

Common Core Alignment
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1.6, 8-9
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1-9

THE BOTTLE CONJUROR

CONTENTS

OBSCURE HISTORIES, "The Bottle Conjurer"

by Dana Rovang

PRIMARY MATERIAL

ADVERTISEMENT, "General Advertiser"

CARICATURE, "From Head to Foot without Equivocation"

SECONDARY/PRIMARY MATERIAL

Dramatic Table Talk (contains 3 selections of primary material)

LESSON MODULES

The Enlightenment and Gullibility

30 minutes to 3 days

1) Main Module - Close reading of article text and primary material

30-55 minutes

2) Caricature - Reading a contemporary drawing like a primary text

10-30 minutes

3) Riots - Why do they occur?

15-30 minutes

4) Hindsight is 20/20

15-30 minutes

5) Automata and Computers

Flipped Classroom, or In-Classroom Essay

55-80 minutes

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THE BOTTLE CONJUROR

BY DANA ROVANG

QUESTIONS:

1) Using the primary and secondary sources, evaluate the article's narrative. What information was included, and what wasn't? Why do you think the author prioritized some information and didn't include other facts?

2) The secondary sources used here are about 150 years old. Why are they considered secondary sources, given their age? Do you think this makes them more or less reliable?

3) Using videos and other sources about the Bottle Conjurer and the Enlightenment, how is this information used to convey different ideas about this period in history?

STORY SPECIFIC QUESTIONS:

4) Why did the audience riot?

5) Do you think the audience was indeed gullible? Do you think they really thought someone could stuff himself into a bottle? Do you think someone could stuff himself into a bottle?

6) What were the ramifications of this hoax? Do you think it was intended to make people think? Or simply to play a joke? What are some examples of hoaxes today?

In 1749, notices appeared for a new magical act in London. This performer was promised to accomplish a variety of near-impossible feats.

First, he takes a common walking-cane from any of the spectators, and thereon plays the music of every instrument now in use, and likewise sings to surprising perfections. Secondly, he presents you with a common wine bottle, which any of the spectators may first examine; this bottle is placed on a table in the middle of the stage, and he (without any equivocation) goes into it in sight of all the spectators, and sings in it; during his stay in the bottle any person may handle it, and see plainly that it does not exceed a common tavern bottle.

The claim that he could "go into" a "common wine bottle" was a major draw in a town renowned for its love of spectacular entertainment.

Therefore, there was little surprise when a large audience packed the Haymarket Theater on the evening of the 16th January 1749. They waited, and continued to wait for hours, all the while growing tired and restless. The theater manager, Samuel Foote, came out front and tried to calm the crowd. They were resistant, and began to demand their money back. There is some confusion as to what happened next. It is said that someone yelled that they would pay double if the conjuror would stuff himself into a pint bottle instead of the wine bottle as originally claimed.

This seemed to have tipped the crowd's good humor, and they rioted.

According to accounts at the time, the theater was utterly destroyed. While most of the audience made a hasty exit,

One party, however, staid in the house, in order to demolish the inside, when the mob breaking in, they tore up the benches, broke to pieces the scenes, pulled down the boxes; in short, dismantled the Theatre entirely, carrying away the particulars above mentioned into the street, where they made a mighty bonfire; the curtain being housed on a pole by way of a flag.

While the original advertisement said that ample guards would be on hand, this did not seem to be the case, as:

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6) What were the ramifications of this hoax? Do you think it was intended to make people think? Or simply to play a joke? What are some examples of hoaxes today?

A large party of guards were sent for, but come time enough only to warm themselves round the fire. We hear of no other disaster than a young nobleman's chin being hurt, occasioned by his fall into the pit with part of one of the boxes, which he had forced out with his foot.

It did not seem as if any one class could be pointed to as either the instigators or those who carried out the destruction. Although the audience was comprised from all levels of society, including royalty. The brother of the King, the Duke of Cumberland, was in attendance, but he made a exit and lost his jeweled sword in the commotion.

