Annie Marie

Disciplines
Anthropology | Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Characters

MOMMA
EDIE
ANNIE
JOE
FLORA
JASPER
MRS.G
ROCK FIGURE
DEER
JOHN
SCHOLAR
JEREMY
JOSEPH
RADIO VOICE

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Act 1: Home

Act One: Home

Year: 1970

[Dark stage, radio playing with static, singing to the tune of "Indian Love Call"—keeps crooning in background.]

RADIO VOICE  Do you hear me calling you-oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo... Say you love me too-oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo...

MOMMA  (humming along with the radio, absentmindedly) MM-mm-mm-mm, oo-oo-oo-oo, mm-mm-mm-mm... Oh, I remember, mm-mm-mm-mm-mm...

[Sound of a door opening and closing at the edge of the stage, and as lights come up, Momma, an elderly woman, is shifting to get out of an easy chair, groaning as she does so. Radio keeps playing in the background.] Annie? That you? Get in here girl—where you been all this time, me sittin' here...

[disappointedly] Oh... Arnold, it's you. Thought it might be our Annie.

[A younger woman walks briskly in and turns off the radio, wheels around, and looks disgustedly at Momma.]

EDIE  (sarcastically) "Our Annie," "our Annie"—Mother, gimme a fuckin' break. Play another tune. Haven't you had enough waitin' on her? C'mon, let's eat something—I'm hungry!

MOMMA  But Annie's got a new script she's writin'—just for us, she says—don't you wanna hear it, sweetie?

EDIE  Hey, I don't need one of Annie's stupid scripts to tell me what to say—I've got words enough to put 'em in my own mouth, thank you very much. Now, where'd you put those groceries she bought ya? Heyyyy—here we go.

[Edie finds a paper grocery bag and starts rummaging through it. Lights up on Annie standing unsteadily at the edge of the stage, looking down at a pile of paper in her hands, nervously fingering a pen]

ANNIE MARIE  (in a shaky voice, occasionally forceful) I um..., I uh, don't know where to begin... Um, should I tell you about the day I ended up in the hospital with bruises around my throat?... Momma tried callin' it a playground accident, but there wasn't no playground within four miles... Oh, and there was the time I got dirt stuffed down my throat for tellin' Momma it was her, not me—"no hidin' for the guilty, no rest for the wicked" and no nothin' for the innocent... Oh, I'm not pretendin' to be innocent, no, no, not me, least of all...it's just that I kinda thought maybe you'd like to know, that is, if I could find the words to tell you, just what--

[Edie suddenly walks over and rips the papers out of her hand, and starts crumpling them.]

EDIE  (rudely and forcefully) Give me that, you little brat! Who said you could be a writer? There's only one writer in this family! You know that!

ANNIE MARIE  I remember there was a door somewhere here...or was it here? And which way were the windows facing? It's kinda hard to breath in here, isn't it? I should do something about that.

ANNIE MARIE  (rudely and forcefully) Hey Annie, get in here and get rid of this chair—I'm in my way! God, it smells like old dog on this stage. Bring some air freshener!

[Annie, a big, burly stage crew hand, comes in and picks up the chair with Momma in it and moves both offstage as Momma starts fussing and thrashing. Annie ignores her completely. The dog scrambles out of the way to get offstage. Edie stands firmly with her arms folded, paper crumpled at her feet.]

EDIE  (sarcastically) I'm not going away-ay...

ANNIE MARIE  You know, that's not the story I wanted to tell at all. Let's work on that time I got picked up by that driver in Utica—what was it, a Mustang? That's right, that's why I've never liked those cars... God, what a slime he was, jerking off right there in the driver's seat cruising at 50... If he hadn't suddenly turned on that side road and I hadn't had the sense to open the door and bail...
Annie starts rubbing her right elbow, remembering an old pain. She starts pacing slowly around the stage as Edie stands defiantly with arms crossed, shaking her head disapprovingly. Ugh, and I almost forgot—and then it got worse, two in the morning, on a lonely road out of Utica with no busses or traffic 'til morning, and suddenly another guy pulls over and comes on to me—what was I thinking? What was wrong with those guys? I had to end up sleeping under a bush in a cemetery...

[Edie struts around the stage, snotty, self-absorbed.]

