

# Study Guide For Teachers

## Catskill Puppet Theater in Hiawatha

presented by

Young Audiences

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### ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Our story opens with Hiawatha as a young boy seen walking in the woods with his grandmother. They discover a magical cave as she teaches him the ways of his people, the Onondagas. He is befriended by a Bear and Turtle who give him clues concerning his future as a great man. Various spirits emanate from the cave and teach him that he must overcome the negative part of himself, the part that would seek revenge, to become a truly great warrior.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

Hiawatha helped unite six nations of the Iroquois Confederacy and also helped to create a government that (as long as it existed) gave women an equal vote.

Hiawatha, for the good of the Confederacy, forgives the evil chief of the Onondagas for killing his daughter, making him the first president of the Iroquois Confederacy. (Hiawatha's name means "He who combs" because it is said that he combed the snakes of evilness out of the chief's hair.)

Nineteenth century linguist, Horatio Hale, is credited with providing one of the earliest recorded versions of Hiawatha's story, and probably the closest to historical fact. He made many visits to the Reserve of the Six Nations in Ontario and visited twice the Onondaga Reservation to speak with those that keep the history of their people.

In "Hiawatha" the puppeteers use rod puppets, or puppets on sticks. They are worked from behind a curtain with the puppets held over the puppeteer's head. Mechanisms are built in with strings, wires and springs to make the mouth, eyes and eyebrows move. Rods are attached to the puppet's hands to make them work.

Another style of puppetry used in the performance is called shadow puppetry. A screen is set up and a light shines from behind. Paper cut-outs are worked with wires to cast moving shadows on the screen.

### LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

- Experience the art of puppet theater
- Learn about Hiawatha, his importance as a hero of democracy, his people and history
- Understand the concept of self-sacrifice for the greater good

## **BEFORE THE PROGRAM**

1. Have each student bring to class a puppet that they have at home. Discuss with students what type of puppet each is, and how it functions. How does it move? What physical characteristics of the puppet give it personality and why? If one wants the puppet to communicate, how would one make it happen?
2. Get the visual arts teacher involved! Have students make their own puppets. There are a number of simple ways to make a variety of types of puppets, i.e., hand puppets, shadow puppets, etc. Have students review their answers to the above questions and think about what they want their puppet to represent and how they will make that happen.

## **AFTER THE PROGRAM**

1. Read all or part of Longfellow's poem "Song of Hiawatha". Compare his version of Hiawatha's story with that of Catskill Puppet Theatre. (Both are fantastical, but very different accounts of this historic figure.)
2. Get the music teacher involved! Dvorak stated that the second movement of his Symphony No. 9, *From the New World* was influenced by Longfellow's "Song of Hiawatha". Listen to at least one section of this movement and discuss what aspects of the music, if any, remind them of the poem and/or anything that they have learned of Hiawatha.
3. Longfellow was inspired by the story of Hiawatha and Dvorak was in turn inspired by Longfellow's words. Discuss inspiration with students and how it fosters creativity. Have students choose a person, story, event, etc. that inspires them. Have them collectively decide how they would like to express their ideas i.e., through painting, sculpting, writing, etc. Have them create and then share and discuss their work.

## **VOCABULARY WORDS**

Puppet  
Puppeteer  
Ventriloquist  
Puppet Stage  
Hand Puppet  
Rod Puppet  
Shadow Puppet  
String Puppet  
Iroquois  
Hiawatha's  
Native American  
Confederacy

## **ARTIST INFORMATION**

Since 1979, John Potocnik and Carol Mandigo, co-founders of the Catskill Puppet Theater, have been touring internationally, enchanting audiences of all ages with their spectacular puppets and delightful musical productions. Combining backgrounds in art, music, drama and American folk culture, they reach more than 75,000 people annually with their high-quality children's theater. The company has received accolades from such premiere venues as Calgary, Winnipeg and Ottawa International Children's Festivals, The New England Puppetry Series and New York State Museum. The Catskill Puppet Theater shines equally indoors on a big stage or outdoors on a festival lawn.

## **RESOURCES**

Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth. *The Song of Hiawatha*. Everyman Paperback Classic. Jeffers, Susan Illustrator. Puffin 1996.

For a listing of over 225 puppet and puppet related books and other materials contact The Puppetry Store, a service of Puppeteers of America - <http://www.puppeteers.org/puppstore.html>