4: The Brave Tin Soldier

Adapted by Sue Reid, read by David Tennant

Background
• The tale was first published in 1838 and has since been adapted into films and ballet.

Synopsis
25 toy soldiers are made from an old tin spoon – they are all alike except for one, who was last to be made. He has only one leg (as they ran out of tin) but stands as straight as his brothers. The soldiers are a birthday present for a little boy, who stands them on a table with other toys, one of which is a pretty dancer made of paper. The soldier falls in love with the dancer, but says nothing – he thinks she will be too grand for him, since she lives in a castle while he lives in a box.

At night a goblin pops out of a jack-in-the-box. He warns the soldier that he shouldn’t wish for what does not belong to him and should wait to see what happens in the morning. When morning comes the boy puts the soldier on the window sill. He is blown out of the open window and when it starts to rain he is put into a paper boat by some other boys and washed away down a drain, where a rat tries to take a toll from him. He plunges into a canal and is eaten by a fish – but the fish is caught and sold at market. The fish is taken to the house where the soldier began his journey and is found when the fish is cut open.

The soldier is put back where he started but one of the other children – perhaps having been whispered to by the goblin – throws him on the fire. A gust of wind blows the paper dancer on to the fire and she is immediately consumed by flame. The soldier melts into a lump of tin in the shape of a heart.

Sequence of events
Suggestions for use include: cues for oral storytelling, support for storyboarding, story planning/writing etc.
• Soldiers given as birthday present
• One-legged soldier sees paper dancer on table
• Goblin speaks to soldier that night
• Soldier placed on window sill and knocked out of window
• Soldier put in paper boat and washed away
• Soldier eaten by fish
• Fish caught, sold, and cut open – soldier found inside
• Soldier taken back to playroom – thrown onto fire
• Paper dancer blown onto fire
• Soldier melts into heart shape

Characters
• Tin soldier
• Paper dancer
• Jack-in-the-box goblin
• Rat

Theme(s)
• The inability to express oneself to those that you love (autobiographical)
• Unfortunate outcast, marked out by physical differences (autobiographical)
• Behaving according to convention when to do something different might bring you more happiness
Understanding, interpreting and responding to texts

- Why does the soldier only have one leg?
- On what occasions during the story does the soldier say or do nothing, when more decisive action might have brought a better outcome? Why is the soldier so reluctant to act?
- How might the story have turned out differently had the soldier acted differently on those occasions?
- Why does the dancer appear only to have one leg?
- How do you think the dancer feels about the soldier and why?
- What is the motive for the goblin’s actions?

Additional text-specific activities

- Imagine the tin soldiers and the paper dancer and her castle were bought in a toy shop. Create packaging and advertising material for the toys.
- Re-write the story from the point of view of the paper dancer.
- Hot-seat the soldier – explore why he does not act more decisively.
- Hot-seat the jack-in-the-box goblin – find out what he does to make the soldier fall out of the window and the boy throw him on the fire – and why he does it.
- Collective voice activity: speaking as the tin soldier, discussing his action (or lack of action); starting with the teacher and passing on to class members.
- Role on the wall activity – describe what we know about the character of the tin soldier, using a simple drawing on a flip chart and adding notes around it.

Location of episode transcript:

http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/schoolradio/pdfs/transcripts/the_brave_tin_soldier.pdf