



Golden Thread Fairytale Players Present

## **21 Days That Change the Year**

Educational theatre performances incorporating story, music and dance from the Middle East

**21 DAYS THAT CHANGE THE YEAR** frames an ancient tale from Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* (King's Book of Kings) within contemporary adventures of Dara & Sara, a sister and brother eagerly awaiting the coming of *Nowruz*. Guided by their sweet but somewhat hard-of-hearing granny, Dara & Sara learn about spring cleaning, setting a traditional *Haft-seen* table, the fun rituals of *Charshanbeh-suri*, and the *Sizdeh-bedar* picnic which concludes the rite of spring ceremonies. This enriching and humorous presentation includes music, dance, storytelling, puppetry, and audience participation. Fusing history and literature with contemporary arts, *21 Days That Change the Year* offers a multi-cultural event providing children and their families with the richness of Middle Eastern arts and culture.

The *Shahnameh* by Ferdowsi is arguably one of the most revered literary accomplishments of the Persian literature. A chronicle of the Persian Empire and its great heroes, the *Shahnameh* presents *Nowruz* as the battle of good against evil where Jamshid Shah's triumph over the evil *deev* (demon) frees the enslaved Iranians and leads to celebration and greatness. Through Jamshid's action-packed adventures, we learn the roots of *Nowruz* in Iranian literature.

Celebrating the first day of spring, the exact moment of the equinox, *Nowruz* ceremonies are rooted in pagan rituals of agricultural communities and symbolic representations of the cycle of life. The celebrations begin on the evening prior to the last Wednesday of the year and continue through the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the new year, encompassing roughly, 21 days.

**Charshanbeh-suri** or Festival of Fire - The celebration starts in the evening, with people making bonfires in the streets and jumping over them singing "*zardi-ye man az toh, sorkhi-ye toh az man*". The literal translation is, *my yellow is yours, your red is mine*. In other words, giving one's paleness to the fire and asking for the fire's red glow in return. Another tradition of this day is to share special mixed nuts and dried berries. Similar to Trick-or-treating on Halloween, people wear disguises and go knocking on doors asking for "Problem-solving nuts."

### **Haftseen**

- *sabzeh* – wheat, barley or lentil sprouts growing in a dish, symbol of spring
- *samanu* - a sweet pudding made from wheat germ, symbol of affluence
- *sonbole* – hyacinth, symbol of youth
- *sir* – garlic, symbol of medicine, keeping diseases away
- *sib* – apples, symbol of beauty and health
- *sekeh* – coins, symbol of prosperity and good fortune
- *serkeh* – vinegar, disinfects the insides

**Sal-Tahvi** – is the exact moment of Equinox, which varies every year. In anticipation, the family gathers and celebrates around a traditional meal of rice, fish and herbs.

**Sizdeh-bedar** – The final ritual of *Nowruz* is an outdoor picnic on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the new year. *Sizdeh bedar*

literally translated means going outdoors on the 13<sup>th</sup>. Frequently, Sizdah Bedar coincides with the first day of April, or April Fools' Day.

### **Follow Up Questions for the Audience**

- What seemed familiar in the play?
  - Halloween
  - Christmas
  - Santa Clause
- What are some examples of Nowruz rituals?
  - Spring-cleaning
  - Charshanbeh-suri
  - Sal-tahvil
  - Eyd-didani
  - Sizdeh-bedar
- What are some non-English words used in the story? What do they mean?

**Fairytale Players shows** are mindful of California Educational Standards as they serve to enrich all of our offerings. In terms of Theater Arts, artistic perception is clearly stimulated as the students are exposed to less familiar yet exciting and authentic theatrical forms. Historical and cultural dimensions of theatrical performance come to the fore as students are challenged to recognize and explore both the diversity and universality of our endeavors. Our treatments of these varied cultures are carefully cultivated by our choices of fables, myths, legends and tales reflecting English Language Arts guidelines – stories that provoke empathy and understanding, socially relevant and all unifying in nature. History and Social Study standards are also addressed, as we bring to life characters from generations past through dress, dance, music and storytelling traditions.

**Golden Thread's Fairytale Players** engage audiences through text, movement, folk music and dance, and also create language, geography and cultural connections to the Middle East. Reflective practice questions are offered after the performances that discuss specific cultural traditions, locations, and characters for further understanding of the play. The performances include music and dance audience participation, designed to foster creativity, imagination and impart basic theatre skills.

### **Preparing for Golden Thread Fairytale Players show**

- The performance is 30-minutes long followed by 20-minutes of question and answer with the audience for a full 50-minute assembly.
- The performance space should be at least 16x16 feet. We can perform on the floor or on a stage. If we perform on the floor, at the same level as the audience, it would be best for the audience to be seated in a semi-circle around the performance area.
- On the day of the performance, two actors and one Golden Thread staff will arrive an hour prior to show time to set up. We have one sound queue which we would like to run off your sound system, if one is available. The Golden Thread staff person will run sound, or work with your tech to do it.
- This show involves audience participation. We will need two volunteer kids, a girl and a boy to help us tell the story. In addition, 7 children in the audience will be given "S cards" to hand to the actors when called upon. You are welcome to choose the volunteers in advance. If not, the actors will do so at the top of the show.
- 21 Days that Change the Year is a celebration of the Iranian New Year. It is rooted in the traditional style of traveling players and epic story-telling. It includes poetry and several words in Persian. We don't expect the children to understand these words, only to appreciate hearing them.