

TARRAGON THEATRE

RESOURCE GUIDE

YAGA
BY
KAT SANDLER

SEPTEMBER 17 - OCTOBER 20

Photo Featuring Claire Armstrong and Seana
McKenna by Jim Ryce

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ABOUT THE PLAY

SYNOPSIS

From the mind that brought you *Mustard*, a genre-bending fairy tale meets whodunit inspired by the notorious figure of Baba Yaga, the hideous old witch who lives alone in the woods grinding the bones of the wicked.

A gruesome murder in a small town leads a local sheriff, a young detective and a university professor with a taste for younger men into a labyrinth of secret lives, ancient magic and multiple suspects.

A play that gives voice to the wicked old witch, Yaga is part thriller, part revenge play and lots of comedy.



PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

I have always been fascinated by stories, legends and myths. Like many, I was raised on a steady diet of cookie-cutter fairy tales and prince-rescues-princess-from-wicked-witch narratives, so when I first came across Baba Yaga I was struck by three things: the imagery of her chicken hut and preferred method of travel/bone grinding (mortar and pestle), her ambiguous moral code and the fact that she had a name.

Witches are so often defined vaguely by colours, geography or their protagonists (i.e. "White" or "of the West" or "the one from Hansel and Gretel") but here was a witch powerful enough to be remembered for how she operated, not just how she got shoved into a an oven or poisoned an apple that one time.

I love that no two Baba Yaga stories are the same. She's usually described as old and ugly, and sure, sometimes she kills people, but she helps them too, when she wants to. Across the globe she's seen as everything from monster to a quest donor, wise woman to a goddess, trickster to saviour and everything in between. She's a morally ambiguous, complex female character - a villain and a protagonist, an antishero who does what she wants in the woods and refuses to be defined or labeled as one thing, and I think that's why she's so resonant with women today. After all, historically what we call a witch is just someone society has decided it's scared of, and what could be scarier than a powerful, sexual, brilliant older women making and living by her own rules?

Yaga has become an exploration of shifting social ideas, tradition, ageism, and fairytale villains, a mashup of my love of lore and legend, police procedurals and noir thrillers and my desire to give a voice to the wicked old witch. Thank you to the cast, the designers, the technicians, to every pal who helped me puzzle through the script, and to Richard and everyone at Tarragon for helping to breathe life in to this script and production, and to you, the audience, for sharing this story and journeying into the woods with us.

ABOUT KAT SANDLER

(Playwright and Director of *Yaga*)



For Tarragon: *Mustard*

Selected Credits: *The Party and The Candidate* (Citadel Theatre), *Bang Bang* (Factory Theatre) *Bright Lights, Punch Up, Help Yourself*, (Theatre Brouhaha - Toronto Fringe) *Delicacy*, (Theatre Brouhaha - Summerworks) *Liver, Cockfight, and Retreat* (Storefront Theatre)

Awards: Dora Award for Best New Play (*Mustard* and *Bang Bang* - nomination) NOW Magazine's Audience Choice Award for Best Director and Best Playwright. Summerworks Spotlight Award (*Delicacy*)

Other: Kat is a playwright, director, screenwriter and Artistic Director of Theatre Brouhaha in Toronto. She has staged sixteen of her original plays in the last eight years, including the simultaneous double bill of *The Party* and *The Candidate* this past April, where the same cast raced back and forth between spaces at the Citadel Theatre. Kat is a graduate of Queen's University.

Who is Baba Yaga?

Like many fairy tales there are lots of different versions of the Baba Yaga story. Linked below are some resources to give you an introduction to the tale.

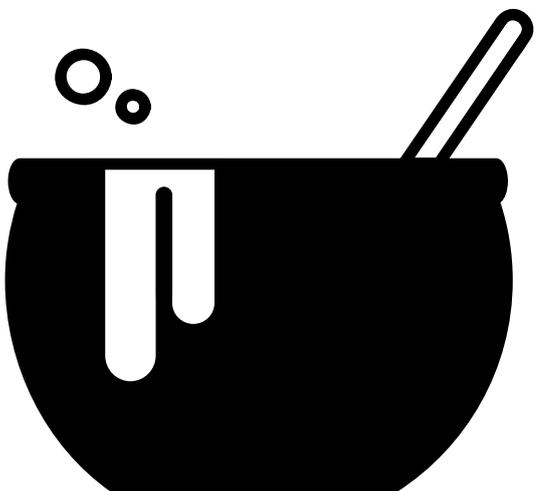
1



[Click here](#)

The Enduring Allure of Baba Yaga, an Ancient Swamp Witch Who Loves to Eat People

A great article on Vice that looks at the tales of Baba Yaga and why they're important to contemporary feminism.



2

Stuff You Missed in History Class - Pisadiera & Baba Yaga

In this episode of the podcast Holly and Tracy look at the various iterations and references to Baba Yaga both in historical folklore and in pop culture.

