

Puppets

Links to QCA schemes of work

History: Unit 1. How are our toys different from those in the past?

Science: Unit 1C. Sorting and using materials

Science: Unit 2D. Grouping and changing materials

Design and technology: Unit 2B. Puppets

Geography: Unit 5. Where in the world is Barnaby Bear?

Art and design: Unit 9 (gen). Visiting a museum, gallery or site

Background notes

Puppets have their origin in ancient cultures, including those of India and China. In Europe, travelling puppeteers reached the height of their popularity in the 18th and 19th centuries. The Museum has a large collection of puppets and puppet theatres that reflects their universality. They can be used to teach children about materials and mechanisms, and linked to plays and storytelling.

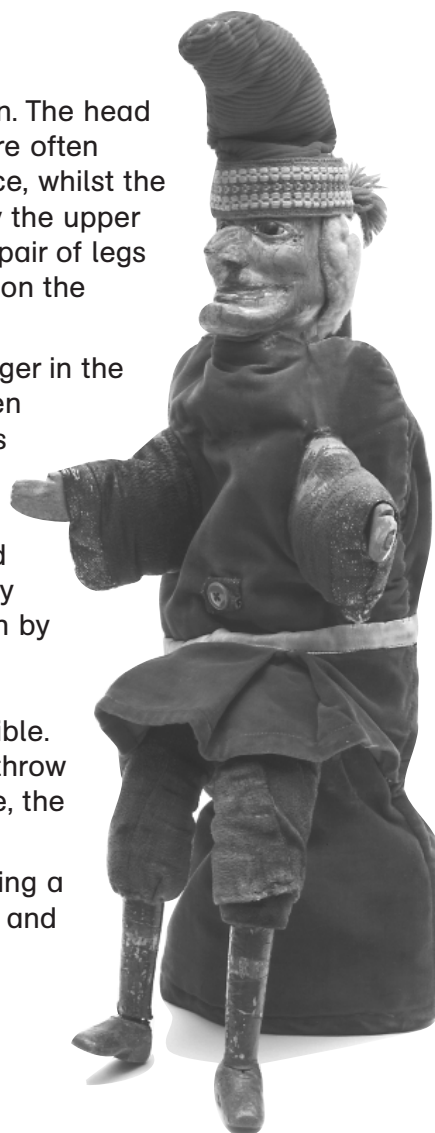
Hand puppets

Hand (or glove) puppets are generally very simple in construction. The head is usually made of carved wood or papier mache. The features are often exaggerated caricatures so that they can be seen from a distance, whilst the body is a cloth tube which hides the operator's arm. Usually only the upper half of the puppet's body is visible, although sometimes it has a pair of legs that can be swung over so that the puppet appears to be sitting on the playboard.

The operator works the puppet from below. They use their forefinger in the head, the thumb and middle (or little) finger in the arms, and often provides a "voice" for the puppet too. Hand puppet performances were extremely popular in streets and fairground shows in the past.

The most well-known puppet characters in Britain are Punch and Judy; Samuel Pepys, the diarist, records seeing a Punch and Judy show in Covent Garden in 1662. The character of Punch is known by a variety of names in other parts of Europe including Kasperl, Pulcinella and Petrushka. He is frequently belligerent, defiant, rebellious and cunning, often unscrupulous and always irrepressible. Audiences seem to delight in seeing him behave badly and overthrow authority figures, which traditionally include a policeman, a judge, the hangman and the devil.

The Museum has a number of examples of hand puppets, including a number of Punch and Judy sets and a booth used between 1912 and 1962.