The perpetrators of the hoax were never uncovered, but it is commonly thought the 2nd Duke of Montagu - a known practical joker - was behind it. The "Bottle Conjurer" became a symbol for the gullibility and credulity of the London populace, which was seen as a powerful criticism in the Age of Enlightenment. Performers in London continued to be compared to The Bottle Conjurer for decades to come.

Primary Sources

General Advertiser (London), Saturday, January 14, 1749;
The same advertisement appeared on the 11th, 13th, and 16th, as well.

"George Bickham the Younger, The Bottle Conjurer, from Head to Foot, without Equivocation," (London), 24 January 1749.

Secondary Sources

Richard Ryan, *Dramatic Table Talk: Or, Scenes, Situations, & Adventures, Serious & Comic, in Theatrical History & Biography*, Vol. 3 (London: John Knight & Henry Lacky, 1830), 69-74.

John Timbs, *Romance of London: Strange Stories, Scenes and Remarkable Persons of the Great Town*, Vol. 3 (London: Richard Bentley, 1856), 55-57.

BOTTLE CONJUROR ADVERTISEMENT

General Advertiser (London), Saturday, January 14, 1749;

The same advertisement appeared on the 11th, 13th, and 16th, as well.

At the New Theatre in the Hay-Market, on Monday next, the 16th instant, to be seen, a person who performs the several most surprising things following, viz. first, he takes a common walking-cane from any of the spectators, and thereon plays the music of every instrument now in use, and likewise sings to surprising perfections. Secondly, he presents you with a common wine bottle, which any of the spectators may first examine; this bottle is placed on a table in the middle of the stage, and he (without any equivocation) goes into it in sight of all the spectators, and sings in it; during his stay in the bottle any person may handle it, and see plainly that it does not exceed a common tavern bottle.

Those on stage or in the boxes may come in masked habits (if agreeable to them); and the performer (if desired) will inform them who they are.

Stage 7s 6d., boxes 5s., pit 3s., gallery 2s.

To begin at half an hour after six o'clock.

Tickets to be had at the Theater.

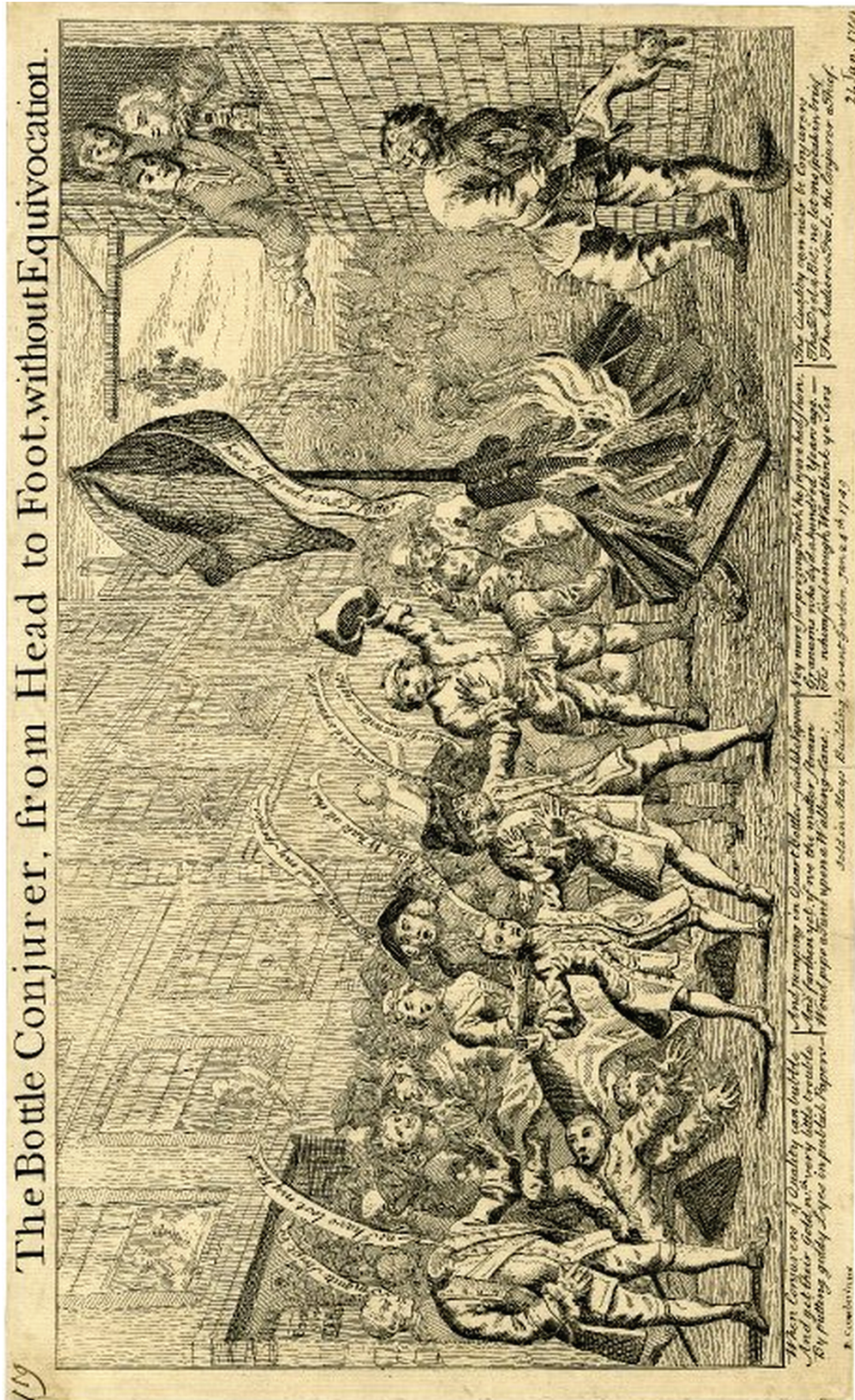
The performance continues about two hours and a half.

