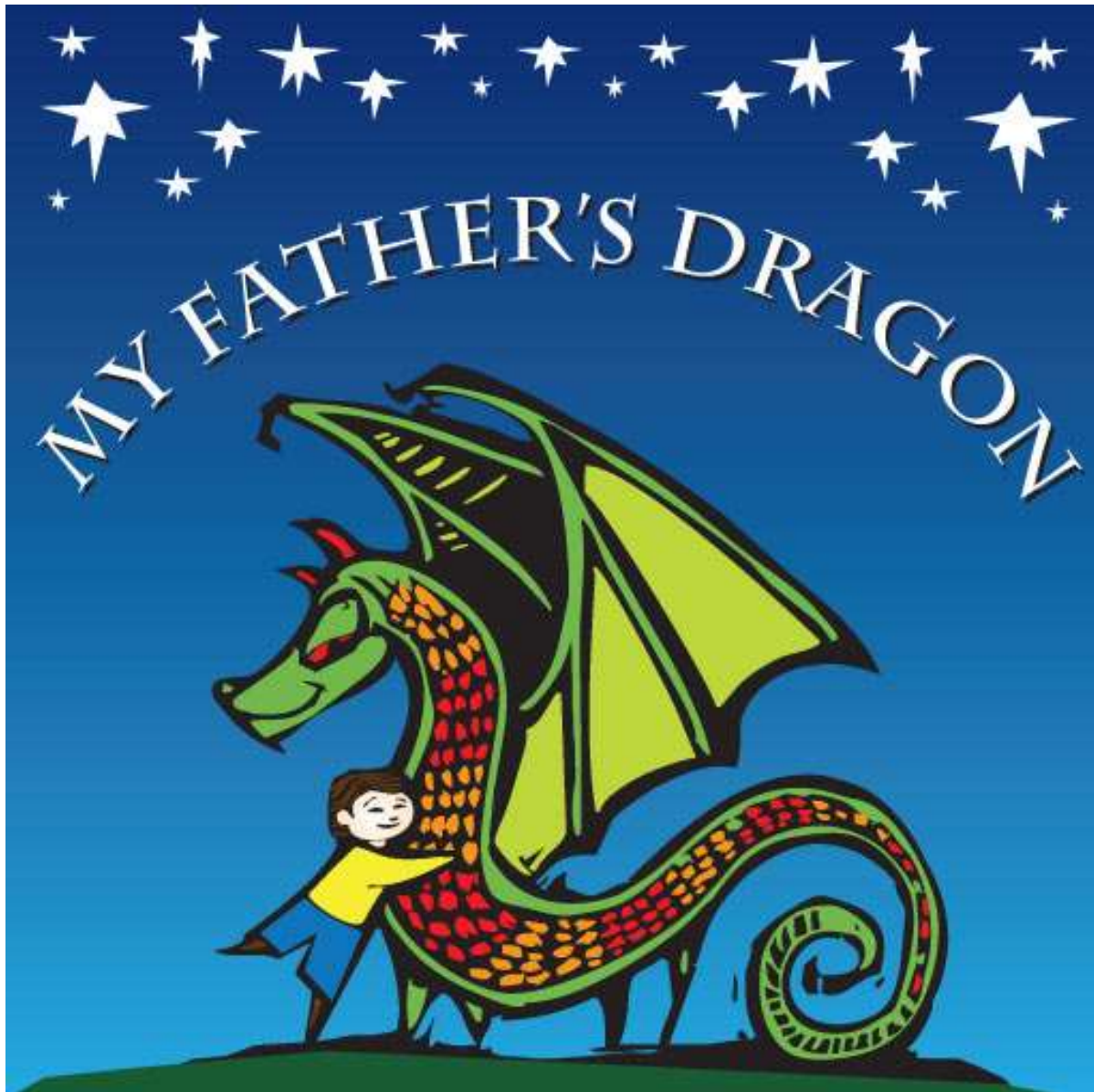


Theater at Monmouth 2021 Fairy & Folk Tales for Schools Teacher Resource Guide



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From the Page to the Stage



For spring 2021, Theater at Monmouth's Page to Stage Tour brings adaptations of classic literature to students across Maine through the *Fairy & Folk Tales for Schools Streaming Series*. *My Father's Dragon* (grades Pre-K-8) was adapted to build analytical and literacy skills through the exploration of verse and playwriting, fostering creativity and inspiring imaginative thinking. The 2021 *Page to Stage Fairy & Folk Tales for Schools Streaming Series* offers students the opportunity to study, explore, and view classic literature through performance.

