PUPPETRY

by Lisa Bean

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

Puppets have a noble and ancient history. Although they may have been used earlier, we do know they go back to 2000 BC, for there are articulated figures of deities and evidence in Egyptian literature and pictorial representations that show a type of puppet. Greek literature from the Golden Age (5th Century BC) alludes to what seem to be puppets in use at that time. Small jointed clay figures that appear to be toy puppets have been found in both Greek and Roman tombs. Most puppets in these periods were for adult audiences and dealt with religious ritual. About this same time puppets were in use on the American continent, also for religious purposes.'

Puppetry in Asia was highly sophisticated at a very early date and persists to the present in deep-rooted traditional and folk-art forms. Puppets and puppeteers held honored positions among early inhabitants of Persia, Turkey, Siam, Java, and Burma. Both China and Japan had early puppet companies and developed intricate puppets that required extensive training for manipulation. By the middle of the sixteenth century puppet shows in Japan dramatized *Noh* plays and by the middle of the eighteenth century *Bunraku* puppets became the most popular entertainment form in the country and drew the most talented writers in the nation.

In Europe in the Middle Ages wandering puppeteers performed in castles all over the continent. Indeed, the word "marionette" is a derivative of the diminutive for Mary, because puppets were frequently used for Nativity plays. Since the Renaissance there has been an unbroken tradition of puppetry in one form or another down to the present day. In some countries it survived as a form of street theatre; in others it has developed into a classical art with extensive production detail and public support.

Puppets were in extensive use in Elizabethan England, for puppetry (variously spelled as *poupette*, *poppit*—while the puppet show was called a *motion*) is mentioned over two dozen times in Shakespeare and plays like Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*. It was the only form of entertainment permitted during the Puritan period and thrived vigorously after that time.

One of the best known European and American puppets was Punch. His history illustrates the mobility and popularity of the puppet. It appears the character was invented by an actor in Naples, Italy about 1600 and was called Polcinella, a derivative of the term for "little chicken." He was transferred almost at once to the puppet stage where he assumed the same strutting, squawking and uncertain courage as well as the lovable qualities suggested by the original name. By 1650, Polcinella had reached Paris, and ten years after he was in London where his name was shortened to "Punch." In 1742 a performance by Punch and Joan, his Wife was advertised in Philadelphia, and five years later New York was offered an opportunity to see Punch's Opera, Bateman, or the Unhappy Marriage. By the end of the nineteenth century puppeteers operating Punch with one hand and all the other characters with the other, working out of a portable booth, played in parks and on street corners, at Sunday School and club picnics, in dime museums and saloons, circus sideshows and variety theatres. Puppets were a part of the American national life. During the time Punch was developed throughout the Western World, many other types of puppets were brought to this country by the immigrants who packed the small bits of entertainment into their humble satchels as they traveled to the New World. This variety is still evident in America today.

TYPES OF PUPPETS

A puppet is usually defined as "an inanimate object moved in a dramatic manner by human agency." This includes a wide range of figures, but not dolls and automata. There are five general types of puppets: 1) hand puppets, 2) shadow puppets, 3) rod puppets, 4) string puppets, and a catch-all classification, 5) related puppetry techniques.

Hand puppet is a term applied to a broad range of puppets that are worn directly on and operated by the hand of the puppeteer. Sock puppets, paper bag puppets, glove and finger puppets are simple forms of this puppet. Jim Henson's Muppets, a more elaborate type of hand puppet, fit this category.

Shadow puppets are flat cut-out figures held by a rod or wire against a translucent illuminated screen. When the shadow puppet is held between the screen and a light, it casts a shadow or silhouette onto the screen. Shadow puppets may be

simple or complex, depending on the construction of the puppet and the skill of the puppeteer.

Rod puppets are held and moved by a rod, usually from below, and may vary in complexity from a figure supported and moved by only one rod (such as a wooden spoon or popsicle stick) to a fully articulated figure with moving eyes and mouth.

