

# Study Guide For Teachers

## Catskill Puppet Theatre

In  
*Willow Girl*

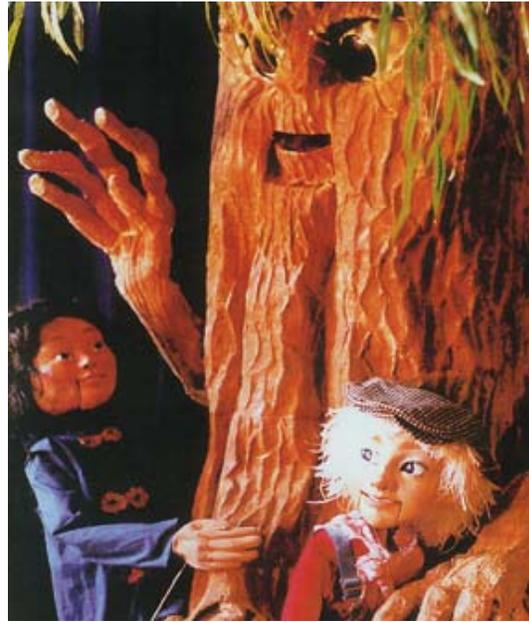
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### LEARNING GOALS

- To acquaint young children with the ancient art form of puppetry.
- To teach the history of the Gold Rush and the pioneer spirit.
- To teach about the immigrant populations in California at the time of the Gold Rush and the discrimination they faced.

Grades: K - 6

### VOCABULARY

**Puppet:** an inanimate figure that is made to move by human effort for the entertainment of an audience.

**Puppeteer:** a person who uses puppets to act, tell stories, teach, or entertain.

**Ventriloquist:** a puppeteer who can use his/her voice so that it appears to be coming from a puppet called a dummy.

**Puppet stage:** a space specially created to show the puppets and hide the puppeteer.

**Hand puppet:** a puppet worked from below with the operator's hands inside a cloth body. **Rod puppet:** a puppet worked from below with arms controlled with thin rods. Muppets are examples of rod puppets.

**Shadow puppet:** a flat puppet projected onto a screen.

**String puppet:** a puppet worked from above, using strings.

**Marionette:** another word for string puppet.

### ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The *Willow Girl* is the story of a young Chinese girl whose family immigrates to California during the Gold Rush, around the year 1850. The play uses fantasy and drama to highlight some of the problems that a child might face while experiencing cultural discrimination as an immigrant in a small community. In *The Willow Girl*, Dauchin, the main character, brings a seed from China and plants it in the New World. The seed has been given to her by a dear friend, an old peasant woman. When she plants it, a magical willow tree grows that comes to life and helps her build a friendship with the Irish family in the cabin next door. The play provides an opportunity to discuss many important historical issues as well as social issues that are relevant to children in today's world and our country's future.

In *Willow Girl* you will hear Irish music in the background. Favorite instruments were the fiddle and an inexpensive tin whistle called the penny whistle. In *Willow Girl* 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 puppets hand to make them work. Another style of puppetry used in the show 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. This is any easy kind of puppet show to make in school or home.

## Background Information for Students

The California Gold rush was discovered in the year 1848 at Capt. John Slitter's sawmill in California. Until that time the state was a disputed property, sometimes claimed by the U.S. and other times by Mexico. When gold was discovered, people flocked to California from all over the world with hope of getting rich. As it turned out, so many people went to California that there was not enough gold to go around. Local merchants took advantage of the situation and charged outrageous price for supplies. One potato cost a dollar, a small fortune in those times. Most of the riches fell in to the hands of a few men and the rest of the miners had to leave in disappointment. Even Capt. Sutter himself died flat – broke. When the news of the gold rush came to China in 1849 the people were suffering from famine and unemployment. Chinese companies lured workers with flyers calling California Gum San, or "Gold Mountains" and ships offered tickets halfway around the world for forty dollars. In 1848 there were only seven Chinese in California but within a few years, tens of thousands arrived. At first they were welcomed because they were polite, hardworking and caused no trouble. They were only allowed to work the poor diggings and if they struck gold any white man could take over their claim. Despite this they worked hard and were still successful. Soon the others miners became jealous because they felt the Chinese were taking jobs and gold away from them. Chinese men were criticized because they were neat and washed every day "like women".

The Chinese were driven off of their mines and forced to pay special taxes that were very expensive. In 1870 the revenue from this tax paid almost a quarter of the state's budget. People began to assault Chinese people and cut off the pigtails of the Chinese men. Men were even lynched. The Chinese were not allowed to become citizens and laws were passed starting in 1892 saying that no more Chinese could come to America.

In 1902 President Theodore Roosevelt signed the Chinese Exclusion Bill that prohibited any further Chinese immigration. In 1852 alone, 200,256 Chinese immigrants came in to San Francisco (more than two thousand in a single forty-eight hour period). One tenth of the population of California was Chinese. The Irish immigrants were discriminated against too but not as much as the Chinese because they looked like other Americans and came from a similar culture. Many Irish people immigrated to find work especially during the Great Potato Famine when many people were starving in Ireland. A lot of them became American citizens and now there are more Irish - Americans than the whole population of Ireland. The Irish worked together with the Chinese not only in the gold mines but also when building the transcontinental railroads.

## RESOURCES

American Heritage Junior Library. The California Gold Rush. New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc. 1961

Hane Bret. The Luck of the Roaring Camp. and Other Stories (including "The Outcasts of Poker Rat"). Boston: Houghton Mifflin

Clemens, Samuel Langhorne. Complete Short Stories of Mark Twain (including "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County") New York: Bantam Books, 1960 (Mark Twain himself went to the gold rush)

For a listing of over 225 puppet and puppet related books, pamphlets, scripts, patterns, videotapes, etc., contact

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## ARTIST INFORMATION

Since 1979, John Potocnik and Carol Mandigo, co-founders of the Catskill Puppet Theater, have been touring internationally, enchanting young and old with their delightful musical productions. Combining backgrounds in art, music, drama and American folk culture, they are one of the nation's finest touring companies. Catskill has received accolades from such premier venues as The Ottawa, Calgary and Winnipeg Children's Festivals, The New England Puppetry Series, The New York State Museum and hundreds more schools, libraries, fairs and festivals.