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Puppetry for School Children

A Term Paper

Presented to

Mrs. Frances Scott

Ouachita Baptist University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
the Honors Program

by

Gennie Eldridge

Spring, 1975

"I do not fear, for my part, to formulate my creed. I believe in the immortal world of marionettes and dolls... They do not live like ourselves, and yet they do live. They live as the immortal gods... They bring to little children the only vision of the divine which is intelligible to them.

To speak frankly, I must say that actors spoil plays for me. I mean good actors... Their talent is too great, it covers everything! There is nothing left but them... I love marionettes... It is artists who construct them, poets who show them."

La Vie Littéraire, Anatole France

"A puppet's anatomy may be determined, not by any requirement to copy human anatomy faithfully but by the demands of the puppet's character and behavior."

Actor With Puppet, S. Obraztsov

"In the puppet we have all those elements necessary to interpretation and in the puppet stage every element necessary to a creative and fine art."

Gordon Craig

Puppetry for School Children

by

Gennie Eldridge

I. P L A Y

"Play is essential to the proper living of life." St. Thomas Aquinas

All puppetry is a form of play. More than most forms, quick methods seldom have utilitarian ends as far as the performer is aware. If the puppets develops from the available materials, then its practical use will quickly lead from aimless play to a more formal form. It is at this stage that dangers lurk for the beginner. It is the liberating possibilities of this medium that are so very important and not the development of a set pattern for repeated performances.

The original materials provide a source of inspiration and this will vary from day to day and with the mood of the operator. It is impossible to predict the result, but it is certain that each performance will be different to all others, full of surprises, original in conception and as inventive as only a truly creative medium allows. It is after repeated experiments that any pattern or script should be written down, and then only in the form of outlines and cues if the joy of spontaneity is to be retained. Puppetry is an ideal medium for free expression as well as providing unlimited potentiality for more planned productions. The puppet itself, even if it is known to be nothing but scraps of rag, paper, or cardboard and a few trinkets, stimulates the child's visual imagination.

Identification with a puppet character often leads to healthy self-revelation and this in turn leads to a general adjustment of deep-rooted problems.

I I. O R I G I N S

The puppet, a theatrical figure moved under human control, has held an age long fascination for mankind. Wherever detailed records survive there are evidences of it. It differs from all those articulated images, dolls, and automata which are not theatrical, not animated by human control. First and always it is a player, whether it be a three inch cardboard Thespian or a thirty-five foot telescoping clown such as Remo Bufano built for Billy Rose's production, Jumbo. It can be any character, cowboy, horse, enchanted tree, flying rug, ghost, or gremlin. Unlike the human actor, it is not limited to an opaque body and more or less transparent disguises; it has its own proper size, shape and qualities made to order. It is, of course, a part of the human being who controls it. Those who watch identify with it, soaring when it vaults, accelerating to its frenetic pace, and exulting in its defiance of physical obstacles. Because its scope is so much wider than that of the human actor, it affords a wider release.

Charles Nodier, writing in La Revue de Paris in November 1842, stated that an audience feels protective toward puppets as if they were dolls banished from the nursery. Charles Magnin, in the classic history of puppetry, said that the audience felt religious awe, as if puppets were

divine images in the dusk of a temple. Spectators may experience both emotions. But when puppets come alive and the play is on, the overwhelming appeal is that of the theatre. One ceases to think of wood and wire; one is absorbed in the action. One loses a sense of proportion. All life is encompassed in the miniature stage realm; the puppeteer is the hand of destiny. The audience, accepting the convention of puppetry, projects itself into them with the same empathy that it feels for any other actors.

When man wanted to invoke the spirit world he made images as intermediaries between him and it. He wore a mask and was himself an image. His spirit so entered the spirit world; when he played scenes of the chase he drew game to him by sympathetic magic; when he re-enacted the lives of heroes he became possessed of their strength. This mystic masquerade came to be the theatre. It was only another step to animate the image and create the puppets.

But to document the beginning of puppet history is difficult. Little jointed figures of sun-baked clay, some of them with loops on the head to suspend them by, have been dug up in Greece and Italy; if they were puppets they were only children's toys. The ancient Egyptian string-operated figurines which have come to light from tombs were probably models of workmen.

Their early course must be reconstructed from what we know of them today. They probably played in suburbs of towns and in out-of-the-way places for humble audiences, giving simplified or burlesque versions of what had been popular in the big theatre a few seasons before. Their booths or stages were light enough to ride in a cart or on the show-man's back. The delight of the

common folk who had no other theatre, they were, however, not unknown to aristocrats who liked parody or had seen too much of the big theatre.

When the theatre of ancient Rome crumbled, if any actors survived they were forced to throw in their lot with that of the traveling entertainers-- jugglers, acrobats, and puppeteers. A whole variety program came to be performed by a small troupe or a mere team. The jongleurs who wandered from castle to castle could sing, tumble, and work a puppet. Little by little a new sort of theatre emerged, that of the Church, enacting miracle and morality plays suitable for the sacred precincts. Now it happened that the Church had images; the actor again bethought himself of animating them.