String puppets are suspended from and animated by strings which are attached to a control stick held by the puppeteer. The construction may be simple, with only a few moving parts, or very complex with operable eyes, mouth, legs, arms, or even fingers. The best known example is the marionette which features a multitude of control strings.

Related puppetry techniques cover diverse puppets which do not easily fall into one of these categories, such as fist puppets, chin puppets or masks. Also lumped in this classification are jumping jacks (a simple pull string puppet), marionettes à la planchette (little painted wooden figures, with dangling limbs suspended on a horizontal string), and the marot (simple form of rod puppet, called the "fool's stick" and carried by a jester in medieval times).

best and serve only to illustrate the available range. Many successful puppeteers have combined several forms in the same performance and have experimented with various forms before finding those that work best for them. Try anything, be creative, experiment with materials and methods of control. Being a pragmatist, I believe what works is what is best.

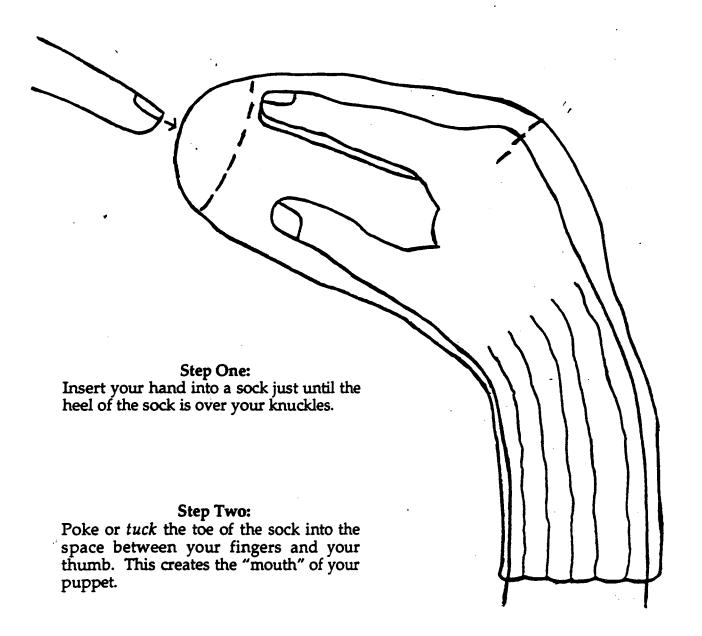
THE PRACTICALITY OF PUPPETS

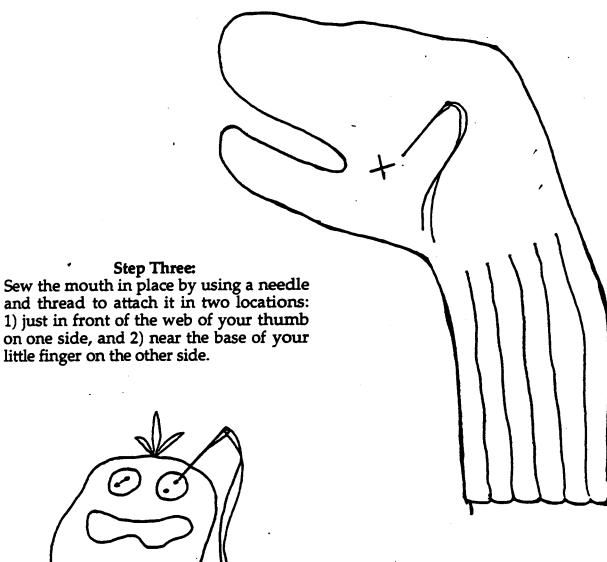
Puppets are useful and effective educational tools. They get and hold the attention of both children and adults. They are dramatic agents unto themselves (seemingly) and highly entertaining.

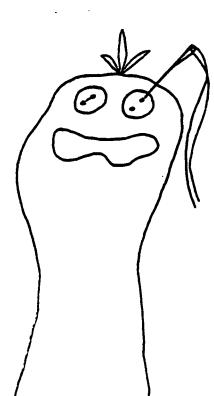
Many types of hand, rod and shadow puppets are very easy to use. You can learn to operate simple ones in a few minutes. Puppets don't require a stage or scenery to be interesting. Because they are relatively small and lightweight, they are highly portable and can be pulled out at a moment's notice.

