

# BATHTUB PIRATES



## Teacher's Study Guide

### ABOUT *BATHTUB PIRATES*

Some of the best times in a child's life are spent playing in the bathtub. Surrounded by aquatic toys and a sea of bubbles, the imagination runs wild with adventure stories. What child hasn't pretended to be a pirate, sailing on his own bathtub ship?

Captain Blackbeard, one of the Carolinas most infamous pirates, is without his ship. So a child's bathtub will have to do. His motley crew outfits the bathtub with rudder, sail and a Jolly Roger pirate flag.

At first the child is delighted to be part of the gang. However, once at sea, the pirates put the "kid" to work. Besides learning strange sailor lingo, the child has to perform all kinds of unsavory duties, including fishing for octopus. Finally relegated to swabbing the decks with "Q" tips, the child wishes only to return home. The life of a pirate proves to be less than romantic.

But Blackbeard has other plans. He wants to be a more contemporary pirate. Instead of sunken treasure, he's after high-tech software. He schemes to be rich by pirating the latest video games and software. When the "kid" gets wind of Blackbeard's plan, he decides to stage a mutiny and become captain, Captain Kid, of the bathtub. But the mutiny fails. No pirate can stand up to Blackbeard.

The kid enlists the help of a friendly pirate, "Tweezers," as well as a plumber (the puppeteer) who happens to be working on the tub. Together they devise a plan. Captain Kid challenges Blackbeard to a duel. Winner takes all. And thanks to a last minute act by the plumber, the kid is victorious and sails off into the sunset.



### OUR APPROACH

*Bathtub Pirates* is a fantasy. This original story by Grey Seal Puppets combines fiction and fact to entertain and enlighten. A child's wish creates the situation "What if I were a pirate?" A sense of child's play is essential to the drama. Making do with what the child finds in the bathtub-- soap on a rope, wash cloth, and toothbrush-- the child creates his own fantasy world. The bathtub doesn't just become a ship; it *is* a ship complete with sails, rudder and Jolly Roger. But in the course of the adventure the child learns what

being a pirate really means. It's not a storybook life. There are rules and lots of work. It is Captain Blackbeard who provides the most conflict. He rules the ship with an iron hand. The child tires of being a pirate. He wants to go home. But his wish is irreversible. He can't just wish the pirates away. Instead he has to work within the rules of his own fantasy. The old adage, "Be careful of what you wish for, because it might come true," applies to *Bathtub Pirates*.

## ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

The puppets in *Bathtub Pirates* are called "Found Object" puppets. "Found Object" puppets are puppets made from commonly found items. In this production, all the puppets and props were made from common bathroom and cleaning utensils. For instance, Blackbeard is a large scrub brush complete with sponge hands and a mop beard. Scuttlebutt, one of the pirates, is a toilet brush. The octopus is a bathtub mat. The rudder is a shower massage and soap dish. Part of the fun of *Bathtub Pirates* is recognizing the different objects used in each of the puppets.

This one-man show is performed in a "walking stage." Walking stages are popular with street puppeteers. They allow for greater mobility and for the stage itself to take on a personality. In this case, the stage is the bathtub. The puppeteer, who also acts the part of a plumber, wears the stage. A backpack frame has been altered to support the bathtub. All the puppets and props hang from the belt of the puppeteer or from within the stage.

## ABOUT PIRATES

Privateers, buccaneers, corsairs—no matter which terms you use, they all mean the same thing: pirates. Who were the pirates? Daring figures that swooped on treasure ships and returned home with golden cargoes? Brutal sea thieves who showed no mercy to their victims? Bold adventurers who financed travel by nautical theft? In fact, they were all these and more. The term "pirate" means "one who plunders on the sea." Pirates have been around for a long time. Since ancient Greece, robbers of the sea have preyed on passing trade ships. The pirates of the Mediterranean and Aegean liked to hide out among tiny islands and inlets, waiting for merchant vessels that hugged the coast and rarely crossed the open ocean. Throughout history, pirates from different countries—Scandinavia, Spain, the Roman Empire—have terrorized the high seas.

