



# PRODUCTION GUIDE

## 5TH GRADE

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# Erie Canal Tales



*Written by:*  
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Dear Teachers,

The Merry-Go-Round Playhouse is pleased to present *Erie Canal Tales* for you and your students as part of our Sequential Dramatics Program. The production experience consists of a live performance, a preparatory classroom workshop and this production guide. The Merry-Go-Round Playhouse's programs are designed to assist you and your students in meeting the New York State Learning Standards. You will find the standards addressed by the components of this production experience notated at the rear of this guide.

The preparatory classroom workshop, or "prep," is a unique opportunity for your students to gain additional value from the experience. During the prep, students are given the chance to explore the content and themes of the performance as well as relevant academic material with one of the actors in the production. **For your students to obtain the maximum benefit, we request your presence in the classroom through the entirety of the workshop.**

Time permitting, at the end of the performance, the actors will take a few questions from the audience. As often is the case, not every question can be answered. We invite you and your students to share your questions and comments by sending letters and drawings to our office. If you write to us, we will write you back!

We hope you and your students enjoy *Erie Canal Tales* and we look forward to visiting you soon.

Best wishes,

Carole Estabrook, Educational Theatre Coordinator

## Glossary:

<b>Foley Artist</b>	the person who creates many of the natural, everyday sound effects in radio. <i>Milton C. Peabody, <b>Foley Artist</b> for the show.</i>
<b>Packet</b>	a passenger boat carrying mail and cargo on a regular schedule. <i>'Queen of the Mohawk' is the fastest <b>packet</b> on the line.</i>
<b>Runners</b>	lured passengers aboard the boat owned by the line they represented. <i>Stay close, 'cause those <b>runners</b> will get you.</i>
<b>Clinton's Ditch</b>	DeWitt Clinton, Governor of New York 1817-1823, supported building the canal but his opponents thought the idea was foolish and called it "Clinton's Ditch." <i>I bet if we found <b>Clinton's Ditch</b>, we'd be rich with treasure!</i>
<b>Hoggie</b>	the boy who walked alongside the mules that pulled the barges. <i>So this new <b>hoggie</b> is trotting along, when this heavy fog sits in near Rochester...</i>
<b>Lock</b>	an enclosure within the canal used for raising or lowering boats from level to level. <i>Don't worry; it's just a <b>lock</b>. It evens out water...</i>
<b>Cargo Room</b>	the area where freight is carried on a ship, typically below deck. <i>I'll check the <b>cargo room</b>!</i>

# Erie Canal Tales



## Summary & The Erie Canal

### Summary:

It is October 12th 1942 and while World War II marches on, Americans back home turn to their radios for entertainment and to take their minds off trouble overseas. Veteran radio personalities Joe, Kate and Vi, with the help of announcer and sound technician Milton, take on different roles to bring to life *Erie Canal Tales*, a weekly radio drama about the adventures of traveling the Erie Canal.

Today's episode is about a British family, William and Christine Roberts and their daughter Elizabeth. The Roberts family is traveling to Niagara Falls during the early days of the Erie Canal. The family boards the *Buffalo Barge*, owned and operated by a friendly Irish family, George and Mary O'Malley and their daughter Georgeanne.

Georgeanne is eager to tell Elizabeth about life on a mule drawn 'packet' including what they eat, where they sleep and all of the wonderful places they visit. But when Georgeanne overhears the first mate Smyth say "Clinton's Ditch is swallowing up all the money in New York" the girls set out to find what they believe is buried treasure. In their mischief the pair ends up locked in the cargo room during a violent thunderstorm.

As the storm settles both families notice that the girls are missing. Mary fears the girls may have sneaked off the boat when last docked. Unable to turn the barge around, the families agree to scour the boat before going back to search for them on foot.

When Georgeanne and Elizabeth are found below decks both families are relieved. William explains to the children that the gold in "Clinton's Ditch" jokingly refers to money spent by supporters like Governor DeWitt Clinton in building the Erie Canal. The girls apologize for their misbehavior, before quickly setting off for another *to be continued* Erie Canal adventure!

### The Erie Canal:

Before the Erie Canal was built, American settlements were largely confined to the eastern seaboard. The Appalachian Mountains proved a large obstacle in westward expansion.

Completed in 1825, the effect of the Canal was immediate and dramatic as settlers poured west. Within 15 years of the Canal's opening, New York Harbor was the busiest port in America, moving more freight than Boston, Baltimore and New Orleans combined.

Today, roughly 80% of the Upstate New York population lives within 25 miles of the old Erie Canal. Cities like Albany, Schenectady, Utica, Syracuse, Rochester and Buffalo were all established along the old canal trade route.

