

# Avenue Q

The Broadway Musical

September 6 - October 14, 2007  
Ahmanson Theatre



**PARENTAL  
ADVISORY:**  
80% TONY-WINNING HILARITY  
10% ADULT SITUATIONS  
10% FOAM RUBBER

MUSIC AND LYRICS BY ROBERT LOPEZ & JEFF MARX BOOK BY JEFF WHITTY  
BASED ON AN ORIGINAL CONCEPT BY ROBERT LOPEZ & JEFF MARX DIRECTED BY JASON MOORE

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 Center  
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**P.L.A.Y.**  
PERFORMING FOR LOS ANGELES YOUTH

## Synopsis



**PRINCETON IS A BRIGHT-EYED COLLEGE GRADUATE** who arrives in the Big City with big dreams, a tiny bank account and zero purpose. He also happens to be a puppet. Princeton makes his way down the alphabet to a humble low-rent apartment on Avenue Q and scrambles to find a survival job as a temp. Luckily, Princeton's neighbors seem really nice — people as well as puppets. There's Brian, an out-of-work stand-up comic, and his fiancée Christmas Eve, a therapist with no clients. Nicky is a good-natured slacker who shares an apartment with a closeted Republican investment banker named Rod. Two Muppet-style monsters live in the building: Kate Monster, a cute kindergarten teaching assistant, and Trekkie Monster, a computer junkie addicted to *Star Trek* and internet porn. There's also Lucy the Slut, the local — well, the name says it all. Along with their building superintendent Gary Coleman — yes, *that* Gary Coleman — Princeton and his new friends struggle to find jobs and dates and to discover their ever-elusive purpose in life.

Princeton and Kate embark on a tentative romance that runs amuck when they fall prey to the machinations of Lucy the Slut as well as the Bad Idea Bears, a pair of adorable puppets whose helpful suggestion is “one more round” of Long Island Iced Teas. The

tenants are thrown another curve when Rod kicks his roommate Nicky out of the apartment. Wedding bells might be ringing for Christmas Eve and Brian, but it doesn't look as though any of their guests will be on speaking terms at the reception. Throughout the show, the characters burst forth with song as they plumb 20-something issues ranging from racism and depression to internet porn. Princeton develops a plan to win back Kate's heart and bring harmony back to Avenue Q — but will it work? *Avenue Q* is a Tony Award-winning Broadway hit that openly parodies *Sesame Street* with satirical smarts, risqué wit and outrageous comedy. ●

### TALK ABOUT...

**1.** “Sunny day, sweeping the clouds away...” Can you sing the theme to *Sesame Street*? How about *The Muppet Show*? (“It's time to play the music...”) Can you find the *Rainbow Connection*? Is it easy being green? The songs of *Sesame Street* and the Muppets informed a generation. If you were trapped on a deserted island with only one puppet character from *Sesame Street*, which one would it be — and why? If you could add a puppet character from *Avenue Q*, which one would you choose?

**2.** After high school or college graduation, the prospect of settling into that first job and that first apartment can be both daunting and thrilling. What was your first job? Where did you live? How did you make ends meet? Do you still remember any of your first neighbors? Did you have a regular hangout or a weekly routine? What was a particularly rough lesson in the transition to adulthood — and who helped you learn it?



## Cast of Characters

### When I Grow Up

**JEFF MARX AND BOBBY LOPEZ**, the original song-writing team behind *Avenue Q*, spent their respective childhoods with Sesame Street characters as babysitters. They also share a lifelong fascination with American musical theatre. When the two met by coincidence at a subway station before starting the [BMI Musical Theatre Workshop](#) in Manhattan, they had no idea that their path would lead to one of Broadway's biggest hit shows.

Faced with the challenge of writing musical theatre for their own generation, Marx and Lopez seized on an idea that had worked for them since childhood: singing puppets. The concept was to write something funny that their friends would like, but with puppets — sort of *Sesame Street* meets *Friends*. Any issue in their 20-something lives became fodder for a potential song: jury duty, laundry, dying grandparents, high school reunions, weight-gain. They developed the concept while hanging out in coffee shops for countless hours, eating French fries and writing songs.

To their good fortune, an early version of their musical revue caught the attention of some of Broadway's most powerful theatrical producers. Jeff Whitty, a young and irreverent playwright, was brought in to develop the book. The challenge, of course, was to identify a plot that would go from "racism to homosexuality to getting out of your apartment to porn." After a wildly successful and critically acclaimed off-Broadway premiere, *Avenue Q* was quickly headed for Broadway. ●



**THE BAD IDEA BEARS**  
Princeton and Kate's inner devils.  
*Performed by Christian Anderson and Minglie Chen.*



**MRS. THISTLETHWAT**  
Kate's boss, an elderly kindergarten teacher.  
*Performed by Minglie Chen.*

PHOTO BY NICK RUECHEL



**NICKY**  
A young, easy-going, slightly disorganized guy.  
*Performed by Christian Anderson with Minglie Chen.*

PHOTO BY CAROL ROSEGG.