But it is the pirates of the New World, the Caribbean with which most people are familiar. In the 18th century pirate ports blossomed in the Bahamas and on mainland America. Ocracoke Island, part of the Outer Banks chain of islands that extend along the coast of North Carolina, was the hideout of many a pirate. The most legendary pirate of the Carolinas was Blackbeard. Myth and truth about Blackbeard are inseparable: he is said to have had wild staring eyes and a cruel streak; he wore lit candles in his hair; he drank rum mixed with gunpowder; he twisted his beard in black ringlets around his ears. He is also said to have had 14 wives and almost as many names, including Drummond, Thatch, Tash and (officially) Edward Teach. Details of his birth are obscure. His death, after a reign of terror lasting two years, is well documented. He was slain at Ocracoke Inlet by a British navy crew in 1718.



## THEMATIC VOCABULARY

Pirates were not only colorful characters, they had a colorful vocabulary. Help the students to become familiar with these pirate terms.

**Booty:** Valuables and goods stolen by pirates

**Anchor:** A heavy object used to keep a ship from floating off course

**Weigh Anchor:** Command to raise and stow the anchor

**All hands on deck:** Command for crew to man stations above the deck

**Go below:** Command to send a crew member below deck

**Doubloons:** An old Spanish coin made of gold

**Pieces o' eight:** An old Spanish coin made of silver

**Cutlass:** A short, curved sword often used by pirates

**Port:** The left side of the ship

**Starboard:** The right side of the ship

**Bow:** The front of the ship

**Stern:** The back of the ship

**Keelhaul:** To punish by dragging underwater behind the ship

**Walk the plank:** To punish by forcing a person to fall overboard

**Davy Jones' locker:** The bottom of the sea

**Spyglass:** Old-fashioned term for a telescope

**Compass:** A navigational device used to determine direction



## Themes to Discuss and Develop BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

Before the performance, introduce your students to the theater experience and to theater etiquette.

### LIVE THEATRE VERSUS TV AND THE MOVIES

Attending live theatre is very different from attending a movie or watching TV. Many people think nothing of eating or drinking or even talking while a movie or a TV show is playing. After all, the actors aren't really there in front of us. They're on film or tape, and even if they are "live," they are thousands of miles away. But in the theatre, the puppeteer is working very hard and they are only a few feet away. Eating or talking distracts the puppeteer and prevents other members of the audience from hearing and enjoying as well. And of course, such behavior is considered inappropriate and impolite for the theatre. Attending the theatre should be considered a very formal but fun occasion, like going to a wedding or a fancy restaurant. You may even want to wear something special that day.

### AUDIENCE GUIDELINES

- Eating and drinking should not be permitted.
- Talking should not be permitted. Even whispering should be limited.
- Restroom trips should be limited to before and after the performance if at all possible.
- Taking photographs during the performance is extremely distracting to the puppeteer and to the rest of the audience. The puppeteer will be glad to pose for photos after the performance.
- Please turn off all cel phones and pagers during the performance.

Explain to your students that in *Bathtub Pirates* they will see stories performed by puppets. Describe the play the students will see as "puppet theatre." Explain that the puppeteer will tell stories using rod puppets.

A performance by Grey Seal Puppets provides an opportunity to explore first-hand the magic of the stage. For a short time we enter another world, a world of fantasy and exaggeration. We hope you enjoy taking this journey of imagination with us.

# After the Performance

## ACTIVITIES

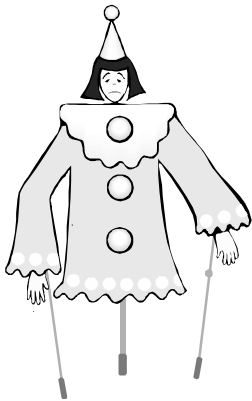
### Puppetry

Puppetry is perhaps the most unique of all art forms. It incorporates aspects of both the visual and performing arts—from music and dance, to painting and sculpture, to theatre and mime--yet it remains a distinct art form unto itself. Making and using puppets is an excellent way to acquaint students with the medium and to provide them with tools to use in the post-performance discussions.

