

ART FORM

Puppetry

LEARNING AREA

The Arts

SUBJECT

Art & Design

TARGET GROUP

Key Stage 2

MATERIALS

An overhead projector (OHP) and screen

Shadow puppets made by pupils

Additional card, acetate and coloured paper to make sets and backgrounds

Music/CD player

SPACE

A classroom

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DURATION

The workshop is structured by developmental stages and can be undertaken in manageable chunks across several class periods for a larger project.

ARTIST'S INTRODUCTION

For people new to puppetry there can be a bewildering array of choices to make not just about materials to use for making puppets, but also in how to animate them and bring them to life in performance.

A broad definition of a shadow puppet would be: A two-dimensional figure shown against a semi-translucent screen and lit so that an audience on the opposite side of the screen can see the shadow of the figure only. Unlike other forms of puppetry, mistakes made in shadow puppets are easily repaired, if you cut too much off, simply stick on a patch and continue.

The first stage of this process is to explore making shadow puppets, creating outlines, moving parts and manipulating – see Shadow Play.

Puppets are full of surprises, sometimes a puppet can say something which a person might find difficult to say, or they can move in new and surprising ways, taking on symbolic significance. Once pupils have explored playing with light, shadow and shapes, the performance element can move into more emotional and thematic areas – examining social interaction, dialogue and communication, as well as familiar and unfamiliar situations.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Communication Skills – listen to and respond to questions, ideas, thoughts and feelings.
- Problem Solving and Decision Making – use a range of materials to make and work a shadow puppet.
- Creative Skills – explore and respond to a range of ideas to make an original silhouette.
- Working with others and self-management – work cooperatively with a group and make choices and review their own work.

INSTRUCTIONS

Puppets Into Performance

From following the steps outlined in Shadow Play, you now have prepared shadow puppets ready for performance. You may want to work to a narrative structure, or work in a freer expressionist way. In either case you will need to allow for the following decisions and steps.

Decide on a performance style.

If it's a performance of an existing story, or one we have made ourselves, how many puppet characters are needed? How does each puppet move?

Unlike in the classroom where the OHP projected on to a screen at the front of the class, remember that for live performance to an audience, they will be on the opposite side of the screen so allow rehearsal time to familiarise the class with this essential difference.

Group the puppets by theme, scale, or how they move.

Does this puppet talk? Walk? Crawl? Hop?

Crawl? Fly? Slither?

Does it represent Anger? Jealousy? Love?

Friendship?

Is it a character from an existing story? Or one we have made up?

Do the puppets move freely, or in time to music?

Do the puppets engage in dialogue?

If it's a story is it narrated? Is it a combination of narrative and action?

Backgrounds and Location

Where does the action take place? When does the action take place? Is it in the street? If so we can show this by deciding on background features which don't move, e.g. a silhouette of a lamp post and a curving kerb, drawn or stuck on to a piece of clear acetate, is laid down on the OHP. (All moving puppet action takes place in front of this, e.g. a bus drives down the street) Is it day time? If so, perhaps we can show the sun in the sky on our clear acetate.

Is it under the sea? In the park? The back garden? If so, we can show this by having background plants made from coloured acetate stuck to a sheet of clear acetate.

Transitions - From scene to scene

Allow time in rehearsal for the setting on and removal of different backgrounds. A simple way to move smoothly from scene to scene is to switch the O.H.P. off, remove the first background, place the next one, then switch the O.H.P. back on.

Transitions from character to character

- Have puppets laid out in the order of their appearance, so that there is no confusion (In the excitement of the moment in performance) about where to find the next puppet.
- Write each puppet's character name on a piece of A4 paper taped to a backstage table. When not being used in performance the puppet is always placed at that piece of paper.

Some top-tips for rehearsal and live performance

Live performance is a discipline in itself, so we need to practice for it.

We know where we need to be so that we don't cast accidental shadows on the screen.

We use the control rods so that our hands don't appear in the scene, unless they are meant to.

Allow adequate time for rehearsal, a short sequence of live puppetry of five minutes or under, depending on the complexity of action, can require an hour and more in rehearsal.

Finally, enjoy the rehearsal process - it is about making mistakes, making discoveries, and practical problem solving. Puppets are made to be performed with and the process of bringing puppets through from first ideas to performance brings many rewards and satisfactions.

TEACHER'S TIPS

A good alternative for the overhead projector is any bright light source and the white board (or large sheets of white paper stuck to the black board)

The performance can take place at assembly, for another class or in any larger room where the curtains can be drawn. Alternatively, experiment with a video camera and tripod and record sequences. Public performance is both challenging and extremely rewarding – offering pupils an ideal opportunity to show their achievements to their families and peers. However, you as the teacher can judge when they are ready for this step.

For pupils with limited mobility, holding puppets against a screen in the traditional manner can be very tiring during repeated rehearsal, which is why I suggest using an overhead projector - puppets can be laid on the surface of the projector and animated with greater ease from there.

For an assembly performance a screen to project on to from behind can be made using a white bed sheet hung from the curtain track on the stage

All materials used are readily available from craft shops such as EDCO, and many materials are free to schools through membership of the Play Resource Centre, North City Business Centre, Belfast www.playresource.org

LINKS TO OTHER LEARNING AREAS

- The Arts – using aspects of drama, art and design and music to develop a shadow puppet show
- The World Around Us – use science and technology to explore light, lenses, colour and make a moving 2D stick puppet; explore world cultures and traditional stories
- Geography and History – research the shadow puppet history of silhouette portrait

making and the shadow puppet traditions from many countries of the world

- PE- exploring how different parts of the body move
- Personal Development – developing confidence in performing with shadow puppets

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Though the workshops are written with KS2 pupils in mind, I have used the same approach with an inter-generational arts project, where I worked with children, their parents and grandparents, to make and perform with shadow puppets. I have worked on combined art -form projects, where shadow puppetry is combined with dance and music, with puppeteers performing behind the screen, as a live action backdrop to different simultaneous performances in front of the screen.

One special school took the ideas of shadow puppetry and used them in performance for the transformation scenes in their school pantomime, Cinderella, where mice became horses; a pumpkin became a coach etc.

Visit the Puppetry Homepage at www.rosesage.com. Follow the links to Puppetry Traditions around the World as well as information on international exhibitions.

Rod, Shadow, and Glove (Puppets from the Little Angel Theatre) By John Wright
ISBN 0-7090-2628-5

The Little Book of Hand Shadows By Phila H.Webb and Jane Corby
ISBN 0-89471-852-5

Don't forget to send feedback to toolbox@youngart.co.uk

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