TAM's Annual Page to Stage Education Tours and complimentary programming challenge learners of all ages to explore the ideas, emotions and principles contained in classic texts and to discover the connection between classic theatre and our modern world.

Teacher Resource Guide information and activities were developed to help students form a personal connection to the play before attending the production; standards-based activities are included to explore the plays in the classroom before and after the performance.

The best way to appreciate classic literature is to explore. That means getting students up on their feet and physically, emotionally, and vocally exploring the words. The kinesthetic memory is the most powerful—using performance-based activities will help students with a range of learning styles to build a richer understanding of the language and identify with the characters and conflicts of the plays.

Thank you for taking some of your classroom time to teach your students about *Fairy & Folk Tales for Schools: My Father's Dragon*! If you need more information to support your preparation for the production, email boxoffice@theateratmonmouth.org or call 207.933.2952.

Enjoy the show!

Dawn McAndrews
Producing Artistic Director
Theater at Monmouth

My Father's Dragon Synopsis

My Father's Dragon is the story of a young boy who rescues a baby dragon from captivity. The main character, Elmer Elevator, meets a talking cat, and brings her home. His mother, who hates cats, forbids the boy to feed the cat. The boy does so anyway and is scolded by his mother. The cat and the boy escape to the park, where Elmer confesses that his greatest wish is to fly. The cat tells Elmer of a magical island where a baby dragon is being held captive and beaten regularly. If Elmer can rescue the dragon then he would surely give him a ride in the sky. Elmer decides to run away to Wild Island to save the baby dragon. The cat proceeds to give Elmer advice about the journey. First they must gather all the things he will need on the island. Elmer is surprised by the need to take things like bubble gum and hair ribbons but he trusts the cat and packs all the items required for survival.



Stowing away on a ship, he hides in rucksack with the name of his destination on it. The sailors inspect the oddly shaped bag and decide it is a bag of corn on the cob. Arriving at the Island of Tangerina, he meets a fisherman who tells him of the dangers of Wild Island. Elmer bravely continues on his journey—after picking a number of oranges for the trip. He crosses to Wild Island over a bridge of stones (one which turns out to be a whale), late at night.



When Elmer reaches Wild Island, he encounters many wild animals. In each instance, he uses his imagination and the items from his pack, to escape them. He gives chewing gum to a group of tigers and convinces them to plant the gum to grow their own trees. He gives a rhinoceros toothpaste to clean his yellowing tusk. Elmer teaches an upset lion how to brush and braid his mane with colored ribbons before his mother arrives. He helps an angry Gorilla get rid of his fleas by offering his monkey friends magnifying glasses to find and pick the fleas. He outwits the policing wild boars who are sure there is an invasion. And to reach the dragon across the river, he ties lollipops to the tails of a group of very hungry crocodiles so they won't eat him. Tying the lollipops to the crocodiles' tails provides Elmer a bridge to cross the wide river and escape from the duped

animals on the other side. The animals figure out it is no invasion but a rescue mission and jump on the backs of the crocodiles to catch Elmer. But the first crocodile has finished his treat, so he swims away and all the crocodiles follow, with the animals still on their backs. Elmer frees the dragon and they fly away, determined never to visit Wild Island again.



Ruth Stiles Gannett's Trilogy

Adapting a Classic



Ruth Stiles Gannett wrote *My Father's Dragon* just a few years after her graduation from Vassar College in 1944. It was an immediate success, becoming a Newbery Honor Book, and was soon followed by two sequels, *Elmer and the Dragon* and *The Dragons of Blueiland*. All three dragon stories have been continuously in print in the more than 70 years since their publication. The author's other books include *Katie and the Sad Noise* and *The Wonderful House-Boat-Train*. She is married to the artist and calligrapher Peter Kahn. They have seven daughters and seven grandchildren.