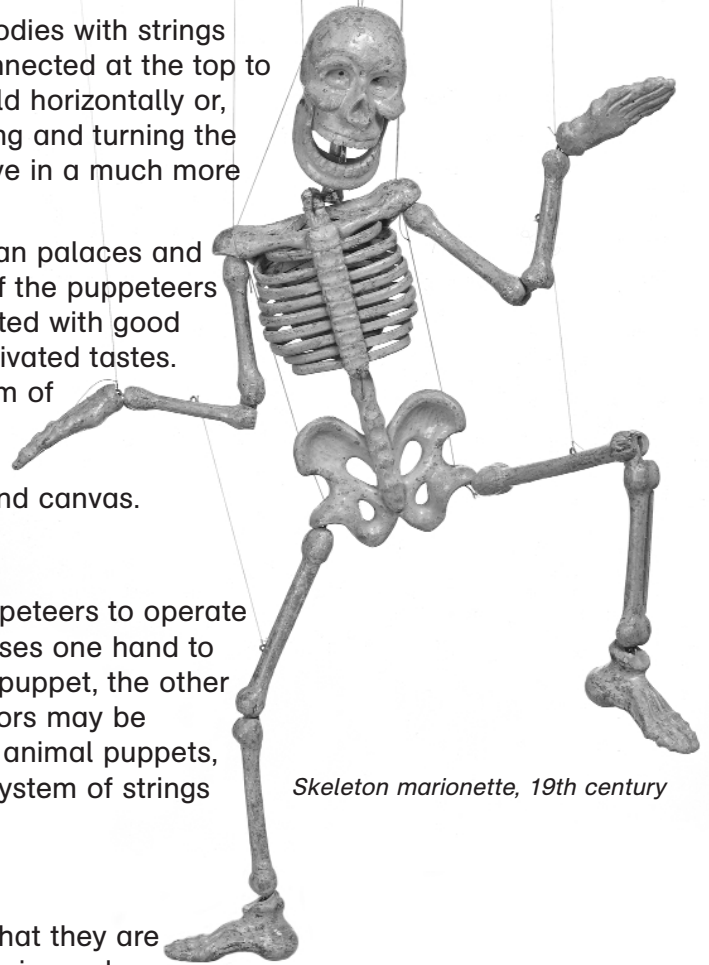
Punch glove puppet by Albert Smith

String puppets

String puppets (or marionettes) have complete bodies and jointed limbs, with carved or moulded heads. They are operated by a single puppeteer who works from above. Early marionettes have one long wire attached to the head with a control at the top for the operator to grip. Consequently the puppet can do little more than jig about.

Later marionettes have more cleverly jointed bodies with strings attached to all the moving parts. These are connected at the top to a control, generally made of wood, which is held horizontally or, sometimes, vertically. By lifting, lowering, twisting and turning the control, the operator can make the puppet move in a much more life-like manner.

Marionettes were particularly popular in Venetian palaces and European courts in the 18th century. The aim of the puppeteers was to imitate “live” theatre and they collaborated with good writers to produce plays likely to appeal to cultivated tastes. They developed a mannered and theatrical form of delivery and style of performance. The marionette theatres themselves were large and elaborate with scenery painted on wood and canvas.



Skeleton marionette, 19th century

Rod puppets

Rod puppets sometimes need two or three puppeteers to operate them. Working from below, the main operator uses one hand to hold a central rod attached to the body of the puppet, the other to move a jointed arm or leg. Additional operators may be required to move other limbs, or, in the case of animal puppets, a tail. Sometimes the central rod may have a system of strings or levers to move the head.

Shadow puppets

Shadow puppets are similar to rod puppets in that they are generally jointed figures operated from below using rods made from wire or wood. Unlike rod puppets, they are two-dimensional and not intended to be “realistic”. Particularly popular in Asia, they are believed to have originated in China or India. The Museum’s collection includes examples from India, Indonesia, Greece and Turkey.

Asian shadow puppets are generally made from animal hide that has been treated to make it smooth and semi-transparent. This is decorated by chiselling and punching out shapes and patterns. The puppet is then held behind a white linen or silk cloth with a bright light projected behind it. The puppet’s shadow appears as a black silhouette. Sometimes the puppets are coloured using natural dyes; if these are translucent they cast coloured shadows.

Bunraku

Bunraku performances originated in Japan in the late 16th century. They were originally called “ningyo-joruri” which translates literally as puppets and storytelling. The puppets take the form of human figures, approximately one metre in height, with lifelike features and beautifully embroidered, traditional Japanese costumes.

Traditionally, bunraku puppets require three puppeteers to operate them. The first works the head and the right arm and the second operates the left arm, which is controlled by a scissor-like arrangement of levers. The third operates the feet of the male puppet and the skirts of the female (who has no feet). The operators, who stand behind and slightly lower than the puppets) are dressed in black, but visible to the audience. A narrator, who speaks the words of the plays, sits beside the stage along with a musician.