At the time of the first voyages of discovery to America, puppetry in Europe were either part of the bag of tricks of the mountebank, who showed them in courtyards, marketplaces, or halls, or fixtures in certain shrines, brought out at holiday season. When the first explorers and settlers were crossing the Atlantic, mountebanks, aware of the new life in the theatre, ventured more elaborate shows.

When there was a chink of stowage in the tightly laden ships sailing westward, puppets made the voyage. Of course, the Puritans who landed in New England abhorred the theatre, though puppets shows had managed to play during the enforced closing of the theatres in England. Puppets were to be the harbinger of the theatre in the New World--they needed less equipment than live players. But their story has been so little known that one finds people under the impression that in America they were an innovation of the present art.

When it was not assumed that puppetry was comparatively recent newcomers, it was thought that they had never been sufficiently popular in the old

days to be of any importance in America's entertainment life. In the introduction to a reprint of the Collier-Cruikshank "Punch and Judy" (Harper's Monthly Magazine, May 1871) S. S. Conant, little knowing what perennial favorites Punch and his spouse had been and were to be, said of the play, "It was exhibited for a short time at a popular place of amusement in this city (New York) about a year ago, but did not take sufficiently with the audience to induce the manager to go on with it."

Puppet shows, unless they were unusually affluent, seldom advertised in the newspapers. And the newspapers almost never took any critical notice of them. That is still the case today. Yet almost the only records of early shows are to be found in ads in the papers. Until recently few puppeteers wrote their memoirs; their diaries and account books have not been saved in public collections. Fortunately, it has been possible to draw upon the recollections of many old-time puppeteers to enrich this history. Together with other stimulants, puppets have frequently been frowned upon in America. They were itinerant and they were small; if they escaped suppression they risked oblivion. It is possible that many an early showman has disappeared without leaving a trace.

III. PUPPETRY in the PRIMARY SCHOOL

Puppetry has been developing as a valuable creative form of expression in schools for a number of years. It has been regarded as an art form which unites creative English on the one hand with visual art on the other.

Through the medium of puppetry children are enabled to develop their imagination to the full. A child's love of fantasy can be given full play

and the basic need to act out situations is completely fulfilled even for withdrawn personalities who find the indirect expressions of puppetry so much easier than alternative means of self-expression such as play-acting. Through puppetry, the opportunity exists for expressing through mime and movement, speech, creative writing, costume and scenic design, lighting and of course, through modelling and construction work in the making of the puppet.

Few would disagree that an ideal opportunity exists for the fusion of art forms while the child is in the primary school. At this time learning is largely under the direction and guidance of one teacher so there is the opportunity for complete integration of study to take place, and puppetry is an ideal catalyst through which much of this integration may be possible.

Children in their play, animate a great variety of objects and to some extent may be recognized as "puppeteers." Puppetry is an art, but the teacher may also find it to be an excellent way of integrating the subjects in the school curriculum and of breaking down the very artificial barriers that have been set up.

Music, history, geography, art, craft, science, and French as well as English, may all be encompassed by this medium. It would, of course, be unwise for a teacher to try to manipulate a subject to fit in if it does not do so naturally.

If used in the right way, puppetry can become a dynamic medium in the field of education, and if the teacher has a deeper knowledge of this art, of its possibilities, limitations, and techniques, he will be better equipped to maximise its potential. In the journals of the Puppeteers of America may be found a detailed description of an experiment carried out by the New York Board of Education to determine "the effectiveness of

of using puppetry in the school to enrich and aid the language arts programme." Classes from kindergarten through eighth grade participated, using shadow puppets, glove puppets, marionettes and masks.

It was found that, through puppetry, the children became aware of the importance of sequence in story-telling, they enriched their vocabularies, held discussions on the plot, script, and production, and took an interest in classical music in order to find appropriate music for their plays. They also had to carry out research into the topic and this included work in the areas of geography, history, and current affairs. There was evident eagerness to improve speech and the problem children, finding that they were depended upon to do their share, did a good job.

I V. T H E P U P P E T and its T H E A T R E

A. Glove Puppets.

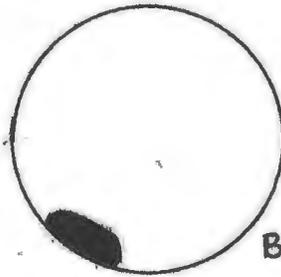
Glove puppets are usually a little quicker to make than marionettes, and they are able to pick up things easily. They are not restricted by leg movement and can move at high speed, so the puppeteer can keep plenty of action in his plays. Although they are not restricted by leg movements, they are restricted by the operator's hand.

The glove puppet, because of the hand, cannot leave the ground and its size may be restricted by the size of the hand and what it can cope with. The glove puppet is also restricted in the realms of symbolic puppetry for the shape is partly dictated by the fact that it has to contain a hand, so the number of objects and shapes that can be made is considerably reduced.