My Father's Dragon (1948)
by Ruth Stiles Gannett
Illustrations by Ruth Chrisman Gannett

A Newbery Honor-winning title and a favorite among children, *My Father's Dragon* by Ruth Stiles Gannett, is a humorous adventure story about a clever and resourceful boy named Elmer Elevator, who runs away to Wild Island to rescue a baby dragon.

Awards:
Winner - Newbery Honor Book (1949) ; Honor - Newbery Honor Book (1949); Winner - ALA Notable Book for Children (1948); Nominee - Ambassador Book Award (1948); Winner - Newbery Honor Books (1949)



Elmer and the Dragon (1950)
by Ruth Stiles Gannett
Illustrations by Ruth Chrisman Gannett

Elmer and the dragon are stranded on a remote island inhabited only by canaries. One of them, Flute, was Elmer's pet until he escaped to Feather Island. Elmer helps Flute and the king and queen canaries to dig up a chest that the island's former human settlers left. Inside are various household items, a watch, a harmonica, and six bags of gold. The dragon flies Elmer back to his house before returning to Blueiland, his own home.



The Dragons of Blueiland (1951)
by Ruth Stiles Gannett
Illustrations by Ruth Chrisman Gannett

Boris the dragon contacts Elmer shortly after the events in *Elmer and the Dragon* to ask Elmer's help: several men have found his family of dragons and are proposing to sell them to zoos and circuses. Elmer runs away from home again and helps Boris's family to scare off the men permanently.

There Be Dragons

A Brief History of the Mythical Creature



Dragons are among the most popular and lasting of the world's mythological creatures. Stories of dragons appear throughout history and almost every culture has their own dragon lore. Some think that dragons must have existed in the distant past—otherwise how could different cultures on different continents describe the same monster?

It's not clear when or where stories of dragons first appeared, but the huge, flying beasts were described by the ancient Greeks as early as 4000 BCE. For centuries no one knew what to make of the giant skeletons that were unearthed around the globe, and dragons became the logical explanation for dinosaur bones. Dragons' habitats ranged from the center of the earth to the middle of the ocean; in caves, fire, or any place dark and damp. In some early cultures, comets in the sky were believed to be dragons as the bright burst of flame flew through the heavens trailed by a long tail.

In ancient Rome, dragons were thought to hold the mysteries of the earth. Romans looked to dragons as a source of knowledge and used them as symbols of strength for their military. In the ancient cultures of Mexico and South America, a divine feathered serpent was believed to renew the world after each cycle of destruction. In medieval times, most people knew about dragons from the Bible, and it's likely that many people at the time believed in their existence. After all, Leviathan, the massive monster in the Book of Job depicts a dragon in great detail.

In China, dragons were amphibious creatures that dwelled in oceans, lakes, rivers, and even raindrops. They were revered as symbols of fortune and fertility, capable of bringing rain in times of drought. They were creatures made up of various animal parts with the body of a snake, the scales of a fish, the talons of an eagle, and the antlers of a stag.



One type of dragon, or sea monster, was feared during the age of discovery and the journeys of Christopher Columbus. During this time when the world was thought to be flat, dragons were



said to dwell at the edges, waiting to eat any one who dared to sail into the unknown. Maps were made marking the location where dragons lived. At the edge of the map the words "Here Be Dragons" were printed with illustrations of the fearsome beasts.

There were also eyewitness accounts from sailors returning from the Far East who reported encountering dragons—Komodo Dragons—a type of monitor lizard that can be aggressive, deadly, and reach 10 feet in length. Western scientists verified their existence around 1910, but rumors circulated long before that.

Dragons, in one form or another (sometimes good and other times terribly evil) have been around for centuries. Today dragons appear in fantasy books and films; they continue to fuel imagination and, unlike the dinosaurs that inspired the myths, they show no signs of becoming extinct.

The Magical Habitats of Wild Island

On Elmer's journey to save the dragon, he meets many wild animals. Wild Island is a magical place where animals live together, but in real life most animals can be found in wildly different places called habitats. Check out some of the many different habitats on our planet, and see if you can match them to some animals that live there.