### Fun Fact:

In 1918 the larger New York State Barge Canal replaced the Erie Canal. Many stretches of the old canal were filled in to create roads like Erie Boulevard in Syracuse and the Rochester Subway in Rochester.



# Erie Canal Tales

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Low Bridge, Everybody Down, Clinton's Ditch & The Golden Age of Radio

## Low Bridge, Everybody Down:

The popular song *Low Bridge, Everybody Down* was written by Thomas S. Allen in 1905 to memorialize the heyday of the Erie Canal.

In the early days of the canal it was not uncommon for crewman and passengers to lie on their backs to clear a low bridge. The man steering the boat would call, "low bridge, everybody down!" The passengers enjoyed imitating the cry, as in the song's catchy refrain.

The song is sung from the point of view of a 'hoggie' trotting alongside his faithful mule, Sal. In the early days of the canal, mules pulled barges, rather than engines, everywhere from Albany to Buffalo.

## Clinton's Ditch:

An upstate canal was proposed as early as 1699; however early proposals intended to connect the Hudson River to Lake Ontario near Oswego, NY. In 1808 the state legislature considered a proposal to connect the Hudson River to Lake Erie.

Governor DeWitt Clinton fought so hard to get the legislation passed that his opponents sarcastically referred to the project as "Clinton's Ditch." Despite naysayers, Clinton continued to support building the Erie Canal and proudly broke ground on the project on July 4th 1817.

## The Golden Age of Radio:

From 1920 to the late 1950s many people tuned into the radio for news and entertainment. Most radio broadcasts were live; very few programs were pre recorded. Like television shows today, radio programs varied from comedy, action-adventure, drama, and science fiction.

One of the most famous radio broadcasts of all time was War of the Worlds by Orson Welles. The adaptation was performed as an authentic news broadcast, alerting citizens of Earth of an alien landing in progress. When the program aired on October 30th 1938 listeners believed the science fiction program was an actual news bulletin and police units were dispatched to settle the frightened crowds.

Our production takes place during WWII, when war updates were frequently on the radio. Radio Programs like *Erie Canal Tales* would have taken 1940s listeners back to a more optimistic time in our nation's history; providing an escape from often unpleasant news.

## Fun Fact:

On the old Erie Canal, the distance between Utica and Schenectady was 80 miles and the passage cost \$3.50, equivalent to approximately \$69.00 today!



### Pre-Performance Activities:

- I. Ask the students to identify local industries that developed, at least in part, as a result of the Erie Canal. Have each student bring to class an item that they feel represents one of the industries. A cereal box could represent milling, an ear of corn could represent agriculture, and wool mittens could represent textiles. Have each student explain why the item they chose represents an industry, and how the industry affects our lives today.
- II. Break the students up into small groups to research current rental-boat companies. Have each group calculate how much a weekend canal trip would cost a student and/or their family. Have the students decide where they would want to go and what they would want to see and do and then present each group's itinerary to the class.
- III. During the 1920s-1950s radio stories and dramas provided entertainment to at-home listeners who had to use their imaginations to picture characters and events. Encourage the students to listen to an old radio program online. Ask them to write down as much detail as they can from the broadcast. Compare this to a television show. Have the students listen to a television show with their backs turned to the screen, again writing down as much detail as possible. Use this activity to demonstrate how much more descriptive radio dialogue had to be.

### Post-Performance Activities:

- I. *Erie Canal Tales* recounts one day, during the early days of the Erie Canal. Have students research the old Erie Canal and write fictitious journal entries about a week-long canal trip. Students can name their own barge and pick their own destinations. Information about the early days of the canal can be found at the school library or online.
- II. Combine units in different subjects and create fun word problems. Research what kinds of boats were used on the Canal for hauling goods. Calculate distance and loads based on cargo and destinations. See sample problem below:  
  
Barge A can travel 4km in 1 hour and Barge B can travel 5km in 1 hour. If the barges depart at the same time from opposite ends of a 12km stretch of canal, how many minutes will it take them to meet in the middle.  
  
Hint: The longest time will be the answer; one barge will have to wait for the other.  
  
Barge A  $6\text{km} / 4\text{km per hour} = 3/2 \times 60 \text{ min} = 90 \text{ min}$   
Barge B  $6\text{km} / 5\text{km per hour} = 6/5 \times 60 \text{ min} = 72 \text{ min}$   
Answer: 90 min
- III. Research old radio shows on the web and start a weekly or monthly broadcast that can be shared with the entire school through the public announcement system.