**EDIE** I was Queen of the Prom, and "Miss Mechanicville"—you never even got a date! I had lots of boyfriends—wanna see my pictures?

[Annie suddenly shifts gears in her head, and yells for Arnie again.]

**ANNIE MARIE** (determinedly) Arnie, I'm gonna start over—no family, no memories, I want a clear stage. Let's dust off that dance number. Get over here and dance with me, you big lug...that's okay, it doesn't have to be good. I don't care if you remember—just dance! Like those guys in boots—did you see that hot video?

[The two start doing a series of funky dance moves, disco, swing, fifties pony, hip rhythms, clogging, tapping out different rhythms on anything at hand. Annie is prancing around the stage, laughing hysterically at Arnie's fumbling steps in his work boots until Arnie steps on her foot. Annie restrains herself from screaming in pain, just barely.]

Agh! Arnie, watch out—I need that foot... Damn, that's not gonna work, either...

[Annie starts limping around, looking for a chair, but finding none, slumps onto the stage, rubbing her foot.] We need some furniture around here...now which one of the three hundred and forty-four apartments I lived in? Now seriously, maybe only forty-four—now, if I use one piece from each, and I could start with that joint in Ann Arbor—what was that singer's name?...

**EDIE** (sarcastically) Some of us stay at home where we belong, instead of traipsing around like a common whore.

[Offstage, Momma is heard breathing laboriously, then speaking with a mixture of regret and judgement.]

**MOMMA** (offstage, groaning) Umph...hunh. hunh...ohhhh... Annie, honey, you should never've been born! I thought sure it was a tumor, me swellin' all up like that, and the doctors not knowin' what to do... And tellin' your sister we had a surprise, and her

[Annie labors to her feet and starts pacing again, as though she's looking around for a way out. Arnie starts bringing in random pieces of furniture, placing them around the stage and then moving them again as Annie moves seamlessly around him as though he's not even there.]

**EDIE** (conciliatory) Annie, you know I'm the only one that loves you. I'm the only one that knows you. And you need me. I remember everything you ever wanted to say. You can't write it without me. And not even Momma can make me go away.

[Annie doesn't notice Edie, but keeps looking around for some way out, hesitating every now and then when she thinks she spots something. She gestures and Arnie starts moving the furniture offstage again.]

**ANNIE MARIE** You know, if Edie were here, she'd be sayin' "Annie, you're so smart, and so good, you can do anything. You're much smarter than I was when I was your age." Yeh, right, Edie. Gimme a break. Remember when I tried photography? And you sold my darkroom while I was away at school?... Oh, wait a minute, that's right. I gave it to that guy, "Sunshine." God, why did I do that?... Well, you did steal all my records from when I was paralyzed with the fever that year I was five, and Momma kept bringin' me record after record, like if I wasn't gonna live at least I would die knowing all the lyrics to:

(starts singing) "I'm late, I'm late, for a very important date, no time to say hello, goodbye, I'm late, I'm late, I'm late... I'm--ver--due, I'm in a rabbit stew, no time to say goodbye, hello, I'm late, I'm late, I'm late!"

[Annie suddenly notices the script on the ground. Edie hears something offstage and shakes her head no, and covers her ears. Annie bends down and starts uncrumpling the paper, slowly, piece by piece. This time, there's nothing on it.] Annie, what's all this blank paper?

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Previous
Act 2: Reading

Act Two: Reading

Year: 1980

[Lights up on a room. Annie is sitting at a table reading. Joe walks in, sighing.]

JOE Annie, honey, what are you doing?

ANNIE MARIE I'm reading, Joe—don't bother me.

JOE Hon, it's getting late—you sure you don't wanna put that book down and follow me? If I still be there waiting for you when you wake up. It's only a book.

ANNIE MARIE Oh, Joe, this is more than just a book. See here—this date—1675—this is the real thing, not just some rewrite. And I'm realizing that if I can just think like...

JOE (impatiently) Annie, could you think like the cat? She's been asleep on the bed for hours, and she'd love for you to join us. We could nestle together, like...

ANNIE MARIE Joe, hold on a minute...oh, you got to hear this—this one's about, well, let me explain. You see, I just got this amazing insight into who these people were, what was really motivating...

