

Tony Sarg was a puppet maker who worked with marionettes, small wooden puppets that are moved by strings. Read the passage about Tony Sarg, and then answer the questions that follow.

BALLOONS OVER BROADWAY

by Melissa Sweet

- 1 From the time he was a little boy, Tony Sarg loved to figure out how to make things move. He once said he became a marionette man when he was only six years old.
- 2 His father had asked him to feed their chickens at six-thirty in the morning—every day. Tony had an idea—what if he could feed the chickens without leaving his bed?
- 3 He rigged up some pulleys and ran rope from the chicken coop door to his bedroom window. That night, he spread chicken feed outside the chicken coop door.
- 4 The next morning . . . Tony pulled on the rope, and the door to the chicken coop opened! The chickens ate their breakfast, Tony stayed snug in his bed, and his dad, so impressed, never made Tony do another chore.



- 5 When Tony grew up he moved to London, where he discovered that no one was making marionettes for kids anymore. So out of wood, cloth, and strings, Tony began to make puppets. He figured out ways to make his marionettes' movement so lifelike that they performed as if they were real actors. Word soon spread about Tony's amazing marionettes. When Tony moved to New York City, the Tony Sarg Marionettes began performing on Broadway.
- 6 In the heart of New York City, in Herald Square, was "the biggest store on earth": R. H. Macy's department store. Macy's had heard about Tony's puppets and asked him to design a "puppet parade" for the store's holiday windows. So Tony made new puppets based on storybook characters, then attached them to gears and pulleys to make them move.
- 7 In Macy's "Wondertown" windows, Tony's mechanical marionettes danced across the stage as if by magic. All day long they performed to shoppers jostling for a better look.
- 8 But Macy's had an even bigger job in store for Tony.
- 9 Many of the people working at Macy's were immigrants, and as the holidays approached, they missed their own holiday traditions. . . . Macy's agreed to put on a parade for their employees, and they hired Tony to help.
- 10 Tony too was an immigrant. . . . He loved the idea of creating a parade based on street carnivals from all over the world. He made costumes and built horse-drawn floats, and Macy's even arranged to bring in bears, elephants, and camels from the Central Park Zoo.
- 11 The animals joined hundreds of Macy's employees on Thanksgiving Day, 1924, winding their way from Harlem to Herald Square. It was a dazzling parade!
- 12 In fact, Macy's first parade was such a success that they decided to have one every year on Thanksgiving Day—to celebrate America's own holiday.
- 13 Each year the parade grew. But when Macy's brought in lions and tigers—in addition to the bears, elephants, and camels—the animals roared and growled and frightened the children.
- 14 Macy's asked Tony to replace the animals.

15 Tony hoped to replace the animals with some kind of puppets, but his marionettes were less than three feet tall. He would have to make much larger puppets in order for them to be seen in the parade. And how could he make them strong enough to hold up in bad weather yet light enough to move up and down the streets?

16 Tony knew of a company in Ohio that made blimps* out of rubber—the perfect material for any weather. When he called the company and showed them his sketches, they agreed to make what Tony wanted.

17 Still, how would Tony make his big puppets *move*?

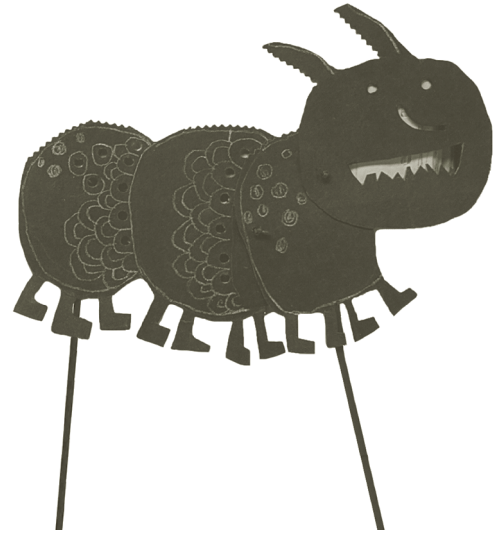
18 Then Tony had an idea—from an Indonesian rod puppet in his toy collection.

19 On Thanksgiving Day, Tony's creatures, some as high as sixteen feet, spilled into the streets, and the crowds cheered wildly.

20 Part puppet, part balloon, the air-filled rubber bags wobbled down the avenues, propped up by wooden sticks.

21 But now the sidewalks were so packed with people that only those in the first few rows could really see the parade. Tony realized his puppets would have to be even bigger and higher off the ground. And though the sticks helped to steer the puppets, they were stiff and heavy. Tony wanted his balloons to *articulate*—to move and gesture—more like puppets. But how?

22 With a marionette, the controls are above and the puppet hangs down . . .



An Indonesian rod puppet



* blimps — large, balloon-like aircraft

- 23 But what if the controls were below and the puppet could rise up?
- 24 During the next year, Tony set his new idea into motion.
- 25 This time, he asked the company in Ohio to make balloons out of rubberized silk—as strong as rubber but lighter than rubber alone.
- 26 Most important, Tony ordered the balloons to be filled not just with air but with helium too. Since helium is lighter than air, it would make the balloons rise.
- 27 Once the puppets were completed, they were deflated and shipped back to Tony in New York.
- 28 Tony did not know if everything would go as planned . . .
- 29 It was still dark on Thanksgiving morning when Tony filled the balloons with helium, tethering them down with sandbags.
- 30 By one p.m. the sidewalks were packed with people ready for the parade. Then, one by one, Tony cut the lines to the sandbags . . .
- 31 **LET’S have a PARADE!**

