



## AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein  
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*“The Association of Children’s Librarians of Northern California (ACL) was founded in the 1930’s by a group of school and public librarians in service to youth. Members have been meeting regularly for almost seven decades....”*

-From “Bay Views” flyer,  
put out by ACL

I recently attended the annual ACL institute, which is an opportunity for children’s librarians of all kinds to learn something, be entertained, eat together and win prizes. This year’s program was called “Set the Stage for Reading! Theatre and Puppetry in the Library,” and it was focused on puppetry and performance in libraries. Included were: a vocal and physical warm-up; how to make a puppet using a sheet of paper and five folds; how to use a hand puppet; a short performance by the “Oakland Public Theater; and a demonstration of reader’s theatre.

The warm-ups, which were done by Janet Keller from “Callback Communications,” were painless – by that, I mean I was able to participate without feeling uncomfortable with the process. I even survived the part when we were told to choose a partner...

The instant puppet making was wonderful. Using various colors of construction

paper, we were each guided – by Pamela Brown – to make our five folds and produce a basic hand puppet. She then showed us several variations on the basic puppet, making simple characters by adding items like tongues, feathers, and ears. It was easy to imagine a group of children creating their own versions of a frog, lamb, dragon or many other animals.

Willy Claflin, an award-winning storyteller, singer, teacher and writer, gave the presentation on using hand puppets. Willy talked about how he came to appreciate the power of a hand puppet, when he discovered it helped an extremely shy young girl communicate with him. Maynard Moose, his most well known puppet, told us a story called “So What and Drop Dead” - a very funny retelling of a familiar fairy tale. Willy also introduced us to Gorf, a large bullfrog puppet, who – because he was born without a tongue – has to use a flyswatter to get his

flies. If you ever have a chance to see Willy Claflin, I would definitely recommend going. His singing and storytelling are done in a comfortable and entertaining way that doesn't seem rote, and his sense of humor is subtle and thoughtful. He also gave us some great tips on using a puppet, including: “to develop a puppet character, you have to believe it's your equal.”

Possibly the funniest part of his presentation was at the end when he took a sock that had one eye sewed onto it and told a story we all knew – but told it in a space alien language. It was amazing to slowly realize what story it was and that I could follow along, even without understanding what he was saying.

The Oakland Public Theater performed a chapter from *The Wind in the Willows*, using five actors, multiple costume changes, a simple but

clever set and some great acting. Every word in the chapter was used, with the various lines distributed carefully among the actors.

Gracie Woodard, from Oakland Public Library, gave a demonstration of reader's theatre. This low-key type of theatre uses narrators and characters to read aloud a book or play. Because no memorization is involved, it can be an entertaining and impromptu way of engaging children in acting.

The culmination of the workshop was the raffle for some lovely puppets, including a splendid iridescent orange dragon. As each winning ticket was drawn, many of the more than 150 children's librarians held up their various puppets and produced the appropriate sounds – mewling, oinking, clucking, and barking. There was even a skunk-on-a-stick bobbing up and down.