



Study Guide for Wild Swan Theater's production of

Roland the Minstrel Pig

Adapted from William Steig's Story



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About Wild Swan Theater

MISSION STATEMENT:

Wild Swan Theater is dedicated to producing professional theater of the highest artistic quality for families and to making that theater accessible to low income, minority and disabled children through low ticket prices and innovative outreach programs.

HISTORY AND ACTIVITIES:

Wild Swan Theater was founded in 1980. Since its inception, the company of professional adult actors, dancers, musicians, visual artists, and American Sign Language interpreters has performed for hundreds of thousands of children. As well as many public performances in its home base of Ann Arbor, the company tours regularly to theaters, museums and public libraries as well as offering residencies and workshops at schools and hospitals serving disabled children statewide. This year the company will give 175 performances for an audience of over 50,000 children and their families.

Wild Swan's performance style, which incorporates storytelling and live action with puppets, masks, music, and dance, has received critical acclaim as well as an enthusiastic following. The Detroit News has praised the work as "professional children's theater at its very best," and the Flint Museum of Art has described it as "superb theater that enhances life and its joys." Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village has called Wild Swan "one of the finest theaters for families in the nation."

Wild Swan has pioneered a number of audience accessibility measures for disabled individuals that are models in the state and have earned the praise of educators and health specialists across the country. All productions are performed in American Sign Language as well as spoken English with the signing completely integrated into the productions. Thus deaf children and adults not only have complete access to the productions but hearing children are exposed to this beautiful and poetic language. A program for blind individuals includes pre-performance backstage "touch tours". Participants have the opportunity to feel specially constructed props and masks, explore the set, and meet actors and hear the voices their characters will use. Audio-description, a simultaneous description of staging, lights, and costumes, transmitted electronically to participating audience members during pauses in the dialogue, permits audience members who are blind or visually impaired to have access to all the visual elements of the production. As a leader of disabled access in the state, Wild Swan has been a recipient of the Governor's Service Award in 1998 in the Arts in Service category and a grant recipient of Very Special Arts/Michigan for ten years.

About American Sign Language in Wild Swan Theater Productions

Making Theater Accessible to Everyone: American Sign Language in the Theater

Wild Swan Theater wants to create theater productions that all audience members can enjoy. There are many things a theater company can do to make attending a play a good experience for people who have disabilities. For example, Towsley Auditorium has two special seating sections for people who use wheel chairs. Not only is there lots of room for wheel chairs or other kinds of mobility devices, but there is room for friends and family members to sit together. Wild Swan also offers backstage "touch tours" and "audio-description" for people who are blind.

Wild Swan Theater includes American Sign Language in all its performances that are part of its season of productions at Washtenaw Community College. American Sign Language (ASL) is the language that children and adults who are deaf use to communicate. Wild Swan uses ASL so that people who are deaf will be able to understand and enjoy live theater.

When you see a Wild Swan production, you will notice several things about the signing. You will notice that the people who do the signing, the interpreters, are part of the production and wear costumes just like the rest of the actors. You will also notice that the interpreters are very good actors as well as experts at ASL. Finally, you will notice that the signing is an important part of what you see on the stage.

Sometimes when other theater companies include sign language, the interpreters are placed off to the side of the stage, and they are not part of the production. When people who are deaf come to the play, they have to look one place to see the signers and another place to see the play itself. That usually means that they miss some important parts of the play or of the sign language. Wild Swan decided that it wanted to make sure the people who are deaf never miss anything.

