

Rag & Bone Puppet Theatre

Teacher's guide for



A Promise is a Promise

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Arctic Ice, U.S. Geological Survey

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A PROMISE IS A PROMISE

Dramatized by Kathy MacLellan

based on *A Promise is a Promise*, ©Robert Munsch & Michael Kusugak

Annick Press Ltd., 15 Patricia Ave., Willowdale, ON M2M 1H9

A Note to Teachers

This Study Guide offers ideas for preparation and follow-up activities relating to Rag & Bone's production of *A Promise is a Promise*.

It includes a synopsis of the story, some notes about the production, and a little background on Rag and Bone. You'll find activity pages, and questions for class discussion: both simple comprehension questions that teachers can use to check their student's grasp of the main ideas in the story, and discussion topics to initiate a deeper look at the play's themes, and at the Arctic.

A Promise is a Promise is first and foremost a good story, but we hope it will spur your students' interest in the people of the North as it did ours. Our brief contact with the North during our preparation for this show left us with a deep admiration for the Inuit people.

The story of the Inuit people, and their vibrant, living culture is in many ways one of the most fascinating and inspiring stories Canada has to tell. It is a story that is beyond the scope of this production, but we hope that the some of you might follow our production with an introduction to Inuit life for your students.



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.



The Last Polar Bears



Felicity Falls



The Wind in the Willows

Synopsis

ALLASHUA, a little girl of about 11, lives with her family in a modern day Arctic town. She goes with her family on a fishing trip “out on the land.”

As soon as they arrive, her parents begin to unpack, but Allashua is so impatient to go fishing that they allow her to go ahead, as long as she goes fishing in the lake, and not in the sea. She promises them that she will not go near the dangerous cracks in the sea ice....But Allashua does not keep her promise. She goes to the sea and fishes in one of the cracks in the ice.

Allashua's parents have told her about the mythical *Qallupilluit*, female monsters who grab children who go too near the sea ice without their parents. She doesn't believe in them, but they do come, and drag her down beneath the ice. In desperation, Allashua promises that if they let her go, she will come back and bring them all her brothers and sisters. The *Qallupilluit* agree and let her go.

When Allashua's parents hear what has happened, they don't scold. They insist that she must keep her promise, but the mother has a plan...Allashua invites the greedy *Qallupilluit* to a goodbye party for her children. While the *Qallupilluit* are busy at the party, Allashua takes her brothers and sister to the sea ice, but, of course, the *Qallupilluit* are not there. Allashua has kept her promise, and the children are safe.



photo: Fred Catterol

About this Production

A PROMISE IS A PROMISE was written by Robert Munsch and Michael Kusugak. It is based on an Inuit legend, and was one of the first children's books to be written and published in Inuktituk. It is a book of extreme importance in the North.

Our production of *A Promise is a Promise* is, really, a form of storytelling with puppets. Imagine that children are acting out the story with dolls. We tried to keep the image of children playing in mind as we designed and staged the play. We felt that simple home-made objects and uncomplicated staging could allow the children to become engaged imaginatively in the story. We appear in full view of the audience as we work the puppets, and freely move from being narrators to being puppeteers.

This style of working puppets, in which the audience sees the puppeteers, is called open manipulation. It may seem unusual to people who expect a traditional puppet stage, but it is actually becoming quite a popular style around the world, and especially in Canada.



The Characters in the Story



Allashua: a girl of about 11.

Qallupilluit: Female sea monsters, like trolls.

Killiktee: Allashua's brother, about 9.

Elisapee: Her 6 six year old sister.

Syola: Her 3 year old sister.

Jamessie: Her 6 month old brother.

Kivioq: The dog.

Mother

Father

Raven

Glossary

THESE INUIT WORDS aren't necessary to understand the play, but children might enjoy learning them.

Aculuk: a term of endearment, used towards babies.

Amoutik: a woman's parka with a hood for carrying a child, also known as a packing parka.

Inukshuk: literally, large man—an arrangement of rocks roughly in the shape of a man.

Komatik: a sled.

Nanook: a polar bear.

Qallunaat: a white person.

