

Rag & Bone Puppet Theatre
teacher's guide for

The Last Polar Bears

from the book by Harry Horse



The Last Polar Bears



Table of Contents

Dear Teacher:	3
The Company	4
Synopsis	5
Vocabulary.....	6
Discussion Topics	7
Making the Show	11
Word Search.....	13
Maze	14
Drama & the Arts Curriculum.....	15

The Last Polar Bears adapted by Kathy MacLellan
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Dear Teacher:

We're looking forward to presenting *The Last Polar Bears* for your students.

This study guide has a synopsis of the show, information about the production, and some background on Rag and Bone. If you'd like to know more about our company visit our website at www.ragandbone.ca.

We hope your students and staff enjoy the show!

Yours truly,

Kathy MacLellan & John Nolan



The Company

Founded in 1978 by John Nolan and Kathy MacLellan, Rag & Bone's shows include *The Nightingale*, *A Promise is a Promise*, *The Story of Holly & Ivy*, *Felicity Falls*, *The Light Princess*, *Zoom at Sea*, *The Tempest*, *The Flying Canoe*, *The Last Polar Bears*, *Owl at Home* and *The Doll's House*. Rag & Bone has been awarded a Citation of Excellence in the Art of Puppetry from UNIMA-USA, the international puppetry association.

Kathy MacLellan is an award winning writer, performer and puppet-maker. Kathy has written over fifty television scripts, including episodes of *Under the Umbrella Tree*, *Theodore Tugboat*, and *Mr. Dressup*.

Actor, puppeteer, and designer John Nolan has built sets, props and puppets for stage and television, and has appeared on television and in many theatres, including GCTC, The National Arts Centre, Opera Lyra, Odyssey Theatre and Skeleton Key Theatre. He played Jackson on YTV's *Crazy Quilt*.

Kathy & John have also taught many puppet-making and drama workshops in schools across Ontario.

In the Ottawa area we are accompanied by musician Russell Levia. Russell is a popular Ottawa musician who appears frequently in clubs, folk festivals, and daycare centres. He has been working with Rag & Bone for 20 years.



A Promise is a Promise

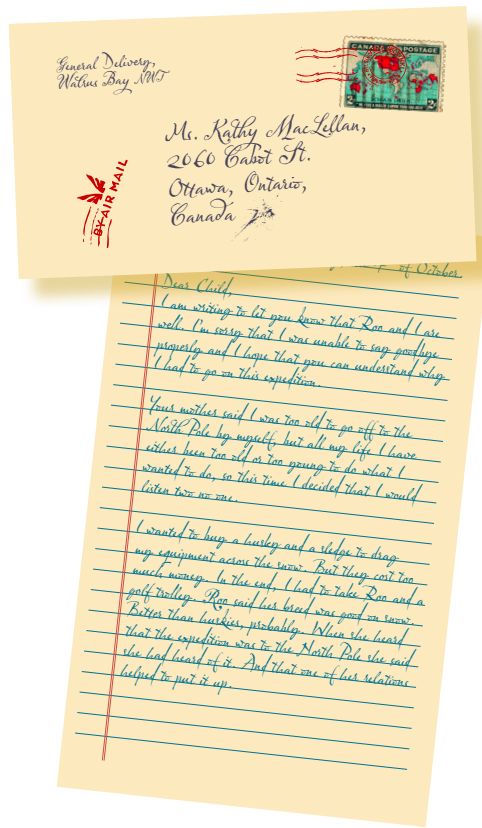


Felicity Falls



The Wind in the Willows

Synopsis



In a series of letters to his grandchild, Grandfather tells of his journey to the North Pole to see how polar bears really live. Instead of huskies and a dog sled, he brings his dog, Roo, and a golf trolley.

On board *The Unsinkable*, Roo is not a very good sailor, so the Captain lets her steer, and gets the mate to sing her a song, with actions. After a terrible storm, they eventually make it to Walrus Bay.