B. The Simplest Glove Puppet.

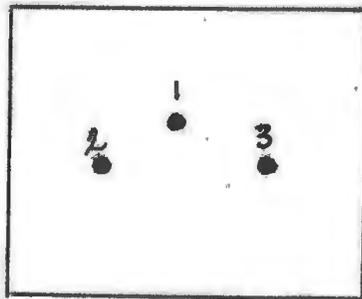
Materials: An old ball; a square or circle of material.

- 1) Make a hole in the ball. It should just take one finger.



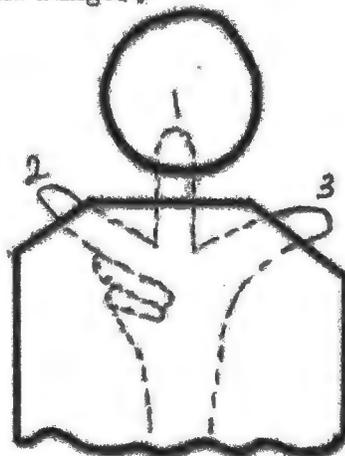
Ball with a hole in it.

- 2) Cut the material to size and then cut three holes in the material as shown.



Material with 3 holes in it.

- 3) The face is painted on the ball. Wool is glued on for hair.
- 4) Fit the body over the thumb and first two fingers, and then the head over the index finger.

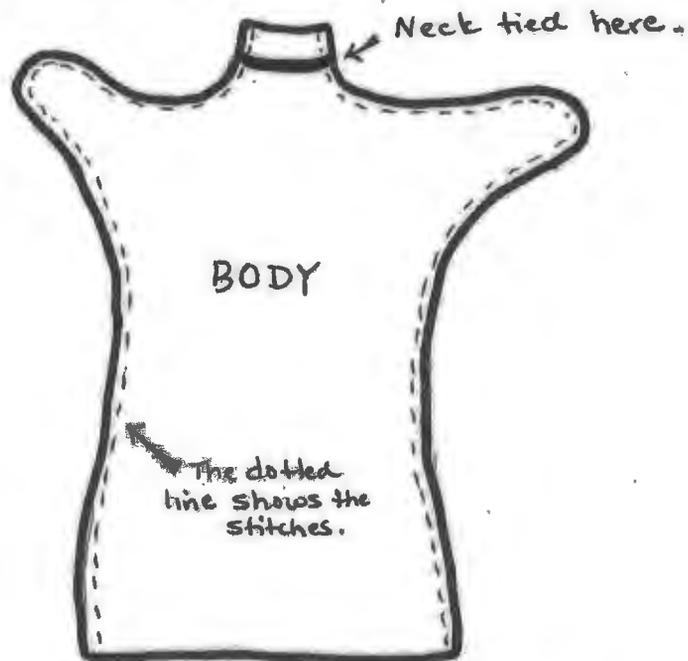


The puppet is now ready for use.

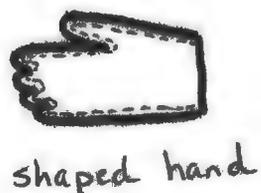
C. The "Glove" for the Glove Puppet.

Materials: Cloth, needle and cotton.

- 1) Cut out the body as shown. You need two pieces like this.



- 2) Stitch around the edges, as shown above by the dotted lines, leaving unstitched the openings for the neck and the operator's hand. The "right" sides of the cloth are stitched together (inside-out).
- 3) Hands may be made in the same way and stitched to the arms separately if desired. They may be the mitten type or the shaped hand.

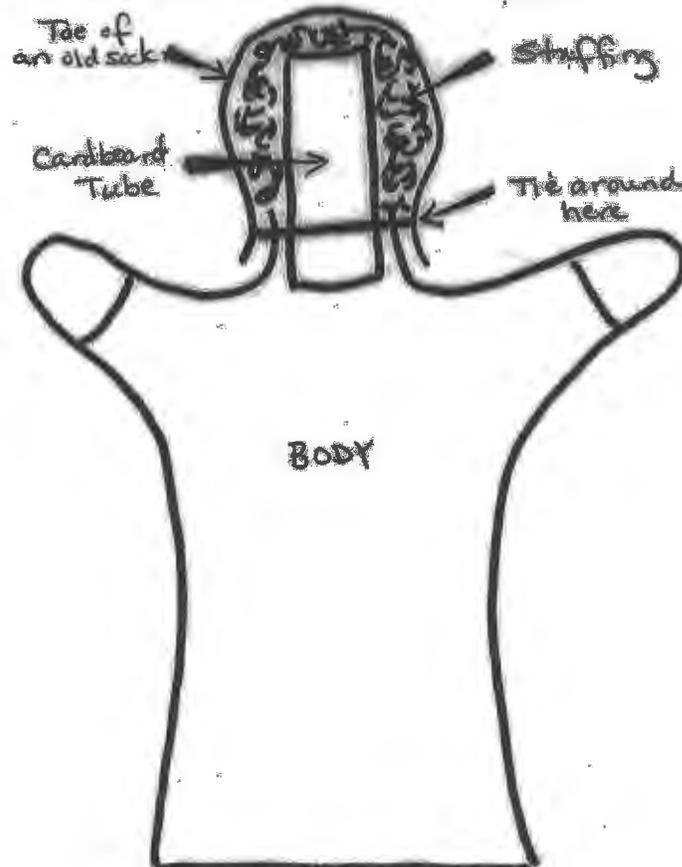


- 4) If hands are made and stitched onto the body, rather than being part of the mitten, when this has been done, the "glove" is turned in the right way to hide the seams.
- 5) The glove is then glued and tied to the neck of the puppet's head, and the puppet is ready for use.

