

# **“Beautiful Blackbird”**

## **An Adaptation of the Story by Ashley Bryan**

MONDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2018 AT 10AM • 60 MINUTES

HANNAFORD HALL, USM PORTLAND CAMPUS



Portland Ovation has brought a dynamic season of exceptional performing artists to Portland, Maine, including classical music, jazz, opera, dance, theater, and Broadway since 1931. Portland Ovation believes that cultural enrichment should be accessible to all and provides quality live performances and education experiences. Ovation collaborates with other arts organizations, nonprofits, education systems and the business sector to promote cultural enrichment and lifelong learning and celebrates the power and virtuosity of the performing arts.

In addition to live performances, we bring the exhilaration of the performing arts out into our community with season-long educational and outreach programs called Ovation Offstage. Ovation Offstage creates resonating moments when artists and audiences connect. Whether it's an unexpected "art happening," a workshop or masterclass with a visiting artist, a lively community discussion, or a pre-performance lecture, Portland Ovation invites you to join us as we explore together the relevance and connection of the performing arts to our lives.

Made possible by our partnership with the Portland Museum of Art and Theater Ensemble of Color."

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ovation Offstage is made possible in part with support from Culture Club-Portland, Bank of America, TD Bank, Machias Savings Bank, Unum, Maine Arts Commission, Dead River Company, and the Sam L. Cohen Foundation, Stephen and Tabitha King Foundation, and Maine Community Foundation's Frances Hollis Brain Fund.



## "Beautiful Blackbird" STUDY GUIDE

This guide includes information about "Beautiful Blackbird" and its broader cultural and literary connections; suggested activities designed to engage and sustain your students' learning before, during, and after the show; as well as a number of local resources to help you extend your learning. Please note connections to Common Core State Standards.

Use this guide to help your students anticipate, investigate, and reflect upon your live performance experience.

### COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS:

- Reading Literature
- Reading Informational Texts
- Writing
- Speaking & Listening
- Language
- Maine Learning Results: Theatre
- Movement
- Character Improvisation

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## THEATER ETIQUETTE

Audience members play a special and important role in the performance. The performers are very aware of the audience while they perform and each performance calls for different audience responses. Lively bands, musicians and dancers may desire audience members to clap and move to the beat. Other performers require silent focus on the stage and will want an audience to applaud only when they have completed a portion of their performance. As you enjoy the show, think about being a part of the performance.

- What are the differences between attending a live performance and going to a movie or watching television?
- What are some different types of live performances? Name a few as a class.
- What kind of responses might an audience give in each circumstance?
- What are the different cues that a performer will give you so that you know how to respond? For example, might they bow or pause for applause?

*Also, remember that a theater is designed to magnify sound and even the smallest whispers or paper rustling can be heard throughout the auditorium. You are part of a community of audience members and you all work together to create your theater experience.*

## LOCAL CONNECTIONS

### The Ashley Bryan Center in Islesford, Maine

- [ashleybryancenter.org](http://ashleybryancenter.org)
- [ashleybryanfilms.org](http://ashleybryanfilms.org)
- [info@ashleybryancenter.org](mailto:info@ashleybryancenter.org)

### Portland Museum of Art

The PMA presents “Painter and Poet: The Art of Ashley Bryan,” on view from August 3, 2018 to November 25, 2018

- [portlandmuseum.org/exhibitions/painter-and-poet](http://portlandmuseum.org/exhibitions/painter-and-poet)

### Theater Ensemble of Color (TEoC)

TEoC is a performance and community outreach group seeking to improve racial relations in Portland, ME and beyond through the use of art, culture, education, and social activism. TEoC is under Fiscal Sponsorship by The Celebration Barn Theater.