3

How John Wick Got Baba Yaga Wrong

John Wick, the popular action movie series, recently got in some hot water online for incorrectly referencing the Baba Yaga tale. This article explains what they got wrong and what they got right.

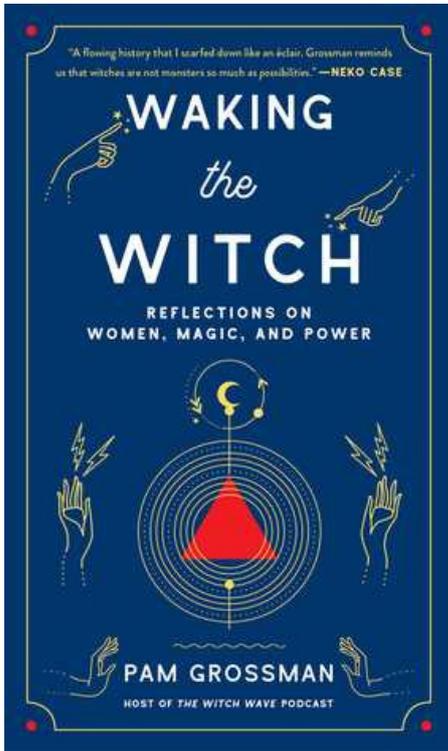
4

Grimm Archives Video - Baba Yaga



A YouTube video from the Grimm Archives channel. It gives an overview of the Baba Yaga legend, including the various versions of the tale from across time.

Resources on Witches and Feminism



1

Waking the Witch: Reflections on Women, Magic, and Power

In this book Pam Grossman, host of The Witch Wave podcast, looks at the cultural and historical figures of the witch and how witches reflect the power and potential of women. Part memoir and part cultural analysis this book is a great resource for thinking about the figure of the witch in a bigger context.

2

The Secret Feminist History of Witches, As Told by a Practicing Witch

A Youtube video produced by New York Magazine where author and wiccan Kristen Sollee talks about witches as a cultural and feminist symbol throughout history.





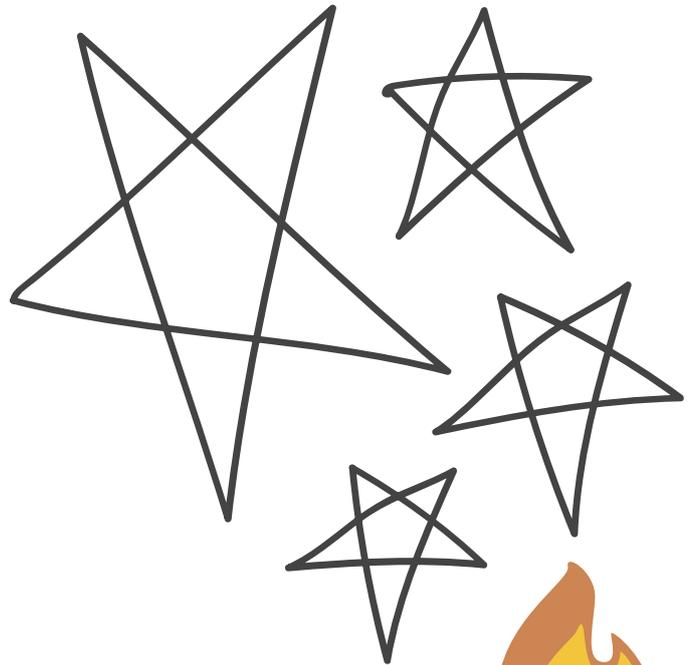
3

A Primer on Witches

An instructor from Wilfrid Laurier's Religion and Culture program gives an overview of paganism, witchcraft and feminism.

Wanna know more? Come hear Chris Klassen speak at our free lecture event on September 28th!

[CLICK HERE](#) for more info!



4

Monsters, men and magic: why feminists turned to witchcraft to oppose Trump

An excerpt from Sady Doyle's book that looks at the recent rise of witchcraft in terms of politics, popular culture, fashion, etc.



Conversation Starters

- What do you think of when you think of a witch?
- Is a modern-day witch different from a historical witch? How so ?
- How are witches tied to the ideas of feminism and traditional gender roles ?
- How did this version of the Baba Yaga tale compare to your own understanding of the story?
- How and why do you think we continue to adapt fairy tales, like Baba Yaga?
- Why do you think witches are such a popular figure today?

Curriculum Connections



English – listening for understanding, the mystery genre, interpreting and re-imagining fairy tales

Drama – development of a wide range of characters by a performer, theatrical design for mood setting, analyzing contemporary drama works

Equity Studies – analyse representations of gender in media and popular culture, social construction of gender roles and norms, analyzing how these gender roles are present in schools/universities

Works Cited/ Quick Links

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