Qallupilluit: female troll-like creatures. They grab children who go too near the cracks in the ice without their parents. They are also said to be responsible for any articles that go missing near the water.

Tulugak: Raven

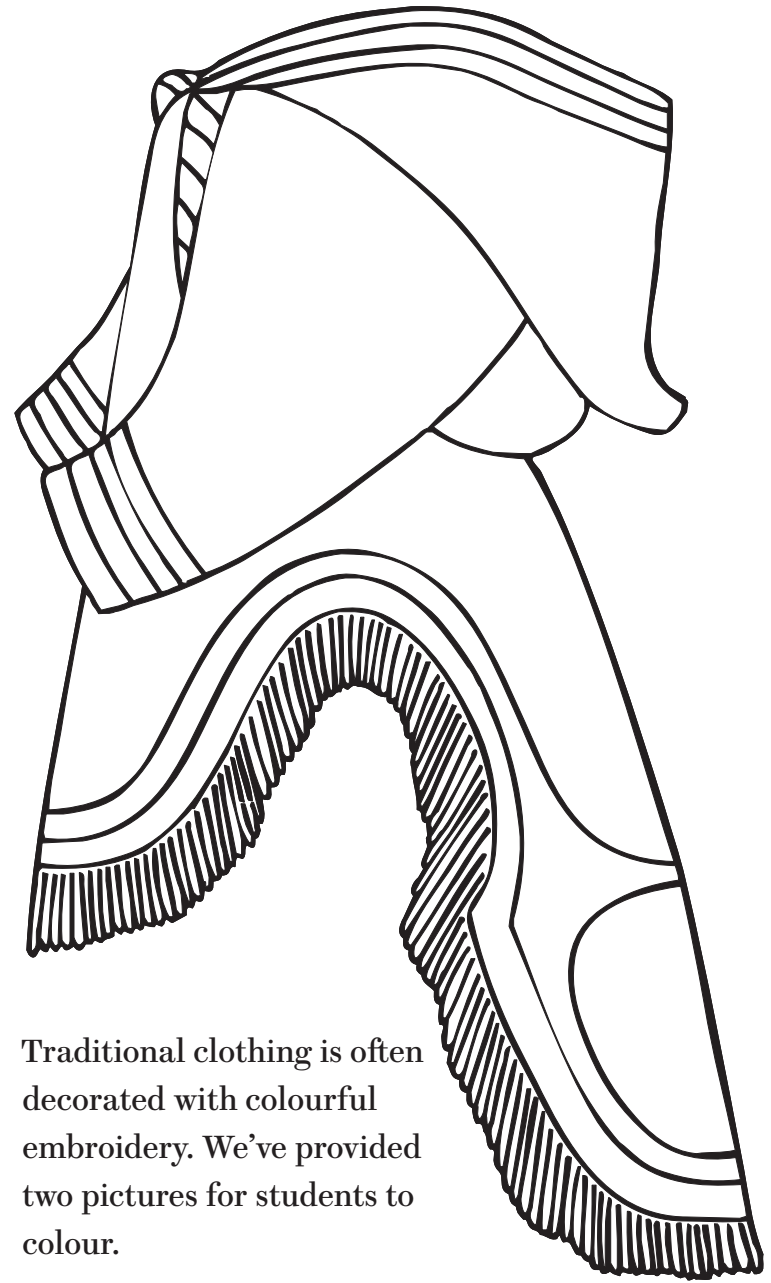
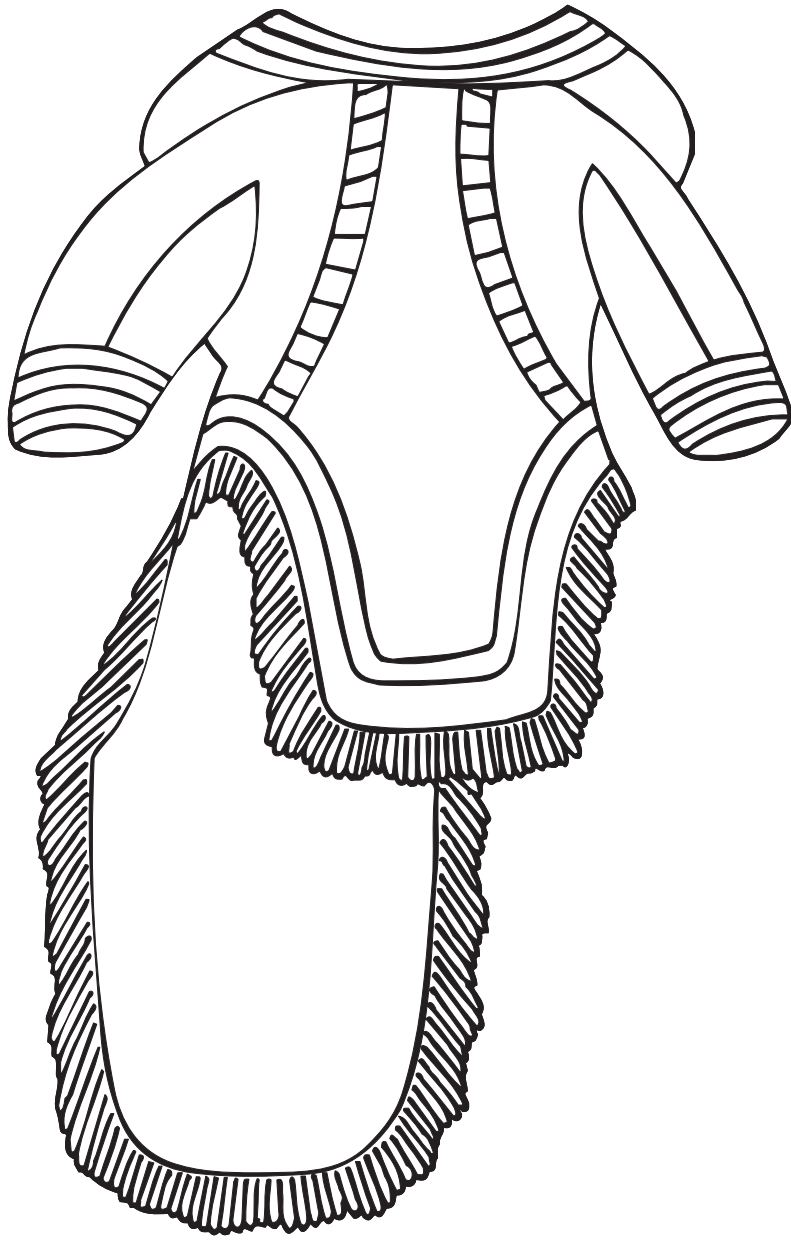
Ullakut: "Good Morning."