HOW TO MAKE A SOCK PUPPET

Tucked Mouth Method







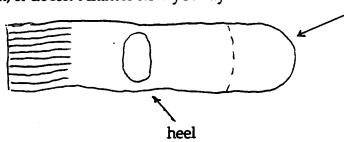
Step Three:

Step Four. Next, attach features such as button eyes, pom-pom nose, yarn hair, felt tongue, or whatever else is desired.

Cut Mouth Method

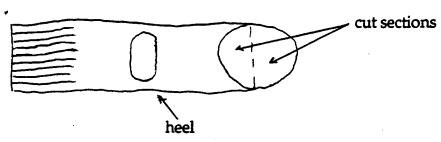
Step One:

Turn sock inside out and lay sock on flat surface, heel up and flat. If you have a tube sock, it doesn't matter how you lay it out.



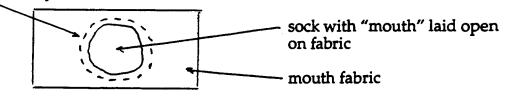
Cut at this angle anywhere from here to the toe, depending on the condition of the sock (if the toe is worn, cut back from there; if heel is worn, move toward toe to cover).

Step Two: Lay, cut open.



Step Three:

Lay this on mouth fabric to be used to mark size to cut mouth for puppet. Add 1/4" seam allowance as you mark mouth.



Step Four:

Sew mouth fabric into mouth opening of sock, either by machine or by hand.

Step Five:

Turn sock right side out.

Step Six:

Sew or glue on eyes and other character features.



HOW TO BRING A PUPPET TO LIFE

A puppet becomes a character when you provide it with breath, senses, movement, vocal expression, and emotional/intellectual qualities. The following exercises are intended to be used by a hand puppet with a movable mouth—probably your newly created sock puppet. Work your fingers, wrist or arm to get the desired effect. It may be helpful to observe yourself in a mirror or look at others to create these expressions and movements.

BREATH

Breath is the fundamental indicator of life. Endowing a puppet with breath allows it to assume a separateness from the puppeteer that is really quite magical.

Breathing indicates many emotional states, too, so it is a quality of expression as well. With your puppet on your hand, experiment with different ways to give breath (life) to your puppet. Be aware that *you* as the puppeteer must fully breathe the way your want your puppet to breathe. The wrist generates most of the movement of breath, with additional shaping of the mouth accomplished by the opening and closing of the thumb and fingers.

- 1. breathe—in and out quietly with a gentle opening and closing of the puppet's mouth.
- 2. pant—rapidly, as out of breath, from running.
- 3. yawn—stretch the mouth wide to take in air, closing mouth as needed. Yawn to indicate boredom. Yawn as though the puppet really doesn't want to.
- 4. deep breathing—as with the measured, deep breathing of sleep. Wrist moves puppet forward and backward.
- 5. snore—softly at first, then more vigorously. The exhalation is as much fun to explore as the raspy inhalation.
- 6. gasp—take a sudden, quick intake of air as though frightened or surprised. Can you find a way to manually distinguish between the two?
- 7. cough—breath explodes outward; fingers and thumb extend and open to indicate coughing. Try a gentle, polite cough; work up to repeated hacking coughs.
- 8. *choke*—breath explodes outward, but the intake is labored or even blocked. Note how the mouth position remains open, with the thumb positioned at quite a distance from the fingers.
- 9. sneeze—"Ah-choo!" Inhalation and exhalation movements are basically equal. The mouth opens on "ah" and the puppet drops down and forward violently on

the "choo" part, then bounces back up. Try a small polite sneeze. Now try a series of great big sneezes, one after another.