Bunraku performances are designed for a highly sophisticated, adult audience. The plays deal with themes such as the conflict between personal feelings and loyalty. The Museum has examples of male and female bunraku puppets, probably dating from the late 19th century.

Useful websites

- www.42explore.com/puppet.htm
Includes information and links to a range of puppetry websites and suggestions for practical activities.
- www.essortment.com/in/Crafts.Kids
Includes clear step-by-step instructions for making a variety of simple puppets.

Pre-visit activities

Performing puppets

Gather as many different puppets as you can (e.g. finger, hand, marionette). Encourage children to experiment with them. Are they operated from above or below? Do they have wires or strings? Which are the easiest to operate? See if they can animate the puppets and create characters for them.

Shadow play

Hang a white sheet across a corner of the classroom. Using directional desk lamps, encourage children to experiment with casting shadows from behind the sheet. Does the light have to be behind or in front of you? If you have managed to find a shadow puppet, see if the children can operate it.

What to see and do in the museum

- Look at the puppets and the puppet theatres in the lower galleries.
- Put on your own Punch and Judy show in the seaside area in the “Good Times” gallery on the top floor.

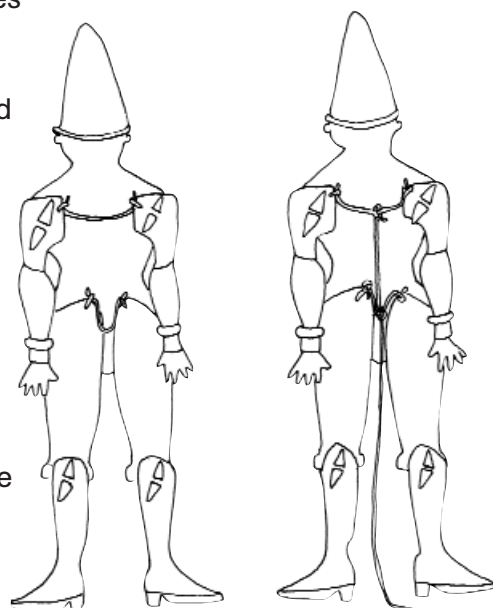
Post-visit activities

Show time!

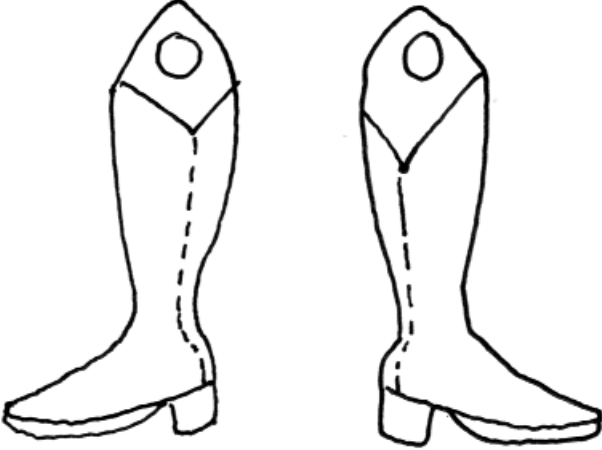
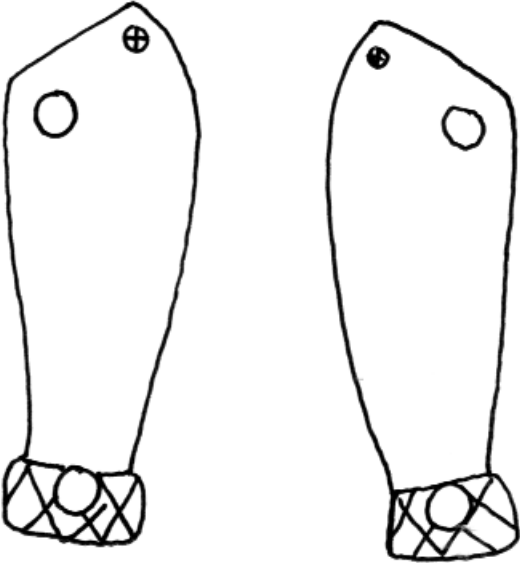
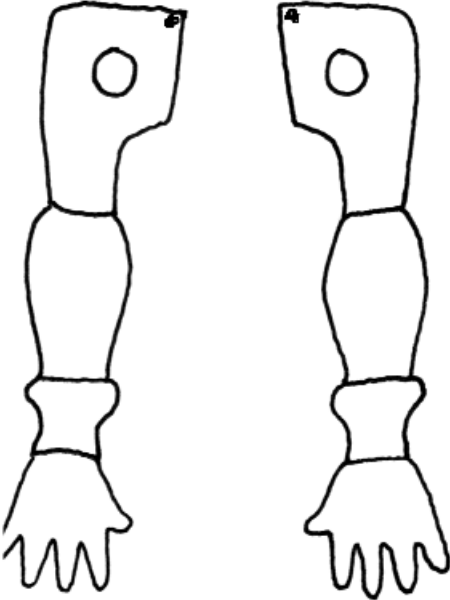
Make a glove puppet as suggested in the QCA Design and Technology Unit 2B. Alternatively, children can make very simple stick puppets (i.e. draw and cut out a cardboard figure and attach to a stick of doweling). Create a puppet “theatre” by putting a cloth over a small table that has been turned on its side. Children can crouch behind the table and operate the puppets from below. Some may be able to devise their own puppet plays; it may be more appropriate for others to recreate stories that are already familiar (e.g. fairy tales).