In Walrus Bay, they see penguins and meet wolves. Grandfather's golf ball knocks out a little penguin who soon recovers and moves in with them, in spite of Roo's objections.

Finally, it's time for the long walk to the Gentle Slopes, and up to Great Bear Ridge. Grandfather, Roo and Penguin start off with great enthusiasm but meet a wild snowstorm. All their equipment is blown away. They huddle in an igloo, sharing out the last of their supplies.

The situation is very grim. But then the storm stops, and they crawl out of the igloo into the warm sunshine where they are happy to see wolves, whales, penguins, seals and, best of all, polar bears.



Vocabulary

Sledge
Golf trolley
Huskies
Breed
Portholes
Steering
Aberdeen
Mast
Hammock
Promptly
Wobble
Voyage
Ambition
Overboard
Expedition
Lash
Lifeboat
Grudge
Fidgeted
Telegram
Keen
Provisions
Glacier
Crevasses

Despondent
Melancholy
Enthusiasm
Unconscious
Magnificent
Fierce
Lonely
Lilac
Crimson
Gale
Snowcaps

EXPRESSIONS

Batten down the
hatches
Lump in my
throat
Keep spirits up

ESL WORDS

Penguin
Polar bear
North and South
pole
Pole
Seagulls
Porpoise
Sheep
Ridiculous
Upside down
Right way up
Barrels
Calm
Shark
Arctic foxes
Seals
Walrus
Wolves
Igloo



Discussion Topics



What is an “unreliable narrator”? Give some instances that suggest that Grandfather is an unreliable narrator. (*Penguins in the North Pole, Roo’s comments and opinions, playing golf on the ice caps, the calendar, no longer taking his pills, surviving the journey*)

Are animals better off in a zoo, where they are protected, fed, and looked after, or are they better off in the wild? Write a persuasive paragraph about your opinion.

Give some examples of people being “too old or too young to do what they want”. What can we do to help our grandparents or younger siblings live happier lives?

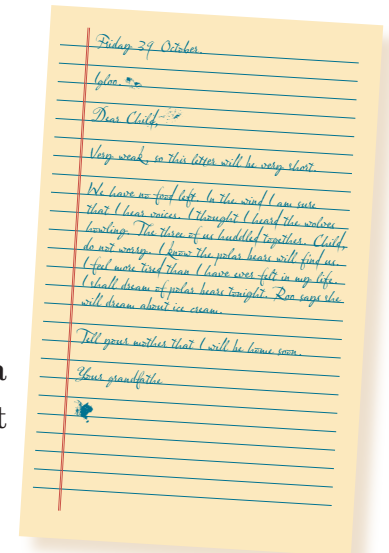
Look at a map to imagine Grandfather’s journey from England to the North Pole. Where is Aberdeen? Where might Walrus Bay be? How long would it really take to walk to the North Pole? (*The Arctic Theme Page from the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has good info.*)

The story is told in a series of letters. Do you write or get letters? What is the more modern way of communicating? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? Write a letter to someone in your family as Grandfather or Penguin

Grandfather sends his sister Aunt Vinnie “a few pounds and a pair of his best golf socks.” What are pounds? How is the British monetary system different from ours? (*see the Wikipedia article on Pound sterling.*)