There are many different types of puppets. Explain to the classroom that when we say a “type” of puppet, we don’t mean a dog or a cat, or other character that a puppet can be. The type of puppet is determined by how the puppeteer controls, or manipulates, the puppet. Here are just a few of the types of puppets:

#### HAND PUPPETS

A hand puppet is a puppet that fits over the performer’s hand. The performer’s first finger goes into the head, while the performer’s thumb and little finger go into the arms to control the hands. Two of the most famous puppet characters in history, Punch and Judy, are hand puppets (pictured here).



#### ROD PUPPETS

A rod puppet is controlled by a stick (or rod) that is attached to the puppet. The rods are usually made of wood or metal. The puppet can be made of any kind of material, including fabric, wood, foam, or papier mache.

#### MARIONETTES

Marionettes are puppets that are controlled by strings from above. The strings are attached to the puppet’s head, hands, and feet, and are controlled by the puppeteer using a wooden control at the top called an “airplane control.”



## **CREATE A PUPPET: MAKING AND USING FOUND OBJECT PUPPETS**

All the puppets in Bathtub Pirates are “Found Object” puppets. You can make your own found object puppets by using discarded materials and your imagination. Children particularly love these kinds of puppets, because of the emphasis on using imagination and abstract thinking.

Creative and dramatic arts objectives:

- To design and create a found object puppet
- To recognize puppetry as a performing art
- To encourage abstract creative thinking
- To encourage recycling

Grade level:

Most effective with children in grades 3 and up.

Materials:

Any recycled items such as empty plastic bottles, egg cartons, paper tubes, milk or orange juice cartons, etc. Also include plastic spoons, yarn, felt, glue, chalk, markers, pipe cleaners, and other decorative items.

Procedure:

1. Recall the puppets used in Bathtub Pirates. What were they made from? Did you recognize any objects used in the puppets? Why did the puppeteer use only bathroom objects for the puppets?
2. Show the students some of the objects they will be using to create their puppets. Have them consider what their puppets will look like. Have the students share ideas on how these items could be made into puppets. Tell the students to consider the personality their characters will have.
3. Divide the students into groups and have each group use a different item for their puppets. For example, one table might have egg cartons, one table might have plastic jugs, etc. Make sure they have a good supply of materials for decorating their puppets. Assign each table a fairy tale that they will perform with their puppets. Make sure all characters in the story will be represented.
4. Have the students share with the class what they have made. They should explain who their character is and what their personality is like.
5. Have the students act out their fairy tale with the puppets. Use the instructions in the following puppet project to make these shows an ongoing event in your classroom.

## **MAKING SIMPLE PUPPETS**

Language and dramatic arts objectives:

- To describe the good character traits depicted in the play
- To recognize puppetry as a way to illustrate good character traits to children
- To create a puppet that represents a good character trait, strength, or virtue
- To analyze the action of the character through a puppet

Grade level:

Two sets of instructions are included for making puppets. Finger puppets will have more appeal for kindergartners and children in lower grades. Bag puppets are fun for all levels. Both require little preparation and few materials. Time required: 3 class sessions of 45 minutes each.

Materials:

Parents are a valuable resource for puppet-making supplies. Felt scraps, buttons, sequins, yarn, cotton balls and sewing trim are transformed into features with the help of scissors and paste. You will notice that all of the characters in *Bathtub Pirates* have distinct appearances and personalities. Stress to your students to be imaginative in creating unique and individual characters as they construct their puppets.

