

RAG & BONE PUPPET THEATRE

# *Tug of War*



*or*

☛ LOVE CONQUERS ALL ☛



*Dear Teacher:*

This study guide offers some ideas for classroom work before and after your students see *Tug of War*. It includes a synopsis of the show, discussion topics, a crossword puzzle, and background on the story and the production. Feel free to photocopy any of this guide for use with your class.

Thank you for inviting us to your school to present *Tug of War*. We hope students and staff enjoy the show!

Yours truly,

*Kathy MacLellan & John Nolan*

## *The Company*

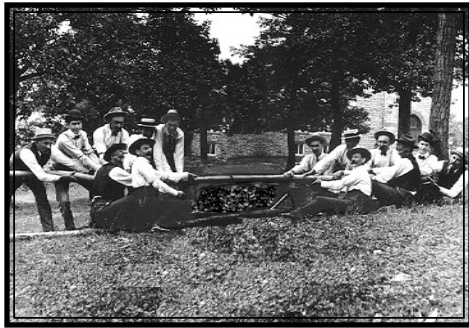
Founded in 1978 by John Nolan and Kathy MacLellan, Rag & Bone's shows produced include *The Snow Queen*, *The Nativity*, *The Cow Show*, *The Nightingale*, *Tug of War*, *A Baubchan in the Family*, *A Promise is a Promise*, *The Weaving of a Dream*, *The Story of Holly & Ivy*, *Felicity Falls*, *Macbeth*, and *The Light Princess*. 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 playwright, script-writer, performer and puppet-maker. She has written over 50 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 for many years, and has appeared on television and in many theatres, including the Guelph Spring Festival, Great Canadian Theatre company, The National Arts Centre and Opera Lyra. He plays Jackson on YTV's *Crazy Quilt*.

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

Musician RUSSELL LEVIA is a popular Ottawa musician who appears frequently in clubs, folk festivals, and even daycare centres. He plays a wide variety of instruments, from guitar and mandolin to accordion and hurdy-gurdy.



## *Synopsis*

*Tug of War* is inspired by the biblical story of the judgement of Solomon. We have set it in the imaginary land of Dragonia, which is very like turn of the century Russia. It begins with a careless, foolish King, a mean, snobby Queen, and a revolution. The King is killed, the Queen escapes: but she is so busy packing all her dresses and matching hats that she forgets her baby, the infant Prince Stani.

The soldiers of the revolution, lead by General Vladimir, want to kill little Stani, because he is the heir to the throne. The only person brave enough to defy Vladimir and protect the baby is Marya, a servant girl. She looks after the boy for three years, risking her life for him several times, and then, suddenly, the revolution is over.

The nasty Queen comes back. She needs little Stani to reclaim her former wealth and position. But Marya insists the child is hers. She loves him and he calls her Mama.

Solomon must decide: which is the true mother? He suggests the two women have a tug of war, with Stani in the middle. Whoever pulls the hardest will win. Marya won't even try. Solomon declares that the true mother is Marya.



*Solomon*



*Marya*



*King Dimitri*



*Prince Stani*



*Mrs. Ivanov*

## *The Characters*

- Marya: a servant girl who works in the palace. Sensible, practical
- Alexei: a soldier, Marya's boyfriend
- General Vladimir: the head of the Royal army.
- King Dimitri: King of Dragonia, a selfish and foolish ruler.
- Queen Olga Tatiana: Queen of Dragonia, self-centred and vain.
- Prince Stanislaw (Stani): son of the King and Queen. Six months old at the beginning of the story, later three and a half.
- Mr. Ivanov: an expert on birds. Kind, but not farsighted.
- Mrs.. Ivanov: his wife, a pro-revolutionary, idealistic and enthusiastic.
- Nicholas: a farmer.
- Elizabeth: his wife.
- First Soldier: Vladimir's assistant.
- Sergei: Marya's brother, a miller. Kind and sympathetic.
- Vera: Sergei's wife, sickly, bossy, bad tempered, hates children.
- Second Soldier: An envoy from Olga Tatiana.
- Judge Solomon: Judge, and adviser to King Dimitri. Wise and gentle.

