

DREAMTREE

A Dream Show for children

By Steve Mobia

Many a parent is at a loss when their child excitedly tells them a recent dream. Most of us are not trained to understand or make use of this unique mental state. As a result, children are left alone with this often-frightening unknown realm, which they may eventually suppress along with other gifts of childhood.

Most of a child's education develops logical objective thinking. *Dreamtree* is intended to fill an important need in education: imaginative subjective thinking. The episodes, for children ages 7-12, will illustrate ways the mind transforms waking experience into the vivid emotional pictures we call dreams. By gaining familiarity with the ways dreams function, children will learn to overcome fears, develop a creative approach to problems and discover new communication skills.

The show will emerge out of improvisational sessions using the actual dreams of the participants. Through a combination of evocative sets, masks, lighting and suggestion, a fascinating dreamscape will be presented. Parents watching the show will acquire a deeper appreciation of their children's inner world and may experience a resurgence of interest in their own dreams.

The recurring setting will be a treehouse where a pair of magical twins, Willy and Nilly, reside. The treehouse appears to be a part of the structure of the tree with branches growing out of the walls. On the inside of the house, the branches are seen as hollow tunnels that can lead to a multitude of dream realms. To the adult world Willy and Nilly are just normal, everyday children. Kids, on the other hand, know the twins have strange powers, including the power to recreate dreams. A variety of kids visit the "dreamtree" where Willy and Nilly playfully recreate the dreams of their visitors who journey through the branch tunnels. Often the twins will surprisingly appear as other characters or creatures in the recreated dreams.

Dreamtree can be conceived as a stand alone show or a series of episodes. The episodes could cover different topics than suggested here or based on dreams submitted by the child actors or audience members writing in. If done as a stand alone show, the topic of nightmares, dream "incubation," and lucid dreaming should be touched on. The intent is not to get kids to think psychoanalytically about dreams at their age but to engender a curiosity and excitement toward them. Since there is virtually no cultural support for dream sharing, this program would fill an important function.

FORMAT

The half hour episodes can be viewed separately or in sequence. Though the variety and content of dreams is expansive and rich enough to fill an ongoing series of programs, as a prototype there can be six episodes covering basic information about

dreaming. In each, one or more children will have an exciting, disturbing or perplexing dream and will seek out Willy and Nilly who in turn use their powers to re-experience the dream. The twins live in a peculiar treehouse (the “dreamtree”) in a forest just outside of town. This is a consistent set for each episode.

Instead of a straight documentary style (i.e. “Today we are going to study dreams about water”), *Dreamtree* will present its information in fictionalized dramatic stories involving Willy Nilly and their friends. It will be shown that waking life situations effect dreams and vice versa. Though Willy and Nilly know much about the land of dreams, they will not give their friends easy answers but rather lead them to think creatively through a variety of surprising, scary, humorous and entertaining encounters.

A STATEMENT ON THE IMPORTANCE OF DREAMS

Throughout the years there have been numerous theories about the usefulness of dreams and attempts to understand their purpose. Early in the 20th century Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung placed great importance on dreams, especially for therapeutic use in psychology. Others have stressed a more biological/material basis, which downplays psychological significance. The jury is still out on both the meaning of dream content and the possible biological and mental usefulness of dreaming.

Dreamtree doesn't push any one specific theory but does present dreams as creative and exciting experiences. Creativity often involves taking something out of its normal context and re-imagining it in another one. This is the stock and trade of “dream thinking.” Since strong emotions are often brought up in dreams, these experiences are valuable to share with others as one might share a strong waking world experience. One could even say that regardless of the any intrinsic meaning in a dream, if the exploration produces value, then dream exploration is valuable.

OUTLINE OF POSSIBLE EPISODES

THE MYSTERY OF SLEEP: Presents in simple form what is known and unknown about sleep. Questions every child asks (for example: “Why do I have to go to sleep?”) will lead Willy and Nilly to a sleep laboratory. The twins will watch while a friend sleeps and has his/her brain waves monitored. The viewers will discover that people go into dream states about five times a night and that the dreams become longer toward the morning. We could actually journey into one of the friend's dreams. The dream could take place in—where else—a sleep lab, although an amusingly strange one. For instance, the scientist at the lab can be seen dressed as a little boy, playing with the equipment as with a pile of toys. This will illustrate how dreams mold external experience to the dreamer's feeling about the experience.

SEEING INTO SYMBOLS: Takes up comparing waking experiences with dreamed ones. Metamorphosis animation will illustrate how a person exhibiting a particular characteristic or emotion can be transformed in a dream into, for instance, an animal or even an inanimate object like a door or fence. Willy and Nilly have fun picking out dream puns and metaphors from their own dreams and those of their friends.