D. The "Sock" Puppet Head.

Materials: An old sock; scraps of material; the body described above; a piece of soft cardboard.

- 1) Stuff the toe of the sock with material.
- 2) Cut off the toe of the sock.
- 3) Glue the card into a cylinder, just large enough to hold the index finger.
- 4) Fit this cardboard insert into the sock.



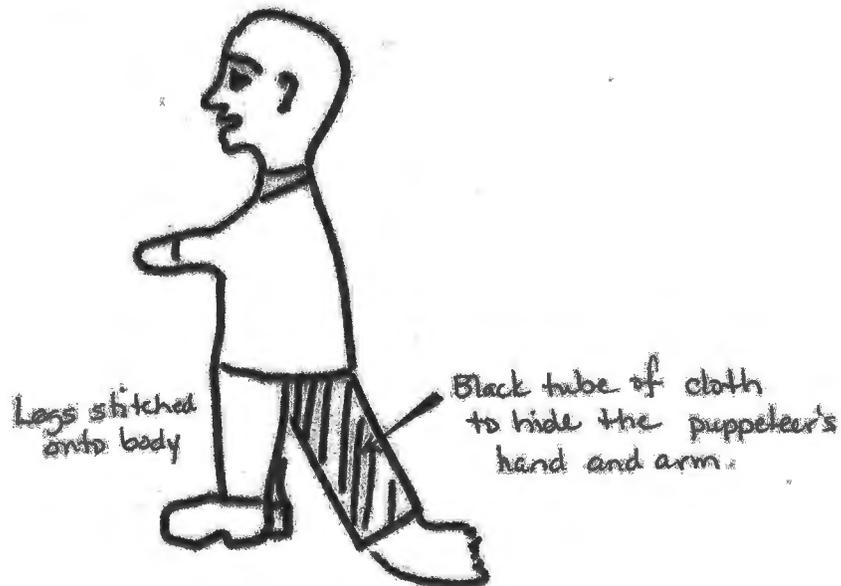
- 5) Tie the costume neck around the insert and sew the sock-head to the body.
- 6) The features maybe sewn on, as one would embroider a design, or they may be cut out of coloured felt and glued or stitched onto the head.

E. Glove Puppets with Legs.

Glove puppets may be given legs. Two tubes of material, stuffed with cloth or foam rubber, and stitched to the inside of the "glove," are quite adequate for this purpose.

Feet may be cut from a chunk of foam rubber and glued to the ends of the trouser legs. These foam rubber feet may then be covered with felt.

The operating hand is inserted in the puppet behind its legs. Often, with this type of puppet, a black tube of cloth is attached to the inside of the puppet. The arm is inserted through this and is thus hidden, or at least not so noticeable.

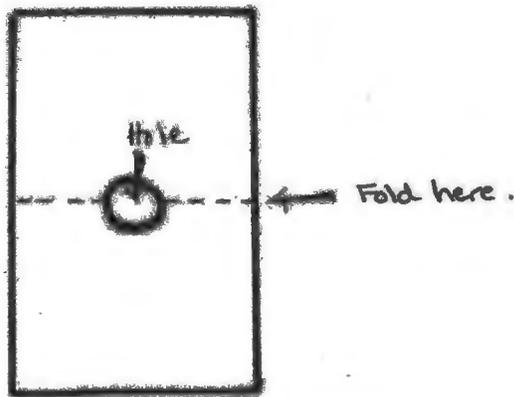


F. Wooden Spoon (Rod) Puppets.

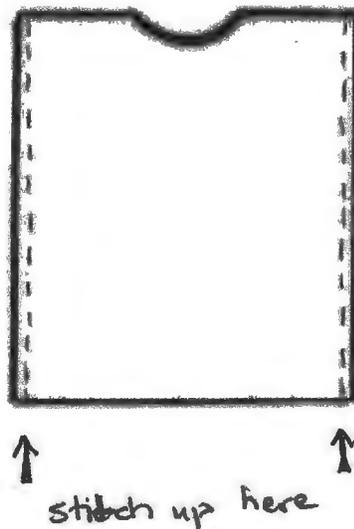
Rod puppets, sometimes called stick-puppets, are extremely easy for children to make and manipulate, especially the simple forms of rod puppets. They also lend themselves well to symbolic puppetry.

