

GET IN CHARACTER

Students will read about puppeteer Megan Piphus Peace. Then groups will work together to come up with a puppet show that will teach younger students an important lesson.



Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.1

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.4

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3

Materials

Class set of "Get in Character"; access to Kahoot! quiz;
access to Sesame Street video

INTRODUCTION

Start the lesson with the Kahoot! quiz about puppets at [ti.me/puppetKahoot](https://www.kahoot.com/join?k=70896d3c-3e3f-4000-a000-000000000000). Ask students to raise a hand if they ever watched *Sesame Street*. Have volunteers explain to the class what the show was like. Ask students to share something they remember learning from the show. Show the students the article “Get in Character,” and explain that they’ll be learning about a woman named Megan Phipps Peace, who became a puppeteer for the TV show *Sesame Street*.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Describe Megan Piphus Peace's path to joining the *Sesame Street* cast.
- What character traits does Piphus Peace try to include in her performances? Why might these be important for her audience?
- How did Piphus Peace show perseverance in her life?

CLOSING

Review the character values that Piphus Peace includes in her performances. Can students think of any episodes of *Sesame Street* that include lessons about perseverance, honesty, or respect? Have students talk to a partner about the following question: Do you agree with Piphus Peace that you can teach kids “anything with a puppet”? Why or why not? Show students an example of the puppet Gabrielle teaching kids an important lesson with the video at ti.me/SesameVideo. Discuss the ways in which this video made being an upstander against racism more kid-friendly. Group students and tell them they’ll be coming up with a puppet-show script that teaches kids an important lesson. The script can include a song, if groups choose. Groups may choose their own lesson to teach, or they can use one of the values mentioned in the article. After a script is written, give students time to create their puppet characters. Invite younger classes to be the audience for the puppet-show performances.

GET IN CHARACTER

Puppeteer Megan Piphus Peace describes how she landed the part of Gabrielle on *Sesame Street*.

It took years of learning her craft for Megan Piphus Peace to land the role of Gabrielle on Sesame Street. The puppeteer met with kids at a Your Hot Job career event. Here's what she had to say.

I started **ventriloquism** and puppetry when I was 10. I'd watch other ventriloquists and puppeteers. When I saw them tell stories with their puppets and bring them to life, my imagination ran wild. I imagined myself being able to talk to puppet characters. I got VHS tapes from the library and taught myself how to talk without moving my lips.

I got a puppet and took it to school, and had my first performance. I was inspired by the spark in children's eyes. I learned that I could teach them anything with a puppet. That's why I always include a message in my performances, usually about character values, like **perseverance**, honesty, and respect. That became my passion.

A PUPPETEER'S PATH

I attended Vanderbilt University, in Tennessee, on a scholarship. Even while I was studying economics—I loved math—I never stopped performing with puppets. In my junior year, I auditioned for *America's Got Talent*. I made it all the way to the boot camp in Las Vegas, Nevada.

After that experience, I thought I would be able to go full-time in entertainment. But I had to work for several years in real estate. I kept practicing puppetry and never gave up. In 2017, I took a chance. I wrote

a letter to the Jim Henson Company, explaining why I love puppetry and ventriloquism. I included a reel of my performance.

In March 2020, I got an email from *Sesame Street*. They said that because of the pandemic, they had extra time to go through applications. They asked if I'd be willing to try out. So I trained in Muppet-style puppetry for a year. In September 2021, I became the first Black woman puppeteer on *Sesame Street*.

Until I made it to *Sesame Street*, I kept practicing. I kept dreaming, never knowing what the outcome would be. I always told myself,

"Tomorrow, I will be a better puppeteer. The day after tomorrow, I will be better than ever. Someday, I will be the best me that I can be." And now, I get to inspire young girls like me, when I was 10.

We all have unique gifts. Keep dreaming, and keep working hard. The right door will open for you, just like the door of *Sesame Street* opened for me.

Power Words

perseverance *noun*: the ability to keep going when things are hard

ventriloquism *noun*: the art of making a voice seem as if it is coming from somewhere else

SING OUT Piphus Peace plays Gabrielle on the set of a music video with singer Lizzo in January.



PUPPET PAL Piphus Peace poses Gabrielle for a picture with a girl in Harlem, in New York City, in October 2022.



ON SET Piphus Peace performs as Gabrielle with TV personality Al Roker on the set of *Sesame Street* this past February.

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Did you like learning about what it takes to be a puppeteer? Visit ti.me/creators to discover other exciting careers in entertainment, such as . . .

COSTUME DESIGNER
DIRECTOR
FILM AND VIDEO EDITOR

THIS TRANSCRIPT HAS BEEN EDITED FOR LENGTH AND CLARITY.