N.B. If any gentleman or lady, after the above performance (either singly or in company, in or out of mask,) are desirous of seeing a representation of any deceased person, such as a husband or wife, sister or brother, or any intimate friend of either sex, (upon making a gratuity to the performer) shall be gratified by seeing and conversing with them for some minutes, as if alive; likewise, (if desired) he will tell you the most secret thoughts in your past life; and give you a full view of persons who have injured you, whether dead or alive.

For those gentlemen and ladies who are desirous of seeing this last part, there is a private room provided.

These performances have been seen by most of the crowned heads of Asia, Africa, and Europe, and never appeared public any where but once; but will wait at any of their houses, and perform as above, for five pounds each time

There will be a proper guard to keep the house in due decorum.



"George Bickham the Younger, The Bottle Conjuror, from Head to Foot, without Equivocation," (London), 24 January 1749.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES - Page 1 of 3

From:

Richard Ryan, *Dramatic Table Talk: Or, Scenes, Situations, & Adventures, Serious & Comic, in Theatrical History & Biography*, Vol. 3 (London: John Knight & Henry Lacky, 1830), 69-74.

In the year 1749, the facetious Duke of Montague played off upon the good people of our Metropolis, a hoax so remarkable, that it has ever since been referred to, as a proof of human credulity. - This Nobleman being in company with some friends, the conversation turned on public curiosity, when the Duke said that it went so far, that if a person advertised that he would creep into a quart bottle, he would procure an audience. Some of the company could not believe this possible; a wager was the result, and the Duke, in order to decide it, cause the following advertisement to be put in all the papers.

- 1) At the New Theatre in the Hay-Market, on Monday next, the 16th instant, to be seen, a person who performs the several most surprising things following, viz. first, he takes a common walking-cane from any of the spectators, and thereon plays the music of every instrument now in use, and likewise sings to surprising perfections. Secondly, he presents you with a common wine bottle, which any of the spectators may first examine; this bottle is placed on a table in the middle of the stage, and he (without any equivocation) goes into it in sight of all the spectators, and sings in it; during his stay in the bottle any person may handle it, and see plainly that it does not exceed a common tavern bottle.