Materials: An old wooden spoon; material for the costume.

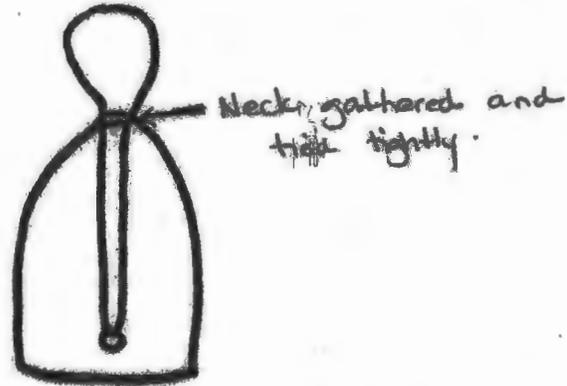
- 1) Cut a hole for the neck in the middle of a rectangle of material.



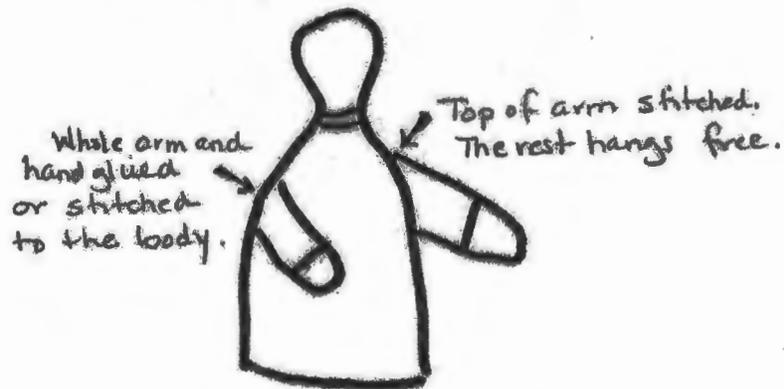
- 2) Fold the material along the centre (inside-out) and stitch down the sides. Turn the material in the right way to hide the seams.



- 3) Poke the handle of the spoon down through the hole, with the hollow in the spoon facing the back of the puppet.



- 4) Gather the costume around the neck and tie it tightly.
- 5) The face is painted on the spoon, and hair may be glued onto the back of it.
- 6) If sleeves and hands are required, these may be made from cloth and stitched or glued onto the body.



Alternatives for arms and hands.

G. The Shadow Puppet.

This is a flat figure which is held between a source of light and an opaque screen. The shadow of the puppet is thrown onto the screen, and the audience watches the shadows from the other side of the screen.

It is an easily made and simply operated puppet, very suitable for children in the primary school.

Materials; Cardboard; coloured cellophane paper; galvanised wire; string or rivet-type paper fasteners.

H. Non-Articulated Shadow Puppets.

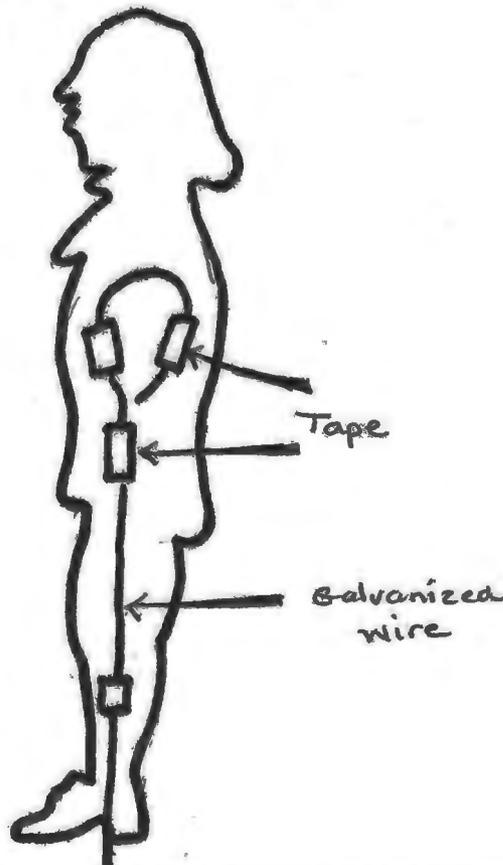
1) Draw the outline of the figure on fairly stiff cardboard.

This will usually need to be a side view so that the puppet can walk across the screen and face other puppets to converse with them.

2) Cut out the figure.

3) Take a length of wire, make a loop at one end of it and tape it onto the puppet as illustrated. The puppet is held by the wire, the puppeteer being below the level of the screen.