10. hiccup—the fingers and thumb are in a closed or nearly closed position. The action of the hiccup is indicated with a sudden jerking apart of fingers and thumb while wrist and arm bounce the puppet sharply.

SENSES

A puppet should experience and express acknowledgment of the five senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch. Of these five, the most important, the one most used, is the sense of sight.

A puppet must seem as though it truly sees its audience, is looking at another puppet character, or is responding to whatever stimuli catches its attention. The eyes of the puppet should be positioned low enough on the hand that the eyes are easily seen by the audience. Use the wrist to tip the head down sufficiently to point the eyes at the audience. Try moving the hand back and forth and up and down to indicate seeing the audience, the ceiling, the floor, and even looking side to side or behind itself (as though checking to see if it is being followed).

Sometimes a puppet needs to indicate an effort to hear. Just tip the hand so that one side of the "head" or the other is slightly raised. If your hand puppet includes arms which are moved by means of a rod or wire, just raise the hand to the puppers's ear.

Tasting is communicated by having the puppet smack or lick its lips (wiggle your fingers to discover the appropriate motions). Accompanying sound effects clarify the action to the audience. Tasting can also be expressed by indicating that something is unpleasant (yuck, bleech, blah) or even by going through the motions of attempting to spit something out (combination of motion and sound effect: coughing, spitting, etc.).

Smelling is really easy to portray. Push or wiggle the nose of the puppet by extending the middle fingers as far as they will go while lifting the nose up slightly from the object being sniffed. Short, quick breath inhalations complete the effect.

The sense of *touch* receives less attention than the other senses, but is sometimes required. If the puppet has arms, you can simply guide the hand (by means of a rod or wire) towards the being or object which needs to be stroked, tapped, punched or

felt. If the puppet has no arms (as is the case with most sock puppets), the audience will accept the puppeteer's hand within the sock as an appropriate agent of touch. Therefore, if a sock puppet needs to tap someone on the shoulder and has no hand to do so, go ahead and use your puppeted hand as though tapping someone's shoulder. The audience accepts the gesture figuratively, even though, literally, the puppet appears to be beating his nose or face against the object or person being touched. Stroking and other gestures of touch are accepted by the audience in the same figurative way.

MOVEMENT

You've already explored a lot of types of movement through breath and sensory depictions. Let's explore ambulatory actions more—that's the kind of movement which propels the puppet's entire body through space, forward, backward, and side to side.

Using a table, the back of a chair, or your other arm as a "stage," practice the following movements with your pupper, always moving from right to left and back again.

1. Walk across the stage. Allow your arm to move up and down in an even, steady motion. You may also choose to bob the head of the puppet up and down through your wrist action.

2. Now try the following motions:

hop	creep	run	dance
skip	crawl	strut	float
jog	slither	skate	fly

CHARACTER VOICES

It is more effective if you use a voice different than your own for the puppet. You should be able to create several voices for different puppets. Give yourself the creative go-ahead and *try*—after all, it's the puppet doing those strange things, anyway.

Try the following exercises while reciting a nursery rhyme:

Voice Changes: Pitch
 Try making your voice high, into falsetto if possible.
 Now low, bottom of your range.

2. Voice Changes: Rate

fast slow

very slow, very fast

3. Voice Changes: Other variations

Try an accent: Western, English, Southern, etc.

Try an old man, small girl, bully boy, snooty society woman, ringmaster

Don't forget to explore animal voices and sounds, even if your puppet is human. Refer back to page 19 for animal suggestions.

EMOTIONAL AND INTELLECTUAL QUALITIES

The last set of characteristics you'll want to explore and give to your puppet is emotional and intellectual traits: a heart and a mind. A puppet needs to freely express many emotions. How feelings are expressed, and which ones are allowed, are vital keys to creating your puppet's personality. Intellectual qualities round out your puppet's character. Below are a few emotional and intellectual qualities which help express character and personality:

happy	vacuous	stubborn	nervous
depressed	confident	proud	shy
annoyed	dumb	mean	flirtatious
intelligent	excited	naive	boisterous

This list is only a beginning; your puppet's personality is limited only by your imagination!