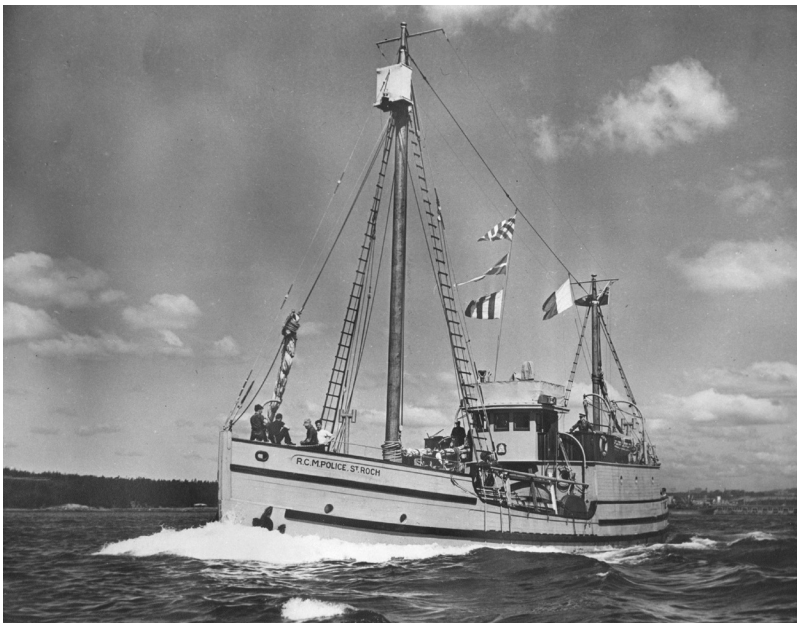
What makes the sky change colours on Grandfather’s journey? Have you ever seen Northern Lights? What causes them? (*See the Wikipedea article on aurora.*)

“The stars seem to shine brighter in the Arctic. Maybe because the air is cleaner.” What is light pollution? Where can you go to see the stars?



Grandfather believes that the snowcaps are melting and the polar bears are disappearing. What is global warming? How does melting ice affect the polar bears? What can we do to protect the environment, and the polar bears? (*See the [Polar Bears International website](#).*)

How many different storytelling techniques can you think of? (*Narration, puppetry, acting, music, video*)
How effective were each of these?



A lot of the video footage comes from the voyage of the St. Roch, an RCMP boat, captained by Henry Larson. This voyage is famous for its navigation of the Northwest Passage. What is the Northwest Passage? (*see [wikipedia article on Northwest Passage](#); information on the St. Roch at [vancouvermaritimemuseum.com](#)*)

The model ship used in the show is a replica of the St. Roch. John spent many happy hours building it and adding details. Have you ever taken a lot of time to make something, just for the fun of making it? How did it make you feel?

Elements of Drama:

The Last Polar Bears is a good opportunity to fulfil some of the knowledge expectations outlined in the *Ontario Arts Curriculum*, such as the elements of drama, the use of music to create mood, and the impact of design elements.

CHARACTERS

How many characters can you remember?

Who are the main characters?
(*Child, Grandfather, Roo; secondary characters are Captain, Ship's mate, Roo's grandfather, the penguin and the wolves*)

CONFLICT

Conflict arises when a character wants something but some problem or obstacle stands between him/her and what he/she wants.



What does Grandfather want? (*To see the polar bears.*)
What stands in his way? (*Lack of money for equipment, lack of family support, old age*) Why? (*His daughter thinks he is too old to go*)

STRUCTURE

All stories have a beginning, in which we find out who the characters are and what they want, a middle, in which a series of actions lead to problems and an end in which problems are solved and the characters' lives are somehow changed.

What action begins *The Last Polar Bears*? (*Grandfather sees polar bears at the zoo*)

What happens in the middle?
(*He and Roo board the Unsinkable, dock at Walrus Bay, and walk up to Great Bear Ridge.*)

How are people changed in the end?
(*Grandfather sees the polar bears and is happy.*)

MOOD

In *The Last Polar Bears*, music adds to the sense of mystery and fun. Can you remember what the music was like at each of the following moments? Can you remember what were you wondering?

The Captain asks the mate to sing a song.
(*Funny music, played on the mandolin: "Forty Years on an Iceberg"*)

The wolves head north.
(*Sad country music: "The Wayward Wind" played on guitar*)

Grandfather sees the polar bears.
(*Slow majestic classical melody played on guitar with special effects: "The Planets" by Gustaf Holtz*)

Can you think of any other moments when the mood changed? (*On board ship, Grandfather is feeling sad and lonely when suddenly the storm hits*)

DIALOGUE

When two characters talk to each other in a play, that conversation is dialogue. Think of some bit of dialogue that:

- Tells us about the characters who are speaking.
- Tells us about what is happening.
- Tells us about other characters.

