

Mom's Joy Room

Where Obsolescence Ends and Wonder Begins

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHENTICITY

Howdy Doody Marionette

Peter Puppet Playthings Inc., United States | c.1950-1954 | 16 inches

ESTIMATED WORTH

\$200–\$350



Howdy Doody marionette with original Peter Puppet Playthings Inc. box

Meet **Howdy Doody** — the freckle-faced star of America's first great children's television phenomenon, in his original 1950s marionette form as sold by Peter Puppet Playthings Inc. This is the authentic mid-century toy version that a generation of Peanut Gallery dreamers begged Santa to bring: a 16-inch, all-original Howdy with his composition head, sliding eyes, cowboy outfit, and famous freckles — and yes, they're all there. Forty-eight freckles, one for every state in the union at the time he was designed, because Howdy wasn't just a puppet — he was a full-fledged American kid.

"What time is it? It's Howdy Doody time!"

History

Howdy Doody debuted on NBC on December 27, 1947, as the star of the first television program ever created specifically for children. Broadcast live from "Doodyville" five days a week through 1960, the show was hosted by "Buffalo Bob" Smith and introduced America to a whole town of beloved characters — Clarabell the clown, Chief Thunderthud, Princess Summer Fall Winter Spring, and the Peanut Gallery of on-air kids. The program was a genuine cultural phenomenon: it pioneered live audience participation, sponsored merchandise tie-ins, and the very idea that television could be made for children. In 1948, the show's "Howdy Doody for President of the Kids" campaign drew an astonishing 58,000 requests for campaign buttons.

Children who watched wanted Howdy of their own, and Peter Puppet Playthings Inc. answered. The company produced this authentic licensed marionette in the early 1950s — designed by puppet artist Raye Copelan, the sculptor behind the iconic Howdy design — and sold it in toy and department stores for about \$3.49. The toy was a mechanical marvel for its price: sliding eyes that wink, a mouth worked by the strings, jointed composition head and hands, and the complete trademark costume — plaid shirt, neckerchief, jeans, and the famous "HD" cowboy boots. An original instruction sheet taught children to make Howdy dance by first switching on "the victrola."

These retail marionettes are distinct from the actual screen-used studio puppets, which occasionally surface at major toy auctions for five-figure sums. But the toy versions hold their own honored place in collecting — they are the pieces Boomers actually owned and loved, and Howdy Doody memorabilia remains one of the cornerstones of "Boomerabilia." The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History preserves an example of this very toy as a cultural artifact of American childhood. Because so many were played with hard by real children, examples that survived complete — puppet intact, strings present, and especially with the original box — have become genuinely scarce nearly three-quarters of a century later.

This example remains in good original condition with the original box (the box showing honest age and wear, as nearly all surviving examples do). Complete licensed examples with surviving boxes typically bring \$200-350 today, with condition of both puppet and box determining placement within the range. For the generation that sat in the imaginary Peanut Gallery, he remains priceless — the most cheerful face of a gentler, black-and-white America.

Notable Features

- ♦ Authentic licensed 1950s production by Peter Puppet Playthings Inc. — not a reproduction
- ♦ Design attributed to puppet artist Raye Copelan — 48 freckles, one for each U.S. state at the time
- ♦ 16-inch figure: composition head and hands, original sliding-eye mechanism, string-operated moving mouth
- ♦ Complete trademark costume: plaid shirt, neckerchief, jeans, and "HD" cowboy boots
- ♦ Original marionette strings and wooden control (per seller description, good original condition)

- ◆ Original Peter Puppet Playthings Inc. display box included — box in poor condition but complete and displayable
- ◆ Companion piece to a Smithsonian National Museum of American History-held example of the same toy
- ◆ Original retail price in the early 1950s: approximately \$3.49

COLLECTOR NOTES

This is the authentic mid-century retail marionette produced under official license — not a modern reproduction (modern remakes exist and lack the composition construction and original box graphics). The puppet is in good original condition; the original box is present but in poor condition, which is noted honestly and reflected in the valuation. As with most Howdy Doody toys, this piece is unmarked beyond the box and costume details typical of the production. Value reflects current demand for authenticated Boomer-era television memorabilia: the generation that grew up with Howdy (1947-1960) now in their 70s, with complete boxed examples increasingly scarce. A worthy example of "the most famous freckled face in American childhood."

Sandy Wade

Proprietor, Mom's Joy Room

This certificate accompanies the item at time of sale and reflects research conducted at the time of cataloguing.