

Puppetry Arts

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Master Class Lesson Plan, by Kent Williams

OBJECTIVE: Introduce students to the art of puppetry - its different styles, origins and manipulating challenges – in a hands-on workshop for exploration, improvisation and storytelling under the guidance of a professional artist. Puppetry styles include finger, rod, hand and mouth, two-handed, and marionette. Students have volunteer opportunities to demonstrate throughout the classroom hour, and all students puppeteer a marionette before the end of the session.

PUPPETRY ARTS MASTER CLASS: In a single-hour class, students have the opportunity to learn about a variety of puppetry styles by observing, discussing and operating puppets displayed before them. Throughout the workshop volunteers are chosen as assistant/apprentice puppeteers, learning to manipulate, position and emote while also applying their understanding of narrative elements (character, setting, plot/action) through improvisation.

- Students are asked to sit in a group on the stage floor facing the teaching artist and a display of colorful and fun-looking puppet characters.
- The teaching artist gives a brief overview of what the students are about to see, do and learn.
- The teaching artist polls the students about their existing knowledge of puppets and puppetry: Who has or has made a puppet or seen a puppet performance, live, TV or film? What do you already know?
- The teaching artist names the styles, or types of puppets the class will learn about today: finger, rod, hand (both hand and mouth and two-handed) and marionette. *Shadow puppetry may be added or substituted.*
- Throughout the session, the teaching artist makes the distinction between puppet “styles/types/kinds” and puppet “characters”.
 - Teaching artist, referring to a clown marionette: “What type of puppet is this?”
 - Students: “A clown”
 - Teaching artist: “That’s the character. The character is a clown, but what type/kind/style of puppet is this? Thinking about how the puppet works is a clue.”

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- The teaching artist also promotes actor-awareness and stage presence as volunteer puppeteers work in front of their audience of peers. The teaching artist continually reminds puppeteers that as performing artists they must constantly be aware of themselves on stage, controlling what their puppet looks like to the audience as it “performs”. As students make adjustments based on the direction, successive volunteers are asked to incorporate everything they learn before their turn.
- **FINGER PUPPETS:** 4 students are asked to volunteer, 2 boys and 2 girls.
 - 4 students are lined up side by side.
 - 4 different finger puppets are introduced, each adding more pockets (places where puppeteers place their finger(s) or hand(s) to operate the puppet).
 - Students are reminded the style of puppetry is *finger* and asked about the characters they see demonstrated.
 - Once all four puppets are revealed, the teaching artist narrates a skit and the 4 student puppeteers are asked to perform along.
 - The teaching artist makes adjustments to manipulation and positioning and prompts students to consider their puppet character for actions and voices appropriate for it.
- **ROD PUPPETS:** 2 students volunteers are selected, a boy and a girl.
 - Indonesian wooden rod puppets, *wayang golek*, are revealed and discussed.
 - Volunteers receive quick instruction and practice manipulation.
 - The teaching artist narrates a sequence of movements and gestures that the student puppeteers perform.

*In both the **finger** and **rod** puppet demos, students have mainly been responsible for repeating or imitating the teaching artists actions and lines, as well as adjusting both the puppet and puppeteer positions on stage. The next two types of hand puppets will challenge students to improvise action and dialogue while continuing to apply the aforementioned skills.*

- **HAND PUPPETS:** 4 students are selected, 2 boys and 2 girls - *talkative ones*
 - The 4 students are divided into groups of 2 and each group positions themselves with their puppet on either the left or right side of the teaching artist and patiently await instruction.

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- Students are now challenged to add a character voice as they puppeteer; and in considering their puppet's character they must also improvise dialogue.
- Puppeteers learn proper hand positioning and movement to create believable lip syncs – the difference between *speaking* and *biting* (many students are *bitters* as hand puppeteers and must learn proper coordination). As the teaching artist demonstrates and instructs the proper technique, the entire class follows along.
- The teaching artist narrates a scene between the characters and the student puppeteers are challenged to interact as they perform, demonstrating character in voice and action as well as proper positioning for both puppet and puppeteer.
- A similar routine follows in which a new set of puppeteer, 2 boys and 2 girls, are selected to team up and operate a different style of hand puppet, the **two-handed** puppet (think Cookie Monster from *Sesame Street*).
 - One puppeteer serves as the **Body**, operating the arms and hands; one puppeteer serves as the **Voice**, operating the head and mouth...and doing all the talking.
 - Cooperation is key, as the **Body** must follow the commands of the **Voice**.
 - The teaching artist hosts a talk show scenario in which the characters, Baby Bear and Goldilocks, must respond in character while cooperating as **Body** and **Voice**.
- **MARIONETTE PUPPETS:** Students all participate in the string puppetry segment. The teaching artist gives first opportunity to those students who have yet to participate as assistant or apprentice puppeteers.
 - The teaching artist introduces a four-string marionette puppet; the character is a bird, like a flamingo or ostrich with long legs and neck.
 - Students learn the terms **control bar** or **controller** as well as the attachments for the strings and what each string, or set of strings, operate.

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- 6-12 students are chosen as a group and stand side by side with the teaching artist in the center for demonstration purposes.
- Puppeteers are guided collectively through a series of movement techniques. Gestures include:
 - Walking – by rocking the controller side to side while gently swinging one leg out in front of the other repeatedly.
 - Pecking – holding the tail string to keep the legs straight while dipping the head string or front of the controller down toward the floor.
 - Searching – lifting one foot to the head, to shade eyes, while sweeping the head from left to right on cue
 - Dancing – shake those tail feathers!
- Students are rotated through the process until everyone has had a turn.
- Students learn the proper care and storage of marionettes by spinning the strings and winding them on the controller bar. As the teaching artist demonstrates, students are asked to carefully help wind and store the puppets

Before the Puppetry Arts Master Class is complete, the teaching artist checks for learning prompting students to recall everything they know now that they didn't know before the workshop, teasing out key details when necessary:

- Types/styles/kinds of puppets:
 - Finger – more than a child's toy
 - Rod – using small rods or sticks to support the body as well as operate the hands
 - Hand & Mouth – point nose to audience or scene partner; no biting
 - 2-handed – Body puppeteer follows Voice puppeteer's lead
 - Marionette – string puppets
 - Shadow – 2-dimensional movement with flat, jointed puppets and small rod attachments
- Difference between the style or type of puppet and a puppet's character

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- Proper positioning on stage for both the puppeteer and the puppet – the puppet is the star; make yourself invisible
- Proper manipulation techniques for each type of puppet – no bites and no fights
- Lip syncing technique – no biting
- String technique – 2 hands are better than 1
- Exercising language arts skills developing appropriate character dialogue and gestures, as well as demonstrating a functional understanding of setting and plot/action.

Though this would signify the end of the Puppetry Arts Master Class, it is also a perfect opportunity to segue into a new, related lesson – construction! A puppet workshop in which junior “Gepettos” design and build original characters – finger, rod, shadow, marionette, etc. – and create original puppet plays for an audience of peers or PTA.

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