JOE Annie, I'm tired. I don't want a lecture, now—it's too late. Can't you give it up?

[She puts the book face down on her lap, patient but exasperated.]

ANNIE MARIE Joe, you clearly don't understand. This book may still be here in the morning, but I won't. At least, not the way I am now. These ideas, these thoughts, these connections... who's to say I'll be able to remember, let alone recapture these same insights, these same "oh-hahs!—like, that's what, that's who, that's where—il only I'd known when...okay, listen to this: "Amid all the stillness of Nature, see Eliot place in the hands of an Indian boy the Testament, and watch the varying emotions which beam across his face, as the tones of the young savage's voice, playing with the rugged words of the unpronounceable language, strike his ear."

[She looks up at Joe, beaming, waiting for a response.]

ANNIE MARIE Isn't that just thrilling?

JOE So some Indian kid's reading a book. What's so exciting about that?

ANNIE MARIE (passionately) But it's the whole concept of reading—putting a language of sound and symbol, and gesture, and emotion—into syllables, and phrases, that make sense, any sense at all. And imagine, trying to render an alien world view into an Indian tongue—that's what gives you translations like "eel-pot" when they mean "wicker screen," and "bear-grease" for "precious oil." Now I could really give a damn about Christianity, but it's the effort, the conversation... It's like we're there with them, in their heads—knowing what Eliot, what that boy, feels when...

[Joe interrupts her, waving his hands in front of him in a warding gesture.]

JOE Oh, no you don't. That's it. It's bed for me. You do what you want with these crazy ideas. Sleep's all I want in my head. No room for nothin' but snores.

[Joe walks out. Annie's already picked the book back up, ignoring Joe, skimming for something. She runs her fingers across the page, then suddenly looks up, shouting after him.]

ANNIE MARIE Hey, here's that part I was looking for. It's the day when they...

FLORA Annie, honey, it's lights-out time!

ANNIE MARIE (in a child-like voice) Aww, do I have to? It's gettin' to a really good part!
FLORA  You'll ruin your eyes reading in dim light. There'll be plenty of light in the morning, and you'll have lots of reading when you get to school.

ANNIE MARIE
(In a whining, sad voice, already resigned.) But, Momma, I wanna read more nowww...

FLORA  Momma knows what's best for her dear. Light's out! To bed for this little one.

ANNIE MARIE  Momma, what if I'm not here in the morning?

FLORA  Oh hush dear, everything will be just the same. You'll be right here, and I'll be downstairs with your poppa, and all the little...

ANNIE MARIE  But Momma, these people I was readin' about, what if they forget, what if I don't find out where they got to, what if I can't remember where I stopped?

FLORA
(tenderly, but firm) So many questions for such a little girl. Hush now, close your eyes.

[Annie starts humming herself to sleep, in a scared and tender little voice.]

ANNIE MARIE  ... Hush little baby don't you cry, no-one's gonna sing you a rock-a-bye, mm-mm-mm-m, a rock-a-bye...mm-mm-mm-mm-

[As her voice trails off to a whisper, she looks around, and then suddenly starts squirming under the covers. A dim light illuminates the tented space where Annie goes back to reading her book. She mutters under the covers.]

ANNIE MARIE  No, I'm not gonna forget. Not Annie.

[The lights slowly go down on stage. It is dark when a slow rustling of covers, and then silence is heard. The silence is broken by a door opening, as lights go up and a big, brawny man walks in, speaking in a broad southern drawl, thumbs hitched in his pockets.]

JASPER
(much too brightly) Ann, you here, girl? Get outa' that bed, honey, we got thangs ta do!

[Annie peeks her head out from under the covers, wide-eyed, surprised, and in an adult voice, snaps at the intrusion.]

ANNIE MARIE  Jasper, how the hell'd you get in here? Did I forget to lock my windows again?

JASPER
(tenderly) Girl, you know you love it when your big ol' sugar daddy lets himself in uninvited. Outta that bed, now!...less ya want me ta climb on in, an' we could do a little hootchie...

[With a great rustle of covers, Annie stomps out of bed, Fully clothed and very rumpled. She shakes her hair out of her face and starts rubbing her eyes.]