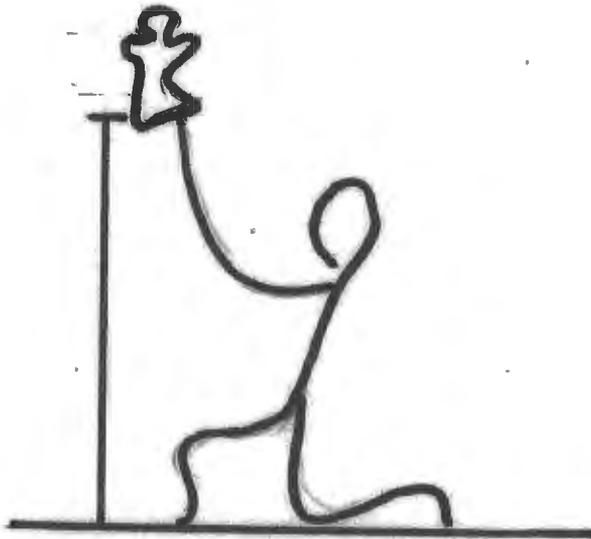
The cardboard
cut-out
showing how to
attach the wire



I.. A Simple Puppet Booth for Glove and Rod Puppets..

A make-shift theatre for glove and rod puppets is easily erected by turning a table on end and acting the puppets over the upper end.

An alternative is to drape a sheet, a tablecloth, or old curtains over a clotheshorse..

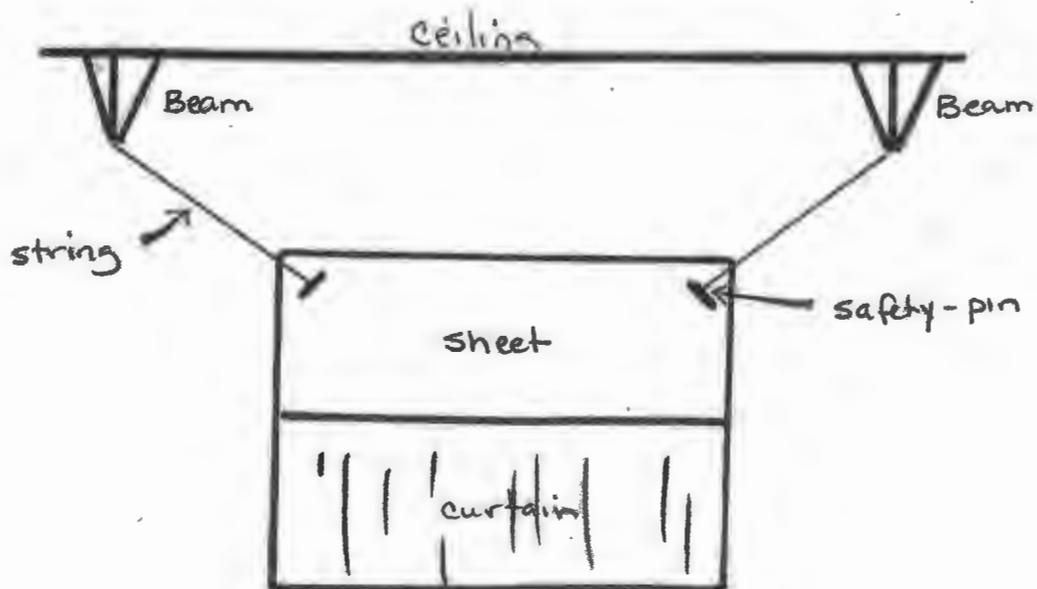
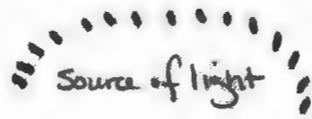
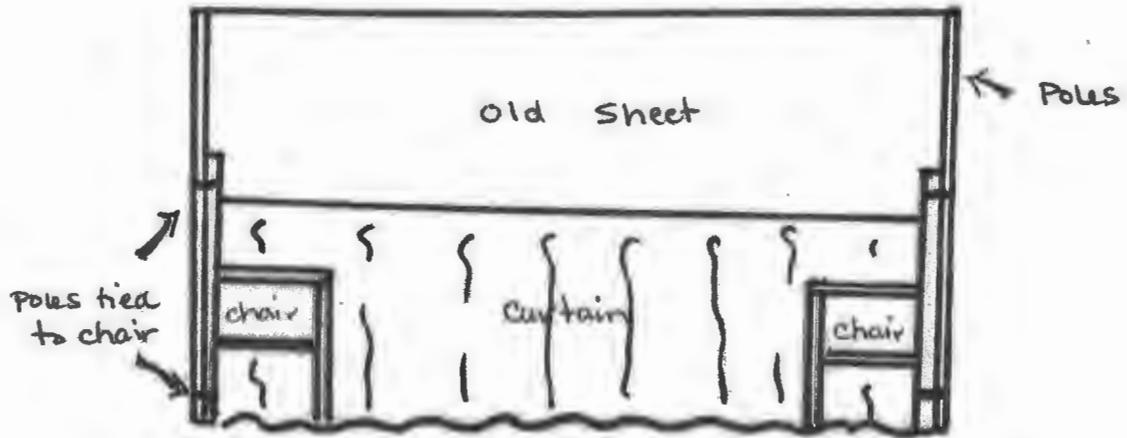


J.. A Shadow Puppet Screen..