Under the Sea: The Ocean

Did you know that water covers almost 75% of our planet? That's why the earth looks blue when seen from outer space. Imagine living underwater in the deep blue sea. First, you'd have to be able to breathe. Fish do this with gills but other animals go to the surface to breathe with lungs. The ocean is home to an amazing variety of species. Depending on where you look, you'll find animals that need sunlight and fresh air to survive, and others that have never seen the light and thrive! Some animals make their homes in the open sea; others prefer caves or plants, and some burrow deep into the ocean floor.



Hotter than Hot: The Desert



Deserts are very delicate habitats because of the extreme heat, lack of moisture, and harsh rays of the sun. The animals that live in these places have adapted their lives to survive here. Snakes, lizards, and some mammals and birds have found ways of coping with the heat, getting water from food sources (even going a week without taking a drink at all), and making their homes in the shade of rocks, trees, and under the sand itself. Animals learn to limit their movements to the cooler times of the day and seek the shade during the peak hours of sun. Surprisingly, these spaces can be very cold after sundown.

Under the Canopy: The Forest

All forests are full of trees, but they are very different around the world. The two main things that identify the type of forest are climate (how hot or cold) and type of trees. Some trees are called evergreens because they never lose leaves or needles. Another kind of tree is deciduous, their leaves change color and fall to the ground each year. These forests are found in cooler climates, are home to animals that can survive in cold weather, and get their moisture from rain and snow. Another forest habitat is the rainforest. Rainforests are warmer, in more tropical locations, with heavy rain that makes plant life thrive.