JASPER  Dang, gal--didja ferget ta undress? Who drug you in last night?

ANNIE MARIE  Jasper, I was just reading and I must have fallen asleep. Now what do you want?

[He leans in to kiss her.]

JASPER
(singsong) Only ta see my little prairie flower. C'mon, hon, we got some travelin' ta do.

ANNIE MARIE  Jas, don't surprise me like this. Where are you talkin' about goin'? Were we planning something that I forgot?

JASPER
(proudly) That's my gal. Lookin' smart and actin' dumb just ta show me off in a good light. C'mon, darlin', we ain't got much time. Story's gonna be over if ya' don't hurry. That's all she wrote!

[He takes her by the hand and lovingly drags her off. She twists back reaching toward the bed.]

ANNIE MARIE  Wait, Jas--my book!

JASPER  It'll still be waitin' when you get back. We got thangs ta do, gal--thangs ya can't read in no book til ya gone 'n done 'em!

[Mrs. G. suddenly stumbles into view, alone, as lights come up on an older woman with glasses sitting at a large wooden desk. She pushes the chair back and gets up when she sees Annie.]

MRS. G.
There you are, dear. Now, Mary, sit right here at my place. I have to leave the room for a moment, and I'm sure you can keep the other children behaved while I'm gone...
Right, class?
[Mr.'s G. whispers to Annie conspiratorily.] Just talk to them, dear. That may keep them quiet. I won't be gone long.

[Annie looks around, puzzled, while the older woman gestures at her chair and ceremoniously leaves the room. Annie reluctantly, almost suspiciously, sits at the desk, eyes wide at the size of the book resting on the desk in front of her. She slowly opens it, begins to smile broadly, and then, slowly, looks up at the room full of students.]

ANNIE MARIE

(in a youthful voice, sounding out each word very carefully) Today, I am going to read to you from the en-cy-klee-oh-pee-di-ah. What would you like to know about first?

[She gesture to one of the students who has raised a hand and nods, approvingly.] Indians? Oh, yes, I can read you all about Indians. First, let me tell you a story...

[The door opens, and Joe walks in, looking impatiently for Annie.]

JOE Annie, we've got to go.

ANNIE MARIE

(in a frustrated adult voice) No, Joe, not now! I'm just figuring it out.

JOE Annie, these books can wait. I can't.

ANNIE MARIE

(whining) But Mrs. G. said I could!

JOE

(exasperated) Mrs. G. doesn't have to live with you, Annie, and I do. Nothing's changed in what seems like three hundred years now, and I'm tired!

ANNIE MARIE

(pleading) Oh, but Joe, don't you see? That's it, That's the problem, it's in the books, it's in the way we think, if it doesn't get lost in the translation... I wanna hear about Indians!

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Act Three: Crossing the Lake

Year: 1995

[Dark stage, dim lights up slow on background screen, projecting video of the waters of a large inland lake, enveloped in waves of fog and circling mist, shadowy forms of mountains in the background coming into focus and fading back into the mist, sounds of water rising and falling, lapping and splashing, occasionally surging as a large wave forms and rolls across the surface.]

[Lights up slow on a figure standing on a rocky promontory, at rear stage left, hair flying back in the wind, arms down and slowly lifting out to the sides, palms forward facing the wind, head tilted back, singing, softly, almost inaudible sounds, unintelligible words, prayers...]

ROCK Figure

Au-ah, au-ahhh, ha-ya-a-a, ha-yaaaa, hiya, hiya, ahh...

[Lights up, wash of broken light, across three figures center stage, kneeling in a canoe. Two are paddling, hard, into the wind and waves, a woman at the bow, a man at the stern, as spray washes across their faces. A woman seated in the center of the canoe is leaning out over the water, staring intently, crumbling bits of loose tobacco from her hands into the water, singing softly the same song as the figure on the rock...]

DEER

Au-ahhh, ha-ya-a-a, ha-yaaaa, hiya, hiya...au-ahhhh, ha-yaaaa, hiya, hiya... Hey! John! Watch it--you're gonna dump me if that happens again! Damn, how does that song go...?

[Deer shifts her weight to regain her balance. John, a big, bulky man in the stern of the canoe, speaks in a patient but exasperated tone, as though they have been arguing this way all of their lives.]

