must rescue her beloved Bijan from her father's prison...

IV. The Main Obstacle

...after he banishes her for falling in love with an enemy warrior.

V. The Big Question

Can Manijeh save her beloved before he withers away?

VI. The Stakes

Or will her forbidden love plunge both kingdoms into fresh bloodshed?

4. After sharing this example with your students, engage them in a critique. *Could anything be heightened? Made to feel even more epic?* Refine as needed!
5. When finished, invite one of your students to read the breakdown in an Epic voice. Stress the stakes – the *drama* – of the story!
6. Finally, challenge the students to complete this exercise once more with their own epic story. It can be a story they already know or a story they invent right now. (Check out the following page for a template.)
7. When ready, invite students to read their work aloud. Bonus points for epic voices!

EPIC STORY BREAKDOWN

I. The Setting

II. The Hero

III. The Objective

IV. The Main Obstacle

V. The Big Question

VI. The Stakes



EXT. BATTLEFIELD

The ARMY wakes up, gathers their weapons and mounts their horses. AFRASAYAB also awakes.
AFRASAYAB: Move forward at once! Find them. Capture them. Show no mercy, even to me.
Bring my horse immediately.



TER

SHAD

EXT. RIVERBANK

ROSTAM, GORGIN, BIJAN and MANUEH stand at the bank of a turbulent river. The sound of the ARMY can be heard from afar.
ROSTAM: It is too dangerous to ride through the waters with our horses, and my intuition tells me the ghoulish Akvan Demon is close by. If he shows up, leave him to me. But first let's see if we can find a boat.
ROSTAM is interrupted by the sound of the army horns. He looks up. **AFRASAYAB** and the ARMY march down the hill towards the river.



ACTIVITY

Storyboard It!

A storyboard is series of pictures used to visualize a story before animating. It's kind of like a comic! Hamid Rahmanian used storyboards during the development of *Song of the North* to help create the projected backgrounds – and to help his performers see his vision during the rehearsal process.

Now it's your turn! Sketch out a six parts of your epic tale below:







GO FURTHER!

In this Resource Packet we've learned about shadow theater, epic stories, and storyboarding. Now it's time to put them all together!

Reunite your classroom's "Shadow Teams" and ask them to choose one epic story from their collection to work on as a group.

Task each team with creating a short shadow puppet performance of their chosen epic story. Challenge them to stage all six storyboards at some moment in their show.

Will their version look just like the drawings? Or will they have to modify?

Reinforce that this is a work-in-progress – tiny details are nice, but for now, can we capture the broader story through our characters, movement, and light/dark magic?

Share and celebrate!

Then, use the critical reflection skills we practiced after seeing *Song of the North*. What worked? What could be improved? How can we tell the most interesting story in our chosen medium?

Go forth, Shadow Storytellers!