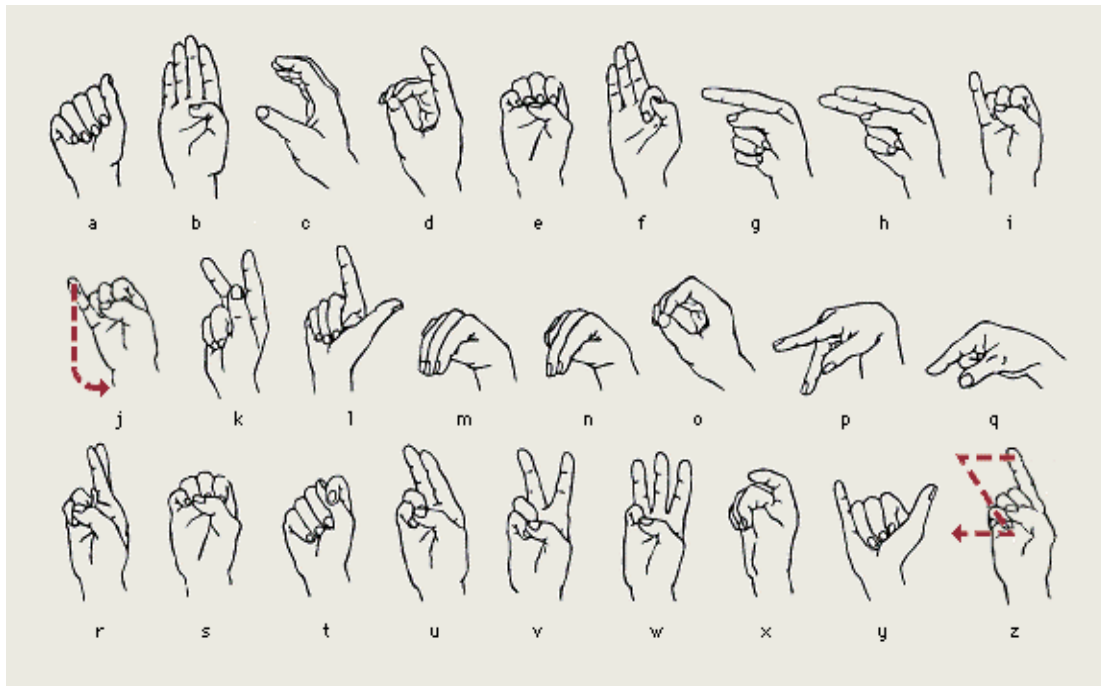
That is why when you come to a Wild Swan production, you will see the signing completely woven into the performance. That way people who are deaf can see what the speaking actors are doing and what the signing actors are doing at the same time. You might even notice that the speaking actors and the signing actors work together. Sometimes a speaking character gets an idea from a signing actor or the signing actors help the speaking actor to make a decision. When you watch a Wild Swan production see if you can pick out some examples of times when the speaking and signing actors work together.

Many hearing people know some sign language. When you attend a Wild Swan production, perhaps you will learn some new signs. That is another reason that Wild Swan uses sign language in its plays. We hope that hearing people will learn a little more about sign language and find out what a beautiful and interesting language it is.

American Sign Language Alphabet

When you come to see *Roland the Minstrel Pig* you will notice that American Sign Language Interpreters are part of the play. They are signing the dialogue of the show for audience members who may have difficulty hearing. American Sign Language is a language used by the deaf and hearing impaired community. Using sign language in Wild Swan Theater shows enables more people to enjoy a theatrical production.

Below is the basic sign language alphabet. Can you make the letters of the alphabet using the chart below?



Classroom Activities:



Try spelling your name using sign language or try spelling names of the characters in the play: Roland, Sebastian, Bruno, King Leon, Gertie, Lorenzo.



Roland is a minstrel, a wandering musician and performer. Can you use American Sign Language to "sing" one of the songs that Roland sings?



Sign a message of friendship to classmate.

About the Play

Roland the Minstrel Pig was written by William Steig and adapted for the stage by Jeff Duncan.

Roland is an enormously talented pig, gifted in music and comedy, who constantly amazes his friends. At the beginning of our story, Roland's friends persuade him to become a wandering minstrel so that he can share his talents with the world, maybe even become rich and famous. He decides to set out alone and his friends bid him farewell. Not long after he leaves his home Roland encounters two interesting characters: Sebastian and Bruno, a fox and a bear respectively. Although they admire his singing, Sebastian and Bruno are hungry carnivores and seem to have secret plans. However, they promise the unsuspecting Roland a chance to sing before the King (whom they say is an old friend of theirs) and offer to take him there. Roland happily agrees and the three set off together. Sebastian and Bruno admire Roland's singing as they "wend their way" to the king, but it isn't long before hunger gets the better of them and the carnivores hatch their secret plan. After making several failed attempts to clobber poor Roland, they eventually convince him to climb a tree in order to navigate their way to the King's castle. Bruno and Sebastian start making a fire, and confess to Roland that they are going to cook him for dinner. Trapped in the tree, Roland asks that he might sing one last song before becoming dinner. Just as he's finishing his song, King Leon, a lion, happens to hear him while passing by. The king intercedes, punishes the fox and bear, and appoints Roland the new royal minstrel. It's a happy ending for Roland, but not so happy for the hungry carnivores.

The Characters:

ROLAND: An enormously talented minstrel pig who wanders the land in search of fame and fortune and finds himself in a whole bunch of trouble instead.