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There will be a proper guard to keep the house in due decorum.

The following advertisement was also published at the same time, which one would have thought sufficient to prevent the other having any effect.

2) *Lately arrived from Italy.*

Signor Capisello Jumpedo, a surprising dwarf, no taller than a common tavern tobacco pile who can perform many wonderful quilibres on the slack or tight rope: likewise he'll transform his body in above ten thousand different shapes, and postures; and after he has diverted the spectators two hours and a half, he will open his mouth wide and jump down his own throat. He being the most wonderfullest wonder of wonders as ever the world wondered at, would be willing to join in performance with that wonderful musician on Monday next, in the Haymarket.

He is to be spoke with at the Black Raven, in Golden Lane, every day, from seven to twelve, and from twelve all day long.

The bait, however, took even better than could be expected. The play-house was crowded with Dukes, Duchesses, Lords, Ladies, and all ranks and degrees to witness the bottle conjuror. Of the result, we quote the following account from the journals of the times.

- 3) Last night (viz. Monday the 16th,) the much expected drama of "The Bottle Conjuror," at the New Theatre in the Haymarket, ended in the tragicomical manner following. Curiosity had drawn together prodigious numbers. About seven, the Theatre being lighted up, without so much as a single fiddle to keep the audience in good humor, many grew impatient. Immediately followed a chorus of catcalls, heightened by loud vociferations, and beating with sticks; when a fellow came from behind the curtain, and blowing, said, that if the performer did not appear, the money should be returned; at the same time a wag crying out from the pit, that if the ladies and gentlemen would give double prices the conjurer would get into a pint bottle. Presently a young gentleman in one of the boxes seized a lighted candle and threw it on the stage. This served as the charge for sound to battle. Upon this the greater part of the audience made the best of their way out of the Theatre; some losing a cloak, others a hat, others a wig, and swords also. One party, however, staid in the house, in order to demolish the inside, when the mob breaking in, they tore up the benches, broke to pieces the scenes, pulled down the boxes; in short, dismantled the Theatre entirely, carrying away the particulars above mentioned into the street, where they made a mighty bonfire; the curtain being housed on a pole by way of a flag. A large party of guards were sent for, but come time enough only to warm themselves round the fire. We hear of no other disaster than a young nobleman's chin being hurt, occasioned by his fall into the pit with part of one of the boxes, which he had forced out with his foot. 'Tis though the conjurer vanished away with the bank. concerning the ceasing of miracles, are greatly disappointed by the conjurer's non-appearance in the bottle; they imagining that his jumping into it would have been the most convincing proof possible, that miracles are not yet ceased.**

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES - Page 3 of 3

Several advertisements were printed afterwards, some serious, some comical, relating to this whimsical affair; among the rest was the following, which we hope may be a means of curing such humors of the future.

“This is to inform the public, that notwithstanding the great abuse that has been put upon the gentry, there is now in town a man, who, instead of creeping into a quart of pint bottle, will change himself into a rattle; which he hopes will please both young and old. If this person meets with encouragement to this advertisement, he will then acquaint the gentry where and when he performs.”

The reason assign in another humorous advertisement, for the conjurer’s not going into the quart bottle was, that, after traveling all the taverns, not one could be found due measure.

THE BOTTLE CONJUROR - The Enlightenment and Gullibility

LESSON MODULES

Common Core Alignment
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1-6, 8-9
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1-9

The Eighteenth Century marked a period when information began to become widely disseminated in writing, and people began challenging institutions, governments, scientific questions, mythology, and many of the “old ways” of doing things. This sometimes resulted in friction between groups of people, or in public debates about conventions or processes. These modules are meant to continue that public debate with an overarching question:

Given the scope of history and comparable issues, in what ways are people from the past different from people living today?

Module 1

MAIN MODULE

30-55 minutes

Read the OH article and primary/secondary source document, from *Dramatic Table Talk*.

10-15 minutes.