Ulu: A multi-purpose tool, consisting of a stone or metal blade set in a short handle—traditionally an antler handle. It is used to cut meat, scrape hides, and tailor clothing.



With Michael Kusugak. Photo: Paul de Broeck

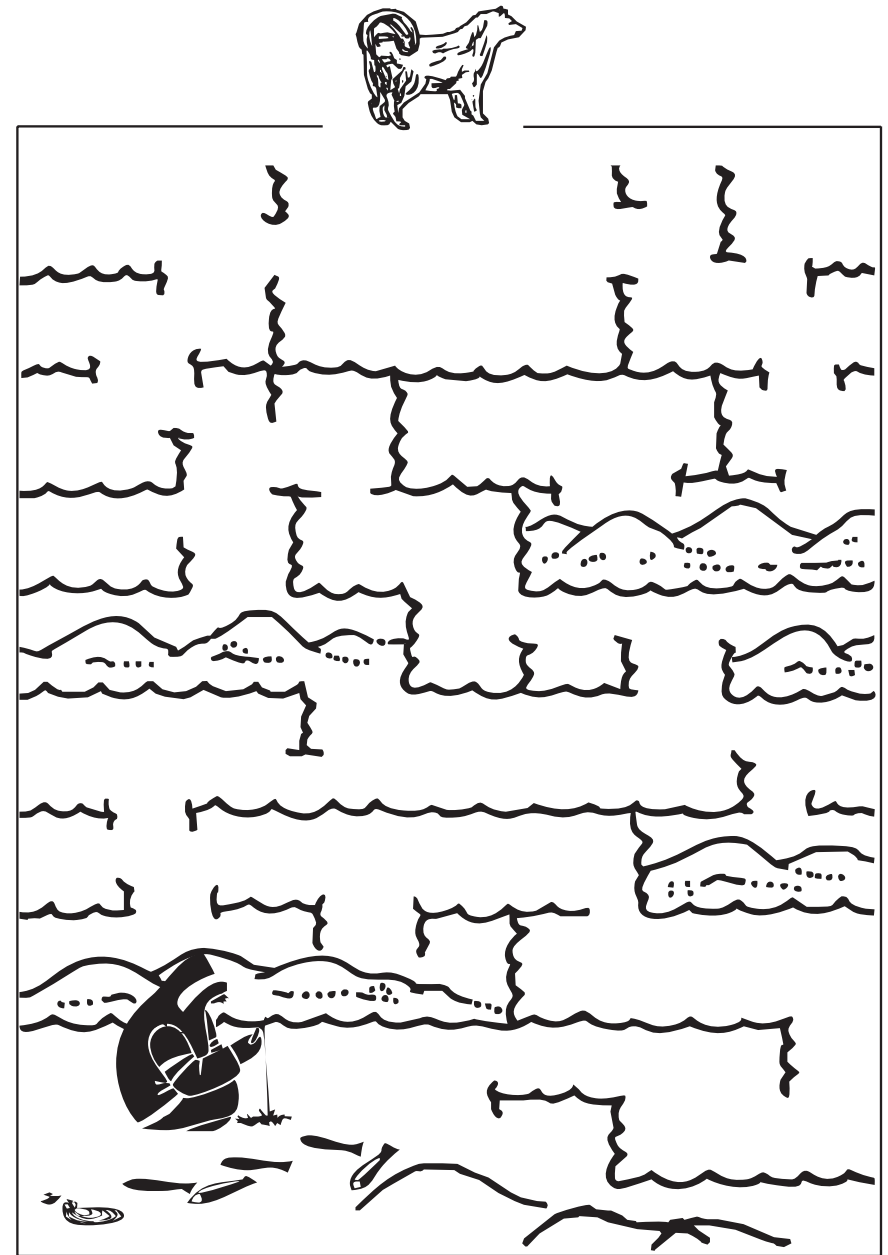
An Amoutik



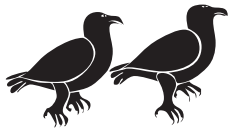
Traditional clothing is often decorated with colourful embroidery. We've provided two pictures for students to colour.

An Icy Maze

Can you help Kivioq find his way past the cracks in the sea ice to Allashua?



Discussion Questions



- Where is Allashua's family going at the beginning of the story?

On a fishing trip.

- Why do Qallupilluit grab children?

They are so greedy they will grab anything.

- How does the mother carry her baby?

In the Amout, or pouch, in the back of her coat, or Amoutik.

- Why doesn't the dog pull the sled?

One dog can't pull a sled; a whole team of dogs would be necessary. Most northern families have skidoos for pulling sleds.

- Why is it dangerous for children to go too close to cracks in the ice?

The cracks can suddenly get much bigger and the children could fall in the cold ocean water.

- What does Allashua promise her parents?

She promises to fish in a lake, and not the sea.

- What does she promise the Qallupilluit?

She promises to bring them all her brothers and sisters.

- What does Allashua learn about promises?

To keep her promises, and not to make promises that she can't keep.

- Why did Allashua call the Qallupilluit nasty names?

She didn't believe they were real.

- How did Allashua's parents warm her up?

By getting under some blankets with her.

- How did her brothers and sisters help?

By bringing her cups of hot tea.

- What was the mother's plan?

To keep the Qallupilluit busy at the party while her children went down to the cracks in the sea ice.

- Why did it work?

Qallupilluit are greedy, and they'd never had tea or candy or dancing before.

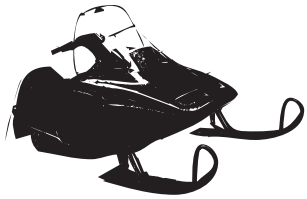
- Was the family afraid to go fishing again? Was Allashua afraid? Why?