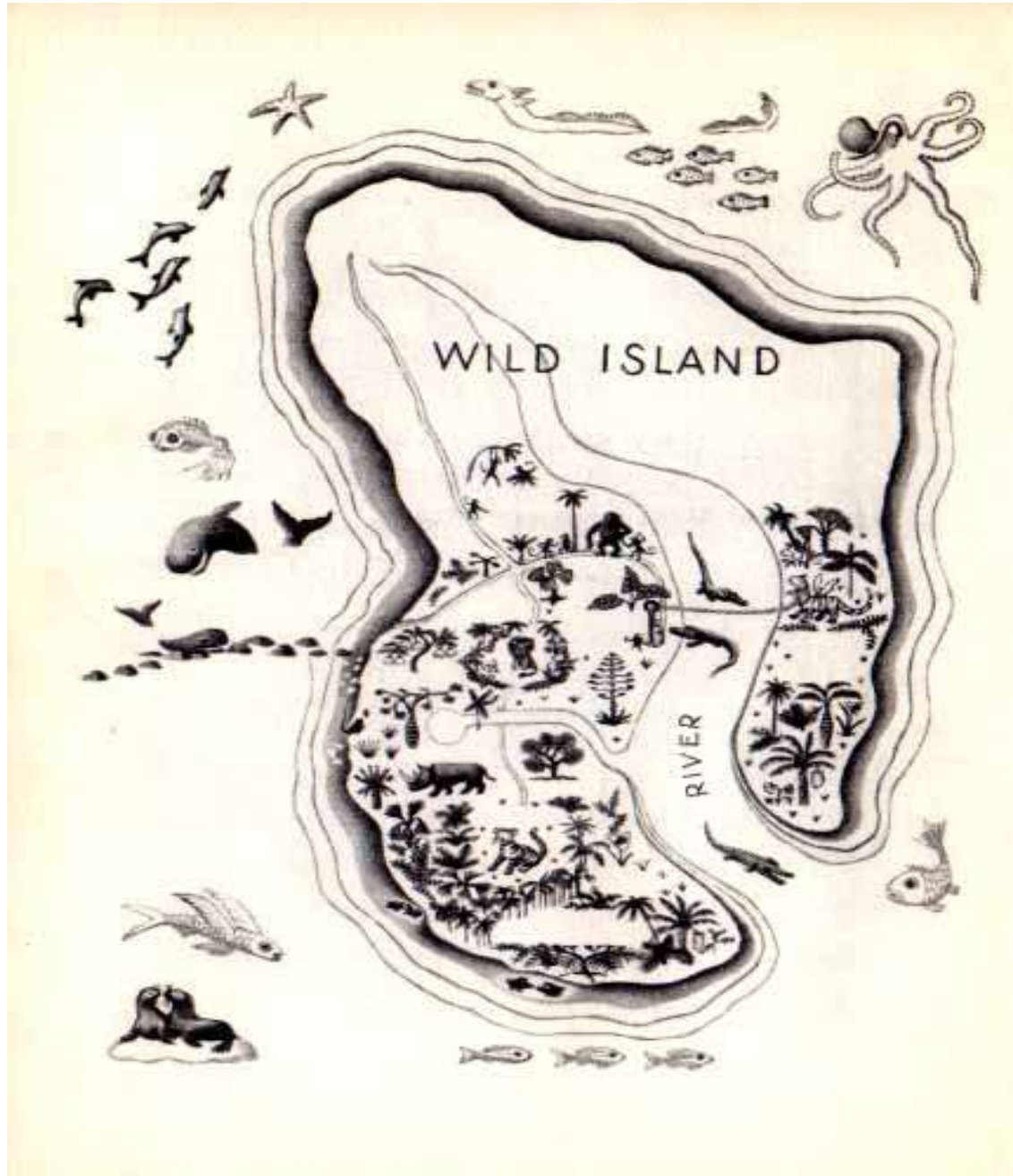
Don't Fence Me In: The Prairies



You've probably seen films or television shows of prairies. These wide-open fields and meadows are carpeted by grass and are usually located centrally on the continents. Prairies exist naturally with the help from wildfires that burn off old grasses and from migrating animals that help to spread seeds. In the US, a lot of prairie land has become farmland, but some remains with herds of grass-eating animals that roam free.

A Map of Wild Island

Illustrated by Ruth Chrisman Gannett



Classroom Activity: Charting the Adventure

As you read the story with your class, track Elmer's journey on the island using the map above. Create a table that lists *Place*, *Animal*, and *Item Given Animal* as column headers and fill in each square. Then use a symbol of each item to chart Elmer's journey on the Wild Island Map. Ask students to keep a journal of Elmer's journey, making an entry after each animal encounter, describing his feelings and thoughts at that time. Have students share their favorite entries with the class.

BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

1. The Moral of the Story

Many of us grew up reading or listening to stories from the Bible, Aesop's Fables, Trickster Stories, or Grimm's Fairy Tales. An important aspect to all of these stories is that they have a moral—a lesson that the author wanted us to learn. While these stories often had very clearly stated morals, Ruth Stiles Gannett's lesson may not be as clear. Ask students to discuss the lesson they felt was communicated in the story. Ask each student to select a character from the story and write the lesson-learned from that character's perspective.

Ask students:

- What lesson does Elmer learn in this story?
- What do the animals learn?
- What does the narrator learn?
- Which character changes the most?

Further discuss:

- What role did the narrator play in the story?
- Who were the good and not-so-good characters?
- Can you identify the problems and the solutions?
- How could the animals talk?

2. The Wild Animal Alphabet Book

Assign a letter of the alphabet to each student. Ask them to research a wild animal whose name begins with that letter. If more than one student has the same letter, they should make sure they do not choose the same animal. Ask students to write down any information they find about their animal. Ask them to write a description of the wild animal—including any human traits they might exhibit. Ask students to create an illustration of their wild animal to accompany the description. Compile the characters into a book or create a gallery (on the wall or online) of the classes wild animal alphabet complete with illustrations and descriptions.

3. Pass the Story, please

Theater at Monmouth's version of *My Father's Dragon* is based on the first book in the trilogy—adapted for four actors. Ask students to develop their own story based on a fairy tale, myth, or folk tale that they have read in class. Sitting in a circle, have students pass a talking block or beanbag to indicate their turn. When they have the bag, they should add one sentence to tell what happens in the original story. Once the story has been completed then start to pass the bag again only this time, students may add to the story in whatever way they wish so long as the new story has a beginning, middle, and end. Repeat as many times as the class' imagination will allow. Ask students:

- What did students find easy/difficult/fun about the process?
- How did their stories change?
- What elements remained in each version?
- What did they add to make the story different?

AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

1. Create Your Own Dragon (Or Mouse, or Boar, or Crocodile)

Now that you've seen the production, it's time to create your own Wild Animal from Wild Island. Have students create their very own Dragon to hang in the classroom. Have students re-read the description of their favorite character and create a dragon (or cat, or mouse, or Boar...you get the picture) to match the description and their imagination. To ensure that their creation fits in the classroom, ask students to adhere to the following guidelines. The 3D character should be:

- No taller than 24 inches
- Be made of some type of paper
- Be securely fastened to a piece of string
- Be three-dimensional

Create a gallery in your classroom or hang them from the ceiling; arrange them in order of when Elmer encounters them on the island as a walk-thru visual of the story.

2. Imagining the World

Designers translate the world of the play into the real space and time of the performance, creating the music and sound, set, costumes and props for the production. Designers transform the ideas of the story into real elements that convey the mood, meaning and magic for the audience. What choices did the designers make for this production? How did they represent the characters, the places, and the magic of the tales? How was it different than what the students imagined? How would students have done it differently? Divide students into groups and ask them to pick an element of the play, sets, costumes, props and re-design it for their own production.

3. Mary Poppins' Carpetbag of Math

Elmer brings a number of items along with him on his trip to Wild Island. First, he packs his father's rucksack with things to outwit the animals: chewing gum, two dozen pink lollipops, a package of rubber bands, a tooth brush and a tube of tooth paste, six magnifying glasses, a comb and hairbrush, seven hair ribbons of different colors, and an empty grain bag. Then he adds in things he needs: black rubber boots, a very sharp jackknife, a compass, and clean clothes. Finally, he brings food for the ship: 25 peanut butter & jelly sandwiches and six apples. When he gets to Tangerina he adds a number tangerines as well. It must have been a magic bag, like Mary Poppins', for him to fit all that in one backpack and carry on his long journey. Divide the class into groups and ask each group to make a graph of the number of items in the pack. Then ask them to either find each item or make a replica of each.

Measure each and determine how much total area he would need in the backpack to carry everything. For extra credit, ask students to determine how much it would weigh when full. Have each group share their bags with the class.

4. Where the Wild Things Are

Tangerina and Wild Island are islands not found on any map but are made up by the author. Ask students to create their own island. Name it, determine where it exists, and draw a map of it. Ask students to add land forms (rivers, mountains, etc.) and label distinctive features of the island. Decide what type of people or creatures live on the island and what language they speak. Create a legend for their island and present to the class.

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

Books on Fantasy and Animals

- *Fantasy Literature in the Classroom*, by Monica R. Edinger. Scholastic.
- *Big Book of Dragons, Monsters, and other Mythical Creatures*, by Ernst Lehner. Dover.
- *Dragonology: The Complete Book of Dragons*, by Ernest Drake. Candlewick.
- *The Creation of the World: Myths & Legends*, by Claude-Catherine Ragache. Cherrytree Books.

Books on Dragons

For Early Readers

- *Dragons Love Tacos* by Adam Rubin. Dial.
- *The Knight & the Dragon* by Tomie dePaola. Puffin Books.
- *When a Dragon Moves In* by Jodi Morse. Flashlight Press.
- *The Tale of Custard the Dragon* by Ogden Nash. Little Brown Books.

For Middle Readers

- *Eragon* by Christopher Paolini. The title character of this New York Times Children's Books Bestseller goes from farm boy to dragon rider when he finds a dragon egg and bonds with the newly hatched dragon, Saphira.
- *Dragon Keeper* by Carole Wilkinson. Set in ancient China, this award-winning tale features a young girl and an old dragon on a journey to protect a mysterious stone. The bond between the girl and the dragon will enchant younger readers.
- *Dragon Rider* by Cornelia Funke. Firedrake, a young dragon, his loyal friend Sorrel and a lonely boy called Ben are united as if by destiny. They embark on a magical journey to find the legendary place where silver dragons can live in peace forever.

Websites

- *The Dragon Chronicles*. PBS. <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/episodes/the-dragon-chronicles/video-full-episode/4563/>
- *Were Dragons Real?* Animal Planet. <http://www.animalplanet.com/video-topics/wild-animals/dragons-videos>
- *Draconika: History, Legend & Lore*. <http://www.draconika.com/history.php>

Common Core Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy: Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening

- Comprehension and Collaboration
 - Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
 - Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
 - Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
- Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
 - Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
 - Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
 - Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.