Make your own Jumping Jack

1. Photocopy the template provided.
2. Colour it in and cut out the pieces.
3. Using a sharp pencil, make holes through all the small circles marked on the template.
4. Cut two short lengths of string. Join the arms and legs by threading the string between the holes marked with an X and tying the ends.
5. Push the split pins through the other holes, from front to back, to make the joints for the arms and legs. Make sure that these are fastened loosely, so that the joints can move smoothly.
6. Cut a long length of string. Connect the arms and the legs by tying the string, first to the centre of the string joining the arms, then to the centre of the string joining the legs.
7. Tie a loop of string through the X marked on the hat so that you can hold up the Jumping Jack with one hand. Pull on the central string to see him jump up and down!



Jumping Jack



Guide sheet

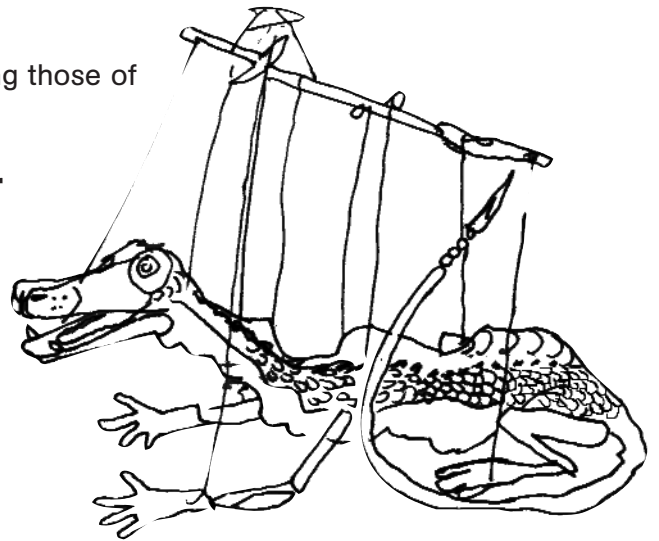
Puppets

Puppets have their origin in ancient cultures, including those of India and China.

