A World of Puppets

By: John Kim
Chapter 1
Playing with Puppets

Puppets can be great toys and even great art. People all over the world have enjoyed puppets and puppet shows.

A puppet is a figure or doll made to look like a person or animal. Puppets come in all shapes and sizes.

Hand puppets are small. They may fit over a hand or just one finger. You use your fingers to make them move. Other puppets are large. You move them by pulling on strings or sticks. Some puppets are so big that it takes more than one person to make them move.

Finger puppets are fun and easy to move.
People use puppets to tell stories. The puppets are the characters in a story. We see the puppets move and speak. But it’s the puppeteer who makes them do that. The puppeteer is the person who brings them to life.

In most shows, the puppeteers hide behind a screen or curtain. But sometimes you can see them.

Some puppet shows take place in special little theaters. But you can put on a puppet show anytime and anywhere.

These puppeteers are telling a story with puppets.
Chapter 2
Hand Puppets

Hand and finger puppets are very popular. They are also easy to make.

To make a finger puppet, draw a character on paper. Then, cut out the shape and a thin strip of paper at the bottom. Next, tape the ends of the strip together to form a circle. Put your finger through the circle.

Sock puppets are made using old socks. Sew on two buttons for eyes. Put your hand inside the sock. Your thumb should be in the bottom and your other fingers can be on top. Move them to make the puppet move its mouth.

Give your puppet a funny voice and make it move. You are a puppeteer!
A glove puppet is another kind of hand puppet. It has a hollow head and two arms. The puppeteer puts a thumb and a pinky finger into each arm. The other fingers go into the head. The puppet comes alive when the fingers move inside.

Punch and Judy are famous glove puppets. They have been popular in England for more than 350 years. Long ago, Punch and Judy puppeteers traveled around the country to perform in villages. Punch and Judy are silly characters who trip and fall, hit each other, and say funny things. They were made to make people laugh.
Chapter 3
Puppets on Strings

Some puppets are moved by strings. These puppets are called marionettes.

A marionette has strings attached to its head, arms, body, legs, and hands.

The strings are connected to a small wooden frame. The puppeteer moves the frame to make the puppet move.

Marionettes look impossible to control. But with talent and hard work, a puppeteer can learn to make it look natural and easy.
In the 1950s, one of the most popular children’s shows had a marionette as its star. His name was Howdy Doody, and he was the star of *The Howdy Doody Show*. Howdy Doody lived in the town of Doodyville with his friend, Buffalo Bob Smith. The show had many funny characters. They had silly names, such as the Flubadub, Dilly Dally, and Princess Summerfallwinterspring.

**Howdy Doody Fun Facts:**

- The audience at the show was filled with children. It was called the Peanut Gallery.
- Howdy Doody’s name comes from the saying, “How do you do?”
- The show was on TV for almost 14 years.
Rods, or sticks, are used to make some puppets move. The rods are attached to parts of the puppet. The puppeteer moves the rods to move the puppet.

Look at the puppets to the left. They are water puppets from Vietnam. Water puppet shows take place in water. The puppeteers stand at the edges of the water and move the bamboo rods. These puppet plays often tell tales from long ago.

*Water puppet shows were sometimes performed in wet rice fields in Vietnam.*
In Indonesia, rod puppets are used in shadow plays. People cut flat shapes out of leather and join them to rods to make puppets. The rods move the puppets’ arms and legs. A light shines from behind the puppets onto a screen. The audience is on the other side of the screen. They see only the shadows.

Puppet shows are a tradition in many parts of the world. Some countries have theaters that perform only puppet shows.

Shadow plays are often shown outside at night. It is very pleasant to sit in the moonlight and watch the shapes move.
Chapter 5
Puppets that Teach

Puppet shows can be used to teach history and other lessons. People teach with puppets all over the world.

Bunraku (BUHN-rah-koo) puppets have been used to tell stories and teach Japanese history for more than 300 years. Three puppeteers are needed to move some Bunraku puppets. One controls the head and right arm. Another puppeteer moves the left arm. The third puppeteer moves the feet. Some puppets even have eyes that move. Watching Bunraku puppets is almost like watching a real person move.

Bunraku puppeteers wear black clothing so the audience does not see them.
Bunraku shows first began in Osaka, Japan. The stories performed by the puppets often show everyday life in Japan. The characters may be rich or poor. The settings are villages, cities, or castles. Bunraku is as popular now as it was more than 300 years ago. It is one of Japan’s greatest treasures.
Puppet shows are popular teaching tools at some children’s museums. Puppets that look like famous people can be used to teach about things that happened long ago. The puppets help bring history to life.

In schools, some teachers may use puppets in their classes. Students may see dancing and singing puppet vegetables as they learn about healthy meals.

Puppets are also used in hospitals. They teach children how to feel better, and sometimes they make them laugh.
Puppets are also used to teach English in countries around the world. The puppets say words that people who speak English say every day. They may teach the alphabet or even the days of the week. The puppets make learning English easier because people can sit back and listen.

In China, the country’s National Puppet Troupe travels around China and performs plays. Their puppets teach children English. The troupe has made a recording of their performance that will be shown in schools all around China.

People in China’s National Puppet Troupe are dressed up as people puppets. They are teaching Chinese children the days of the week in English. The troupe also uses hand puppets to teach Chinese children how to speak English.
Puppets have been enjoyed by children and adults for hundreds of years. Puppet shows are still performed in many countries.

There are different kinds of puppets, including simple finger puppets, marionettes, and rod puppets. Some puppets, like the Bunraku in Japan, almost look like people.

Some puppets teach us about our world, but others perform to make us laugh. No matter when puppets are used, it’s always fun to watch them!

A paper bag puppet is easy to make and fun to play with.