Resource Guide

This resource guide serves as an educational starting point to understanding and enjoying Suzan Zeder’s Wiley and the Hairy Man. With this in mind, please note that the interpretations of the theatrical work may differ from the original source content.
Wiley and the Hairy Man

Adapted from the American Folktale by Suzan Zeder

Blinn College-Brenham’s 2021 Entry to the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival

Produced by Special Arrangement with Dramatic Publishing, Inc.

This play is based on an actual legend passed down from generation to generation in the backwaters of Alabama and Mississippi. It is the story of a fatherless boy, his conjure-woman mother, his faithful dog, and the Hairy Man who haunts the swamp. As the story unfolds, our unlikely hero learns to rely on his own resources to conquer the Hairy Man, as well as his own fears.

Public Performances

November 18 & 19 7:00 PM
November 20 & 21 2:00 PM

Elementary School Preview Performances

November 18 & 19 10:00 AM & 1:00 PM

Endowed Scholarship Auditions

November 20 4:00 PM

Dr. W. W. O’Donnell Performing Arts Center Auditorium
Brenham, Texas
From Oral Tradition to the Stage

The origins of *Wiley and the Hairy Man* can be traced back to the American South. Originally an African-American folktale set in Alabama, the story was written in text form by Donnell Van de Voort in 1932. Van de Voort, who recalled being told the story by a family gardener, wrote the work as part of the Federal Writers Project of the New Deal Era. The story was published in *A Treasury of American Folklore*, a book edited by the head of the Federal Writers Project, B.A. Botkin.


Nationally and internationally known playwright Suzan Zeder wrote the stage version of *Wiley and the Hairy Man* in 1972. In adapting the story, Zeder changed the ending and focused on the character of Wiley, a boy who learns to overcome his fears by himself. Zeder currently serves as the head of the playwriting programs in the Department of Theatre and Dance at the James A. Michener Center for Creative Writing at the University of Texas at Austin.
Themes in Wiley and the Hairy Man

Fear

Whether it’s a fear of the dark, a “monster” under the bed, or of failure, fear can keep us from realizing our potential. In this story, Wiley faces his concerns and shows the audience that we all have the power to overcome our fears. We may even end up laughing at them!

Confidence

Wiley eventually overcomes the Hairy Man, but he does not get much help from his mother, nor does he get much help from his dog. Instead, our protagonist uses his unique abilities to trick the Hairy Man and banish him forever. With a wise adult and a loyal friend by his side, Wiley learns to face his fears and become confident.

Characters in Wiley and the Hairy Man

Wiley
An energetic child with a wild imagination who goes from being a scared little boy to a confident young man.

Mammy
Wiley’s mother. A conjure-woman who pushes her son to grow up and face his fears.

Dog
Wiley’s best friend. Dog is a loyal companion to Wiley.

The Hairy Man
A bumbling, goofy character who is often fooled by Wiley.

The Swamp Creatures
These characters create the swamp and the wild world of Wiley’s imagination.
The story of *Wiley and the Hairy Man* takes place in a swamp in the American South. A swamp is defined as a wetland that is often covered with water and dominated by woody vegetation. Below is a list of creatures one may find in the wetlands:

**Alligator:** A thick-skinned, long-bodied, aquatic crocodilian reptile found in the southeastern U.S.

**Crayfish:** A freshwater decapod crustacean resembling a lobster, but usually much smaller.

**Dragonfly:** An insect that is larger than a damselfly and holds its wings horizontal in repose.

**Egret:** A heron that bears long plumes during the breeding season.

**Fish:** A cold-blooded aquatic animal with an elongated body terminating in a broad caudal fin.

**Frog:** An aquatic amphibian that has a slender body with smooth skin and strong hind legs.

**Mosquito:** A dipteran fly that has a set of slender organs in the proboscis adapted for puncturing the skin.

**Raccoon:** A small nocturnal carnivore of North America that has a bushy ringed tail and lives chiefly in trees.

**Tadpole:** A frog larva with a rounded body and a long tail.
Word Search

Dog
Hairy
Man
Swamp
Wiley

Alligator
Dragonfly
Frog
Raccoon
Tadpole
Color Time!
Color Time!
Hey, Teachers!

Please review the following rules with your students to assure that all audience members enjoy the show!

1. Be on time by being in your seat 10 minutes before the performance is scheduled to begin. Latecomers will be seated at the discretion of the theatre and in locations chosen by the theatre.

2. Remain seated until intermission and until curtain calls are completed. If an emergency requires leaving your seat, please remain outside the theatre until allowed to return by the theatre’s staff.

3. Finish and/or discard all food and drinks before entering the theatre. Please be respectful of others by disposing your trash.

4. Silence or turn off all electronic devices, including cell phones, beepers, and watch alarms. You are encouraged to share your theatre experience via social media, but you must refrain from sharing or texting during the performance. The glow from all media is easily discernable in the dark theatre and is distracting to your neighbors and the actors.

5. Video and flash photography of live performances is not allowed. Actors will generally be available for photographs after the show.

6. Please refrain from talking during the performance.

7. Your courtesy is much appreciated as it allows for the ultimate experience of theatre productions for all our patrons.
Sources

Internet Source, www.auburn.edu, “Noodleheads, Tall Tales, and Other Humorous Tales.”
Internet Source, www.merriam-webster.com, Definition for Fish.
Sources


