Reading 2: Using Puppets in Storytime

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Introduction

Using puppets to tell a story can be an intimidating idea for some storytellers, but the truth is that puppets are a guaranteed hit. Kids adore them! You don't have to be anything even close to an expert performer to make a big impression when using puppets.

I grew up with puppets. My mother was a teacher and loved creative dramatics. I still remember the Three Little Pigs puppet show she performed for my fourth birthday and how alive the story became. I think back to the shows I put on for my family and how I loved to play different characters. It must have been in my blood.

Last week we looked at brain development, developmental milestones, and early literacy skills. All of these serve as our building blocks in supporting children as they learn to read. This week we are going to explore the use of puppets in storytimes. Puppets are an amazing storytime tool and can be used in many different ways, depending on how comfortable you feel with performing.
Literacy and Puppets

We want to educate parents through all of our storytime activities. In a puppet show we're modeling ways that parents and children can interact with stories at home. Instead of reading a favorite book for the hundredth time, act it out with puppets or stuffed animals. This activity at home stimulates language, encourages children to talk, and reinforces communication.

Here are some "parent patter" tips on puppetry that you can share with parents.

- **Your beginning reader can read books to a puppet.** Young children love the fantasy of interacting with inanimate objects. Sometimes the presence of the puppet helps a child who is struggling with reading to relax and enjoy the experience. The puppet makes reading fun.

- **Your child can retell books by writing a script and using puppets.** This is a fun way to encourage your child to reread a book and understand it well enough to capture the essence of the story. It also encourages your child to write a good script. A younger sibling will love to watch the puppet shows produced by your beginning reader.

- **You can make a read-aloud more engaging with a puppet.** My kids love listening to the puppet reading stories, asking questions, and explaining parts of the stories. They talk to the puppet. They also like touching it and even mimicking the way that I use the puppet. Use of a puppet can be especially helpful in engaging children who find it difficult to sit still long enough to listen to an entire book.

- **Your child can teach the puppet.** Have your child summarize a new skill or concept that you've been practicing. For example, the puppet can learn to sound out words or find rhyming pairs. The puppet can even find sight words in a story such as "the," "what," and "said."

- **You can research another culture with puppets.** Shadow puppets are part of Indonesian culture. Your children can create a shadow puppet show as a culminating activity after researching Indonesian culture.[1]

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**Endnotes**

Puppet Manipulation

It's the puppets' job to carry the story in the most amusing but believable way possible. They demand to be outrageous. It helps for each puppet character to be distinctive (i.e., to have a certain sound or song).

The way you manipulate your puppet is very important.

1. Coordinating the movements of your finger, wrist, shoulder, and elbow helps move the mouth, scrunch the face, tip its head, answer yes or no. You can make it run, walk, fall, laugh, sleep, or sneeze.
2. Natural position. Practice placement of your puppets during the story. Don't sleep on the job. Keep your puppet awake at all times. [2]

The Legends and Lore website has great tips for puppet posture and movement.

Endnotes

Puppet Songs and Rhymes

If you are just starting to use puppets in your storytimes, you might want to start small. Sing a song or recite a rhyme. Use a familiar song like "Old MacDonald Had a Farm," and bring out each animal puppet as you name it in the song. Once you become more comfortable with the performance aspect of puppets, you can move on to an entire puppet story.

Puppet Song

**Horse Song**
Neigh, neigh, neigh goes the little brown horsey
Neigh, neigh, neigh goes the little horsey song
All day long, all day long, he sings his song, he sings his song
Neigh, neigh, neigh goes the little brown horsey
Neigh, neigh, neigh goes the little horsey song

Puppet Rhymes

**Horse Poem**
My horse is looking all around
My horse can sniff the ground
My horse is sleeping in his bed
My horse is sitting on my head
My horse is looking at my toes
My horse can kiss me on the nose
My horse can whisper in my ear
What’s he saying? Can you hear?
My horse can hide behind me,
But wherever I go, my horse will always find me.

Little Mice Creeping
Make a box with your hand
Open your box
Let the mice creep out
The little mice are creeping, creeping
They don’t make a sound as their feet touch the ground
The little mice are creeping, creeping
SHHHHHHHHHH!
Put your mice back in your box
Put the lid on your box
And quietly put your box in your lap.
I Went to the Zoo Today
I went to the zoo today
I met an elephant along the way
This is what he had to say
Trumpet Trumpet Trumpet
When I perform a puppet show I don't usually memorize a script, but I make sure I know the basics of the story and just let it flow. This allows for more humor (yes, you can turn a faux pas into part of your story!) and improvisation depending on the audience reaction to the performance. Your story will never be told exactly the same way twice. It's fun for both you and your audience!

**Warning:** the kids will want to touch or hold the puppets. I always make sure I explain that they will have a chance to visit with the puppets after storytime is over.

I categorize my puppet shows into two types: one-person puppet shows and two-person puppet shows. The first type usually consists of a puppet and several props that the storyteller manipulates during the performance. The second type consists of one main character who usually meets other characters along the way, thus needing the help of a second person in the performance.

There are certain aspects that I look for in a story when turning books into puppet shows. First, I look for a story that has a recognizable beginning, middle, and end. This helps when formulating your script. Second, I look for humor. How funny can I make this when performing it? Are there parts of the story I can embellish to get the audience involved? A repeated phrase or animal noise is a good example. Third, I look for stories where the character has some sort of problem to solve or a quest where they meet other characters along the way. This lets you showcase different puppets during one performance.
Puppet Shows

For your viewing pleasure, watch the following puppet shows. You can find the scripts in the Supplementary Material.

One-Man Puppet Shows

- Tail That Wagged the Dog

- Poppy the Panda
• Perfect Nose for Ralph

• Who Sank the Boat?
Two-Man Puppet Shows

- Lion and the Mouse (Version 1)
• Lion and the Mouse (Version 2)

• Monkey Face

• Only Joking
• Old Hat New Hat

• One More Thing Dad
For the Week 2 Assignment, you will write a puppet script based on a favorite picture book. We will share the scripts written for this course, so you can build your folder of storytime resources. If you are feeling really brave, you can do the optional assignment, which is to videotape one of your puppet performances and upload it to YouTube.

**What to Do Next:** Choose one or more of the Week 2 Assignment options:

- Option 1: Write a Puppet Show Script
- Option 2: Discuss Using Puppets in Storytime
- Option 3: Record Your Own Puppet Show