JOHN

Deer, it's the waves. I'm just paddling. Keep singing...

[he gesture with his head toward the pouch in her left hand] More tobacco?

[Annie, the woman in the bow, turns over her shoulder, pausing for a moment, then resumes paddling without saying a word John keeps paddling as Deer keeps singing and scattering tobacco on the water, looking a little worried as she watches the waves increase around them The rock figure on the promontory keep singing softly, gazing down at them.]

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[Spotlight up on a scholarly figure in a suit standing at a podium stage right front, lecturing.]

SCHOLAR

Lake Champlain, with a total length of 125 mi. from north to south, forms the boundary between Vermont and New York... It extends from Missisquoi bay and the Richelieu river in Canada southward to South bay near Whitehall, N.Y. It has a maximum width of 13 miles and a total area of 490 square miles, consisting of 435 square miles of water surface and 55 square miles of islands. Lake Champlain is extensively utilized for commercial and pleasure boat navigation. The navigation season is limited to eight months, however, by ice conditions. The lake is a link in the international waterway between New York harbour and the lower St. Lawrence. Lake Champlain fishing is popular; the catch includes trout, salmon, bass and whitefish

(pike perch). The tributaries and their branches--Otter creek and the Mettawee, Poultney, Winoski, Lamoille, Missisquoi, Bouquet, Ausable, Saranac and Great Chazy--are fished for trout. Lake Champlain was discovered by French explorer and soldier Samuel de Champlain from whom the lake takes its name. During the early period of settlement Champlain was the gateway between French Canada and the English colonies. It played an important part in all the wars during which hostile peoples faced each other across the lake...

(The scholar stops to turn the page, then silently reads to himself.]

[Lights up on stage left front, where two scruffy-looking young men, Jeremy and Joseph, dressed in flannel, denim, and leather, with multiple piercings and peculiar haircuts, but not quite punked-out, are seated at a rickety kitchen table with cups of coffee, reading to each other from an old book. Every time they get excited and shift their weight, the chairs and table creak and moan as though they're about to give way at any moment. They read the Abenaki language text in a halting, broken way, following with their fingers, sounding out the words, then clearly and confidently read the translations.]

JEREMY

Listen to this one, Joe--"Ni kizii k'pozinana. K'nodamen engine altoguak?"

(translates) "Now we are on board. Do you hear the noise of the engine?"

JOSEPH

(Joseph leans in near Jeremy to continue reading) "Oda ni wibiwi, achi n'awawadamen ali nanamipodak stimbot."

(translates) "Not only that, but I also feel the steamboat shaking."...

(pushes his chair back, and exclaims) Cool stuff! Man, I didn't know Indians had steamboats?

JEREMY

(patiently) They didn't, Joe--this book was to help 'em get work in the states where the white guys had steamboats,

(more excitedly) Joe, here's a conversation starter for ya. "Witebokwaaw wii isiato sena!" Steer well; look out for the rocks!

JOSEPH

(leans in again, following the book text) "Kakaswi kinlomsen kakaswi achi kinôlego." It blows harder and harder; and the sea runs higher and higher...
ANNIE MARIE  
(speaks fluently, a soft rolling sound) Kagui k’d-elôwzi? K’pilwinôgwzi.

DEER  
(sharply) Annie, don’t talk Injun to me when I’m drowning!

JOHN  
She’s asking after your health—you look pale.

DEER  
I’m fine—just feel like hurling again, that’s all  
(coughs, choking) argh, huff... some of that tobacco blew right down my throat when the wind shifted.

ANNIE MARIE  
Niagaki wji,ôda kagui n’-d-illogowen sobagw. “As for me, I am not subject to sea-sickness.”

JOHN  
Don’t rub it in. Keep paddling.

[Lights go down on the canoe and the rock figure in the background, although the images of the lake and sounds of the waters continue, at lower volume.]  
[Front stage right, the Scholar clears his throat, adjusts his glasses, and recites.]