## *Follow-up Questions*



### *The Engagement*

- Marya and Alexei are both very busy in this scene. What is each one doing? Why is it so difficult for Alexei to ask Marya to marry him?

### *The Royal Baby*

- What is on the King's mind on this special day? What is on the Queen's mind? Are they good rulers?
- Why does Solomon warn the King? How does the King react?



### *The Royal Baby*

### *The Takeover*

- What two things are most important to the Queen as she escapes? What does she forget? How does this confirm what we already know about the Queen?
- Vladimir says "From now on, the government work will be done neatly, correctly and on time." Are these the most important qualities for a government? What other qualities might be more important?

### *The Escape*

- Why is it difficult for Marya to decide whether to do the good thing or the sensible thing? In this case, which is which?

### *The Ivanovs*

- Mrs. Ivanov thinks that Dragonia would be a perfect world if everyone would move to the country and farm, whether or not they want to. Is this a good idea? What does she think Vladimir should do with people who refuse to go?

### *The Farm Couple*

- Why does Elizabeth tell Vladimir about the baby? What else could she have done? Why do we feel sorry for Elizabeth?
- In what way are Vladimir's plans sensible but not kind?



*A Farm Couple*

### *Marya's Brother Sergei and his wife, Vera*

- Vera says: "What's she doing here? She must have quit her job. Well, she can't stay here. We don't have room. Especially for people who won't work." Is that why Marya doesn't have a job? Is she lazy? What does this statement tell us about Vera?

### *The Revolution Ends*

- Marya waits for Alexei for three years. How do we know that she thinks of him often? Why doesn't she mail the letters?

### *Alexei's Return*

- Alexei misunderstands Marya's situation. What does he think? Why?
- What lie does Marya tell the soldier? Why?

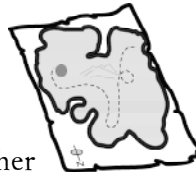
### *The Trial*

- Who had a harder three years, the Queen or Marya?
- Why does the Queen want Stani back?
- Solomon has to decide which is the true mother. Which is the real mother? Which is the better mother? Is Solomon's decision good, sensible, or both? How does this decision show the famous "Wisdom of Solomon"?

### *General questions*

- Almost every person in this story has to make a difficult decision. Name some of these. Why are they difficult?
- Do you know anyone who had to make a difficult decision? Have you ever had a hard time deciding what was the right thing to do?
- Marya gave up a lot of things for Stani, and risked even more things. How do we know that in the end Marya felt that Stani was worth it?

- At the end of the play, Solomon suggests Dragonia be ruled by a democracy. At the beginning of the play, the country had a monarchy. In between, there was a military dictatorship. What do these terms mean?
- *Tug of War* is based on a story from the bible called *The Judgement of Solomon*. When Vladimir says he wants every male child under the age of two brought to him, it reminds us of another story in the bible, the part when King Herod is looking for the baby Jesus. Can you think of a bible story about a baby floating down the river? Read all of these stories. How are they like *Tug of War*? How are they different?
- Draw a map of Dragonia. Show where the castle is, the river where the Ivanovs camp, the farm house, the mountain, the rope bridge and Sergei's house on the other side of the mountain. Don't forget to give a scale to show distances. You could also show latitude, longitude and elevation.



