



# Crabgrass Puppet Theatre

## Study Guide for

# HAIKU, HIPHOP AND HOTDOGS: puppets do poetry

**CRABGRASS PUPPET THEATRE'S** shows are aimed at educating as well as entertaining our audiences. School performances include a demonstration of the puppets and techniques we use. This study guide provides background information about the show and suggestions for classroom activities.

## ABOUT “HAIKU, HIPHOP AND HOTDOGS: PUPPETS DO POETRY”

Once upon a time, way back in the year 2001, we were working on a show based on poetry for children. We love poetry, and knew it would make great material for puppet theater. We read many, many poems, and got excited about a lot of them. There's a lot of wonderful poetry out there! Finally, we narrowed the choices down, and started brainstorming ideas for presenting the poems with puppets. One of the poems was Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky*, which appears in the second Alice-in-Wonderland book, Through the Looking Glass. We came up with many ideas for *Jabberwocky*. Then we came up with even more ideas, and more . . . and at some point we realized that we had to do a whole show of *Jabberwocky*. So we did.

This time, we're going to let the other poems have a chance. And between 2001 and now, we've found even more poems we love and want to share with our audiences.

**Jack Prelutsky** was the first Children's Poet Laureate of the United States, and is a wonderful, funny poet. We like him so much that we chose not one, not two, but THREE of his poems: “*The Goblin*,” “*Do Not Approach an Emu*,” and “*We're Fearless Flying Hotdogs*.” Another famous poet for children, **David McCord**, wrote a beautiful poem entitled “*Every Time I Climb a Tree*.” **Calef Brown**, a contemporary poet and illustrator, came up with “*Funky Snowman*.” **Geof Hewitt**, a Vermont poet, imagined what it would be like if goldfish could play music, in “*The Goldfish*.”

We love spinach. We eat a lot of it. And we couldn't resist **Florence Parry Heide's** “*Spinach*.” It was just too much fun. **Beatrice Schenk de Regniers**, author of many books for children, advises everyone to “*Keep a Poem in Your Pocket*.” After seeing our show, we hope you'll do just that!

## ABOUT THE PUPPETS

**ROD PUPPETS** are moved from below or behind with rods (sticks). The girl in “*Spinach*” is a rod puppet moved on the playboard (when we work the puppets above our heads). The boy in “*The Goblin*” is also a rod puppet, worked on the tabletop (when we work the puppets in front of us).

**SHADOW PUPPETS** are two-dimensional (flat) figures that are placed against a screen that has a light behind it, so that the audience sees the

shadow of the puppet. The puppets have rods that allow the puppeteers to hold them against the screen and move different parts. Shadow puppets can also be played on an overhead projector. “Goldfish” and “Every Time I Climb a Tree” use shadow puppets.

**HOW ARE THE PUPPETS MADE?** We make all of the puppets, as well as the scenery and stage. The puppets' heads are first sculpted in clay. We then make a plaster mold of the head, so that when the plaster has dried, it takes the shape of the head and features. We pour a liquid rubber, called neoprene, into the mold. When that cures (dries), it becomes hard, and we have a durable hollow puppet head. The bodies of the puppets are usually made of a dense, stiff foam rubber – the same stuff that pool noodles are made of. We carve it with an electric carving knife.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Divide the class into small groups. Have each child read several poems, then choose poems that would make a good puppet piece. Look for poems that have action, conflict, and a limited number of characters. Have each group decide on a poem to dramatize. Have the students create a short play based on the poem, using themselves or simple puppets, OR have them illustrate the sequence of action in comic-book form.

Read some tongue-twister poems, and have the students write one of their own.

Choose one tongue-twister poem and have a timed Tongue-Twister Race to see which student can say the poem the fastest and most accurately!

Create “poetry portraits:” poems made up of one-word lines or short phrases that describe a person – themselves, a loved one, a pet, or a friend.

Pick-a-word Haiku! Label three bowls: Nouns, Verbs and Adjectives. Make small slips of paper with one word written on each. Divide the students into groups of 3 or 4, and have each student draw several words from the bowls. Each

group writes its own haiku with the traditional 5-7-5 syllable pattern, using only the words drawn from the bowls.

“We’re Fearless Flying Hotdogs” is funny because it puts two unrelated things – hotdogs and flying – together. The combination is ridiculous. Divide the class into two groups. Each child in Group 1 writes a food word. Each child in Group 2 writes an action word. Have each child in Group 1 choose a partner from Group 2. Each pair must write a poem (individually or together) that includes the food and the action. Have the children illustrate their poems. Now you have a book of ridiculous food poetry!

Read “We’re Fearless Flying Hotdogs” (text at the end of this study guide) to your class and have them find the food puns (quite a few!).

Choose a rap song and print the lyrics. Have the students study and discuss the form the song is written in. Give the students a topic to write a rap song about.

Have the students write a poem about “*Haiku, HipHop and Hotdogs.*” We would love to read them! Poems and letters can be sent to:

Crabgrass Puppet Theatre  
c/o Encore Performing Arts, Inc.  
P.O. Box 630  
Melville, NY 11747

Discuss audience behavior: how is live performance different from television or a movie? How is it different from a football or basketball game? How should you act in a performance? If you were giving a performance, how would you want your audience to act?

## INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS ON AUDIENCE BEHAVIOR:

Many children do not have much experience with live performance, and do not understand that live performance is different from a sports event, a movie, or television. It is helpful to discuss audience behavior with them prior to the performance. In addition to the basics (pay attention, don't talk, don't yell out), the following is important:

**Applauding:** this is the main way the audience shows its appreciation to the performers. Teachers can explain this prior to the performance, and can lead the way by applauding at the end of stories and at the end of the show.

**Laughing:** is another way of showing appreciation! We are *trying* to make the audience laugh, and sometimes we will visit a school where the teachers quiet the children when they laugh. We *want* them to laugh! Young children may need to be reminded that after they laugh, they need to quiet down again to listen.

**Is it okay for teachers to laugh?** YES! We are performing for teachers as well as students, and there is plenty of humor in our shows for adults. Many teachers seem uncomfortable laughing in a school performance, but teachers' laughter does several important things. Overall, it shows the children that the teachers are paying attention to and enjoying the performance, which elevates the children's interest. It also raises the children's understanding of more sophisticated humor: when teachers laugh at something the children didn't find funny, the children often realize quickly that it *was* funny, and we get a second wave of laughter. The most enjoyable performances we do are the ones in which both teachers and students are engaged and responding.

**Teachers: please be courteous to the performers!** We're well aware of how overworked and short of time most teachers are

these days. But if teachers are correcting papers or carrying on conversations during a performance, they are unable to become involved in the performance, discuss it with their students afterwards, or set an example for the children by responding and applauding at the correct times.

## Useful Online Links

Library of Congress poetry site:

<http://www.loc.gov/poetry/>

National Poetry Month (April):

<http://www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/41>

Academy of American Poets site: [www.poets.org](http://www.poets.org).

Full of resources, including *Online Poetry Classroom*, discussion forums for teachers, lesson plans, poet biographies, and poems

Poetry Foundation announcement of Jack Prelutsky as the first Children's Poet Laureate:

[http://www.poetryfoundation.org/foundation/release\\_092706.html](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/foundation/release_092706.html)

Many resources and ideas can be found at:

[www.poetryteachers.com](http://www.poetryteachers.com)

Information on holding a Poetry Read-a-Thon at your school:

<http://www.poets.org/media/ReadaThon.pdf>

"How to Eat a Poem" site from poets.org, containing links to a multitude of poems for young readers:

<http://www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/341>

Jack Prelutsky's website:

<http://jackprelutsky.com/>

Calef Brown's website: [www.calefbrown.com](http://www.calefbrown.com)

## Recommended Books

There are too many wonderful books of poetry for children to list here! Just visit your school or public library and dive in. Here are just a few . . .

**Hip Hop Speaks to Children: A Celebration of Poetry with a Beat** (A Poetry Speaks Experience) by Nikki Giovanni, Alicia Vergel de Dios, Damian Ward, and Kristen Balouch Includes a CD. Sourcebooks Jabberwocky

**How to Eat a Poem: A Smorgasbord of Tasty and Delicious Poems for Young Readers**, American Poetry & Literacy Project, Dover Publications

**A Poke in the I: A Collection of Concrete Poems**, Paul B. Janeczko, Candlewick Press

**A Kick in the Head: An Everyday Guide to Poetic Forms**, Paul B. Janeczko, Candlewick Press

**A Foot in the Mouth: Poems to Speak, Sing and Shout**, Paul B. Janeczko, Candlewick Press

**Behold the Bold Umbrellaphant: And Other Poems**, Jack Prelutsky, Greenwillow

**Grim and Ghastly Goings-On**, Florence Parry Heide, Lothrop (Contains "Spinach")

**Something Special**, Beatrice Schenk de Regniers, Harcourt. (Contains "Keep a Poem in Your Pocket")

**Polkabats and Octopus Slacks**, Calef Brown, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (Contains "Funky Snowman")

**One at a Time**, David McCord, Little, Brown & Co. (Contains "Every Time I Climb a Tree")

**It's Halloween**, Jack Prelutsky, Greenwillow (Contains "The Goblin")

**A Pizza the Size of the Sun**, Jack Prelutsky, Scholastic (Contains "Do Not Approach an Emu")

**Something Big Has Been Here**, Jack Prelutsky, Greenwillow (Contains "We're Fearless Flying Hotdogs")

**The Twentieth Century Children's Poetry Treasury**, Jack Prelutsky, Editor, Knopf.

### **We're Fearless Flying Hotdogs**

By Jack Prelutsky

We're fearless flying hotdogs,  
the famous "Unflappable Five,"  
we're mustered in formation  
to climb, to dip, to dive,  
we spread our wings with relish,  
then reach for altitude,  
we're aerobatic wieners,  
the fastest flying food.

We're fearless flying hotdogs,  
we race with flair and style,  
then catch up with each other  
and soar in single file,  
you never saw such daring,  
such power and control,  
as when we swoop and spiral,  
then slide into a roll.

The throngs applaud our antics,  
they cheer us long and loud,  
there's never a chilly reception,  
there's never a sour crowd,  
and if we may speak frankly,  
we are a thrilling sight,  
we're fearless flying hotdogs,  
the delicate essence of flight.