Discuss questions in the sidebar of the OH Article

10-15 minutes

DEBATE: According to the secondary source reading (Dramatic Table Talk), the intent of the hoaxers was to demonstrate the gullibility of the populace. Do you think the Bottle Conjurer riot was the outcome of the gullibility of the populace?

Yes or No? Take sides.

10-20 minutes

ADD ON: The OH article used selective quotes from the primary sources. Why do you think some of the primary source information was used in the article and other information was not? Do you think this was a good use of sources, or what would you have done differently if you were writing it?

10 minutes

ADD ON: Watch “The Bottle Conjurer” Video

1:56

Discuss how it compares to the primary material:

1. Primary Sources - Advertisement and Caricature
2. Or, in Primary/Secondary material - *Dramatic Table Talk*, primary sources 1 & 3

10 - 15 minutes

THE BOTTLE CONJUROR - The Enlightenment and Gullibility

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Module 2

Caricatures - Reading a contemporary drawing as a primary text

10-30 minutes

Examine the Caricature the riots, “The Bottle Conjuror, From Head to Foot without Equivocation” and compare it to the primary source material describing the riots, from *Dramatic Table Talk*, primary source 3.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

What are the differences between the two newspaper account and the caricature?

What are the similarities?

How does the title of the caricature frame how to “read” the picture?

Do you have to know the story of the Bottle Conjuror Riots to understand the caricature?

What is useful or not useful about a stylized drawing in comparison to a photograph today?

10-20 minutes

ADD ON: Further Research - Look up other caricatures and see how they compare to the Caricature primary source. See :The Bottle Conjuror video” (1:56min).

10 minutes

THE BOTTLE CONJUROR - The Enlightenment and Gullibility

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Module 3

Riots - Why do they occur?

15-30 minutes

The Bottle Conjuror riots were an unexpected consequence of a hoax played upon an audience. They resulted in only one injury, but great property damage done to the theater.

Read *Obscure Histories* Article, “The Bottle Conjuror.”

DISCUSSION:

What are some examples of riots throughout history, and what do you think were the motivations behind them?

DEBATE:

Are riots effective means for change? Yes or No? Take sides.

THE BOTTLE CONJUROR - The Enlightenment and Gullibility

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Module 4

Hindsight is 20/20

15-30 minutes

Compare the two advertisements within the Primary/Secondary document, from *Dramatic Table Talk*, primary sources, 1 & 2.

DISCUSSION:

It would appear that the potential answer for how the Bottle Conjurer achieved “going into a bottle” was always right in front of the audience, but things were not put together until after the fact. What are some examples of “hindsight is 20/20” from your own experience or in the news?

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Module 5

Automata and Computers

Flipped Classroom or In-Classroom Essay

55 - 80 minutes

WATCH: BBC 4 video on writing automata (4:48)

http://youtu.be/bY_wfKVjuJM

WATCH: Vaucanson's Duck (1:05)

<http://youtu.be/-wR6jAYgVPM>

WATCH: (Optional) Simon Schaffer on Enlightenment Science (27:32)

<http://youtu.be/ccfGq4Mqbj0>

READ: Vaucanson and the History of the Computer

<http://history-computer.com/Dreamers/Vaucanson.html>

SHORT ESSAY

Clockmakers and other engineers were responsible for some of the most spectacular mechanical contributions to the Eighteenth Century. These automata astonished their audiences with their near-lifelike capabilities, which confounded the viewer and led many debates as to whether human beings were simply machines, or more than the sum of their parts. While some of these questions would fall away with the rise of the industrial revolution, these automata were ancestors of computers and they could be “programmed” to perform certain actions.

CHOOSE ONE OR DEVELOP YOUR OWN QUESTION ABOUT THE MATERIAL

-How was entertainment a way of getting at important questions about biology and nature?

-Does the current quest for Artificial Intelligence (AI) have anything in common with the early automata? If so, how?

-Can we say that early automata are computers? If not, why?

-Can we say that computers still have a “spectacular” component to them, in that, do they have to be entertaining to teach something or provoke thought? (See: IBM's Big Blue)