



CRAFT IN AMERICA

SCHROEDER CHERRY: UNDERGROUND RAILROAD, NOT A SUBWAY

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

1. *What did you know about the Underground Railroad before seeing the puppet show?*

What did you learn that was new? Some students may be very familiar with the subject; for others it may be completely new. Schroeder Cherry has said he created the play because he met youths who mistakenly thought the Underground Railroad referred to a city subway.

2. *Why does Schroeder Cherry say the children laugh at first when they see Mr. Zeke? Why do you think they stop laughing?*

Schroeder Cherry says that the children laugh because it is rare for them to see a Black puppet. Sometimes people laugh at things that are surprising and new to them. However, when Mr. Zeke begins to speak, they quiet down and listen.

3. *What does the woman tell the boy about the Underground Railroad?*

The boy is named Kyle and he is 10 years old. Kyle asks: "What's an underground railroad?" The Woman tells him: "It's not a thing you can see, exactly. It's something that helps slaves get to freedom."

4. *What does Kyle say after the woman tells him about the Underground Railroad?*

He says, "I don't want to be a slave all my life. So, here I go!"

5. *Kyle decides to run. The slave owner who keeps him captive asks the audience to help find him. What is the reaction of the children in the audience?*

The children react strongly and shout "No!" when the slave owner asks them to agree that it is fair that Kyle be returned to him, and for their help to find Kyle.

6. *Kyle follows the North Star. What do you know about the North Star as used by the Underground Railroad?*

The North Star is part of the Big Dipper constellation, which is also known as the Drinking Gourd because gourds were used as dippers, or scoops, for drinking water. This map in the sky was a guide for enslaved people to head north, where they hoped to find freedom.

7. *Are you able to find the North Star and the Big Dipper in the night sky?*

This is an opportunity for a discussion, using maps, of what one might encounter, today-or historically, if one had to run from a southern state to New York, where Kyle was heading. Also, let students know that in the full play, when Kyle gets to New York it is 1850; and the Fugitive Slave Act is passed. This meant he must run again, to Canada, or risk being returned to the slave owner because of the new law.



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8. *Why do you think Schroeder Cherry used a young boy as the character in this play?*

Many children and teenagers were enslaved, and many sought escape with family or on their own. Schroeder Cherry says, "We're getting across the fact that enslaved Black people did want to escape, and there were things they had to do that were very dangerous."

9. *Do you think the puppets tell their stories well?*

The children seem to be paying attention. Schroeder Cherry says, "... Because it's a puppet show, and is done in fun ways, the audience absorbs a lot, I think. With play, you are relaxed enough to be able to receive information."

10. *What did the children who watched the play say at the end of the performance?*

One student says, "It was important because they were showing you what happened long ago." A second student says, "I learned that the Underground Railroad was a secret." This could be an opportunity to have a student act as a reporter and to interview several classmates about the Underground Railroad, as were the children who watched the play.

11. NOTE: If students have watched both videos, discuss the different ways the shows are presented with the following question:

Describe the different ways Schroeder Cherry performs in the two shows.

In the Underground Railroad play, he works behind a curtain so he can't be seen. He wears dark clothes and a head covering so that he is difficult to see, and the puppet DeAndre stands out. He uses scenery and backdrops that are painted. In both plays, he uses some painted signs. In both plays, he uses rod puppets. In *Children's Crusade*, there are additional figures, such as the group of students and the group of firemen that are stick puppets. In *Underground Railroad*, he works behind a curtain.

EXTENDING THE DISCUSSION: PUPPET MAKING & PERFORMING

Puppet making is an engaging art practice for all ages. There is a playfulness in constructing puppets as they seem to "come to life" even before they are fully completed. Puppet performing, whether live performances or digitally recorded, is also playful in that the actors perform (and pretend) through "someone else;" that is, through the puppet.

Possible themes for pursuing puppet making and performance inspired by Dr. Schroeder Cherry's work could include reenactments, through puppets, of stories from the history of the Underground Railroad. Another theme may be representing further stories of the Civil Rights Children's Crusade (see resources above for access to more stories and individuals from the event.) Students may want to focus on current events of the civil rights movement, with its ongoing issues.