**TREKKIE MONSTER**  
An internet porn addict.  
*Performed by Christian Anderson with Minglie Chen.*

PHOTO BY NICK RUECHEL



**GARY COLEMAN**  
A former child star now employed as a building manager.  
*Performed by Carla Renata.*

PHOTO BY CAROL ROSEGG.

## Cast of Characters



**KATE MONSTER**  
A sweet, intelligent, sensitive kindergarten teaching assistant. *Performed by Kelli Sawyer.*  
PHOTO BY CAROL ROSEGG.



**ROD**  
A single white male, well-off, lonely and Republican.  
*Performed by Robert McClure.*  
PHOTO BY CAROL ROSEGG.



**CHRISTMAS EVE**  
A trained psychotherapist with no clients.  
*Performed by Angela Ai.*  
PHOTO BY CAROL ROSEGG.



**LUCY THE SLUT**  
The kind of girl you take home, but not to meet your mother.  
*Performed by Kelli Sawyer.*  
PHOTO BY NICK RUECHEL.



**PRINCETON**  
An earnest, recent college graduate with no sense of direction.  
*Performed by Robert McClure.*  
PHOTO BY NICK RUECHEL.



**BRIAN**  
An aspiring stand-up comic without a gig.  
*Performed by Cole Porter.*  
PHOTO BY CAROL ROSEGG.

## “I can’t work with Puppets”

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PHOTO BY NICK RUECHEL

**RICK LYON, THE PUPPET-DESIGNER** for *Avenue Q*, has been involved with the production since early workshops, bringing 15 years of experience as a puppeteer with Jim Henson’s Muppets on *Sesame Street*. In keeping with the Muppets tradition, Lyon’s designs are “mouth puppets” of malleable foam-rubber and synthetic fur construction that remain pliable and expressive in the puppeteers’ hands.

The theatrical demands of a Broadway-scale puppet show presented particular design challenges. To be visible from the back row, the puppets in *Avenue Q* were given bigger heads than people have, along with bigger eyes and bright colors, exaggerated even by Muppet standards. The puppets are largely costumed in children’s clothes, although separate puppets are utilized with each costume change in order to avoid time-delays and wear-and-tear on the materials.

As such, the production requires more than 40 puppets, including seven Princetons, five Kates, five Nickys, four Lucys, four Rods and three Trekkies.

Individual personality traits for each puppet are worked into the design. In keeping with his “everyman” character, Princeton’s features are somewhat more refined and his orange coloring could represent any race. Kate Monster is styled in fuzzy fake fur but her warmth is enhanced by wigs made from actual human hair. Rod’s uptight rigidity is accented by a long, rectangular face and his light-blue color



Princeton and Robert McClure.  
PHOTO BY CAROL ROSEGG.



suggests sadness. By contrast, his roommate Nicky has a round face in a muted green to reflect a laid-back slacker mentality. [WARNING: SPOILER AHEAD] Since the script requires partial puppet nudity, Kate Monster and Princeton are outfitted with nipples, and Princeton has surprisingly sculpted abs.

Puppets in the Henson tradition display emotion according to a strict code that is something like mime. Happiness is conveyed by direct eye contact and a wide open mouth. Sadness is shown by downcast or averted eyes. Anger is indicated by sharp, focused, high-energy movement. This performance approach owes much to techniques devised by the French actor and mime [Jacques Lecoq](#) who sought to enhance audience engagement by focusing on the physical aspect of the characters over their emotions.

During developmental workshops, the team discovered that audiences really responded to seeing puppeteers performing alongside the puppets. This staging device created its own design opportunities. Princeton and Kate Monster were conceived as single-handler puppets to underscore their prominence in the story. Larger-than-life characters like Trekkie Monster and Lucy the Slut were created as multiple-handler puppets to allow for broader, more rambunctious performances. Rod is a single-handler puppet to underscore his character's essential loneliness. Since the puppeteers would supply the subtler and more complicated emotions that puppets couldn't provide, director Jason Moore cast charismatic performers who could modify their performances to keep the primary focus on the puppets.

### TALK ABOUT...

Potential cast members for *Avenue Q* are subjected to a quick two-day session of puppet school to gauge their basic skills. They work with the simplest puppet — two Ping-Pong ball eyes attached to the top of the hand with an elastic band.

Try creating a similar puppet with your hand. Maintain eye focus and lip synch to a song or a conversation. Try articulating words with your hand-puppet — tricky words like “therapy,” “temporary,” “Valium,” or “pornography.”



Minglie Chen, Trekkie Monster and Christian Anderson.  
PHOTO BY CAROL ROSEGG.

## Not Just Child's Play



### PUPPETEERS DESCRIBE

**THEIR CRAFT** as a beguiling “come-hither” dance between reality and make-believe, drawing the audience in at the same time that it reminds them it is not real.

Children are naturally attracted to the heightened imagination and suspension of disbelief that hooks a puppet audience — but grown-ups aren't immune. Adults respond to puppets, the same way kids do — and why not? The pure playfulness of puppets makes them eye-catching and entertaining, to be sure. Natalie Venetia Belcon, the original “Gary Coleman” in the Broadway production, shares that “the challenge was to not coo over the puppets all the time.”