- [teoc-maine.weebly.com](http://teoc-maine.weebly.com)
- [celebrationbarn.com](http://celebrationbarn.com)





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### About Ashley Bryan



Born in 1923, Ashley was raised in the Bronx, NY. At seventeen, he entered the tuition-free Cooper Union School of Art and Engineering, having been denied entry elsewhere because of his race. Encouraged by supportive high school teachers, Ashley applied to Cooper Union because admission was based solely on a student's exam portfolio.

Drafted out of art school and into the segregated US army at age nineteen, Ashley preserved his humanity throughout World War II by drawing, stowing supplies in his gas mask when necessary. After the war, Ashley completed his Cooper Union degree, studied philosophy and literature at Columbia University on the GI Bill, and then went to Europe on a Fulbright scholarship, seeking to understand why humans choose war.

Ashley eventually returned to the United States, teaching art at several schools and universities, retiring in the 1980s to Maine's Cranberry Isles as professor emeritus of Dartmouth College.

Meanwhile, Ashley published books—more than fifty to date. Among Ashley's awards are the Coretta Scott King-Virginia Hamilton Lifetime Achievement Award, Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal, and the New York Public Library's Literary Lions award. Throughout the United States and Africa, libraries, children's rooms, and literary festivals are named for him.

For more information on Ashley Bryan, visit [ashleybryancenter.org](http://ashleybryancenter.org) and click on “Learn.” There are many articles, videos, and audio recordings to share with your class!

### About Theater Ensemble of Color

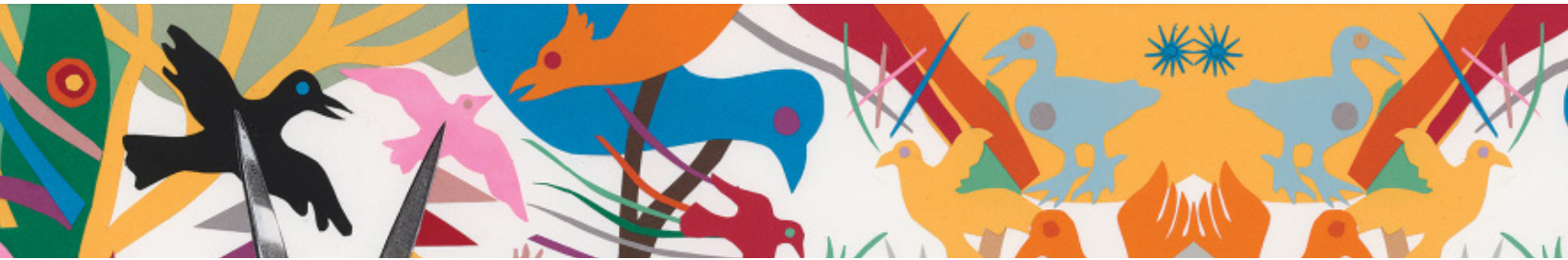
Theater Ensemble of Color strives to improve inclusion and strengthen culture within our communities through education, social activism, and the arts. Founded in 2015 as a small, 8-member theater company filling a cultural niche in Portland, Maine, TEoC has matured significantly with over 50 past and present affiliate members. This unique collective of multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-generational performers and community organizers is drawing diverse packed audiences to their innovative work.

Directed by René Godess Johnson, a teacher, director, and physical performer, the shows feature women, men, and non-binary people of Color between the ages of 6 and 70. Through this work, TEoC has and continues to provide professional development resources for people of Color to become leaders in the arts communities of Maine and plays a vital role in theater preservation, history, operations, social justice activism, and education.



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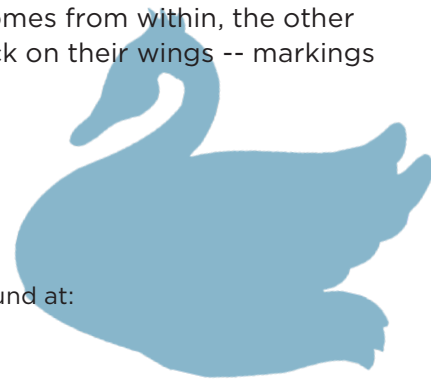


## Synopsis

Long ago, Blackbird was voted the most beautiful bird in the forest. The other birds, who were colored red, yellow, blue, and green, were so envious that they begged Blackbird to paint their feathers with a touch of black so they could be beautiful, too. Although Blackbird warns them that true beauty comes from within, the other birds persist and soon each is given a ring of black around their neck or a dot of black on their wings -- markings that detail birds to this very day.