LESLIE THE GOOSE AND LORENZO THE DONKEY: Friends of Roland's who encourage him to become a wandering minstrel and seek his fortune.

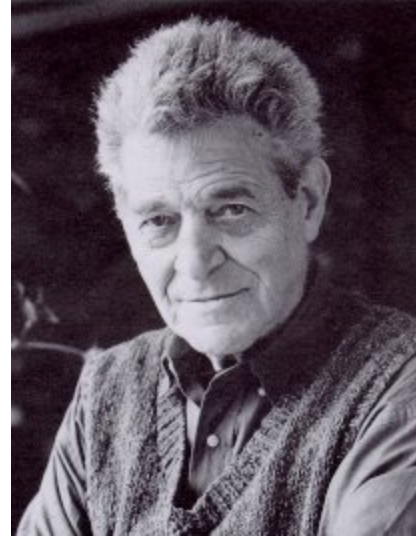
SEBASTIAN THE FOX: Half of a carnivorous duo formed with Bruno the bear. He meets Roland on his journey, and loquaciously convinces the minstrel to come with him to meet the king, but he is very, very hungry.

BRUNO THE BEAR: The other carnivore in the team, Bruno is simpler and more straight forward than his counterpart, but no less hungry.

KING LEON THE LION: King of the realm and lover of music, Leon rescues Roland from Sebastian and Bruno and appoints him minstrel to the royal court.

About the Author, William Steig:

Author William Steig spent most of his life working as a cartoonist for the *New Yorker*. Beginning in 1930, he created more than 1600 drawings and 117 covers for the magazine. Then, at the age of 61, he began writing children's books and was an instant success. Published in 1968, *Roland the Minstrel Pig* was his first children's book. He went on to write many other classics, including *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*, *Abel's Island*, *Doctor De Soto*, *The Amazing Bone*, and many others. Steig also wrote the book *Shrek!*, on which the movies have been based. He was the winner of the Caldecott Medal, the Newbury Prize, and the Christopher Award. His books have sold more than 2 million copies world-wide. He would have been 100 years old November, 2008.



A Steig Cover

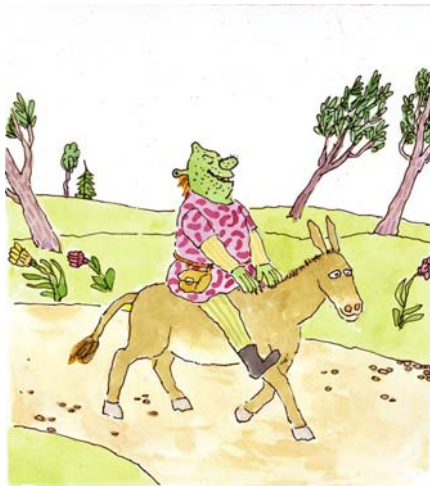


Illustration from *Shrek!*



Steig at work on his cartoons

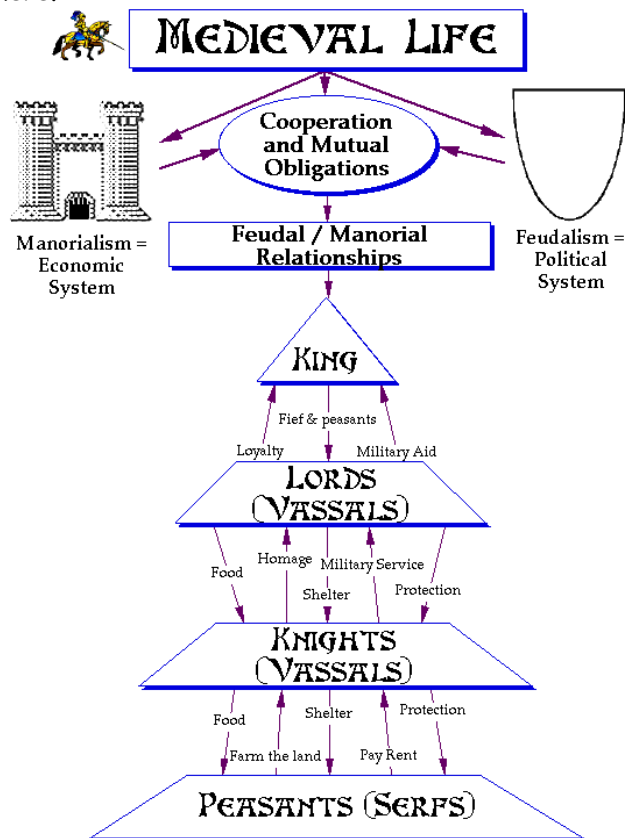


A Steig cartoon from the 1930's

About the Middle Ages:

Overview: Many of us imagine the Middle Ages as a time full of adventure and romance, but for most average people life in the Middle Ages was fraught with difficulty and hardship. The majority of people were either peasants or serfs (there is a difference; see below) who worked an average of 80+ hours a week as farmers and only had Sundays off. Peasants and serfs generally did only hard labor, such as threshing (beating husks and seeds) and reaping with a heavy scythe. Lords, ladies, kings, queens and the rest of the aristocracy also suffered hardships in the form of kidnappings and ransoms, rampant diseases and wars. Even a small thing like a cavity would have caused enormous pain as there was no dentistry. However, all classes of people enjoyed occasional festivals and religious holidays, and performances. It is little wonder that minstrels were so highly valued in such difficult times.

Feudalism: One of the reasons life was so hard in the Middle Ages was because people like Roland and his friends would not have had many rights. Under the feudal system, the only people allowed to own land were the king and his vassals. Ordinary people had to do what they were told in order to scrape out a meager living as farmers and laborers. Serfs were not allowed to leave the manor, and if they refused to work they were severely punished. They were more or less slaves, the difference being that they could buy their freedom (but only with an impossibly huge sum of money). Peasants on the other hand were free to leave the land, but usually chose to stay since they were just as poor as serfs and wars were often raging everywhere.



Daily Life: Average people, like all the characters in *Roland* (except for King Leon), usually woke at 3 a.m. and labored into the evening. Serfs had to spend half their time working for the vassal or lord of the manor who owned the land. This work usually consisted of farm labor but could also take the form of any personal service. Additionally, serfs then had to pay a tax or homage to the lord in the form of grain, eggs or produce, and support their families through subsistence farming. Additionally, serfs had to pay a substantial tax (or tithe) to the church. After all this, there was very little left for the serfs themselves and they often went hungry. Peasants and serfs alike lived in cruck houses made of wattle and daub (essentially manure and straw) which were damp and dark, and burned acrid smelling tallow candles for light. Children did not attend school and were generally put to work as soon as possible. By the time most children were in their early teens, they were working an adult schedule of hard labor.

Clothing: In *Roland the Minstrel Pig* the actors wear a variety of traditional medieval costumes. Tunics with leggings were commonly worn by both peasants and the upper classes, and a variety of outrageous hats were worn by all. The straw hat which Sebastian the fox wears was common garb among peasant farmers. Roland's round hat was known as a chaperone, and Bruno the bear wears a rondelle, or a "stuffed rolled hat". Roland, Sebastian, Bruno and Roland's friends would have worn clothes made out of uncomfortable, scratchy wool or linen.

Suggested Activities:

Test Your Knowledge of the Middle Ages; Social Studies Connection:

Complete a KWL chart for the Middle Ages and ask students to do research in groups using the following websites to test their ideas:

<http://www.mrdowling.com/703middleages.html>

<http://www.kyrene.k12.az.us/schools/brisas/sunda/ma/mahome.htm>

<http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/medieval/>

http://www.siue.edu/COSTUMES/COSTUME3_INDEX.HTML

<http://www.kyrene.k12.az.us/schools/brisas/sunda/ma/1jon.htm>

<http://www.learner.org/interactives/middleages/artsact.html>

Reconvene as a class to revise your theories and answer questions.

Use a flip book or other kinesthetic organizer to create a "day in the life of..." story for Roland, Gertie, Lorenzo, King Leon or anyone else from the play.

About Minstrels and Troubadours



The word minstrel literally means "little servant", however in early medieval England, minstrels were initially referred to as "shapers" or "makers". Like Roland, minstrels often had many talents. In addition to being musicians, usually singing and accompanying themselves with a lute or harp, they wrote their own poems, stories and yes, jokes. After a minstrel had sung he would perform feats of agility such as acrobatics, tumbling, or clowning. Minstrels performed for both the upper and lower classes so their repertoire had to be quite broad.

When performing for vassals, kings or queens, minstrels often sang in French and told stories of courtly love and honor. However, when they performed for the masses, they sang in English and told stories such as Robin Hood or parodies of the upper classes. Frequently minstrels acted as newspapers, singing to inform the crowd of events from afar.

Additionally, many minstrels in Europe performed with live animals, and in particular bears. Some minstrels would roam from manor to manor, and some were lucky enough to find a permanent position in a noble's household. Of course, the most prestigious position would have been in the King's palace.