FALLING AND FLYING: Covers these common dream experiences. Willy and Nilly will teach children how to fly more often in their dreams—that in dreams one can do things hard or impossible to do while awake. Many common pleasant dream examples will be actively illustrated. The twins will make friends with animal spirits, super heroes and other helpful figures in order to have more pleasurable dreams. Some simple “dream incubation” techniques will be explored, showing how kids can suggest to their dream-selves before going to sleep, places they want to go and people or creatures they’d like to meet. This practice becomes especially useful as the child gets older and wants to dream about a certain topic or problem.

NIGHTMARES: The twins will help their friends face the scary monsters/persons/animals in their nightmares. Research has shown that when a dreamer faces the feared situation, it nearly always transforms into a positive one. Often merely telling the dream to a parent or close friend will subdue the demon’s power. Techniques for empowering children to take action in their dreams instead of remaining victims will be illustrated in a few common nightmare situations.

LUCID DREAMING: Becoming aware that one is dreaming while having a dream empowers the dreamer as well as intensifying the dream experience. Willy and Nilly will point out through recreated dreams, those common elements of dream reality easily recognizable when they occur. By recognizing these elements as being “dreamlike,” children can learn to discover when they are dreaming. With this discovery comes the ability to change the dream, opening vast realms not available in waking life. The lucid dreaming skill can be beneficial throughout one’s lifetime. Steve LaBerge of Stanford University has suggested that children learn to lucid dream once past the age where they realize that dreams happen in their minds.

INVENTIONS AND IDEAS: Explores how dreams can be used in art and invention. Willy, Nilly and friends enter a gallery of artists to see how dreams have inspired evocative painting, sculpture, music, dance, theater and film. The twins then come up with ways to express their own dreams, trying a variety of art forms. Historical figures come to life and describe inventions suggested by their dreams (such as Elias Howe’s invention of the sewing machine after his dream of a cannibal attack). In this way, children will learn that the strangeness of dreams can actually show a new flexible way of looking at things and encourage an active creative life.

PRODUCTION

The production will involve a variety of people including animators and puppeteers in order to bring out the variety of dream experience. A number of popular books on dreams have been published in recent years, removing dreams from the sole dominion of psychiatrists and neurophysicists while giving interpretive tools to the general public. Many of the authors in this movement would love to participate in the *Dreamtree* project as advisors and/or writers. Those who have written letters of support for this show include: Gayle Delaney Ph.D. (author of “Living your Dreams” and guest on many talk shows), Jeremy Taylor (author of “Dream Work”) and Patricia Garfield Ph.D. (who has published many books including “Your Child’s Dreams”).

The supportive letters by dream authors were written in 1985 when the show was first conceived. At that time, the working title was *Dreamex* (short for ‘Dream Excursions’).

ADDENDUM

STEVE MOBIA — Producer, Director: Has made symbolic dream-oriented films and video as well as having written fiction, plays and music. For three years (1978-1980) he led dream exploration groups in San Francisco, emphasizing theatrical reenactments of dreams in evocative settings. The groups would meet in a different location every week, such as a cave, a forest, a cage in a zoo, an abandoned hospital, etc.

Steve went to California State University at Long Beach where he majored in Radio-Television and San Francisco State University majoring in Film. At Long Beach he was also Associated Students Film Commissioner which involved scheduling, budgeting, promoting (including written articles) and presenting the University’s film programs.

His most important film/video work (which he wrote and directed) include:

LIGHT FIXTURE: (1982, 16mm): After being chased through the dark by a woman’s nightgown, a man finds himself trapped in a room of light, ever exposed to the forces of darkness outside his curtainless window.

LIMBOID (1983, 16mm): Explores the classic conflict between painter and blank canvas and, afterward, the conflict between creator and creation. A longish short film (25 minutes) filled with strong imagery and with music for a variety of chamber groups composed and conducted by Steve Mobia

LORETT AT A LOSS (1994, Hi-8 video): A young girl moves into an anonymous modern town, bringing with her the leaves from her previous country home. Her sense of dislocation is explored in a meeting with another girl who lives in a “puzzle room.” Ultimately her own insecurity provides fuel for new exploration and discovery.

Steve Mobia has studied much of the literature on dreams and has a working knowledge of a variety of dream analysis techniques, including those described by Fritz Perls (the “Gestalt” system), Carl Jung (“Active Imagination”), Sigmund Freud (“Free Association”) and Calvin Hall (“Content Analysis”). He has a keen interest in current sleep research, especially the work being done on “lucid dreaming” by Dr. Stephen LaBerge at the Stanford University Sleep Lab. Steve Mobia’s decision to develop *Dreamtree* came from a realization that even though much fantasy material is presented to children, little effort is made to stimulate the innate creativity of a child—a creativity beautifully epitomized in dreams.