(*Roo resents the Penguin and Grandfather tells her to be a little more caring of her fellow animals. Roo thinks the Penguin smells like fish.*)

NARRATION

Can you remember a time when a storyteller or a character spoke directly to the audience? (*almost the whole play!*)

ACTION

Something happens. What actions do you remember?

(Grandfather sneaks out of the house. Grandfather's golf ball hits the Penguin in the head. Grandfather puts the Penguin in his bed. Grandfather, Roo and the Penguin walk to Great Bear Ridge.) How did these actions move the story?

DESIGN

How does the set change to create the attic, the ship, Walrus Bay, and the Northern Lights? Do these changes contribute to the mood of the story? *(The attic is safe and homey, the ship is lively and fun, the north is beautiful and mysterious.)*

How does the design of the puppets contribute to our feelings about them? *(The knitted Penguins are soft and cuddly, the wolves, in silhouette, are aloof and mysterious, Roo with her expressive body and long eyelashes, is lively and a bit self-centered)*

How do all these elements of drama work together to create different effects on the audience?

For example: we like the Penguins, we laugh at Roo, we wonder about the wolves, and we admire the Grandfather because he achieves his dream.

For Primary Students

Compare your response with those of your peers. How did you like it? What was your favourite part? What did other people like best?

How could research help you to understand this play? *(Find out about the real animals: penguins, wolves, huskies. Find out about sea voyages and famous Arctic explorers like Franklin, Shackleton, and Henry Larson. Look at a map of the Arctic. Find out about igloos.—watch “How to Build an Igloo” on the NFB site.)*

Draw a picture of your favourite part of the play. Why did you like it best?

Do you wish you could go on an expedition to the North Pole?

What would you do if your Grandfather wanted to go there all by himself?

Do you know anyone who has gone away? Do letters, photos and stories about that person make you remember them and feel close to them?



Making the Show



Creating a new show takes a lot of time. First, we brainstorm ideas about the stories, the characters and the setting. Kathy wrote the script based on a book by Harry Horse and we workshopped it (tried it out) with students at The School of Dance and Propeller Dance.

Then we designed the show. What would the set look like? How could we show the sea voyage, Great Bear Ridge and the snow storms?

Roo and her Grandfather were sewn from fabric and stuffed. Kathy started with a toy pattern, and then altered it to suit the characters.

The penguins are knitted: Kathy made most of them, but we had help from friends, our daughter, and Kathy's mother.

John carved the head for the miniature Grandfather out of wood, and Kathy made the costume.

The model of *The Unsinkable* is actually a model of the *St. Roch*, the famous RCMP ship that sailed through the Northwest Passage in the 1940's. John built the wooden model from a kit.

In rehearsal, we blocked the play: that is, we planned all the movements. Of course, we also had to learn our lines. We also decided what sound effects and musical instruments we'd use in the play.

The way that we work puppets in most of our shows is called open manipulation. The performers are more

like storytellers than puppeteers, working the puppets and narrating the story in full view of the audience. We often describe it as “using puppets to tell stories in the same way that children play with toys”. We hope that our shows encourage kids to use their imaginations and play together in the same way.

The music for *The Last Polar Bears* was created by Russell Levia. Russell plays mandolin, harmonica and electric guitar in this show.

Russell drew on a variety of sources for the music, from folk music to classical. He uses several themes from *Jupiter*, by the English composer Gustav Holst, as well as the melody *Sí Bheag, Sí Mhór* by 17th century Irish composer, Turlough O’Carolan. And then there’s *Forty Years on a Iceberg*, a campfire song. You can listen to *Jupiter* [here](#) and *Sí Bheag, Sí Mhór* [here](#). You can learn *Forty Years on an Iceberg* [here](#).