Go to the “Puppets” area in the Lower Galleries

Find the hand puppets

- How would you make these puppets come to life? (*e.g. put your hand inside, move your fingers, create a “voice” for the puppet*)
- What materials are the heads made out of? (*wood or papier mache*)
- Can you find Punch and Judy?
- Have you ever seen a Punch and Judy show? If so, where did you see it? Was the show for adults or children?
- Did Punch make you laugh? What sorts of things did he do? Was he a bit naughty too?
- What other characters were in the show? Can you find any of them? (*e.g. policeman, crocodile*)



Find the string puppets or “marionettes”

- Point to parts of your body that move. What do we call these? (*joints*)
- Can you see how the strings are attached to the joints of the puppets?
- How would you make the puppets move? (*Hold the wooden frame and then lift and twist the strings.*)
- Do you think they would be easy or difficult to operate?
- Are these puppets more, or less, life-like than the hand puppets?
- Do you recognise any of the characters? If so, what stories are they from? (*e.g. St. George and the Dragon*)

Find the rod puppets

- Some of these puppets would need more than one person to operate them. Can you explain why? *(e.g. the fox would need one person to move the body and head, one for the arms and one for the legs)*
- This type of puppet is often used to tell folk or fairy tales. Which fairy tales do you know?

Find the shadow puppets

- How would you make the puppets move? *(compare with the rod puppets)*
- What else would you need to put on a shadow puppet show? *(e.g. a white screen or cloth, a bright light)*
- Can you explain how you would put on the show? *(Hold the puppet between the cloth and the light so that it casts a shadow on the cloth.)*

Find the large puppet theatre

- What colour is the theatre painted on the outside? Can you see the painted scenery on the inside?
- Look at the puppets inside the large puppet theatre. What kind of characters do you think they play? *(e.g. good or bad, young or old, father or son)*
- What do you think is happening in the play? *(Children can invent their own plots!)*

Other things to see and do in the museum

- Look at the Bunraku puppets in the "Puppets" area. What country have these come from?
- Look at the toy theatre and the Jumping Jacks near the Moving Toys gallery.
- Go up to the Childhood Galleries and put on a Punch and Judy show in the "Good Times" area.

Activity sheet

Puppet fun

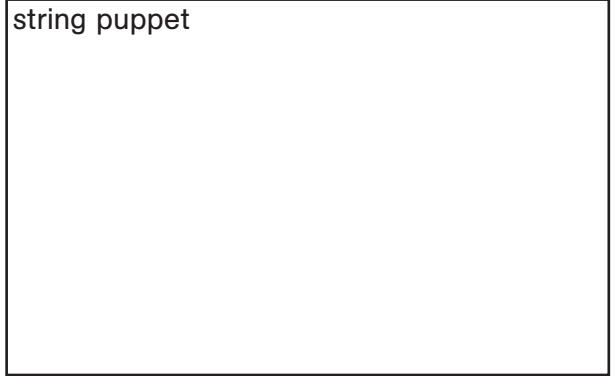


Draw one of each type of puppet in the boxes below.

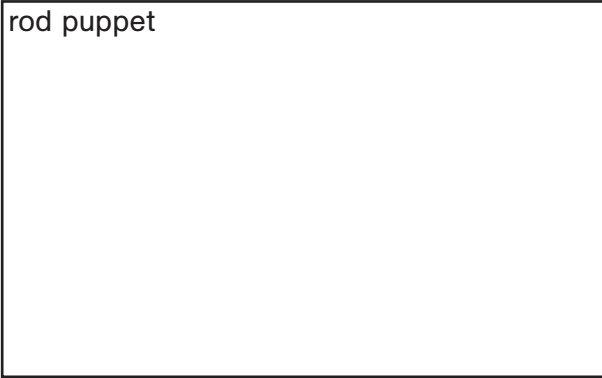
hand puppet



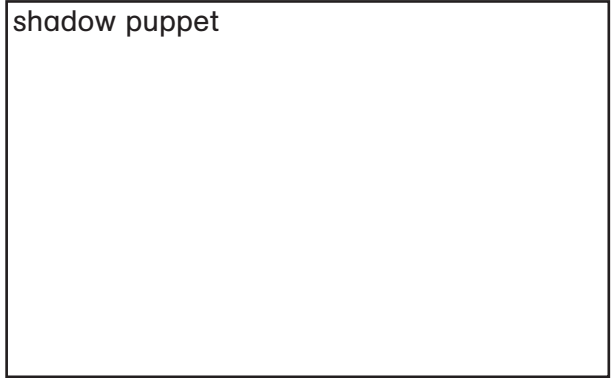
string puppet



rod puppet



shadow puppet



Now draw Punch and Judy in the booth below. Can you draw in any other characters from the show too?