# Erie Canal Tales

## Preparatory Workshop Outline & Additional Resources

### Preparatory Workshop Outline:

- I. Actor will introduce the performance to the class; explaining that it takes place in two different time periods.
- II. Actor will explain the inner workings of a Radio Show, providing definitions of key terms and concepts.
- III. Students will work together to perform a radio broadcast, including music and sound effects, using only their voices and provided materials.
- IV. Actor will provide an overview of the Erie Canal focusing on the impact that the canal had on the growth of New York and America.
- V. Actor will present the popular folk song, *Low Bridge, Everybody Down*. Students will be asked to recall songs written to make tedious tasks easier such as *I've Been Working on the Railroad*, *Sixteen Tons* and the *Banana Boat Song (Day-O)*.
- VI. Actor will remind students what constitutes good audience behavior and remind them that since the play is in radio format they will need to use their imaginations.

### Resources:

#### Websites

- [http://www.nyhistory.com/links/Erie\\_Canal.htm](http://www.nyhistory.com/links/Erie_Canal.htm) — for historians and students of New York and New York Culture.
- <http://www.eriecanalvillage.net/> — All aboard for the 19th Century! Welcome to the Erie Canal Village...A Step into History.
- [http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/volpe/canal/history\\_body.html](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/volpe/canal/history_body.html) — A history of Erie Canal politics.
- <http://www.genericradio.com/library.php> — The Generic Radio Workshop, vintage radio script library.

#### Books

- Yezerki, Thomas. *A Full Hand*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2002.
- Stack, Debbie and Donald A. Wilson. *Always Know Your Pal*. Erie Canal Museum, 1993.
- Fall, Thomas. *Canal Boat to Freedom*. Neversink Area Museum, 1966.
- Edmonds, Walter D. *Mostly Cannallers*. Syracuse University Press, 1987.
- Buxton, Frank & Bill Owen. *The Big Broadcast 1920-1950*. Scarecrow Press, 2nd Ed., 1996.

#### DVD Resources

- Modern Marvels: the Erie Canal*. (The History Channel, ©2000) VHS; approx. 50 min. — Originally aired on the History Channel on August 14, 2000.
- The Erie Canal: Albany to Buffalo*. (Media Artists Inc., ©2002) DVD; 3 episodes, 25 min. each — Three episodes of the PBS series: *Cruising America's Waterways*; gives a brief history of the Erie Canal, followed by a description of a tour of the Erie Canal today and nearby tourist attractions.
- History of the Erie Canal*. (Erie Canal Museum, undated) DVD; approx. 12 min.
- Radio, Radio Station and Broadcasting History Film Library*. (The Historical Archive DVD); 151 min.

#### Audio

- The Golden Eagle String Band. *The Canaller's Songbook*. Bravoproductions, 1990.
- Radio Classics: Old Time Radio Shows*. (Original Radio Broadcasts Collector Series) Nostalgia Ventures, 2004.

# Erie Canal Tales



## NYS Learning Standards

The workshop, performance and production guide for *Erie Canal Tales* build skills as defined by the Learning Standards indicated below:

### Preparatory Workshop

ARTS 1: Creating, Performing and Participating in the Arts – THEATRE

ARTS 2: Knowing and Using Arts Materials and Resources – THEATRE

ARTS 4: Understanding the Cultural Dimensions and Contributions of the Arts – THEATRE

ELA 1.1: Language for Information and Understanding – Listening and Reading

ELA 1.2: Language for Information and Understanding – Speaking and Writing

ELA 4.1: Language for Social Interaction – Listening and Speaking

SS 1.1: History of the United States and New York – Development of American culture.

SS 1.2: History of the United States and New York – Recognize how traditions and practices were passed from one generation to the next.

SS 1.3: History of the United States and New York – Understanding roles and contributions of individuals and groups

### *Erie Canal Tales* Performance

ARTS 1: Creating, Performing and Participating in the Arts – THEATRE

ARTS 1: Creating, Performing and Participating in the Arts – MUSIC

ARTS 2: Knowing and Using Arts Materials and Resources – THEATRE

ARTS 4: Understanding the Cultural Dimensions and Contributions of the Arts – THEATRE

ARTS 4: Understanding the Cultural Dimensions and Contributions of the Arts – MUSIC

ELA 2.1: Language for Literary Response and Expression – Listening and Reading

ELA 4.1: Language for Social Interaction – Listening and Speaking

SS 1.1: History of the United States and New York – Knowing the roots of American Culture

SS 1.2: History of the United States and New York – Recognize how traditions and practices were passed from one generation to the next.