Troubadours: Like minstrels, troubadours were multi-talented performers who both sang and played instruments. However, hailing from Occitania and performing more refined, lyrical poetry, troubadours were considered superior to minstrels and eventually began replacing them at court. This in part led to the advent of wandering minstrels, who have evolved into street performers and musician-buskers in modern times.

Music: The Middle Ages and the craft of minstrelsy brought about polyphonic music for the first time. Before the Middle Ages music generally consisted of only one melodic line. With the appearance of minstrels, music was suddenly being played with two or more melodic lines to create a rich and complex sound. For this reason, many minstrels actually traveled with jongleurs (or back-up musicians).

Instruments: Minstrels played a variety of instruments, some of which exist today in similar forms. Most played stringed instruments to accompany themselves while singing, but many played flutes, drums, horns and other unusual wind instruments. Troubadours and minstrels who played the harp were considered extremely important, often leading armies into battle while playing their large instruments.

Here are some examples of the instruments medieval minstrels would have played:



Lutes were the most common instruments that minstrels would have played. They resemble a modern guitar or mandolin with double sets of strings.



A theorbo is a kind of lute with a double neck which was widely used all over Europe.



A hurdy gurdy is also a stringed instrument, but it is played with a rosined wheel which functions like a violin bow.



Harps were held on the lap and considered aristocratic instruments. However, harpists often led soldiers to war whilst playing their instruments.



The shawm was a reed instrument like a clarinet or oboe which produced a very high-pitched, nasal sound.

Suggested Activities:

Medieval Minstrel Music and Movement:

Play some examples of medieval minstrel music (free downloads can be found at http://music.download.com/2001-8169_32-0.html, <http://www.jsayles.com/familypages/earlymusic.htm>, and <http://www.learner.org/interactives/middleages/artsact.html>).

Students can draw what they see as they listen, or the music can be paused and students can tell a partner what the music makes them feel or think. Students can complete a web chart to describe all the different feelings they had while listening to the music. Students can compare and contrast the minstrel's music to the music they hear today, using creative adjectives to describe the differences in a Ven Diagram or a T-chart.

Students can improvise dance and movement as they listen to the music, imagining they are Roland and his friends. How did people dance to this music in the Middle Ages? Students can recreate Roland's story in groups as a dance, using only movement and the music.

Students can create the instruments that minstrels used out of paper or cardboard, studying the pictures and using the internet resource <http://www.learner.org/interactives/middleages/artsact.html> to create a minstrel band, using their voices to create the sounds of the instruments.

Classroom Activities:

Creative Play/Drama Connection:

Ask students to work in small groups, or for younger children, everyone can work together. Asks students to create skits of what Roland did before the play began, or what happened after the play finished. Create skits showing what happened to Sebastian and Bruno. Create skits of the three most important moments from the play, or their favorite moment.

Show students pictures of a medieval castle (see <http://www.topcastles.com/>). Using boxes or a blocks, asks students to create a "castle center". Students can create paper dolls of the characters from Roland to reenact the story, or to imagine what life in a castle was like.

Literacy Connection:

William Steig Author Study: If students are particularly interested in the story and the author, you could have them do a William Steig immersion (see the bibliography at the end of this study guide). Students could read with a partner, or for lower levels, you could do whole class read alouds and notice William Steig's writing strategies (i.e. show don't tell, detailed small moment writing, beginnings, middles and ends, how the characters change). Then try to create small moment stories that replicate William Steig's style.

In the play, Roland tells many of his own jokes and sings his own songs. Common practice amongst minstrels was to compose their own work suitable for the audience. If they were speaking to the lower classes they made fun of the upper classes and visa versa. Students can create their own minstrel poems, jokes and songs. Here are some original examples of minstrel jokes (these are also good examples of Medieval English):

1. *A nouice souldiour putting on his first harnesse, trembled, and said: Now that I see my selfe in Armes, I am afraide of my selfe.*
2. *The Duke of Nazareth, comming to the Court to doe his dutie to the Emperour in moste riche and sumptuous robes, and his liueries most gallant: The Emperour seeing him out at a window, saide: It seemeth that Nazareth comes rather to bee seene of vs, then to see vs.*
3. *One vsed to say, that a foole and a dauncer differ but in this, That a foole is a foole all his life, and a Dauncer but whiles hee daunceth..*

Here are some examples of minstrel lyrics and poems.