Puppets can be simple or more detailed, as are Dr. Cherry's. Here are two methods suitable for beginners.

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Stick puppets

Suggested for younger students, yet effective for any age, stick puppets are a simple puppet form. Schroeder Cherry uses stick puppets in portions of his work. One example in *Underground Railroad, Not a Subway* is the North Star, which can move across the sky. It is a star shaped piece of card or wood, attached to a stick handle. Stick puppets are also visible in the Civil Rights Children's Crusade. For example, the crowd of students is a single cutout silhouette attached to a stick handle. The crowd turns to reveal a different design on the back of the cutouts, depicting the students inundated with water from the fire hoses.

Materials for stick puppets

- Cardboard (sturdy enough to hold its shape) a rectangle least 9 by 12 inches for each puppet
- Tempera paints and brushes Colorful papers for details
- Scissors
- Hot Glue gun and glue sticks; and/or white liquid glue
- For Sticks: paint stirrers or lightweight dowel rods make good support for a handle attached to the cardboard silhouette, or make a sturdy handle by layering and gluing two or more 1" wide strips of cardboard.
- Brass fasteners or paper clips for attaching extra parts
- Pliers

Building the stick puppet

Guide students to draw the character on the piece of cardboard, encouraging them to keep the drawing large so it can be seen from a distance when finished. When the drawing is satisfactory, have students carefully cut out the puppet shape. If a student wants to create a separate back piece for the puppet, they can now trace the shape they made on a second piece of cardboard and cut it out. Guide students in painting the puppet with tempera paints. When the paint is dry, demonstrate how to glue the handle to the base of the puppet shape. Students who made a back shape can glue it to the front shape with the stick handle encased between the layers. After painting and constructing, students can add details as desired. See the sock puppet materials list for inspiration in material choices.

Sock Puppets

Schroeder Cherry makes rod puppets with lots of detail: wooden carved heads that can turn, hinged jaws, moving eyes, and hands controlled by attached rods so the puppets can gesture. Sock puppets are a much simpler form, but they can be surprisingly detailed and crafted with care. At the same time, they are easy enough to make and have an appealing look by the nature of the stretchy sock and the easy manipulation of facial expressions. Arms can be added and left loose and floppy or attached to rods for more controlled gesturing, as Schroeder Cherry does.

Materials for sock puppets

- Socks: Use inexpensive or gently used socks, one per puppet. These should at least fit over the hand and wrist. Crew socks and knee socks work well; longer is better as it covers more of the arm.
- Scissors
- Hot Glue gun and glue sticks; and/or white liquid glue
- Needles and thread
- Safety pins for marking feature placement and attaching items

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- Chalk for marking features
- Permanent black marker for pupils in eyes and other details
- 9x12" felt pieces for features, clothes, hair, and details
- Lightweight cardboard for structure where needed (such as cereal boxes)
- Yarn and string (for hair)
- Fake fur scraps (for hair/wigs)
- Fabric scraps for clothes
- Pipe cleaners for optional arms and other details
- Assorted materials such as buttons, pompoms, artificial plants and flowers, old jewelry, doll shoes or accessories, wiggle eyes, trims, sequins, and small toys for props (such as tiny plastic tools, food, etc.) to add details to puppets.

Build the sock puppet

Instruct and demonstrate for students: "Place your four fingers in the toe of the sock for fitting. Pull the toe of the sock away from your fingertips about 3 inches or more to create some slack, and tuck the toe in between your thumb and fingers to make an indented mouth. You should now be able to open and close the thumb and fingers to make the mouth move." With the puppet on the hand, students can mark the placement of features. Show students how to use safety pins (or chalk marks) to map out where they want the eyes, nose, and upper and lower lips to be placed. Students can remove the sock and proceed with making and attaching features.