TIPS FOR PUPPET USE

Puppets are small, so make sure the audience is of an appropriate size to see and hear what is going on. Make sure that the voices you give to your puppets are *loud* and *clear*. Distinctive character voices enhance a puppet's magnetism and help define its personality to the audience.

Frequent use of a puppet, plus the wear-and-tear of being manipulated as well as packed and unpacked requires that a puppet be durable. It should be made of strong materials so it can last for a long time. Puppets which are intended for only

one or two uses may be constructed of flimsier materials, of course—but serve the educator less effectively because they begin to disintegrate before the puppeteer has really had a chance to develop a personality, a voice, specific movements or full applications for its use.

A PUPPET CAN SOMETIMES DO WHAT PEOPLE CAN'T

A puppet can discuss hard or embarrassing issues that people feel uncomfortable addressing directly. These might include family and social issues such as death or divorce. Sometimes personal problems can be handled by a puppet who can discuss them as a non-threatening removed third party. Other concerns might include hygiene—why children should bathe, brush their teeth, or keep their clothes clean. Simple basic understanding about toilet use, the role of germs on hands, and other issues can be frankly discussed. A puppet can ask bold, direct questions because of its presumed naïveté. It can represent the collective curiosity of an entire class when needed:

1. The puppet can ask questions of the puppeteer that the audience would like to ask or are too embarrassed to ask.

2. The audience can learn by "overhearing" the puppeteer's response to the puppet

(better than just being told).

3. The puppet can talk to the audience, asking them questions to see if they understand the issue.

Another aspect of puppets doing something that people perhaps can't is found in the situation where the child puppeteer uses the puppet to vent emotions or frustrations that would otherwise remain bottled up. Some children who are too timid or shy to speak aloud find enormous avenues of expression when safely tucked "behind" a puppet. There are many true anecdotes of profound stutterers speaking clearly and easily when vicariously extending themselves into the puppet's life and speech habits.

PUTTING ON A PUPPET SHOW

You can operate a puppet without a stage or other characters by putting the puppet on one hand and simply talking to it. Make it talk back to you. Have it look

at and respond to the children. Frequently, a teacher must be able to move freely around the classroom with the puppet. If a stage is desired because a more formal puppet show is being presented, a table, desk or the back of a chair will work. Just get down behind it and have the puppet be on top! You can also use a blanket or sheet stretched across a doorway, between two trees (if outside), or just held by two people. There are many lightweight puppet stages available commercially. Remember, most puppet shows don't need scenery. The puppets do fine by themselves.

Discuss the ideas from the show with the audience after it is over. That will help them understand and apply concepts in their lives.

CURRICULUM APPLICATIONS

- 1. Teach a foreign language or introduce a foreign culture with a puppet made to look like a person from that country. This puppet could ask questions, chat, or discuss the country either speaking the language or using an accent. The puppet could comment on similarities and differences between its culture and the one in your locale.
- 2. Teach numbers, the alphabet or spelling with the puppet working hard to learn, but sometimes making mistakes the class can correct. It may also ask for help in counting or spelling so that the child becomes the teacher.
- 3. Act out stories from literature using puppets as characters. It is great fun and helps the readers to:
 - a. Sequence and synthesize the story.
 - b. Use new vocabulary.
 - c. Work with others towards a mutual goal.

PUPPETS AS CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT TOOLS

There are many ways to use puppets as aids for classroom management:

- 1. Puppet can be a class mascot—creating camaraderie.
- 2. Puppet can make announcements or review homework assignments.
- 3. Puppet can be a special occasion puppet (birthday, for example) or a holiday puppet (singing songs, teaching about holiday origins, etc.).
- 4. Puppet can be a transitional step—to quiet down class, or conversely, energize tired bodies.
- 5. Puppet can help maintain order—such as getting into line for an activity or cleaning up after a project.

