

Study Guide For Teachers

Puppet Theatre, Inside Out:

...a program by Steve Abrams

Presented by

Young Audiences

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

Puppets have been used by storytellers for centuries to illuminate and entertain. No one knows where puppetry first began, though most scholars seem to agree that puppetry as an art form started in China with the introduction of the shadow puppet. However, that is only one particular kind of puppet and one kind of puppetry.

In the seventeenth century, hand puppets, which are figures with heads and a body of cloth which fit over the puppeteer's hand, became popular. They were easier to operate, cheaper to make and more mobile. Shows could be given from the back of wagons and from small portable stages. Puppet characters like Punch and Judy became popular and shows based on local politics became common. These puppets could comment on things the masses could not.

These days, puppets still play an important part in our culture. Puppets can make us laugh at ourselves, can teach principles that might otherwise be difficult to grasp and help us empathize with others, all while providing us with entertainment.

Virtually anything that can be manipulated can be made into a puppet--socks, gloves, stuffed animals, paper sacks, etc.

The only limit is your own imagination!

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Aesop's fables and other stories from Africa and Europe have taught and entertained children for thousands of years. In a lively and informative performance, Steve Abrams brings these tales to life as he combines the elements of humor, fantasy, and improvisation in a demonstration of the ancient art form of puppetry. Steve also "takes" his audience backstage for a closer look at the mechanics of puppetry. He encourages audience participation as he demonstrates several techniques of puppet manipulation and gives the children the opportunity to help design a working puppet.

LEARNING GOALS

- To acquaint young children with the ancient art form of puppetry.
- To share stories and fables from a number of cultures through puppetry.
- To demonstrate the various forms of puppetry.
- To stimulate the creativity and imagination of the children as they help to design a working puppet.

VOCABULARY WORDS

Puppet:-an inanimate figure that is made to move by human effort for the entertainment of an audience.

Puppeteer-a person who uses puppets to act, tell stories, teach, or entertain.

Ventriloquist-a puppeteer who can use his/her voice so that it appears to be coming from a puppet called a dummy.

Puppet stage-a space specially created to show the puppets and hide the puppeteer.

Hand puppet-a puppet worked from below with the operator's hands inside a cloth body.

Rod puppet- puppet worked from below with arms controlled with thin rods. Muppets are examples of rod puppets.

Shadow puppet- a flat puppet projected onto a screen.

String puppet-a puppet worked from above, using strings.

Marionette-another word for string puppet.

Fable- short story, not based on fact, often with animals as characters and conveying a moral

Moral- A lesson or a principle. The lesson of The Tortoise and the Hare, for example, is "Slow and steady wins the race."

ARTIST INFORMATION

Steve Abrams has been a professional puppeteer for many years and has given more than 2,000 performances. He started Pan's Puppets in Philadelphia and has taken this one- man show to the Renaissance Pleasure Faire near San Francisco, Indian reservations in Arizona, and the Library and Museum of the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center in New York. Steve has performed for Young Audiences since 1979 and has appeared in schools and libraries in New Jersey and the Philadelphia area. He has also appeared as a guest artist at the Elm Seed Puppet Theatre at Rhode Island School of Design, Longwood Gardens, and Olana Historical Site at Hudson, New York. Additionally, he has conducted work- shops for young children, college students, teachers, and librarians.

AFTER THE PROGRAM

Creating a puppet:

- Bring a paper bag to life!
- Create a puppet character out of an everyday object such as a paintbrush or a plastic plant.
- Make a puppet out of simple materials, e.g. socks or styrofoam balls. Keep it simple; make sure you sustain the interest of the class beyond the making of the puppet into the realm of creating characters and stories.

Creating a puppet character:

When Steve talks to a puppet — whether on his or someone else's hand, he needs to find out what the character is. He therefore asks it questions to help a new puppeteer figure out what to do with the creature on his/her hand.

- Believe in the puppet. Assume it is alive and treat it with respect to help the child think and create.
- Interview the puppet in a curious, interested, and non-judgmental way, as you might talk to a visitor from another world (which it is). You might begin by asking the character how it feels. You might ask, "Do you have a name yet?" rather than "What's your name?" • Compliment the character on its appearance. Any trait will do. In Steve's world of puppetry, the concept "ugly" has no meaning; each character, no matter how strange or different from the others, accepts its appearance as normal and positive.
- Ask about what it likes to eat, where it lives, and who its friends are. You can ask, "Who is your friend back there?"— meaning the puppeteer. This reminds the uncertain puppeteer that together you are making an imaginary character.

Creating a puppet show:

- Steve has two basic rules for beginners: 1) Keep it short and 2) Keep it moving.
- He recommends Puppetry and the Art of Story Creation, by Nancy Renfro, published by Nancy Renfro Studios, 1117 West 9th Street, Austin, TX 78703 as a basic reference.

RESOURCES

Mahlmann, Lewis and Jones, David. Puppet Plays from Favorite Stories. Boston: Plays, Inc., 1977. Collection of 18 puppet plays, short and lively.

Wright, Lyndie. Puppets. New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1989. Excellent ideas for puppet construction; illustrations make instructions easy to follow.

http://members.fortunecity.com/gingerbread_grandma/puppetwkshp/puphist.html

<http://www.sunniebunniezz.com/puppetry/>

