

Fur Trade in a Box

Interactive Script



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Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site of Canada

Fur Trade in a Box Interactive Script

Part 1: The Beaver

“Heads or Tails?”

Main Messages:

- An introduction to the puppet characters.
- The role of the beaver during the fur trade.

Props needed

Tyson the buffalo puppet
Gerry the beaver puppet
Picture of a beaver
Felt top hat
Beaver fur

Teacher: Pick two students to be the puppeteers. One will be Gerry the Beaver and the other Tyson the Bison. Gerry the Beaver is the first to speak.

Tyson: The buffalo puppet is a “know-it-all bison” - he is very smart and thinks a lot of himself.

Gerry: The beaver puppet is an “eager beaver” - would like to learn but is easily confused.

Part 1: The Beaver “Heads or Tails?”

Gerry: *(Act scared and upset.)* Hey what’s going on? Who are all these people? Tyson why are they staring at me? Do I have something in my teeth?

Tyson: No Gerry, calm down! There’s nothing to be afraid of. These are students from (Insert your school’s name here). *(Talk to class.)* You’ll have to excuse my friend; he’s not the sharpest pencil crayon in the box.

Gerry: Hey I heard that!

Tyson: Sorry Gerry. Anyway, down to business. Gerry and I are here from Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site of Canada.

Gerry: *(Act confused.)* We are?

Tyson: Yes we are, don’t you remember? That’s why we were put in the box. We are here to tell these wonderful students about an important part of Canada’s history.

Gerry: Oh, I thought we were hibernating.

Tyson: Silly rodent! Bison and beavers don’t hibernate!

Gerry: Oh, so what are we here for then?

Tyson: We are here to teach them a little bit about Canada’s fur trade.

Gerry: Well, that sounds exciting, NOT! I rather liked the idea of hibernating. I could use a good nap!

Tyson: You know Gerry, the beaver plays a pretty big role in this story.

Gerry: Really? I like the sounds of that!

Tyson: You might not be as impressed when I tell you what the role was, but here goes. It was all about fashion!

Gerry: No surprise there. Us beavers have always been well known for our great fashion and good looks! See these sharp teeth, they are perfect for chopping down poplar trees. Don’t forget about this beautiful fur coat, so soft and warm.

Tyson: I wouldn’t brag too much about your fur coat. The type of fashion I’m referring to has more to do with top hats.

Gerry: Whoa Tyson! I’m confused. What does my fur coat have to do with a fancy hat?

Puppeteers can break while teacher continues.

Teacher: *(Pull out picture of beaver and top hat.) What do the beaver and this hat have in common? (Respond whether they get it right or not.) The hats were made from the fur of the beavers. (Pass around the top hat. Show the beaver pelt next, but wait to pass it around.)*

Continue after everyone has seen the top hat.

Gerry: *(Act upset and cover his eyes.) Ahhhhhh! No, I can't look! That was my Uncle Bucky! (Start crying and sobbing.)*

Tyson: *(Consol Gerry by patting him on the back.) Sadly it is true Gerry. (Talk to class.) If you feel the beaver pelt, it has long, pointy, outer guard hairs. Underneath is the soft duvet fur. It was this duvet fur that was used to make felt material, and the felt was made into hats.*

Puppeteers can break while teacher continues.

Teacher: *(Pass the beaver pelt around.) Can everyone see the two different types of fur? Making the hats was a very long and complicated process! (At this point, if you have time, you can use the "Making a Beaver Hat" handout to better explain the felting process.)*

Continue after everyone has seen the beaver pelt.

Gerry: They wouldn't like my fur it's all rough and tangled!

Tyson: Oh come on Gerry, I think you have really nice fur!

Gerry: *(Acted scared.)* Don't look at me like that Tyson! I want to go back in the box now. I will not be just another pretty hat!

Tyson: Relax! Beaver felt hats went out of fashion over 150 years ago. Now, the hats didn't just look pretty, they were also symbols of a person's wealth and importance.

Gerry: If a beaver felt hat showed how rich and important you were, what would happen if they put the whole beaver on their head? *(Jump onto Tyson's head.)*

Tyson: They would have a big PAIN IN THE NECK! *(Push Gerry off.)* But seriously, the beaver was very valuable back then. People came all the way across the Atlantic Ocean to collect the beaver pelts. These pelts were the 'brown gold' of the fur trade. In fact, at the fur trade posts, instead of using money, items were priced in beaver pelts.

Gerry: Hmm. I wonder how much Grandpa Castor would have gone for?

Tyson: Gerry!

Gerry: Oops! Did I say that out loud?

Tyson: As I was saying, beaver pelts were extremely valuable and everybody wanted a beaver hat. It is said that some people paid as much for one hat, as a fur trader earned in a whole year! Who were these fur traders who couldn't even afford to buy a hat? Let's find out, shall we?

Gerry: Yes, who were these cruel beaver hunters that Uncle Bucky ran into?

End of Scene.