HAND PUPPET MANIPULATION EXERCISES

A puppet should move naturally. A good puppeteer makes this look effortless. However, it is your hand and arm that give the puppet life and beginning puppeteers soon discover muscles in their hands and arms they didn't know they had. Making a puppet come alive is hard work. These warm-up exercises for your wrists and fingers will help you find these muscles and get them ready to bring your hand puppet to life.

Wrist bends:

- Bend hand at wrist forward and backward ten times.
- Rotate your hand at the wrist in a complete circle ten times.

Fingers:

Circle with individual fingers ten times.

Your hands can be puppets. Try creating butterflies, snakes, snakes in baskets, worms, fish, spiders, rabbits, frogs, etc.

Nod your pupper's head "yes" (wrist moves up and down); make it nod "no" (wrist moves from side to side.) Now make your puppet bow by bending your wrist forward and moving your arm slightly forward as your wrist bends.

Three movements that bring a puppet to life are: looking, breathing, and walking. The following exercises will help you focus on each of these important movements.

Looking: Get the pupper's eyes to really focus on an object, person, or scene. Make the viewer see what the puppet is seeing. Practice the following sequence.

1. look forward

2. look to one side

3. look forward

4. look to the other side 5. look forward

6. look behind

7. look forward

8. look up

9. look forward

10. look down

11. look forward

Breathing: This movement comes from the wrist. Relax your wrist by doing the warm-up exercises and then practice doing the following movements:

1. a sigh

2. yawn

3. sneeze

4. cough

5. hiccup

7. surprise—a breath in, puppet takes a step back and slightly upward, arms out if possible.

8. fear-breath in, backward and slightly down, arms in.

Experiment with your puppet to find other ways to make it seem like it is really breathing.

Walking: Imagine solid ground underneath your puppet. Move naturally with no sudden, jarring steps (unless that is the movement intended!). Practice the walking exercises listed below. You will come up with some of your own as you develop your puppet's character.

- 1. up-down-gentle movement up and down of the arm.
- 2. proud-nose in the air, stately dip and then upward.
- 3. sad-head down, slow walk.
- 4. happy-head up, lively walk.
- 5. glide.

Now that you have some idea of how a hand puppet can move, use the following exercises to practice them in a variety of combinations and sequences.

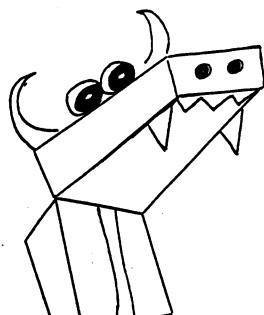
- 1. The pupper pops onto the stage. He looks at himself and then bows. He then pops out of sight.
- 2. The puppet creeps on and looks around to see if he is being followed. No one is following him. He breathes a sigh of relief and walks off.
- 3. The puppet slowly comes on stage and looks at the audience. He is very shy. He finally smiles, nods hello, and runs off.
- 4. The puppet runs the entire length of the stage. He realizes that he can't go any farther ("no" movement), so he points in the other direction and runs off in the same direction from which he came on.
- 5. The puppet walks on looking for something. He sees something, bends down, and smells it. He nods yes and runs off.
- 6. The puppet walks on searching frantically for something. He looks in several places. He finally shrugs, sighs and goes slowly off.
- 7. The puppet enters and paces back and forth. He sits down and looks impatiently from one side of the stage to the other. He gets up, looks around, but does not see anyone. He walks off shaking his head "no."
- 8. The puppet runs onstage and falls. He starts to cry gently and then more loudly. He limps off.
- 9. The puppet hops on. He looks up at the sky and nods "no," indicating bad weather. He turns his back to the audience and slowly walks away.
- 10. The puppet creeps on; he has a cold and gently starts to sneeze. The sneezing gets worse and worse; he looks at the audience, is embarrassed, and runs off.