## Discussion Questions

Adapted from the Simon & Schuster Reading Guide for Beautiful Blackbird, which can be found at:  
<http://simonandschusterpublishing.com/thebookpantry/>



### Dive deeper into Ashley Bryan's illustrations:

- Ask your students to pick their favorite illustration in the book. Discuss why Ashley Bryan chose the specific colors and materials in that illustration. How do the colors and shapes match the story?
- After the performance, discuss how the costumes, lights, and sets differed from the illustrations. Did they still evoke the same emotion and energy? How?

### Compare and contrast:

- Read the original story of the ringdove, titled “Cursing the Birds” in the anthology, *African Folktales: Traditional Stories of the Black World* by Roger D. Williams at [tinyurl.com/RingdoveStory](http://tinyurl.com/RingdoveStory). Compare it to Beautiful Blackbird. Make a chart of all the similarities and then another for all the differences. Why do you think Bryan changed the story? Which version of the story do you like best?
- After the performance, discuss the similarities and differences between the book and the performance. How did the actors portray the different characters and how did those portrayals compare to what you expected?

### Share the love:

- Ask your students to turn to a partner and discuss what each of them loves about themselves for two minutes. Then, go around the classroom so each student can stand up and share what their partners love about themselves.
- After the performance, ask your students what they loved about the performance. Have them fill out the Student Response Form at the end of this guide, and share the results with Ovarions Offstage!

# “Beautiful Blackbird” STUDY GUIDE

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## Craft Ideas

### Paper Collage Art

Ashley Bryan is perhaps best known for his paper collages, especially those that serve as the illustrations in *Beautiful Blackbird*. After reading the book, have your students make their own colorful paper collages.

#### Materials:

- Colored construction paper
- Scissors
- Poster board
- Glue

#### Directions:

1. Have your students form small groups. Distribute a poster board to each group, as well as several sheets of colorful construction paper.
2. Ask each student to draw an animal on the construction paper and cut it out.
3. Have the groups take a look at all of their animals and decide what the setting of their animal gathering is – it could be anything (a pond, beach, jungle, house, etc.)!
4. Then have the students draw and cut out shapes that represent that setting (water, sand, leaves, couches, etc.).
5. Finally, have each group assemble the scene and glue it onto the poster.
6. Once each group has a complete poster, ask them to present their posters to the class, explaining why they chose the colors and shapes that they did to represent their scene.





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## Craft Ideas

### Create Your Own Bird Pond

With this project, adapted from the Gregory-Lincoln Education Center, students will celebrate their own uniqueness and the colorful community they create together.

#### Materials:

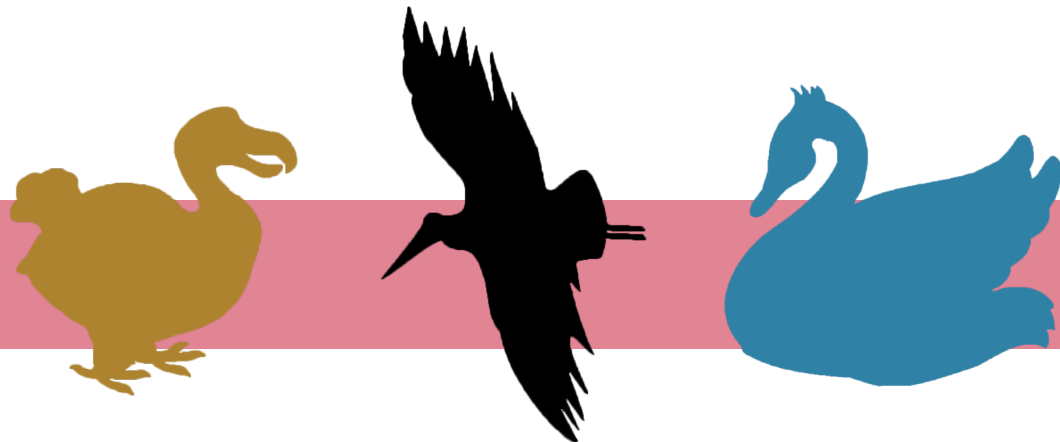
- Long sheet of butcher paper
- Construction paper
- Decorating materials like stickers, markers, glitter, paint
- Glue

