

Study Guide For Teachers

The Town That Fought Hate

...a program by the Catskill Puppet Theatre

presented by

Young Audiences New Jersey, Inc.

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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The Town that Fought Hate is based on the true story of events in Billings, Montana. The community was being terrorized with hate crimes against minorities. When a rock is thrown through the window of a young Jewish boy because of his menorah, the community takes action. This show about courage and facing fears features masks, puppets, and music.

LEARNING GOALS

- To provide a quality example of puppetry including elements of production, such as movement, music, sculpture and playwriting as well as light, sound and scene designs.
- To teach children the importance of standing up to bullies
- To teach the importance of individual action; that each one of us *can* make a difference
- To teach the effectiveness of non-violent crisis resolution
- To emphasize the power of community in one's life
- To show the power of standing up for what you believe
- To show the importance of respecting each person's beliefs and differences

This program addresses the following NJ Core Curriculum Content Standard(s):

- 1.1 All students will acquire knowledge and skills that increase aesthetic awareness in theatre.**
- 3.2 All students will listen actively in a variety of situations to information from a variety of sources.**
- 3.5 All students will view, understand, and use non-textual visual information.**
- 6.5 All students will acquire historical understanding of varying cultures throughout the history of New Jersey, the United States, and the world.**

**Auditorium performance
300 audience limit
Intended for grades K-6**



BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

In early 1993, skinheads and members of racist groups in Billings began distributing hate literature vilifying African-Americans, Hispanics, Jews and other minorities. Town leaders urged the town's citizens to react strongly to stop the hate mail. Many people initially thought that the hate mail should be ignored, and that focusing attention on the hatemongers would only encourage them. But town leaders persisted, starting a series of "teach-ins" throughout the community to educate people about the consequences of not taking a strong stand against hate crimes, even minor ones.

Educators, human-rights advocates, and labor leaders joined town leaders to form a community network that monitored and forcefully responded to the hate speeches and acts of vandalism against minorities. They published a full-page advertisement in the town newspaper, *The Billings Gazette*, strongly condemning hatred and bigotry. More than 100 community organizations placed their names in the ad, as did thousands of citizens. Community leaders then organized a town rally, where the moral equivalent of war against hate crimes was declared.

Things settled down for a while, but more troubling incidents followed. In October, the house of a racially mixed couple was spray-painted with racial epithets. Within hours, the Billings Coalition for Human Rights arranged for members of the local painter's union to donate their services to repaint the house. The next day, armed with paints and brushes, more than two-dozen union members appeared and obliterated the slurs within an hour. They were cheered on and supported by dozens of neighbors and well-wishers.

At about the same time, efforts to intimidate the town's black population intensified. Hate-group members began appearing at the town's African-American Methodist church during Sunday worship services. Taking seats in the back pews, they silently glared at the worshipers. When word of this harassment spread, dozens of members of other churches began coming to the Methodist church's Sunday services to worship along with their neighbors and provide moral support. After the menorah incident portrayed in the puppet show occurred, schools and churches began holding discussions with children of all ages about the events; the talks stressed the dangers of bigotry and the importance of fighting against it. Children started to think and talk about how children must feel to be the targets of hatred. This deeper understanding led to a show of solidarity against hate within the town during the holiday season.

BEFORE THE PROGRAM

Discuss the following questions with your students or use them as writing prompts:

1. Have you or one of your friends ever been bullied by (or discriminated against by) someone?
2. How does it feel to be set apart or belittled because you are different?
3. How did you react to what the bully did?
4. Was this a good way to handle the situation? Why/why not?

Take some time to make sure your students understand the following:

Hanukkah: The Festival of Lights; celebrated by people of the Jewish faith to remember the miracle of the burning lamp in the Temple of Jerusalem after the Maccabees' victory over the Syrians.

Menorah: A candle holder used during Hanukkah to symbolize the miracle of the burning lamp.

Prejudice: An unfair feeling of hatred or dislike for a group because of their background, race, or religion.

Individual responsibility: The idea that every individual charged with the responsibility to do what is right.

AFTER THE PROGRAM

Discuss or have children write about the following questions:

1. Do you think that what happened in Billings could happen in your town?
2. What do you think your family and neighbors would do? What would you do?
3. What do you think about what Isaac and Teresa did? Do you agree with their actions?
4. How did the puppets and the staging (lights, sets, props) help the storyteller tell the story?
5. What was your favorite part of the show? Why?

More Puppet Ideas:

Puppets can be quick and easy to make and staging a puppet show is a great way for children to explore difficult topics.

- Dress up a paper bag with crayons, yarn, buttons, or fabric.
 - Paint a face on an old, wooden spoon
 - Make finger puppets with an old glove. Cut off the glove's fingers and you have 5 puppet fingers to decorate with colors.
 - Decorate an old sock with yarn, buttons, pom-poms or beads.
1. Have children work in small groups to create their own puppets and write a play to perform for the class. Have them focus on a topic that is important and/or controversial within the school/ community. After the show, talk about why they made specific choices regarding the content of the show as well as how they decided to stage the show.
 2. Either in conjunction with the previous exercise or separately, have students write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper to persuade people to come together to fight hatred and intolerance.

VOCABULARY WORDS

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 arms controlled 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 puppets: a flat puppet projected onto a screen.

String puppet or Marionette: a puppet worked from above, using strings.

ARTIST INFORMATION

Since 1979, John Potocnick and Carol Mandigo, co-founders of the Catskill Puppet Theatre, have been touring internationally, enchanting young and old with their delightful productions. Combining backgrounds in art, music, drama, and American folk culture, they are one of America's finest touring companies. Catskill has received accolades from the New York State Museum, The New England Children's Festivals, and hundreds of schools, libraries, and fairs.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Dr. Janice Cohn is a psychotherapist who specializes in helping foster compassion and moral courage in children *despite* the violent world in which we live. She also focuses on helping children and adults cope with grief and loss due to death, divorce and separation. Dr. Cohn has written and lectured widely, appears regularly in the media, and has provided consultation to schools, professional and community organizations.

The Christmas Menorahs: How A Town Fought Hate has won or been nominated for over a dozen national awards.

RESOURCES

The Christmas Menorahs: How A Town Fought Hate, by Janice Cohn (grades 4-6). This book, upon which *The Town That Fought Hate* is based, tells the story of how two children and their families, one Jewish and one Christian, are affected by the events in Billings Montana during the holiday season of 1993.

Number the Stars, by Lois Lowry (grades 4-6). This book is set during World War II, and tells the story of the Danish resistance to Nazi occupation from the point of view of 10-year-old Annemarie Johansen.

Twenty and Ten, by Claire Bishop (grades 4-6), recounts the story of French children who hide Jewish orphans during the Nazi occupation of France.

The Sneetches, by Dr. Seuss (kindergarten – second grade), entertainingly makes an indelible point about the silliness of judging people solely by what they look like.