The family wasn't afraid, because the Qallupilluit promised never to take children who were with their parents, but Allashua was still afraid because "she had been too close to the Qallupilluit."



- Why did Allashua want to fish on the sea ice?

The cracks in the sea ice mean you don't have to chop a hole through the ice, and, depending on the time of year, the fishing can be better.



Allashua went onto the sea ice because she didn't believe in the Qallupilluit—she hadn't seen them on TV. In addition to its message concerning the importance of keeping your word, and heeding your parent's advice, A Promise is a Promise is a reminder to respect the old traditions.

The following questions could lead to a class discussion about the value of tradition and culture in modern life.

- How were the sleds pulled in the old days?
- What does Allashua's family use?
- The Inuit word for dogsled is komatik. In what way are snowmobiles more convenient than a komatik?
- What disadvantages might there be to snowmobiles?
- The coat that Allashua's mother wears is called an amoutik. It has extra room in the back so she can carry Jamessie, the baby. If it is cold, she can put her hood up over both of them.
- Although the amoutik is a traditional garment, but it is still worn by many northern women today. Why?

- In what ways is it better than a stroller in a northern climate?
- Why did Inuit parents tell their children about Qallupilluit? Can you think of any other monsters like them?
- Are there any other mythical figures you can think of that we still refer to as if they were real?



Making the Show

THE STORY

The first step is to select a story. We look for a story with a good plot, interesting design possibilities, and a strong theme. *A Promise is a Promise* was suggested to us by an elementary school teacher.



Design sketch

We wanted our presentation of the north to be accurate, so we began our work on the show with what we called the research tour. We toured Baffin Island with another show of ours, *Tug of War*. Performing *Tug of War* gave us a chance to meet and talk to lots of people — children and adults.

The trip also gave us a feeling for the Inuit people, their lives, their art, and their landscape. All of these over a unique perspective on what is often called the “soul of Canada”. Of course, a brief trip can’t tell you everything about a place, and we also read lots of books and talked to lots of people to round out our knowledge.

Then we spent a lot of time developing ideas about the plot, the characters and the setting. Kathy wrote the script.

THE PUPPETS

The longest part of the process was making the puppets. Before a puppet can be built, it must be designed. How big should it be? How should the puppeteer hold the puppet?

Once the general style of the puppets was determined, we thought about the appearance of each character, and what special actions each character must perform. After the design work was done, we started making the puppets. John made the heads, while Kathy made the bodies and costumes.



Sketch for Dad

To make the costumes, Kathy used a process called draping. The general shape of the costume is cut out in inexpensive fabric and these pieces are pinned on the body and altered until the desired result is achieved. Then these pieces are used as a pattern in the final fabric.

The puppet heads were modeled in clay, and then cast in plaster. Plaster was poured over the clay face, and then left to dry, forming a sort of plaster bowl. Once the plaster was dry, the clay was removed, leaving a backward, or negative, impression of the face inside the plaster bowl, or mold. We then carefully built up layers of papier maché inside this negative mold: first glue and tissue paper, then glue and heavier paper, and finally glue with strips of cotton. The papier maché was left to dry and then removed from the mold. Finally, the heads were given handles, and painted.

MUSIC

Russell Levia performs the music for *A Promise* is a Promise, but it was composed for us by Nathan Curry. It combines traditional musical sounds with modern instruments.

Nathan made the some of the instruments for the show, including the Inuit frame drum.

The “sound of snow blowing over the ice” is provided by an Indonesian instrument called a rainmaker. Nathan drilled a large bamboo tube with dozens of holes, into which he inserted bamboo skewers. Then he poured lentils and pinto beans into the tube and closed the ends with leather. The beans trickle across the skewers.

The soundscape is rounded out with jaw harps, bones, synthesizer and electric guitar.

REHEARSAL

The third stage was to rehearse the show, and add the music. In rehearsal, we had to decide how the puppets should talk, and what actions they should perform. We blocked the play; that is, we planned all the movements. Of course, we also had to learn our lines.

After talking to us about musical ideas, Nathan arrived with a variety of musical instruments, and worked with us for a week, so that the music could be developed. Then we rehearsed with the puppets for a week, while Nathan worked on the music.