SS 1.3: History of the United States and New York – Understanding roles and contributions of individuals and groups

SS 1.4: History of the United States and New York - View historic events through the eyes of those that were there

### Production Guide

– standards addressed by the suggested activities

ARTS 1: Creating, Performing and Participating in the Arts – THEATRE

ARTS 3: Responding to and Analyzing Works of Art – THEATRE

ARTS 4: Understanding the Cultural Dimensions and Contributions of the Arts – THEATRE

ARTS 4: Understanding the Cultural Dimensions and Contributions of the Arts – MUSIC

ELA 1.1: Language for Information and Understanding – Listening and Reading

ELA 1.2: Language for Information and Understanding – Speaking and Writing

ELA 2.1: Language for Literary Response and Expression – Listening and Reading

ELA 2.2: Language for Literary Response and Expression – Speaking and Writing



# Erie Canal Tales

Merry-Go-Round Creative Team

**Ed Sayles, Producing Director**, is recognized in the *Who's Who in American Theatre* for his many accomplishments over his thirty year career. One of the first pioneers of the youth theatre movement, Ed helped to create innovations in performances for children and has spearheaded youth theatre companies in both Ohio and his native New York. During his tenure at the Merry-Go-Round Playhouse, his leadership has seen the company gain national recognition for both its ground breaking youth tour and artistically acclaimed summer musical theatre.

**James Cantu, Company Manager**, graduated from the University of Mississippi with a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts (Acting Emphasis) in 1999. James has toured across Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Pennsylvania and New York State, and has performed on television and the main stage. In 2002 James joined the Merry-Go-Round Youth Tour. This is his fourth year as the Youth Tour Company Manager.

**Carole Estabrook, Educational Theatre Coordinator**, graduated from SUNY Oswego in 2003 with a BA in English Writing Arts (Playwriting) and a minor in Theatre (Acting). Carole is very excited to be scheduling the same educational theatre tour that she enjoyed as a child in the Southern Cayuga School District.

**Michael Antico** hails from Chicopee, Massachusetts and has been part of a number of productions leading up to his latest venture with MGR. Most recently, he played Cardinal Richilieu on a national tour of *The Three Musketeers* after having spent the summer of 2005 in Ferrum, VA with the Blue Ridge Dinner Theatre. Some of his other credits include *Godspell* (Jesus), *Guys and Dolls* (Harry the Horse), and *Arsenic and Old Lace* (Teddy) as well as various singing and dance revues for Six Flags.

**Kristy Barrington** is originally from Little Rock, Arkansas. Kristy has traveled the country helping children smile. She has toured with the National Theatre for Children and The Arkansas Arts Center Children's Theatre. Kristy has also performed at the Seaside Repertory Theatre, and most recently as the role of Shelby in *Steel Magnolias* at Murray's Dinner Playhouse in Little Rock. She is looking forward to a magically creative season with the Merry-Go-Round Playhouse.

**Mike Brennan** is a New Jersey native and holds a BA in Theater Arts from Rutgers University. He recently completed touring around the tri-state area with SurfFlight Theatre's touring company, SurfFlight-To-Go, playing George in *Schoolhouse Rock Live!* Some of Mike's favorite credits include *Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story* (The Big Bopper), *Working* (Mike Dillard), *Damn Yankees* (Applegate), *South Pacific* (Luther Billis), and *Barefoot in the Park* (Paul Bratter).

**James Caito**, originally from Geneva, graduated with a B.A. in Theatre Arts from SUNY New Paltz in 2004. For the last three years James has resided in Rochester where he has worked extensively with Rochester Children's Theatre, TYKEs (Theatre Young Kids Enjoy), Blackfriars Theatre and the Downstairs

Cabaret. James is very excited to be joining Merry-Go-Round for their 2007-2008 season and would like to thank his family and friends for their love and support.

**Sara Churchill** is a 2005 graduate from SUNY Fredonia with a BFA in Acting and a Minor in Dance. She recently played Leslie in *The Bridge To Terabithia* at The Theatre of Youth Company in Buffalo, New York. Her other TOY performances include *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. Other productions include *The King and Queen's Royal Feast*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Top Girls*, *Hay Fever*, *Barnum*, *Damn Yankees*, *A New Brain* and *Peter Pan*. Sara is originally from Stafford, New York.

**Jamie Dellorco** is a graduate of Rhode Island College where she received degrees in both Musical Theater and English Literature. She spent two years as head of the drama and dance program at the Henry Barnard Elementary School working with children grades K-5 on jazz, tap, creative movement, improvisation, short plays and scene work. Jamie has spent the past three years working with Kaleidoscope Touring Children's Theatre based in Cranston, RI where she has played many roles including the title roles in both *Mother Goose Live* and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* as well as being part of the original cast of a brand new musical *Cinderella TOO! The Story Continues* which premiered this past summer.