1. *When the leaf sings
from the highest peaks
and the cold raises,
withering the kernel and willow,
of its sweet refrains
I see the wood grow dumb;*

*but I'm close to love,
whosoever might leave it*

*2. I see scarlet, green, blue, white, yellow
gardens, bushes, plains, hills and valleys;
and the birds' voices sound and echo
with sweet chords, morning and evening:
this puts in my heart that I colour my song
with a flower such that its fruit will be love
and joy the seed and the scent a shield against sadness.*

And of course you can always use the jokes and poems from the play as examples:

*1. Lonely am I as yonder moon
that roams the empty sky.
No one's here to hear my tune.
I'm so scared that I could cry.*

*Would that I could take to wing
and fly back home to friends.
But I cannot fly, just sing,
and so my sad song ends.*

*2. Hey, nonny, nonny, this weather is bonny,
the flowers are all in bloom.
Let us be gay as we go on our way
singing ta-ra, ta-ra-ra, ta-boom.*

*Hey, diddle diddle, I'll tell you a riddle
and also a joke or two
so we can be gay as we go on our way
singing ta-ra, ta-ra-ra, ta-roo*

3. Why do birds fly south for the winter?
Because it's too far to walk!

4. Why does an ostrich have such long legs?
So his feet can reach the ground!

5. So one guy said to another, "My dog's got no nose."
The other said, "How does he smell?" And the dog owner said, "Terrible."

Also, see this resource: <http://www.moonwise.com/ballads.html>

Discussion Topics:

1. When Roland finally finds out that Sebastian and Bruno are planning to eat him, he asks to sing one last song. Can you put yourself in Roland's shoes? What would you have done? How would you have felt? What would you have been thinking?
2. Roland has a lot of special talents, like standing on his front legs and telling jokes. What do you have in common with Roland? Do you have any special skills of your own that would make you a good minstrel?
3. Wandering minstrels like Roland spent all their time traveling from town to town. When Roland first leaves his friends he feels very lonely and homesick. Have you ever been away from your home and felt lonely like Roland? Do you think you would like to have been a wandering minstrel? Or do you think you would get homesick?
4. Why do you think Roland's friends, Sebastian, Bruno and King Leon love Roland's music so much? Why are music and jokes so important to people? Are they important to you? If so, why?
5. In the story, Sebastian is a fox and Bruno is a bear. They are both carnivores. What does this word mean? Do you think it was wrong of them to want to eat Roland? What do you think they should have done?
6. What do you think will happen when Roland gets to the castle to be the new royal minstrel? What will he see? How will he feel? Who will he meet? What will he do every day?
7. What lessons do you think Roland learned from his adventure?

Bibliography

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Steig, William; *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*; Simon & Schuster, New York, 2005
Steig, William; *Amos and Boris*; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1992
Steig, William; *Doctor de Soto*; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1990
Steig, William; *Brave Irene*; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1988
Steig, William; *The Amazing Bone*; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1993

Steig Online Resources for Educators:

General:

<http://www.williamsteig.com/index2.htm>

For *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*

http://askeric.org/cgi-bin/printlessons.cgi/Virtual/Lessons/Arts/Visual_Arts/ARA0032.html

<http://teachers.net/lessons/posts/1270.html>

For *Dr. De Soto*

<http://www.holtzbrinckpublishers.com/images/Books/TeachersGuides/0374418101TG.pdf>

For *Brave Irene*

http://192.107.108.56/portfolios/m/mchugh_s/lessplns.htm

<http://comsewogue.k12.ny.us/~csinger/projects/braveirene/lessonplan.htm>

Reading Guides for *The Amazing Bone*, *Amos and Boris*, *Doctor de Soto*

<http://www.williamsteig.com/guides.htm>

http://fieldguides.heinemann.com/samples/The_Amazing_Bone.pdf

For *Shrek!*

http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=810

<http://www.factmonster.com/games/hangman/shrek.html>

Books about the Middle Ages and Minstrels:

Lilly, Linda; illustrated by Cheryl Goettemoeller, *Minstrel (People of the Middle Ages)*,
Rourke Publishing, Vero Beach, FL, 2002

Elliot, Lynn, *Children and games in the Middle Ages*, Crabtree Publishing, New York, 2004

MacDonald, Fiona; Salariya, David; illustrated by Mark Peppe; *How Would You Survive in the Middle Ages*, Franklin Watts, New York, 1997

Jordan, William Chester; *The Middle Ages: A Watts Guide for Children*, Franklin Watts, New York, 2000