USE OF PUPPETS AS CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT TOOLS (Taken from *Instant Puppet Resource* by Lois and Herb Walker,)

- 1. Announcements
- 2. Surprise Activity
- 3. Subject Change
- 4. Puppet Always Wrong—Can't Get Answers right. Students Correct Puppet
- 5: Recapping the day
- 6. Motivating Work
- 7. Encouraging Personal Hygiene
- 8. Encouraging good eating habits.
- 9. Role-playing (two sides of a dispute)
- 10. First Day of School
- 12. ESL
- 13. Cleaning up the room (Garbage Gobbler)

JUNK PUPPETS

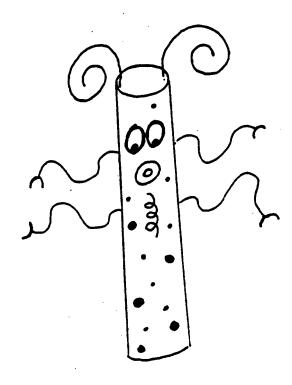
Junk puppets, also known as found object puppets, can be any type of puppet, but are categorized by the fact that they are made from items usually discarded: cereal boxes, styrofoam food containers, paper sacks, disposable cups, aluminum cans, cardboard tubes, plastic bottles, and so on. They are inexpensive and easy to make—often teaching respect for ecology because they use recyclable materials.



"Dragon"
Created from a cereal box, slit on three sides to create a hinged mouth. Covered in construction paper and featuring pingpong ball eyes.

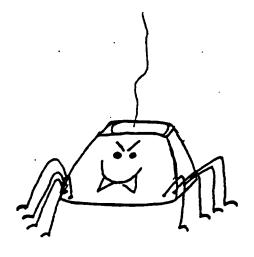
"Alien"

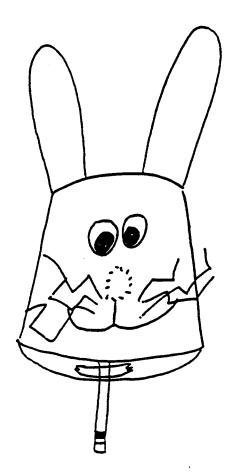
Created from a paper towel tube wrapped in paper and decorated with marking pens and pipe cleaners.



"Spider"

Created from an egg carton cup and pipe cleaners; suspended from a string.





"Rabbit"

Created from a paper cup with a pencil taped inside. Paper ears, pipe cleaner whiskers, pom-pom nose, and movable eyes are attached with a glue gun. Mouth is drawn on with marker.

PUPPETRY MATERIALS LIST

Basic Puppet Making Tool Kit Supplies

(These will be useful in making all puppet types.)

Scissors Needle(s)

Thread (mainly white or black)

Hot glue gun Hot glue sticks

Tacky glue [brand name for a high quality craft glue]

General materials used for puppets hair, eyes, costumes, etc.

felt (all sizes and colors)

bric-a-brac

buttons

varn beads

fabric pieces

ping pong balls

feathers

fake fur scraps

plastic spoons, forks, knives

construction paper

pieces of sponge (different colors)

stuffing from packing boxes

pipe cleaners

Anything that is small, lightweight, and interestingly shaped.

Materials that can be used as body bases

socks

cracker boxes

gloves

cereal boxes egg cartons

paper bags plastic bags

milk cartons

styrofoam trays

fast food burger containers

popsicle sticks

cottage cheese and ice cream containers

colorful sponges

chunks of foam rubber

cardboard tubes from paper towels, toilet paper, foil, wrapping paper, etc. all kinds of plastic bottles: soap, shampoo, cooking oil, bleach, detergent, etc.

Anything that comes to you from your imagination!





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Boy Accessory Set includes: denim legs, shirt, and wig.

Girl Accessory Set includes: legs, dress, and wig.

A poly puppet dressed in a boy or girl accessory set look like these figures.



dressed with a girl accessory set. This combination is called combination is called Pauline Puppet.



We sell a poly puppet We sell a poly puppet dressed with a boy accessory set. This Paul Puppet.

Poly Puppets

poly - prefix 1. More than one; many; [Gk. polus, many, much]

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> Click on boy accessory set or girl accessory set to get more info or to order.



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