**Chandra Lynn Diesel** is a recent graduate of Shenandoah University Conservatory and has just completed her fifth season at The Blue Ridge Dinner Theatre located in Ferrum, Virginia. Her recent credits include: June in *Smoke on the Mountain* and *Smoke on the Mountain: Homecoming*, Lenya in *Fools*, and Sister Robert Anne in *Nonsense*. After all those years in Virginia, Chandra is looking forward to New York winters and her upcoming year with The Merry-Go-Round Playhouse.

**Tim Dunn** is originally from Minneapolis, MN and recently graduated from Illinois Wesleyan University with a BFA in Acting. Professionally, he has worked with The Big Picture Group in their Chicago productions of *The Wild Duck* and *Three Sisters* and he recently spent a summer working with The Lost Colony in Manteo, NC. Along with his acting training, Tim has studied improv for five years with theatres including The Second City and the I.O. Theatre. Tim is very excited to be working with Merry-Go-Round Playhouse.

**Hilary Ford** comes to Merry-Go-Round from Paducah, Kentucky (the quilt capitol of the world) and has a degree in Theatre Performance and Mass Communications from Missouri Valley College. Her first big break in theatre was as Princess #3 in a local production of *The King and I*. Hilary recently worked for Prairie Fire Children's Theatre and has an extensive background in performing with and for children.

**Kathryn Holmes** has spent most of her life in Birmingham, AL. When she's not acting, she loves to read, especially Harry Potter books. She has also been playing the piano almost forever (well, since she was

five, to be exact). When she grows up she wants to act, write children's books, and teach.

**Joshua Katzker** has been acting since he was eleven. He was born in Ft. Lauderdale, FL and he has acted all over the country, most recently in Ohio. Josh has appeared in many different plays and musicals including *Guys and Dolls*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *The Threepenny Opera*, and *Arsenic and Old Lace*. When he isn't acting, you can find Josh cheering on his beloved Chicago Cubs. He also enjoys writing songs, playing guitar and singing.

**Carl D. Krickmire** is a native of Rochester, NY and a 2004 graduate of Niagara University with a BFA in Acting. While at Niagara he performed in everything from Sondheim to Shakespeare. For the last three years Carl has been very active in the Rochester theatre scene playing varied roles including Linus in *You're A Good Man Charlie Brown* and most recently Tom Joad in *The Grapes Of Wrath*. He has also performed Off Broadway in the original comedy *Last Laugh*.

**Kara Minute** comes to Merry-Go-Round Theatre from Rochester, NY, where she just finished performing in *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change*, as Woman 1 and in *Water Coolers* as Brooke with the Downstairs Cabaret Theatre. She also taught theatre in DCT's Summer Education Program for Young Performers. Kara holds a BFA in acting from Adelphi University on Long Island. While living there, she was blessed with the opportunity to direct *Oklahoma!* at Carey High School. Some of Kara's favorite roles include: Miranda in *The Tempest* and Cinderella in *Into the Woods* (because she got to be a princess and talk to birds!)

**Lisa Myers** is excited to be starting her third season with Merry-Go-Round! Past MGR shows include: *The Oldest Story Ever Told*, *The Paper Bag Princess*, and the *Comedia Princess and the Pea*. She recently worked with Prairie Fire Children's Theatre in her home state of Minnesota where she was the Genie in *Aladdin* and Puck in a *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Lisa graduated from Concordia College with a BA in Theatre. In addition to acting, Lisa loves teaching, directing, working with power tools in the scene shop and playing with her fish.

**Joe Pine** is an Auburn native. He recently made his professional acting debut in the Merry-Go-Round production of *Miss Saigon*. Other Roles include Tom in *Glass Menagerie*, Michael in *Lena's Secret Garden*, Russ in *Bonjour Raconteur* and Paul in *Balcony Scene*.

**Robert Williams** is a native of Omaha, Nebraska. After leaving Rockhurst University in Kansas City, Missouri, Robert continued to perform, direct, & teach in Omaha. Recently Robert completed a tour of *Pinocchio* and is now happy to join Merry-Go-Round. Some stage highlights include *Angels In America*, *Smokey Joe's Cafe*, and *See What I Wanna See*. Robert's passions include video games, musicals, & playing the "glass armonica." He would like to thank his parents & friends for their continued support and patience!

Production guide created by Carole Estabrook & Designed by Jamar Redmond, Coburn Design

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