

# CREATIVE PUPPETRY

A Project inspired by Macbeth

## Table-Top Puppets (Suitable for KS1+)

### Context and History of Puppet-Making

Before starting this project with your children, it is always worth sharing children's prior experience and existing knowledge of puppets. They may mention finger puppets, hand (glove) puppets, marionettes, rod puppets, shadow puppets or even ventriloquists' dummies. The BBC Bitesize website is only one of many online resources that provides a concise video introduction to puppet-making as an art form, including this behind the scenes film at Little Angel Theatre, Islington:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/clips/zww2hyc>



Image Credit: BBC

### Introduction to Table-Top Puppet-Making

Table-top puppets are simple to operate on a flat surface or floor using only one or two rods. Children can customise them to make different characters. In this project, Year 1 children designed puppets based on the characters of the Witches in Macbeth.

As well as being visually appealing, and teaching children new art skills, puppet-making can also provide endless opportunities to enrich literacy lessons, promote writing and generally increase children's understanding of the play - through the re-enactment of scenes, dialogue development and devising alternative endings, to give only a few examples.

Table-top puppet-making can be suitable for children as young as Year 1, as long as there is sufficient adult support in class and enough time is allowed for completing each stage.

### Acknowledgement

I am very grateful to Little Angel Theatre for allowing me to adapt their wonderful Table-Top Puppet design. For more information about Little Angel and the services they offer schools:

<https://littleangeltheatre.com/creativelearning/schools-and-teachers/activities-for-schools/>



## LESSON 1 – Designing a Character

Before children make their puppets, they must have some idea of what kind of character they would like to create. It is important that the design stage is given time as this is how children will later be able to show their creativity and imagination, even while following the same stages of making as everyone else in their class.

You might want to discuss with your children how witches have been traditionally depicted in different cultures and across different media. Children could also share their ideas about whether the witches in Macbeth are 'good' or 'bad'.



Image Credit, Clockwise from top left: Leo and Diane Dillon, Warner Bros, Axel Scheffler, Disney Studios.

Children should make **at least one** simple drawing plan for their puppet character – making sure to show their choices of facial expression, hair colour, clothing detail, shoes etc. You will know best whether some of your children might benefit from using a template for this.

### RESOURCES

You will need:

- Polystyrene balls (about 50mm diameter)
- Tissue paper, variety of colours, cut to size
- Class supply of paper cups
- Chopsticks – 1 per puppet
- Skewer – 1 per puppet
- Felt pieces, variety of colours cut to size
- Wool, variety of colours, cut to size
- Sequins, ribbons or similar decorative craft supplies
- Felt-tip pens
- Glue sticks
- Scissors
- Glue gun (for adult use only)



## LESSON 2 – STARTING TO MAKE

Depending on the age, artistic experience and manual dexterity of your children, the making process might be covered in only a couple of sessions. On the other hand, you may need to spread things out over a much longer period of time. I will break the different stages into lessons for guidance but teachers must use their own judgement as to how to best meet the needs of their children.

### THE HEAD

Children will use a polystyrene ball for the head.

To make a nose, take a very small, pre-cut square of tissue paper and screw it into a ball. For a bigger nose, you may want to use more than one square. Glue this firmly to your polystyrene ball.



To create the skin colour of your puppet, take a larger (approximately 18 x 18 cm) pre-cut square of tissue paper in the same colour as your nose.

Apply glue ALL OVER the head of your puppet.

Holding the puppet's head nose-up, place the tissue paper flat down onto the head, and wrap around to stick.

You will end up with some excess tissue paper at the back of the head.

This can be trimmed and the ends stuck down so you have a smooth, covered ball.



To add facial features, use a felt tip pen to draw in the puppet's eyes.

For the mouth, children can either draw this in with red felt tip pen, OR, using a small pre-cut rectangle of tissue paper, twist this into a line and glue to the head. Consider whether you want your character to appear happy, sad, angry, confused etc.

### ADDING HAIR

For the puppet's hair, pre-cut wool into looped strands, MUCH LONGER than the length desired for the puppet.

Using a generous amount of glue all over the top and back of the head, stick the wool down, spreading it so that there are no 'bald' patches.

When children are satisfied, they can give their puppet a 'haircut' – careful supervision is needed at this stage to avoid over-enthusiastic results!



### LESSON 3 - THE BODY



The puppet's body is made out of a paper cup.

In advance of this lesson, teachers will need to make a hole in the base, large enough for a chopstick to poke through. This is how the head is eventually fixed to the body.

Then, cut a small hole, about the size of a 10p piece into the side of the cup. The chopstick will come out of here later on.

Children should cover their puppet's body in tissue paper in their colour of choice following their design.

They can use one large piece of tissue, or if they find it easier, they can glue a section at a time using smaller pieces of ripped tissue paper.



## ATTACHING THE HEAD TO THE BODY

This is a job that should be done by ADULTS only.

Make a hole in the bottom of the character's head, using a bradawl or similar tool.

Poke a chopstick through the hole in the back of the puppet's cup body and out through the hole in the base.

Use a glue gun to securely glue the puppet's head to the chopstick.



## LESSON 4 – HANDS, ARMS, FEET AND LEGS



### HANDS

Arms for the puppet are made using pre-cut strips of felt, (about 2 x 9 cm). Before children attach these however, they should make the puppet's hands.

Children can freehand draw, or use a simple template to create the hands from card. They will need to be decorated on both sides.

### ARMS

The hands can be glued or stapled to the ends of the arms.

The arms should be glued to the sides of the puppet, facing forward, not down.

Later a skewer can be attached to one hand to give the puppet more expression.





### FEET AND LEGS

Legs are made using pre-cut pieces of felt (approx 2 x 10 cm) glued to the inside front of the puppet's cup body.

Again, children should make the feet from card, and can use a template or draw these freehand, before colouring them in.

When they attach the feet to the legs, staple so that the felt is folded back at the bottom over the feet. This will help the puppet to appear as if it is really standing on its feet.

### FINISHING DETAILS

To finish off their puppet's outfit, children can add details of their own choice, such as cloaks, hats, dresses, skirts, belts, buttons etc – using a variety of materials (tissue paper, net, felt, paper, sequins or ribbons).



Refer children back to their original designs and encourage them to be as creative as possible.

To give the puppet's some expressive gestures, tape a wooden BBQ skewer to one of the puppet's hands – they can now wave, put their hand to their mouth, or point at something!

Have fun exploring your puppet's character – its way of moving, talking and behaving!

Adapted from a design by Little Angel Theatre: <https://littleangeltheatre.com>  
Jan Periton Dunning 2016 for <http://primaryshakespearecompany.co.uk>