Procedure:

1. Discuss good character traits such as courage, honesty, and loyalty. Why is it important to practice them? How does it help others? How does it help you? Discuss the benefits of practicing good character traits.
2. Discuss the puppets in the performance. What types of puppets were used? (Rod puppets) How did each work? How did they display emotions? Was each puppet effective?
3. Have the students make finger puppets or bag puppets and use them act out scenes where good character traits are illustrated. These could be scenes that illustrate the benefits of practicing a good character trait, or the consequences of bad actions. Make these shows an ongoing class event to reinforce the importance of knowing and practicing good character traits.

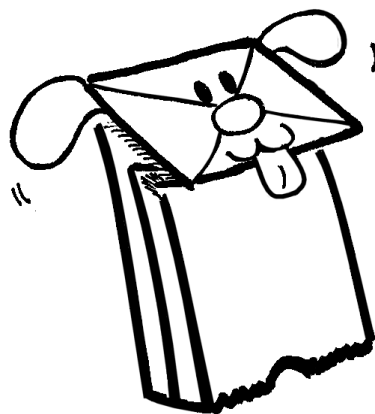
## PUPPET MAKING

### Finger Puppet



To make little animal finger puppets, use pinking shears to cut off the top three inches from the fingers of old brown, black or tan gloves. Attach eyes and felt noses and mouths, and appropriate ears to make different types of animal finger puppets.

### Paper Bag Puppet



For hand puppets, choose bags just large enough that the bottom fold can be easily moved up and down with fingers inserted. Indicate the tiny button placement of facial features on the bottom of the bag.

## POST-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

*Bathtub Pirates* develops concepts that can prove useful in classroom activities after the performance. For each concept an activity is suggested to explore its ramifications. Very young children may have difficulty in expressing feelings that may be generated. For them, the puppets they have made in advance may provide "the voice" for newly discovered values and beliefs. For older children, script writing for their own productions may help to reinforce what they have learned.

### 1. Content Area: Language Arts, Critical Thinking, Art

#### Activities:

Have students read and report on a famous pirate- "Calico" Jack Rackham, Mary Read, Anne Bonny, or William Kidd. Talk about motivations of the characters. Compare their lives to find out what made each character turn to a life of piracy.

Pirates used the Jolly Roger to frighten their victims. Have the students research and draw various versions of this famous pirate symbol.

### 2. Content Area: Affective

#### Activity:

Have each student tell what character he/she would most like to be and why.

List characteristics and traits of that character. Have students tell which character they think best represents themselves and why.



## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

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## Meet Grey Seal Puppets

Founded in 1976, Grey Seal Puppets is well known nationwide. The company performs over 250 shows a year from New York to Hawaii, from Canada to Mexico. Their repertoire consists of familiar fairy tales (*The Emperor's New Clothes*), classic folk tales (*Tangle of Tales*) and original stories (*Bathtub Pirates*). Grey Seal travels to theatres such as The Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta, The Detroit Museum of Art and The Philadelphia Museum of Art.

In addition to live performing, Grey Seal also performs regularly on television, with clients such as The Reimler Agency (Bojangles), WTVI-Channel 42 (local PBS affiliate), the Muppets, Silver Burdett Ginn, and the International Mission Board. Grey Seal Puppets also custom designs and creates mascot characters for sports teams and corporations such as Blimpie Subs and Salads, New Orleans Hornets, Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines, and Lowe's Motor Speedway.

The company has garnered a number of awards including a "Citation of Excellence" for their adaptation of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and their original story called *Bathtub Pirates*. They were also awarded the North Carolina Theatre Conference's Award for leadership in theatre arts and The Puppeteers of America President's Award for outstanding accomplishment in the art of puppetry. Their television work also has been honored with several awards in the industrial and broadcast categories including a prestigious Beacon Award and the ITVA Silver Reel of Excellence.

Grey Seal puppeteer Drew Allison has co-authored two books on polyfoam puppet construction, *The Wit and Wisdom of Polyfoam Puppet Construction* and *The Foam Book*.

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