

PUPPET POWER

Stick Puppets

GET INSPIRED

Using puppets in storytelling can help children of many ages and abilities to develop literacy skills, such as building vocabulary, decoding, conversation, grammar, and general knowledge. Puppet shows can also help children develop their listening and participation skills. When creating puppets and puppet plays, children can foster skills in reading comprehension, adaptation of material into a different format, and collaboration. For many years, the Library hosted a puppet show and puppet-making workshop on the day after Thanksgiving. You can continue the tradition from home using inspiration from the Library's collections and past puppet programs. The two activities below demonstrate how to create stick puppets and a shadow theater based on traditional Chinese shadow puppetry.



GET READY

To start your puppet show, you need a story. For the Puppet Show in 2019, U.S. Poet Laureate Joy Harjo provided a beautiful statement on the power of stories.









“All human beings are story gatherers. We native peoples have been fed by stories we have gathered for thousands of years, long before any Europeans arrived on the shores of this country. We need stories, poems, songs, dance and art as much as we need food, clothing and shelter. We need to feed our imaginations, our spirits. We share stories by drums talking across distances, in novels and movies, and now on cellphones. We love to gather in circles around the fire, whether it's outside at a ceremonial ground, a trash can in the forgotten part of the city, or in the kitchen around the stove-to hear. When we listen to stories together our hearts beat together. We become one.”

You can retell your favorite folktale, fable, or picture book, explore our collection of [classic children's books](#), or create your own. You can also get inspired by hearing authors and poets [reading their work](#) in online collections from the Library's Poetry and Literature Center.

Once you decide on the story and characters, it's time to create your theater and puppets! Choose from the stick puppet show or shadow theater instructions below.

STICK PUPPETS:

For this activity you'll need:

-  Cardstock
-  Crayons or markers
-  Decorations such as googly eyes, yarn for hair, or glitter (optional)
-  Glue
-  Sticks (paint stirring sticks work well)
-  A large cardboard Box
-  Packing tape or duct tape
-  Paint to decorate your theater

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CREATE YOUR PUPPETS!

1. Using cardstock, **draw** your own puppet or print figures from coloring pages (for example, this [dog](#), [owl](#), [fox](#), and [hare](#) from the Library's Japanese woodblock collections), one of the Library's [poster collections](#) (check out this [hippo](#) or [panda!](#)), or images in our popular [Free to Use and Reuse images](#).



2. **Color** your puppet (if necessary) and **cut** it out. Add any extra decorations you would like, such as googly eyes or yarn hair.



3. **Glue** the back of your puppet to a long, smooth stick. A paint stirring stick is perfect.



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CREATE YOUR THEATER!

1. **Open** the ends of a cardboard box for the puppet stage. Tape one of the flaps closed so that you don't reveal the hands of the puppeteer.



2. **Paint** and **decorate** the outside of your puppet theater any way you want.



3. **Cut** slim holes in the side to slide your puppets through.



4. **Place** your puppet theater on a table and **start** the show!



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Shadow Theater



These Chinese shadow puppets are from Shaanxi province and were created in the 19th to early 20th century. They survived the Tangshan earthquake of 1976 and the Cultural Revolution, when puppet theater was considered a counter-revolutionary art form. They are in Ann Roddy's personal collection.












GET INSPIRED

Shadow Theater is everywhere in traditional Chinese life—in temples, the streets, the countryside, the marketplace, and the human soul. Before shadow theater became recognized as a performance art, it was a form of imaginative entertainment. Shadows from trees played upon the wax windowpanes of traditional housing and inspired people to tell stories, much like people tell stories about the shapes they see in the patterns of stars. As people began to use puppetry to complement these shadow stories, the idea that stories could be told by the manipulation of natural entities like light and shadow empowered puppetry with deep meaning. People saw the puppets as sacred objects that had power and influence larger than the performance. As puppetry linked to these natural and cosmic phenomenon spread throughout Asia, this understanding spread with it. Stephanie Hall from the American Folklife Center wrote in her blog post [Puppets: A Story of Magical Actors](#), “Puppetry is often seen as both sacred and magical even today.”

GET READY

For this activity you'll need:

-  Cardstock
-  Black Paint
-  Sticks (paint stirring sticks work well)
-  Glue
-  A large cardboard Box
-  A roll of white paper
-  Packing tape or duct tape
-  A small table lamp or camping lantern
-  Paint to decorate your theater

PUPPET POWER

Shadow Theater



CREATE YOUR PUPPETS!

1. **Draw** or **print** your puppet characters on cardstock. There is an example of a traditional Balinese puppet character [here](#). The rare book collections include this set of [Chinese paper dolls](#) [PDF] from the latter part of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) that can serve as either a template or inspiration. You can find additional ideas for characters in the stick puppet making section above.
2. **Cut** your characters out and **paint** them black.
3. **Attach** a stick to the back of each of your shadow puppets with tape. A paint stirring stick is perfect.



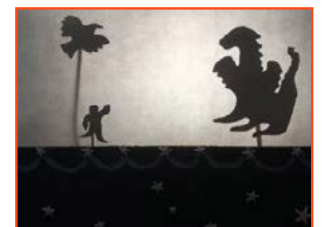
PUPPET POWER

Shadow Theater



CREATE YOUR THEATER!

- 1. Open** the ends of a cardboard box for the puppet stage. Tape one of the flaps closed so you don't reveal the hands of the puppeteer.
- 2. Cut** slim holes in the side to slide your puppets through.
- 3. Paint** and **decorate** the outside of your puppet theater.
- 4. Attach** white paper to the front and **tape** its edges securely.
- 5. Place** a small lamp or camping lantern at the back of your theater.
- 6. Dim** your room lights and **start** the show!



PUPPET POWER






Shadow Theater





EXPLORE MORE!

Check out this [blog post](#) about puppetry books in the Rare Book Collection at the Library.

Read more about how to make puppets:



-  Bryan, Ashley. *Ashley Bryan's Puppets*. New York: Atheneum, 2014.
-  Engler, Larry and Carol Fijan. *Making Puppets Come Alive*. New York: Dover, 1973.
-  Kennedy, John. *Puppet Mania*. Cincinnati: North Light, 2004.
-  Kennedy, John. *Puppet Planet*. Cincinnati: North Light, 2006.
-  MacNeal, Noel. *10-Minute Puppets*. New York: Workman, 2010.

Read more about Shadow Theater:

-  Broman, Sven. *Chinese Shadow Theatre*. Stockholm: Ethnographic Museum of Sweden, 1981.
-  Chen, Fan Pen Li. *Chinese Shadow Theater, History, Popular Religion, and Women Warriors*. Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007.
[Digital Museum of Shadow](#)

Visit the [World Encyclopedia of Puppet Arts](#)

View these Library webcasts focused on puppets (for parents and older siblings):

-  [African American Dollmaking and Puppetry: Renegotiating Identity, Restoring Community](#)
-  [Experimental Shadow Theater in Contemporary Bali, Indonesia](#)