*Clues:*

Across

2. Where Marya and Stani stayed at Sergei's.
4. Lift and move.
6. The short form of Vladimir.
9. Opposite of lose.
11. Toward.
12. Opposite of down.
13. A servant girl.
14. A sound of satisfaction.
17. Opposite of peace.
19. Game played with a rope.
20. Clean with a broom.
22. Same as 11 across.
23. Opposite of bottom.
24. In favour of. Mrs. Ivanov was \_\_\_ revolutionary.
26. Examination of facts in a court.
28. Female monarch.
30. Plus.
31. Is concerned about.
34. Expression of affection.
35. Moved very quickly.
38. Tear.
40. Mail.
42. This broke in the play.
43. Fix with a needle and thread.
44. Selection.
47. Opposite of girl.
48. Prefer.
49. Actually.
50. First person to die in the play.

Down

1. The Ivanov's wanted to arrange one for Stani.
2. Mr. Ivanov was one.
3. Article for apple.
4. What baby Stani might do.
5. Call noisily and rudely.
7. Dragonia was \_\_\_ war.
8. Person who makes decisions.
10. Rule .
13. Wedding.
15. The Queen's favourite clothing.
16. Allowed.
18. What you hold in a tug of war.
20. Alexei's profession.
21. Opposite of rich.
25. Colour of the King and Queen's clothes.
27. Same as 3 down.
28. Argument.
29. Sergei was Marya's \_\_\_\_\_.
31. What the King loved to play.
32. A white cloth was used in the play when it was \_\_\_\_\_.
33. Untruth.
36. Grow old.
37. Opposite of old.
39. Put in a suitcase.
41. Dirt.
42. Stani, at the start of the play.
45. Opposite of she.
46. Opposite of out.

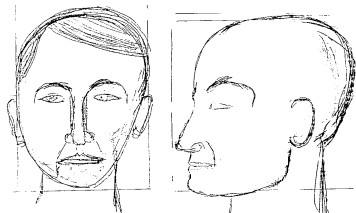


## *A Rag & Bone Production*

How did you make the puppets? How long did it take? How long does it take to rehearse? These questions are frequently the first questions students ask in the question period that follows a Rag & Bone performance.

The first step is to select a story. Once that is done, John and Kathy spend a lot of time developing ideas about the plot, the characters and the setting before Kathy actually sits down to write the script. This first step probably takes about a month.

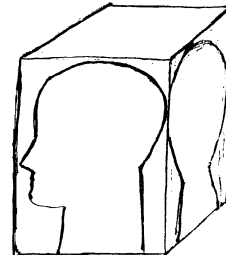
Step two, the longest part of the process, can take six months or more: making the puppets. John designs the faces and the bodies, making lots of sketches. He then proceeds to make the heads.



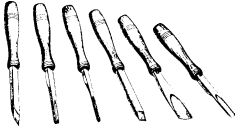
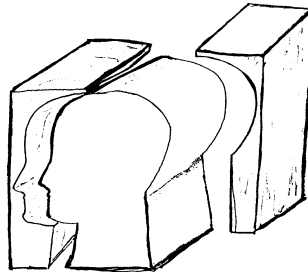
face on.

The *Tug of War* puppet heads are carved from wood. John began by drawing each face twice: once in profile, and once

The drawings are then traced onto a block of wood as shown here, the profile on one side and the front on the front.



The shapes are then cut out on a band saw. (Once the front is cut out, he uses a glue gun to lightly glue the pieces back together so that he can cut out the profile).



Then he uses a variety of carving tools to shape the heads.

Meanwhile, Kathy was making the puppet bodies, and their costumes. The puppet bodies are made of leather and stuffed tubes of fabric. The costume designs are first tried in inexpensive cotton fabric, then this fabric is used as a pattern for the final costume. Details on the costumes were added with a careful look at photographs and drawings of people of the period.



*This drawing inspired the Queen's costume*

Finally, John and Kathy worked together to assemble the puppets, checking their heights, how well their feet are balanced (crucial if the puppets are going to be able to walk) and the length of their arms. Then the puppets were painted, varnished, and given handles. Each puppet head

took John about two weeks, each body and costume took Kathy another two weeks.