#### Directions:

1. Prepare for the activity by creating a pond and a blackbird out of construction paper and pasting it on to the butcher paper.
2. Invite each student to draw and cut out a bird silhouette out of construction paper, or provide them each with a coloring sheet like the ones on the next few pages.
3. Have each student decorate their bird, asking them to be mindful of the colors they are choosing. How is that color important to you? Why did you choose that color?

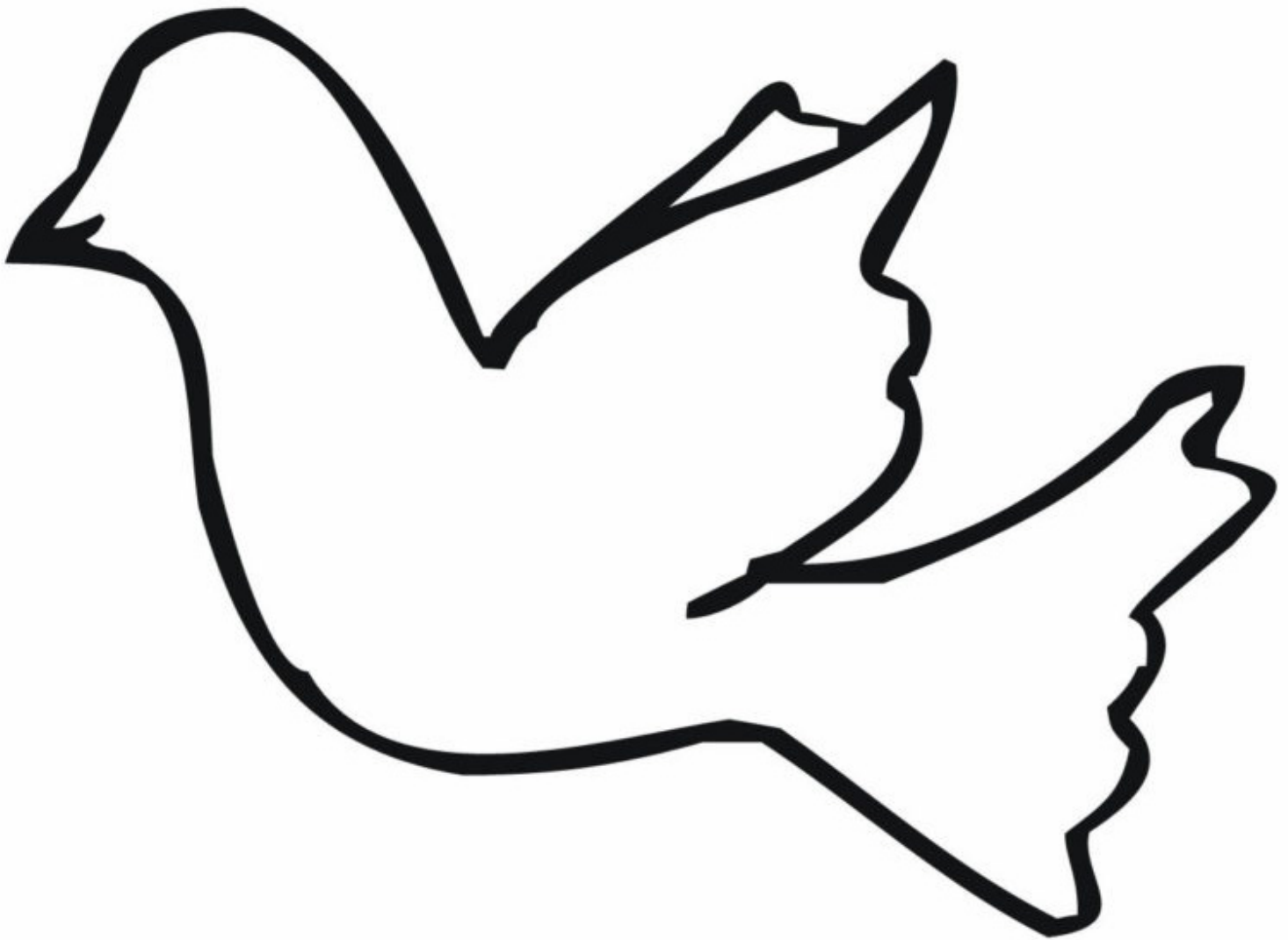
*One student named Khanak at the Gregory-Lincoln Education Center explained, “I love purple and gold because my mother wears a lot of gold rings and I love to wear my favorite purple dress. In India, gold is a treasure. My mommy says I’m her treasure.”*