As Russell rehearsed the music, he altered and refined it to fit more closely with the action. More ideas develop and grow once the show gets on the road, but most of the music and movements are set in rehearsal.

Finally, when the show was all ready, we had to learn how to set up and take down the show quickly—we didn’t want to be puzzling over the set-up in a school gym on Monday morning.

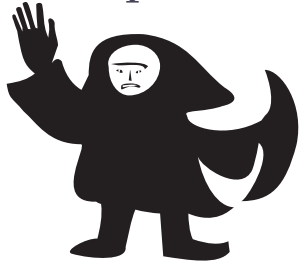
We had to take great care in planning where each puppet and prop is placed. There’s nothing worse than not being able to find your puppet in the middle of the play!

PLANNING THE TOUR

The last job, which actually had to be done at the same time as the other steps, was the administration: writing this study guide, planning a brochure to send out to schools, and planning other pr material. We then mailed brochures, contacted potential sponsors by phone, and arranged the tour!



Recipe for a Puppet Show



Qullupilu with ulu

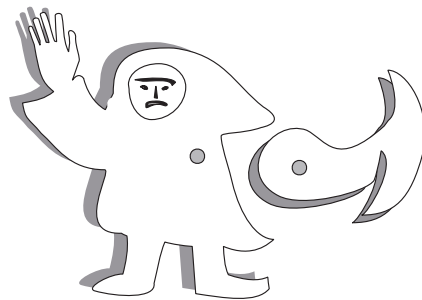
Why not make a puppet show of your own? Students could do their own version of A Promise is a Promise or another story. Here's how to make some simple cardboard puppets.

INGREDIENTS:

Newsprint, pencil, cardboard, two straightened coat hangers per puppet (rods), two brass paper fasteners per puppet, scraps of fabric, glue, crayons, markers, scissors, hole punch, wire cutters and pliers or vise grips.

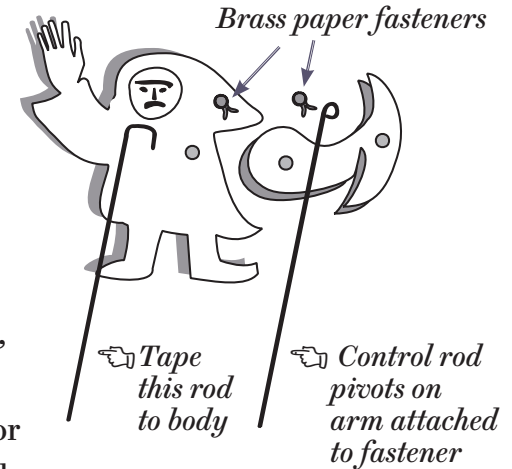
METHOD:

- Draw a design on newsprint. The puppet should be about 6 inches tall. Choose one part (leg, arm, head, whatever) to be the moveable part.
- Cut out the design. Cut off the moveable part. Cut out “windows” where you want the light to shine through. These windows can be covered with coloured acetate if you like.
- Trace both parts of the design onto cardboard. When you trace your moveable part onto cardboard, add an extra bit (about the size of a quarter) to make an overlap.



- Hold the pieces together, lining up the main body and the moveable part so that the extra piece overlaps.
- Punch through both halves with a hole punch. Use a brass paper fastener to connect the two parts of the puppets.
- Cut the hooks and twisted wire off the coat hangers and straighten the remaining pieces with pliers. These are the puppet's rods. Now, bend a U shape on the end of one rod. This is the support rod. Tape this one onto the puppet's body.

- Bend an small eye on the end of the other rod. Use a brass paper fastener to attach this second rod through the hole in the moveable part.



- With crayons or markers, draw the face and other details. To make clothes or fur, glue fabric on the body.
- Use a table top, cardboard box, or the floor for a stage. Sets and props can be made with cardboard and cardboard boxes.
- Have fun!

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With Michael Kusugak. Photo: Paul de Broeck

*We would like to acknowledge the support of The City of Ottawa, First Air, The Canada Council
& The Ontario Arts Council, an agency of the Government of Ontario*