An excellent screen may be made from an old sheet.. Old curtains may be stitched or pinned to the bottom of the screen to hide the operators..

This theatre front may be suspended between two sticks or poles which are held upright by tying them to chairs or tables.. A source of light (a window will do in daytime) is required behind the screen to produce the shadow when the puppeteer holds up his cut-out figure from below the level of the screen..

Alternatively, the curtains may be suspended from classroom fixtures such as metal beams across the ceiling. Strings to support the curtains can be tied to safety-pins in the top corners of the screen.

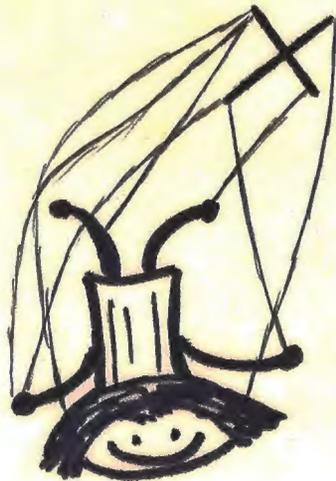


K. The Marionette.

The marionette, or string puppet, has a greater variety of actions than other puppets. It can leave the ground, but cannot pick up objects at random; this, however, can be achieved with extra stringing, magnets, or hooks, but is not usually needed in the primary school anyway. The shape of the puppet can add a lot of character to the marionette, more than is afforded by the shape of the glove puppet.

A criticism often levelled against marionettes is that they are difficult to manipulate, but even a child of seven to eight years of age can handle a simple marionette quite competently. It may be noted that with an eight-string marionette half of the strings are solely for support, and the other four control the hands and legs; thus, the puppet is not really as complicated as it first appears to the unfamiliar eye.

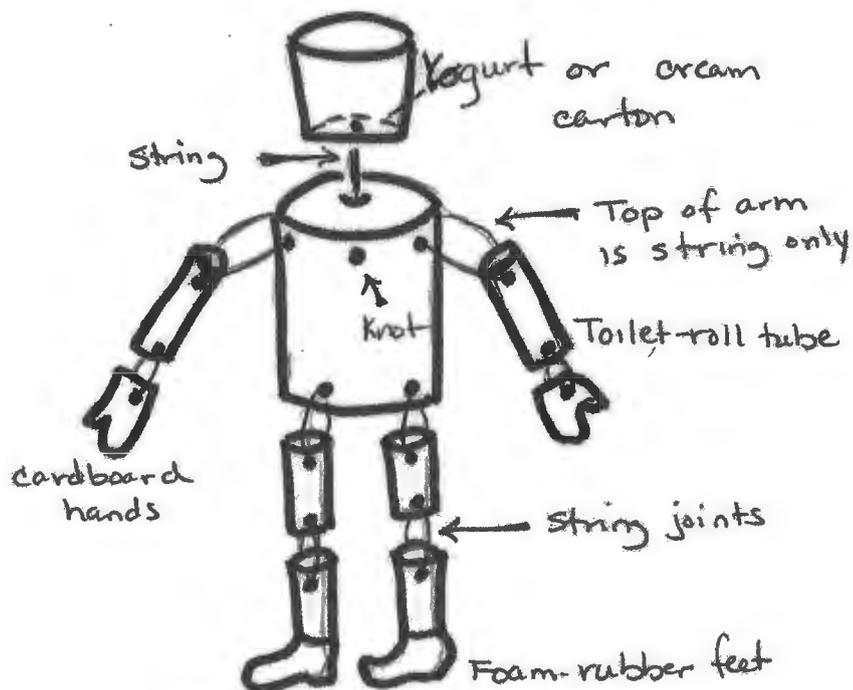
Marionettes are ideal for "trick" puppetry, and they lend themselves well to symbolic puppetry and to the animation of any objects whatever its shape.



L. The Tube Puppet.

Materials: Yogurt or cream carton; washing-up liquid container; toilet roll tubes; cardboard; string; foam rubber.

- 1) Make a hole in the bottom of the cream carton and in the bottom of the container for washing-up liquid. Join these by a string which is knotted at each end inside each container. These form the head and body.
- 2) Attach the toilet roll tube arms and legs by loops of string through holes in the tubes. Instead of these tubes, pieces of cardboard may be rolled and glued into the cylindrical shape.
- 3) Cut the hands from cardboard and join them to the arms with string.
- 4) Cut pieces of foam rubber to whatever size and shape desired for the feet and glue (or stitch) them onto the ends of the legs.
- 5) Glue a sheet of paper around the head so that it may be painted.
- 6) Features are painted or glued on (e.g. buttons for eyes, tooth-paste tube cap or cork for nose) and then hair (wool) is added.