At the same time, puppets are somehow empowered to speak the unspeakable,

mention the unmentionable and escape all culpability for their comments because they are, after all, **only puppets**. In *Avenue Q*, puppets are harnessed for satirical and comedic effect, blithely tossing outrageous and incisive observations like, “The Internet is for Porn,” and “Everyone's A Little Bit Racist.” Puppets defuse the discomfort otherwise associated with provocative remarks. In many ways, these puppets are akin to the court jesters of yesteryear or the stand-up comics of today, speaking a sucker-punch of truth wrapped in a joke.

Puppeteers simply present their puppets as toy-replicas of human beings with hands, eyes, ears and mouths. It is the audience that endows the puppet with recognizable emotions and makes psychological connections based on its identification with the puppet's behavior. Jennifer Barnhart, an original *Avenue Q* puppeteer, remembers showing her ailing grandfather the first marionette she made in college. Although it was only a doll, her grandfather began engaging with it in ways that he hadn't been

interacting with his own family. “People think about the capacity of puppets to reach children,” Barnhart reflects, “but there was something about this puppet that helped my grandfather go back to a place of innocence and safety. And I thought, ‘Wow, these things have power.’” ●

### Kudos

**IN 2004**, *Avenue Q* won the **Tony Award** for Best Musical as well as Tony Awards for Best Score and Best Book of a Musical, defeating the much larger-scale, front-runner musical of the season, *Wicked*, and the critically acclaimed *Caroline, or Change*. Directly after winning the Tony Award, *Avenue Q* opened on the Las Vegas strip. This is the first national tour of that production and international tours are now being planned for Sweden and Finland. ●

## TALK ABOUT...

### 1. THE POWER OF PUPPETS

American popular culture is full of puppets. They include football teams' mascots, life-sized costume characters at Disney and Universal theme parks and those massive Macy's Thanksgiving parade balloons. Animated movies like *Cars*, *Finding Nemo* and *Ratatouille* are really one-dimensional graphic puppet shows. Some puppet characters have emerged solely from commercial advertisements, like the Geico gecko and the Burger King. *Avenue Q* pays tribute to *Sesame Street*; can you think of other puppet characters who have worked their way to prominence in American pop culture? Do you own stuffed animals or plastic figures of puppet characters? Is there a particular puppet character you identify with? Have you ever described a friend by comparing them to a puppet character?

### 2. POLITICALLY INCORRECT

*Avenue Q* employs puppets to make outrageous comments about American society: racism, sexism, homophobia, internet pornography. Were there statements in *Avenue Q* that struck you as outrageous? The "awful truth"? Would you respond differently if these lines were spoken by human characters?





## Who is Gary Coleman?

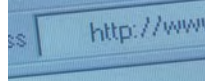
Gary Coleman became a huge television celebrity at the age of 10 as Arnold Jackson, the cute and mischievous black child adopted by a wealthy white Manhattan family on the sitcom *Diff'rent Strokes* (1978-1986). With a well-known signature catch-phrase (“Whatchoo talkin’ about?”), Coleman was so wildly popular that he received a visit from First Lady Nancy Reagan on a “very special” episode to launch her “Just Say No” anti-drug campaign.

In life, Coleman would never grow taller than 4’8” due to a congenital kidney condition which complicated his ability to parlay childhood success into an adult acting career. Instead, Coleman became a professional celebrity, trading on his notoriety as the former child star that never quite grew up. Coleman was also famous for suing his parents for misappropriation of his trust fund. At the peak of his career, Coleman’s earnings exceeded \$18 million, secured in trust; however, Coleman’s parents drew huge salaries as employees of Coleman’s production company, depleting Coleman’s share of trust assets down to a mere \$220,000. Coleman sued his parents and managers and successfully recovered \$3.8 million.

Recently, Coleman returned to the popular spotlight as a candidate in the 2003 statewide recall race for governor of California, a race that was eventually won by [Arnold Schwarzenegger](#).



## Resources



### WEBSITES

[www.avenueq.com](http://www.avenueq.com)

Official website for *Avenue Q*

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPKng8j9Mnw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPKng8j9Mnw)

Jim Henson, Frank Oz and Michael Frith discuss their Muppet-style puppeteering techniques



### BOOKS

[Avenue Q, the Book](#)

by Zachary Pincus-Roth (Hyperion/Melcher Media, 2006)

A compendium of everything-you-ever-wanted-to-know about *Avenue Q*



### FILM & VIDEO

[Team America, World Police](#)

directed by Trey Parker (Paramount, 2005)

The creators of *South Park* take on marionettes, patriotism and terrorism

[Diff'rent Strokes - The Complete First Season \(1978\)](#)

(SONY Pictures, 2004)

A DVD set of Gary Coleman’s glory days

[Sesame Street - Old School, Vol. 1 \(1969-1974\)](#)

(*Sesame Street*, 2006)

Meet the original. A DVD box set of the Children’s Television Workshop production



### RECORDINGS:

[Avenue Q \(2003 Original Broadway Cast\)](#)

(RCA Victor Broadway, 2003)

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