4. When the students are finished decorating their birds, invite each one to paste their bird onto the pond. Once you have a complete pond, hang up the butcher paper and admire your community!



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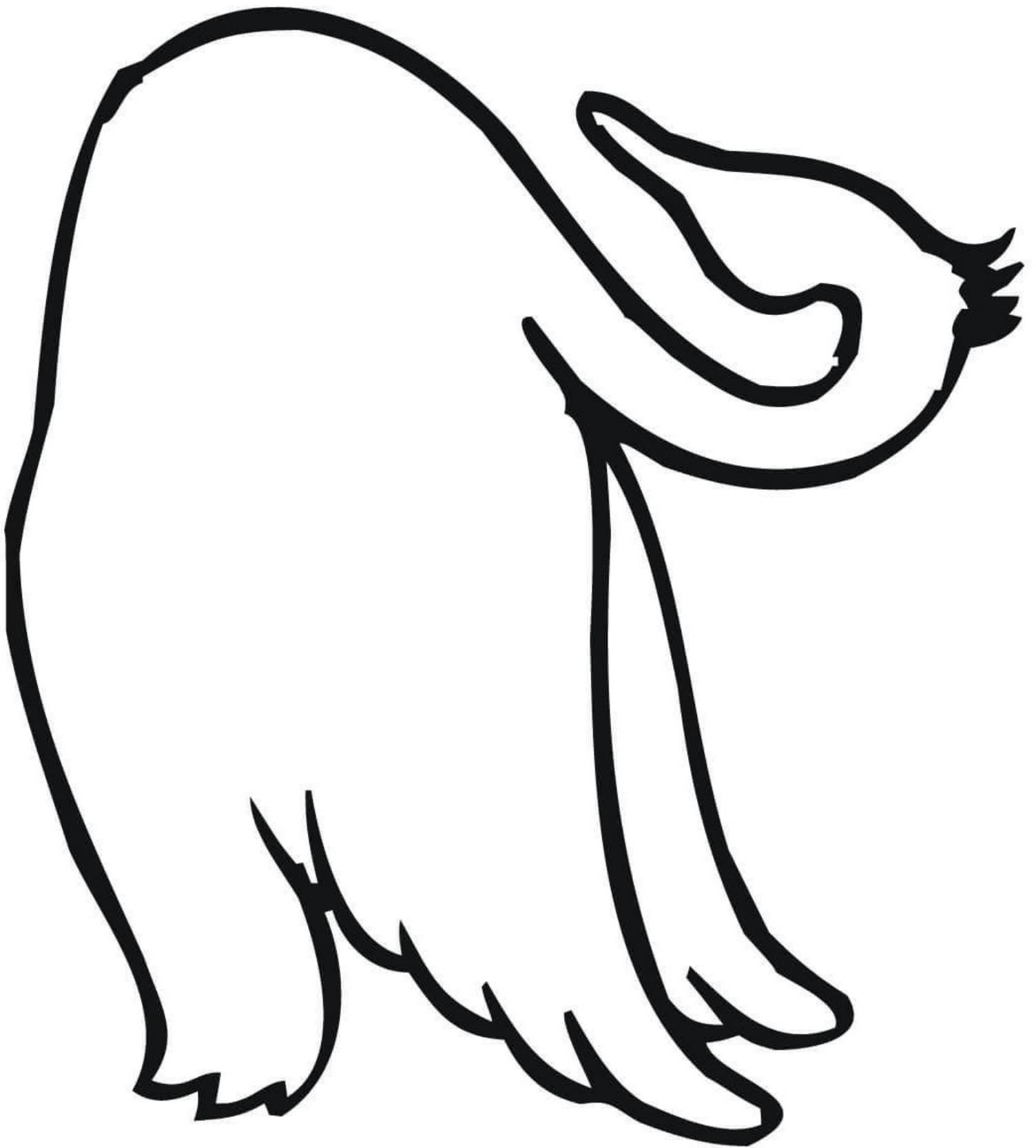
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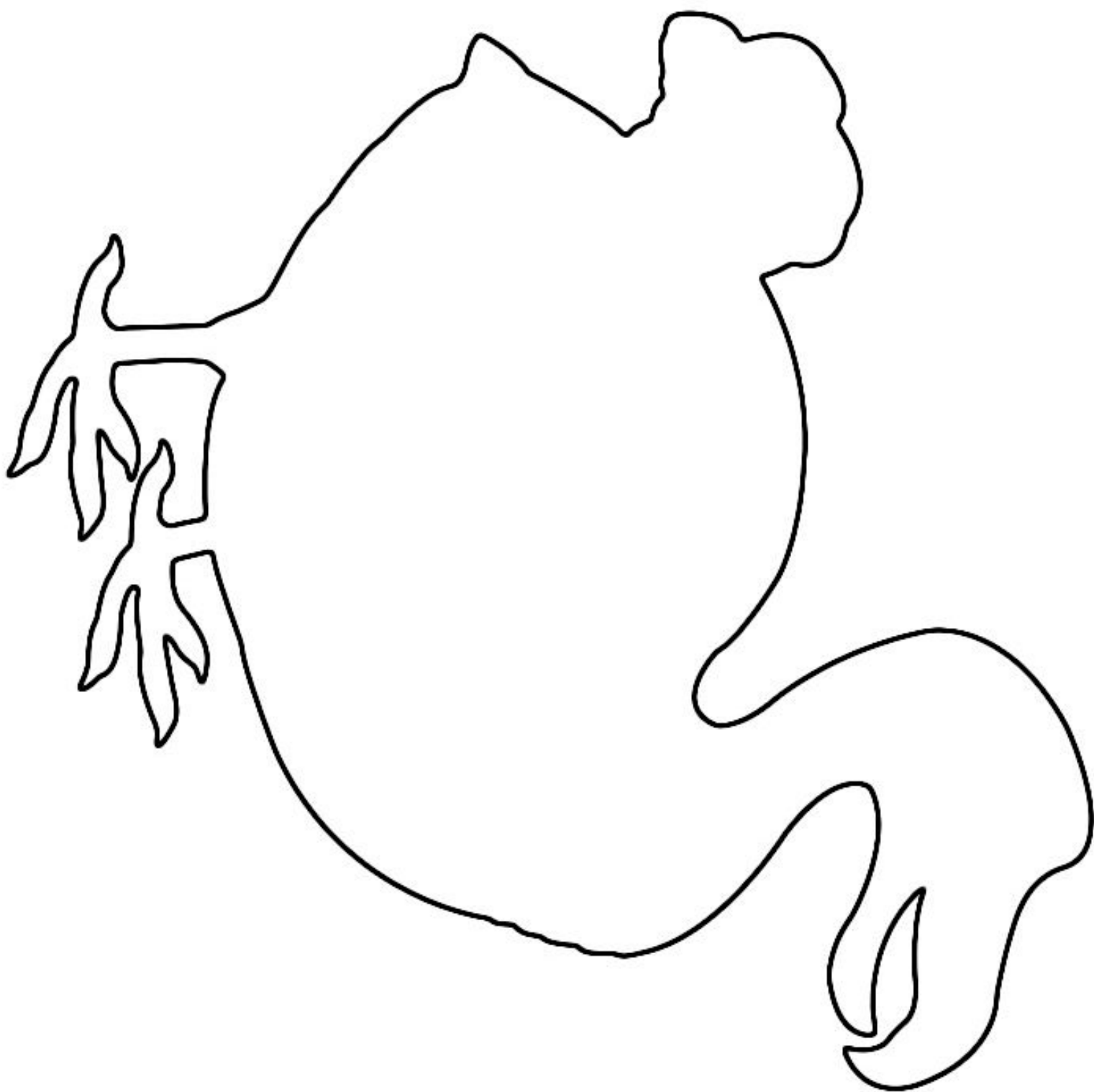
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# Student Response Form