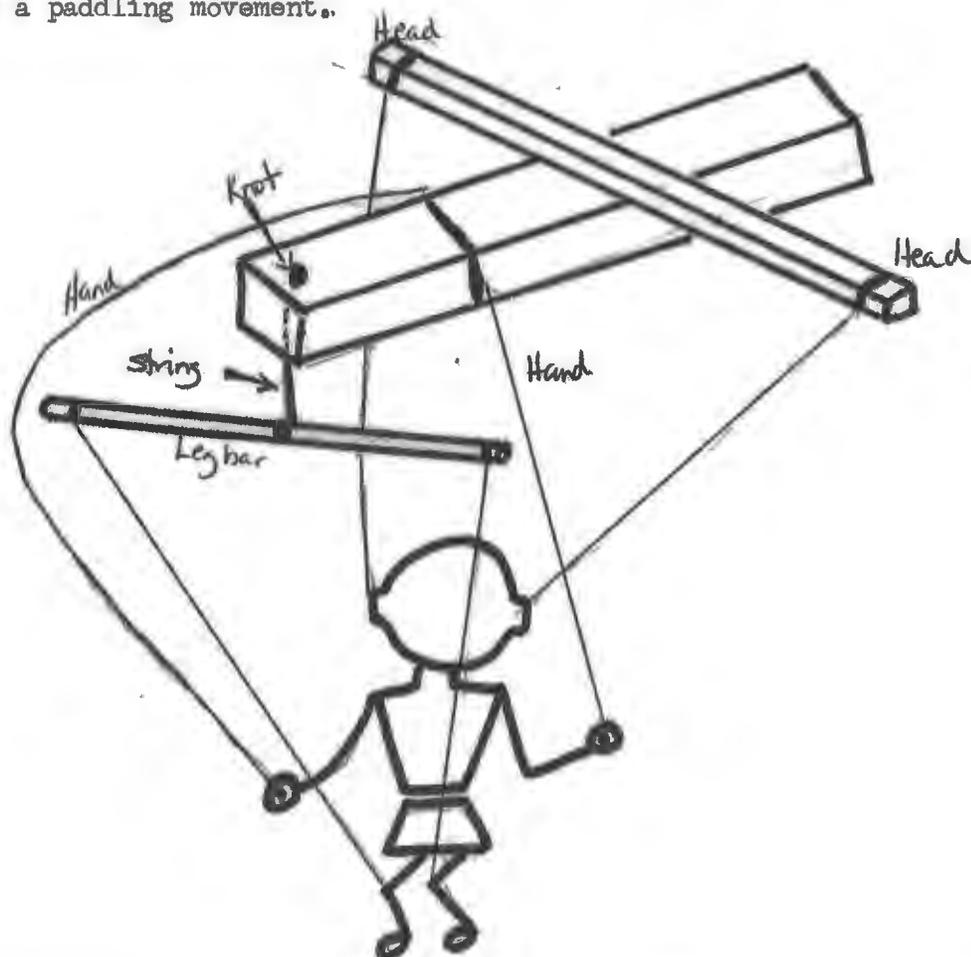
M. A Simple "Aeroplane" Control for Marionettes.

This control is made by gluing, screwing, or tying together two pieces of wood in the shape of a cross. A hook for hanging up the puppet may be be screwed into the main centre piece.

A string from each hand is tied to the center bar.

Leg strings are tied onto a separate cross-bar which is joined to the centre bar by a piece of string. They are attached to the puppet just above the knees. The leg bar may be omitted if it is not required; some younger children might be quite happy to "walk" the puppet by bouncing it slightly if they cannot cope with leg strings.

The puppet is held in one hand by the centre bar. The free hand operates the hand strings. When it is needed to walk, the leg bar is rocked with a paddling movement.



V. C O N C L U S I O N

This paper has aimed to provide ideas and techniques for the quick production of puppets of several kinds, using only the simplest materials and methods. Puppetry is not only for those with a flair for craft or drama, but more particularly for the shy and timid who still feel the desire to make and do something, but are too modest to have faith in their own talent. All teachers are aware of the problems of this kind of child and also of the backward reader or writer, the tongue-tied introvert, and the child with poor speech or with an actual physical speech defect. It is a conviction that quick forms of puppetry are an excellent way of releasing the inner tensions that often produce and foster such disabilities.

While it is difficult to over-emphasize the value of puppet-making in the early stages, it is the use of a puppet that is important. Many times one can see children and students spending so long in the making of a first puppet head that their interest has gone before they can enjoy using the puppet. Others, at their first introduction to puppetry, have been required to invent and write down plot and dialogue for non-existent puppets. For the novice, such practices rarely produce the best results. Each puppet has its own character which creates and moulds the acting personality that the puppeteer manipulates. It is essential in the beginning to allow situations and plots to develop from the puppet itself rather than the more difficult problem of making a puppet fit a given plot or character. Every puppet and every performance is in reality a new production. New ideas arise, further possibilities are seen and one soon realizes that there

is endless interest and pleasure in creating life through a puppet. It is not only in puppetry that traditional methods and ideas are being challenged and altered by the new materials and standards now possible.

Because of the fascination of the puppets that the children have invented, fears, shyness and inhibitions vanished, and the most unlikely characters blossomed behind the stage or screen as well as upon it.

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