SCHOLAR  
The Champlain lowland, the widest in Vermont, spreads across 25 miles in the north. It slopes from an average elevation of 300 ft. in the south to 120 ft. in the north, and is underlain by limestones, dolomite, shale and sandstone, and largely covered by post-glacial lake deposits and glacial till. The lowland’s flat or rolling topography and dairy and fruit farms contrasts with the abrupt, sharp rise of the fronts of the Green and Adirondack mountains with their high peaks and forested slopes.

[The Scholar pauses again, and at stage left, almost as if in response Jeremy picks up a large ring binder and flips through to find a page. He starts reading.]

JOSEPH  
Hey, let’s look up the old name of the lake.

JEREMY  
Okay, this is from a translated text called “T8ni Kiozigapi Wlitow8gan ’Nd’akinna”—“How The Talker Shaped ’Our Land”

JEREMY  
“This talker” ain’t no college professor—this guy made mountain ranges—listen to this Now the great mystery asked again, “Who are you?” and the dust said “I am ’hozo nia”—“the one who brings himself together.” “Kizi ’oji hozo’ kinap wiwniwi agma. Wkadip pamkanrit.” The one who shaped himself wanted to travel. “Ni w’kwagwajip w’aka, kanwa ndaba skaw.” So he tried to stand, but he could not stand. “Ni spiwi w’eljial w’kwagwn8p kikajiw i wi sj8khipozit, kanwa mina ndaba.” So with his hands he pushed against the earth to the East, “achigaba kizitok kchi adenak wji s8khipozit.” He made great mountains in the East, still he did not stand. Again “w’kwag wajip, kwagwn8p kikajiw i ah nakih8t, kanwa aska w’dab i laka, mina ndaba” he tried, pushing against the earth to the West “Achigaba kizitok kchi adenak alla nakilh8t.” He made great mountains to the West Then “oji hozo” put his hands “kjiwi adenak sj8khipozit” on top of the mountains he made and pulled, and again tried to stand. “Achigaba kizitok kchi sbok adenakwi.” He made great river channels in the mountains. After seeing this...

JOSEPH  
And one of those rivers is Lake Champlain!

JEREMY  
(patiently exasperated) Champlain is a lake, not a river, dummy. Get It? Lake Champlain?

JOSEPH  
Well then what the heck is the lake called in Indian?

JOSEPH  
I’m getting to that. Be patient.

[Lights up on The scholar who harrumphs, pulling out another book. Adjusting his glasses again, he starts.]

SCHOLAR  
The phenomenon of language loss is especially acute in North America. No doubt scores, perhaps hundreds, of tongues indigenous to this continent have vanished since 1492. Some perished without a trace. Others survived long enough for 20th century linguists to track down their last speakers and partially describe their grammars. In formulating a response to this crisis, there are three questions that need to be explored (1) What causes language decline and extinction? (2) Can the process be reversed? And (3) why should we concern ourselves with this problem? Conceiving language loss as a Darwinian process implies that some languages are fitter than others, that the developed” will survive and the “primitive” will go the way of the dinosaurs. There comes a point when multilingual parents no longer consider it necessary or worthwhile for the future of their children to communicate with them in a low-prestige language, and when children are no longer motivated to acquire active competence in a language which is lacking in positive connotations such as youth, modernity, technical skills, material success, education.

[In the background, lighting slowly rises on the rock figure who kneels down, reaching her arms toward the water, softly singing again. The waters calm suddenly, and the paddlers in the canoe stop paddling. Deer is slumped over the boxes, apparently unconscious. John laboriously shifts her body. Annie has shifted around to try to help.]

ANNIE MARIE  
(in a hushed voice) Pita wlawiben.

JOHN  
(reverently) Kaalatta wlawiben. It is very calm indeed. Wilioni “Bitompagokw.” Thank you, “the waters in-between.”
[Annie looks around slowly, speaking to the water, then up to the rock figure. John is rummaging around, checking the boxes under Deer.]

ANNIE MARIE  Wiloni Odziehzo ta Odziehzo atsi. Are the old ones safe?

JOHN  Looks like it. Deer's down for the count, but she'll be fine once we hit land.

[John takes a deep breath, closes his eyes, and leans back, weary and concerned. The rock figure rises to her feet again, poses, and dives into the water. The canoe rocks as she hits the water. John and Annie look at each other, and the water, and with a knowing nod, turn back to their chore.]

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JOHN AND ANNIE  Paddle