Please guide your students through this form. Students may write and/or draw pictures to respond to the performance.

**PERFORMANCE:** “Beautiful Blackbird” • OCTOBER 2018

**SCHOOL NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**STUDENT NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_ **GRADE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**VISUAL RESPONSE:**

Draw your favorite moment from “*Beautiful Blackbird*” below.

What did you really like about the performance?

What would you tell other kids about the performance?

Please print your name below to give Portland Ovarions permission to use your comments in future promotions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Your Name Here

**MAIL RESPONSES TO:**  
Ovarions Offstage  
50 Monument Sq, 2<sup>nd</sup> Fl.  
Portland, ME, 04101

# Teacher Response Forms

Please take a few moments to fill out and return this form after the performance. Your response to our School-Time Performance Series helps us plan for the future. Include any comments from class discussion as well!

**PERFORMANCE:** "Beautiful Blackbird" • OCTOBER 2018

**SCHOOL NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**YOUR NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_ **GRADE(S) OF STUDENTS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What made this a valuable experience for your students?** (If it wasn't, why not, what can we do better?)

**How did this live performance connect to or enhance your curriculum?**

**If you used this guide, how did it help you prepare for and reflect upon the performance with your students? Why or why not? OR if you knew about the guide but opted not to use it, tell us why you chose not to use it.** (We want to design the guides so that they are helpful tools for teachers—your feedback is key!)

**Tell us about planning the trip:**

How did you hear about this School-Time Performance? How was the process when arranging transportation?

# Teacher Response Forms

Please take a few moments to fill out and return this form after the performance. Your response to our School-Time Performance Series helps us plan for the future. Include any comments from class discussion as well!

**Tell us about the trip itself:** How was the arrival and dismissal process? Were all of your specified seating needs met?

**What types of performances would you like to see in the future? (topics/themes, genres, specific artists, etc.)?**

**A number of generous individuals and organizations make it possible for us to offer these School-Time Performances at extremely discounted rates. Is there anything you'd like them to know in terms of your experience or its impact on your class?**

Please sign below if Portland Ovarions has permission to use any of your comments in future promotions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sign here

**RETURN TO:**

Ovarions Offstage  
50 Monument Sq, 2<sup>nd</sup> Fl.  
Portland, ME, 04101