Russell worked with John and Kathy for the first week so that musical ideas could be developed, John and Kathy rehearsed for two weeks, and finally Russell came back for the fourth week of rehearsal.

More ideas develop and grow once the show is on the road, but those four weeks cement most of the lines, action and sound effects.



Word Search



There are words hiding in the box of letters.
Can you find them? They could be hidden upside-down,
backwards or on a diagonal!

- bear

cabin

captain

cold

expedition

Freddie

gale

glacier

golf

Grandfather

hammock

howl

ice

iceberg

igloo

letters

lifeboat

map

mast

mate

penguin

polar

pole

porpoise

portholes

Roo

sea

sheep

sledge

snow

stars

storm

telegram

unsinkable

Vinnie

voyage

walrus

wind

wolves

zoo

Circle the letters of the list words. The leftover letters
will spell out a mystery phrase.

R	A	P	G	P	W	M	A	P	N	E	L	N	O	Z
O	E	O	O	A	O	R	R	O	F	L	I	K	O	O
S	L	H	L	R	E	L	I	L	R	B	F	C	L	O
F	R	R	T	I	P	T	A	E	E	A	E	O	G	M
T	U	E	C	A	I	O	A	R	D	K	B	M	I	A
S	H	A	T	D	F	L	I	M	D	N	O	M	E	S
G	L	E	E	T	C	D	W	S	I	I	A	A	R	T
G	A	P	G	S	E	A	N	O	E	S	T	H	E	N
E	X	L	X	D	X	L	P	A	H	N	P	L	G	R
E	I	C	E	B	E	R	G	T	R	U	E	W	A	S
P	O	R	T	H	O	L	E	S	A	G	E	O	Y	H
N	I	B	A	C	O	D	S	I	R	I	T	N	O	E
S	T	O	R	M	R	T	R	A	E	B	N	S	V	E
C	O	L	D	N	I	W	M	N	I	U	G	N	E	P
I	O	S	E	V	L	O	W	V	I	N	N	I	E	N