Mouth

Students can choose to use the mouth as is, adding felt lips for definition. Lips can be cut from felt and sewn or glued in place. This mouth will be easily manipulated (for example, curling the fingers and thumb inward can make an angry expression.) Or, students may refine a sturdier (but less malleable) mouth in the following way: Demonstrate how to cut an oval for a mouth (or you may want to make a pattern that students can trace.) Draw an oval about 3 inches wide by 5 inches long from paper and cut it out. Fold it in half to check the fit on the sock; that is, tuck it between the fingers and thumb to see if it will do for the size and shape of the mouth. Adjust the shape as needed. Students can use the paper pattern to trace and cut a mouth from lightweight cardboard and again from a piece of pink felt for the inside of the mouth. Students can glue the felt to the cardboard, and then glue the mouth in place on the sock.

Features: Eyes, noses, and other features can be cut from felt and applied with glue or sewn in place. Pompoms can be used with felt to make more 3-dimensional features such as round eyes or a more prominent nose. For example, demonstrate the following to students: Use a white pompom for an eyeball. Add a colorful felt circle for an iris and glue it to the pompom. Color a pupil on the iris with a marker. Cut an upper and a lower eyelid from felt and glue these above and below (and slightly covering) the eyeball. Add lashes if desired, and eyebrows made from felt.

Hair

Demonstrate several methods to students. 1. Felt: Felt pieces can be cut in hair shapes such as bangs, hair for each side of head from part to desired length, hair for back of head, ponytails, etc. These pieces may be glued or sewn to the puppet's head. 2. Fake Fur: Pieces of fake fur can be used the same way as felt, and the fur can then be combed and styled. (Note: When cutting fur, cut carefully through the backing fabric, with the fur side place against the table and pointing the scissors away from the fur to avoid cutting the fur itself.) 3. Yarn: Long or short hair can be made from one or more tassels of yarn, and then styled in braids, up-dos, brushed out,



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etc. Demonstrate to students how to make hanks of hair: Wind yarn around four fingers or around a book that equals the length of the desired hair. For example, a 6-inch book will yield 6-inch long strands. Wind about 20 rounds to start. (Adjust amounts later if needed.) Tie yarn around one end of the folded strands, threading it under and around the strands. Carefully cut through the other end of the strands to release the hank of hair. Attach the tied end with glue or by sewing to the head. Make as many hanks as desired and arrange them on the puppet. Trim hair and style as desired.

Arms

Demonstrate making arms for students: Cut arm shapes from felt, two for each arm. Sew or glue a pair of arm shapes together with a pipe cleaner between the layers (fold the ends of pipe cleaner to fit inside arm shape.) Make a second arm. Attach securely to the puppet with glue or sewing. Bend arms as desired.

Clothes

Clothes can be fashioned largely from fabric rectangles, cut to fit the puppet, and glued on or carefully stitched. (This is a good opportunity to practice some basic sewing.) Demonstrate some costume designing for students. For example, to create a shirt or top, cut a rectangle of fabric to fit around the puppet from the neck to the length desired. Create another rectangle to cover the base of shirt (at the waist) to look like pants or a skirt. (Caution students not to make clothes so snug that the puppet no longer can stretch over the hand.) Sleeves can be made from rectangles of fabric that wrap around the arms. A collar can be cut from felt: Cut a long thin rectangle. Wrap around the puppet's neck. Adjust length, trim, and attach to puppet's shirt.

When finished with the stick or sock puppet, refine and audition the puppet:

Encourage students to examine their puppets for secure attachments, and to add some sewing, or glue, if needed to improve puppet sturdiness. Have students work in small groups to audition their puppets: "Ask your partner if the puppet looks good or expresses the feeling you want it to. You may want to enlarge or exaggerate features so the puppet can be easily seen."

Demonstrate for students a technique for making puppets talk effectively: "Open the mouth of the puppet with each word and close the mouth at the end of the word. In other words, when saying "Hi!," the puppet's mouth opens when you say "Hi!" and closes at the end of the word. When talking fast, your puppet's mouth might barely close between words."