



Educational Companion: puppetry arts

WHAT IS A PUPPET?

A “puppet” is an inanimate (non-living) object that is brought to life by an outside force (usually a human being working as a performer) in order to tell a story. It’s anything you can pick up and bring to life!

There are five basic types of puppets:

rod puppets: A rod puppet is manipulated (moved) by wooden or wire sticks (rods). These rods enable the puppet to be above or some distance in front of the puppeteer. The number of rods is determined by the number of parts on the puppet that need to be moved for the puppet to accomplish what is needed to tell the story and are often found on the puppet’s head, body, arms, and legs.

body puppets: A body puppet is moved from the inside by a puppeteer or puppeteers, and is often larger in size and scale than other types of puppets. A body puppet is similar to a costume, but the puppet’s character and movement is much more important than its appearance as a costume.

shadow puppets: A shadow puppet is a cut-out figure held between a source of light and a translucent screen. Shadow puppets can form solid silhouettes or be decorated with various amounts of cut-out details. Different effects can be achieved by moving the puppet (or light source) out of focus.

string puppets (or “marionettes”): A marionette is suspended and controlled by a number of strings, plus sometimes a central rod attached to a control bar held from above by the puppeteer.

hand puppets: A hand puppet is controlled by one hand which occupies the interior of the puppet. It can be worn like a glove and the mouth may also open and close.

NOTE: There are variations of all of these types of puppets, which makes for numerous other puppetry styles not specific to these categories (i.e. finger puppets, object puppets, tabletop puppets)

- **DISCUSSION:** Ask the students what puppets are. Where have they seen puppets before? What can be used as a puppet? Out of what materials can puppets be made, and why would you choose some materials over others for certain projects? Have you ever made your own puppets?

WHAT IS A PUPPETEER?

A performer who uses a puppet or puppets to tell a story is called a “puppeteer.”

- **DISCUSSION:** What skills does it take to be a puppeteer? Puppeteers tend to play multiple roles in every show they do. How are they able to make each character distinct and unique? Puppeteers can maneuver their bodies to make their puppet characters move in unique and interesting ways, and can modify their voices to make those characters sound different from one another. Can you change your bodies and/or voices and play different “roles”?

WHAT IS AN AUDIENCE?

Being a good audience member is as important as being a good puppeteer! It takes teamwork between the audience and puppeteer/actor to make a show successful. There are “rules of etiquette” that need to be followed, such as:

- A LIVE SHOW IS DIFFERENT THAN TV OR MOVIES. It’s okay to have fun, but do remember that the people on-stage (and in the audience) can hear you—be polite!
- MAKE SURE EVERYONE CAN SEE. Stay seated so the audience members behind you can see the show.
- BE SUPPORTIVE. The way audience members show that they like something is to applaud. Make sure to applaud if you appreciate what you see and hear. Between songs or scenes, after the show, and after the post-show demonstration are appropriate places/times to show your appreciation.
- LISTEN CLOSELY. It’s important that you hear all the details of the story so that you can enjoy it fully.
- **DISCUSSION:** Review the “rules” of being a good audience member.
Role play what is appropriate and what is not.

PUPPETS FOR ALL!

Puppetry is perfect for EVERYONE. It combines all aspects of the arts (design, construction, performance, writing/dramaturgy, directing, arts administration, technical arts), and every subject in school (language arts, math, sciences, social studies, and physical education). Puppets *captivate* audiences of all ages! They invite empathy and interaction. When an artist creates his/her own puppet characters, it stretches the imagination, and develops important language and coordination skills. Though simply *fun*, puppets are fabulous tools to stimulate learning, too: they satisfy educational objectives across the curriculum: problem solving, turn-taking, and environmental awareness are an added bonus. Puppetry has been used for thousands of years across cultures to entertain, educate and inspire.

WHY PUPPETS (and masks)?

*FOR/IN SHOWS THAT SPECIFICALLY CAST PUPPETS OR OFTEN USE PUPPETS:

-*Specifically cast*: Avenue Q, Little Shop of Horrors, Shrek, The Lion King, The Long Christmas Ride Home, War Horse, Carnival, Hand to God, The Oldest Boy

-*Often use*: She Kills Monsters, Beauty & the Beast, James and the Giant Peach, The Producers, Into the Woods, The Addams Family Musical

*FOR/IN SHOWS THAT CAN REPLACE CAST (HUMANS) AS PUPPETS: Peter Pan (Nana), Bunnica, Children of Eden (The Naming), Seussical (The Whos)

*FOR/IN SHOWS THAT CREATIVELY USE PUPPETS TO ENHANCE AN AESTHETIC OR SOLVE CASTING/TECH ISSUES: Peter Pan (flying = shadows), The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas (chorus line of aggies), Gilgamesh (Humbaba – Performance Gallery), A Midsummer Night's Dream (Bristol and Old Vic), Pinocchio (The National Theatre)

*TO TEACH: teamwork/collaboration, moving w/o dancing, to help every student find their artist

*TO SUPPORT CURRICULUM STANDARDS: ELAR, Fine Arts. IB. 21st century skills (and content areas, e.g. measuring and fractions and geometry and simple machines and optics in building, social studies and history in world puppetry styles, poetry in global scripts, biology and anatomy in designing)

(NOTE: list all the things that the puppet needs to do THEN decide what style fits! – Aretta's approach after workshops and conversations with George Latshaw, puppet and theatre director)

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SOME GREAT PUPPETRY RESOURCES!

BOOKS

Bernier, Matthew and Judith O'Hare (editors). Puppetry in Education and Therapy (Unlocking Doors to the Mind and Heart). ISBN 1420884603

Crepeau, Ingrid C. and M. Ann Richards. A Show of Hands: Using Puppets with Young Children. ISBN 9781929610365

Doney, Meryl. World Crafts Puppets. ISBN 0531158721 (also called Puppets Around the World, ISBN 0749645482)

Haines, Ken and Gill Harvey. The Usborne Book of Puppets. ISBN 0746027230

Kennedy, John. Puppet Mania! ISBN 1581803729 and Puppet Planet, ISBN 1581807945

Lade, Roger. The Most Excellent Book of How to Be a Puppeteer. ISBN 076130505x

Latshaw, George. The Complete Book of Puppetry. ISBN 048640952x

Laughlin, Nancy. Puppet Power. ISBN 0673363899

Rump, Nan. Puppets and Masks: Stagecraft and Storytelling. ISBN 0871922983

Sims, Judy. Puppets for Dreaming and Scheming. ISBN 0881601675

Sinclair, Anita. The Puppetry Handbook. ISBN 0909431043

Smith, Johanna. Puppetry in Theatre and Arts Education: Heads, Hands and Heart. ISBN 9781350012912

Walker, Lois and Herb. The Instant Puppet Resourcebook for Teachers. ISBN 0921217315

Wallace, Mary. I Can Make Puppets. ISBN 1895688205

Wisniewski, David and Donna. Worlds of Shadow: Teaching with Shadow Puppetry. ISBN 1563084503

GROUPS/ORGANIZATIONS (follow the links to other great websites, too!):

Puppeteers of America: 1-888-568-6235, membership@puppeteers.org, <http://www.puppeteers.org>
(guilds and festivals listed, too!)

Union Internationale de la Marionnette (UNIMA): 404-873-3089, unima@mindspring.com,
<http://www.unima-usa.org>