

Family Activity: Ajijaak on Turtle Island

Prior to colonization by Europeans, the five boroughs that make up New York City were inhabited by the Lenape, Merrick, Canarsie, Rockaway and Matinecock Nations. It's important to acknowledge the Peoples of these Nations, their cultures, their communities and their elders both past and present, as well as future generations.

The land on which The New Victory Theater stands was once part of the land protected by the Lenape Peoples and was founded upon exclusions and erasures of many Indigenous peoples cultures and stories. The intention of this land acknowledgement is to demonstrate our fervent commitment to educating ourselves and our audiences about the enduring consequences of settler colonialism.

In this Family Activity for [Ajijaak on Turtle Island](#), your family will discover information about First Nation Peoples that lived on the land you currently live on, become Eco-Champions and create a puppet performance inspired by the show.

But first, read through our [Grown Up Guide and Synopsis](#) to gain a better understanding of the show you and your family are about to see.



AT HOME

In this activity, dig deeper into the history of your home and learn which of the First Nations lived there before. First, take a look at what pre-colonial Manahatta, or “island of many hills,” used to look like.



Step One: Now, explore this [interactive map](#) of the First Nation Peoples and look up New York state, New Jersey and Long Island. Then find your neighborhood—who were the First Nation Peoples who once lived there?

Step Two: Visit the pages below to learn more about the Nations that used to live in the five boroughs of New York City.

- [Lenape](#)
- [Canarsie](#)
- [Rockaway](#)
- [Merrick](#)
- [Matinecock](#)
- [Massapeguas](#)

Step Three: [Far Rockaways](#) and [Canarsie](#) are not just names of neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Queens. Their names come from Indigenous Native Americans. “Rockaway” might have meant “place of sands” in the Munsee language and “Canarsie” is adapted from a Lenape word meaning “fenced area.” With your family and friends, find all of the parks, streets or other public works located in your neighborhood that are named after or related to the First Nations communities.

Step Four: Reflect on your research with the following questions:

- Did you learn anything that surprised you?
- How did you feel learning about the rich history of the people that came before you?
- What aspects of your research impacted you the most? Why?
- Did this activity change the way in which you view the city? How so?

AFTER THE SHOW

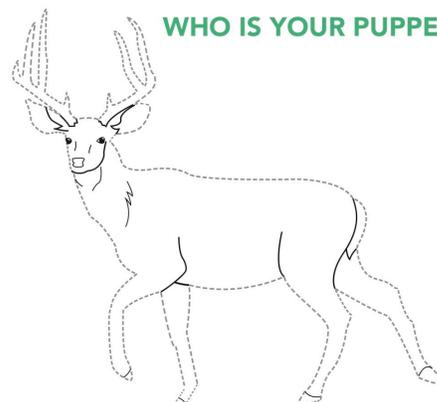
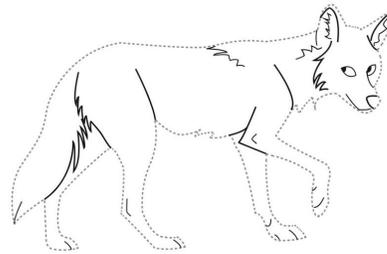
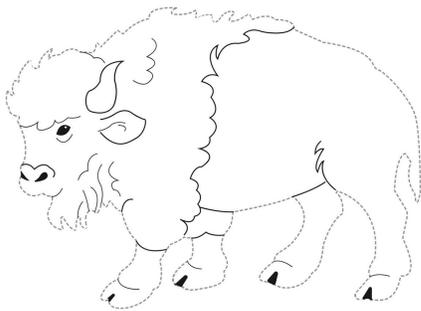
On your way home, right after the show, use these questions to start a conversation with your family:

1. What do you think Mishibizhiw was? How did the Mishibizhiw puppet make you feel?
2. In Native American mythology, Mishibizhiw is the symbol for chaos, for things that are not balanced, or not right in the world. What were some things that were not right in Ajijaak's world?
3. What are some things that scare you? What are some things that bring you strength?
4. Are there any stories that your family has passed down through the generations? If you could tell a story that could be passed on to other people and generations, what would it be?

In [Ajijaak on Turtle Island](#), the story of Ajijaak's migration from Canada to the United States of America (the United States is referred to in the show as Turtle Island) is told with puppetry. During her journey, she encounters various animals, humans, plants and spirits along the way.

Once you've discussed the show, create your own tabletop puppet show with characters from [Ajijaak on Turtle Island](#)!

Materials: [Coloring sheets](#), popsicle sticks, crayons or markers, construction paper and glue or tape



WHO IS YOUR PUPPET?

Step One: Construct your puppets.

- Print out all four [coloring sheets](#) and color in each animal anyway you'd like. Think:
 - How does this animal look and feel?
 - Would you like your puppets to be realistic or interpretive? Is the animal striped? Polka dotted? Get creative!
 - Cut out your puppet and trace that shape onto a piece of construction paper, then cut out that tracing. This will serve as the backing for your puppet, giving it structure. Repeat this step for all four puppets.
 - Glue or tape a popsicle stick to the middle of your construction paper backing, making sure that there is enough popsicle stick for your hand to hold. Then, attach the image of your animal on top of that so the popsicle stick is hidden in the middle. Repeat this step for all four puppets.

Take a look at our example!



Step Two: One at a time, make your puppets come alive through movement. Think about the following questions.

- How does your puppet breathe?
- How does your puppet walk—slowly or quickly? Does your puppet fly?
- How do the movement and breath of your puppets differ from each other?
- How does your puppet laugh? Cry?
- What does your puppet's voice sound like?

Step Three: Take your crane puppet on a journey!

- Using your crane puppet as your main character, decide on their journey. Are they travelling from uptown to downtown? East to west? The mountains to the ocean?

- Your puppet will encounter three animals along the way—the buffalo, the deer and the coyote. To inspire your puppets’ characters, dedicate these three animals to people in your life. Think of something that they say often and add that to your dedication.
 - Example: I dedicate the deer puppet to my aunt who always says, “Love and light make life so bright.”
- Once you know the inspiration for each of these animals, take your crane puppet on their journey and interact with all the characters along the way. Think:
 - What do each of these animals share with your crane puppet?
 - How do they help or hinder their journey?
 - Do any of these animals change the way your crane puppet sees the world? How?

Rehearse your puppet show and perform it for your friends or family. If you capture photos or video, post them on Instagram and tag us at [@NewVictoryTheater](#).

AND BEYOND

- Head over to the Museum of Natural History to check out their [Human Origin and Cultural Halls](#). Please also take a second to utilize some of their digital [resources](#).
- We highly recommend you visit the [National Museum of the American Indian](#).
- Discover more about crane conservation efforts [here](#).
- Deepen your understanding of the [history](#) and [heritage](#) of the people who first lived in North America.