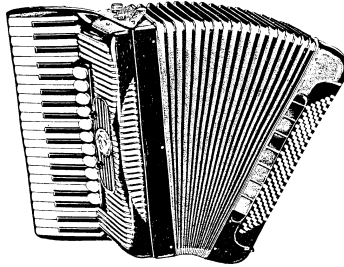
The third stage is to rehearse the show, and add the music. Music for *The Cow Show*, *The Nightingale* and *Tug of War* was written by Brian Searson. He worked with John and Kathy for the first week, so that musical ideas could be developed, then John and Kathy rehearsed with the puppets for two weeks, and Brian 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 action and sound effects. Several years ago, Russell Levia joined the company as our musician. Russell is a well known Ottawa based singer, songwriter and instrumentalist. He rehearses each show with us for about two weeks before his first performance.

A fourth step which actually occurs concurrently is the administrative tasks which John and Kathy work at together: writing this study guide, planning a brochure to send out to schools, and other PR material such as photos and posters which will be needed for public performances. We then mail brochures, contact potential sponsors by phone, and arrange a tour!

## *The Musical Instruments*

### *Accordion*

The accordion is a keyboard instrument with a bellows which forces air across a series of reeds. The accordion, concertina, harmonium and harmonica are all part of a group of “free reed” instruments developed in Europe during the 19th century.

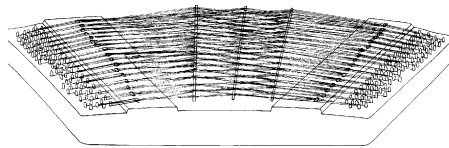


### *Tongue Drum*

This percussion instrument is made entirely from wood. Six tongue like pieces are mounted over a hollow chamber. Each wooden tongue is a different length and as a result each one produces a different pitch when struck by a rubber mallet. This is a modern instrument but its construction was inspired by the sound of African hollow log drums.

### *Hammer Dulcimer*

This instrument is similar to a zither. The strings are struck with small “hammers” tipped with leather.



## *Sources for the Story*

*Tug of War* is based on stories from several sources. There is a very old Chinese folk tale in which two women, both wives of the same man, each claim to be the mother of one child. The true mother is found when a circle is drawn on the ground, the child placed in the middle, and each woman instructed to pull the child out of the circle. The woman who refused to participate is named the true mother.

Bertolt Brecht adapted this story when he wrote *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in the early 1940's. In his hands, the story became an allegory about the ownership of land after a war. Brecht changed the story so that the stepmother is the one who truly loves the child, and who will keep him at the end of the story. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* ends with the words:

*But you who have listened to the Story of the Chalk Circle  
Take note what men of old concluded  
That what there is shall go to those who are good for it,  
Children to the motherly, that they prosper,  
Carts to good drivers, that they be driven well,  
The valley to the waterers, that it yield fruit.*

Most of us, however, are most familiar with the biblical story of the *Judgement of Solomon* (1 Kings 3:16–28). In this story, wise Solomon, encountering the same dispute between two women, threatens to cut the child in half. The

true mother would rather give up the child than see it die, and as a result, the child is awarded to her.

In developing *Tug of War*, we took elements from all of these sources, and we worked other biblical images into the story as well: Herod calling for the death of all children under the age of two (Matthew 2:16), and the birth of Moses (Exodus 2:10).

*Tug of War* is also inspired by an historical event: The Russian Revolution. The story of the revolution seemed to work very well with the events of our story. We were also very taken with the design possibilities of Russia at the turn of the century: costumes, architecture, music, etc. It is almost a fairy tale time, and yet it is the beginning of the modern era, the decline of the nuclear family, etc.

It might be interesting for your class to have a look at some of these stories which inspired our production, either before or after you see the play.

*Crossword solution*

				A					B	A	R	N			C	A	R	R	Y			
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||| *We gratefully acknowledge The Ontario Arts Council and  
 The Canada Council for their support of this production of  
 Tug of War.*

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