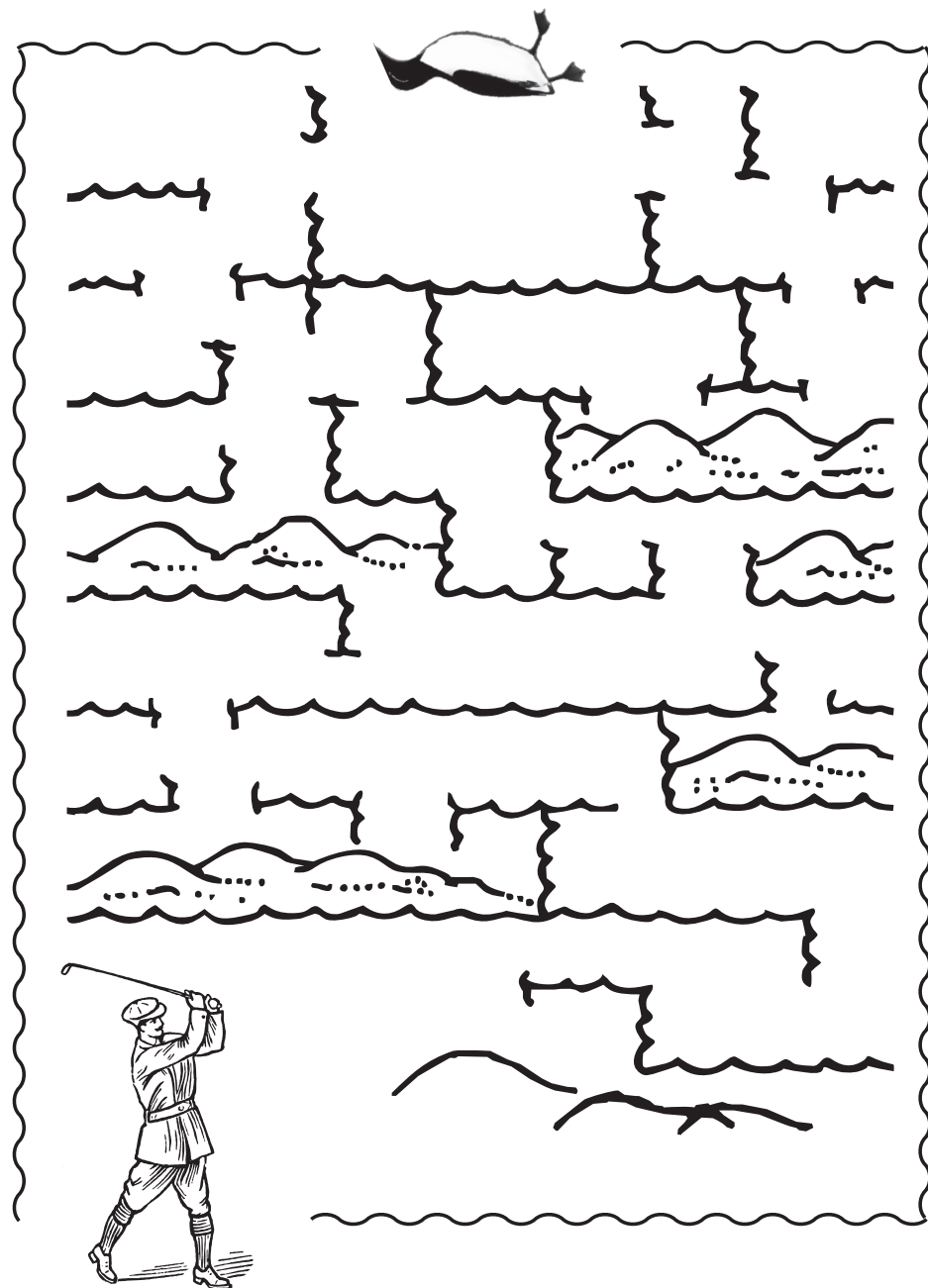
Grandfather wanted to see the polar bears “swimming
amongst the icebergs and playing in the snow,” so he
and Roo went on:

(three words)

Help Grandfather find
his golf ball



*(and the
penguin!)*



Drama & the Arts Curriculum

The Arts Curriculum requires the development of knowledge and critical thinking about the arts. Here are some arts curriculum expectations. Teachers, we'd love to hear some of the ways you connect our shows to the arts curriculum. Talk to us after the show, or send us an email at mailbox@ragandbone.ca.

GRADE 8

Review drama performances. Critique the use of elements and techniques. Analyse and explain the meaning and effect of the work. Describe some aspects of the historical context of music.

GRADE 7

Review and evaluate a drama performance. Explain the significance of the materials, props, costumes, and symbols used. Describe the history, construction, and use of a musical instrument.

GRADE 6

Present and defend their analysis of a performance, focusing on the ways in which various elements of drama are used together. Identify the significance of symbols in dramatic explorations.

GRADE 5

Explain how elements of drama work together to create different effects on the audience. Describe how the various elements of music are used to create mood.

GRADE 4

Identify and describe how the principles of variety and unity are used in drama and dance productions. Explain the effects of different musical choices.

GRADE 3

Identify effective uses of drama in performances and compare their own responses with those of their peers. Explain how their understanding of drama has been increased through research.

GRADE 2

Communicate understanding of drama through discussion, writing, movement, and visual art. Identify specific aspects that were effective. Explain the effects of different musical choices.

GRADE 1

Describe how the experiences of characters in performances relate to their own experiences. Recognize that mood can be created through music. Describe how artists use design to create mood.

JK & SK

Name different elements in performances. Demonstrate knowledge gained through exposure to the arts. Identify feelings evoked by art. Communicate their responses to music, art, drama, and dance.

MORE RESOURCES

Our PDF booklet of drama and puppet ideas is available [on our website](#). It has activities for primaries and juniors, and also includes language curriculum links.

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