THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF PUPPETRY
FOR THE YOUNG CHILD

Puppets are magic for children of all ages. They are magic because they can be anything we want them to be. The puppet’s life comes from our heart as well as our hands.

This magic was recognized by Goethe when he said, “This childish entertainment and activity produced in me such a capability to create and to act, and exercised and demanded such skill and technique, as perhaps could have occurred in no other way, in so short a time and confined a space” George Bernard Shaw once wrote that the influence puppets had on him was greater than that of live actors.

Whether the child is watching a puppet perform a favorite song, or is joining in the singing with his or her own puppet, something special is taking place as puppet play stimulates language development, encourages imagination and movement.

Puppets are probably as ancient as people. What makes them so appealing is their versatility of use and the unique ability to stimulate imagination. Everyday life situations can be transformed into new areas of exploration for teachers and students.

Puppetry is a magnificent opportunity to broaden the dimensions of learning, offering flexibility and creativity in academics, social learning, interpersonal development, and just plain fun!

Young children generally accept puppets as non-threatening sympathetic friends they can trust with their thoughts and feelings without fear of ridicule or reprimand. Puppets can become a valuable tool to help teachers tune into a child’s world and open up new avenues for learning.

While puppets could be viewed as strictly “toys,” good teachers know that puppets are a viable, legitimate tool that is visual as well as auditory and tactile in nature.

Things to remember about puppetry:

- Puppetry is a performing art and is so all encompassing that children get to practice many skills in the process of puppetry;
- The use of music with puppetry uses both sides of the brain, encouraging the child to develop both rationally and creatively;
- The emphasis on puppetry should be on the use of the puppet and not on the making of it.

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• In making puppets, keep in mind that the puppet is a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. It’s an instrument.
• The movement of the puppet is as important as its words.
• Puppetry should be FUN!

Puppets fascinate and involve children in a way that few other art forms can. It may be because they allow children to enter the world of fantasy so easily. In this magic world, children are free to create whatever is needed right then in their lives.

**PUPPETRY LEADS TO CREATIVE THINKING AND USE OF THE IMAGINATION**
Almost every stage or step of puppetry calls for the use of creative imagination which is so needed in today’s youngsters whose imaginations are often taken up with video games. Much of the educational process tends to stamp out imagination. Puppetry keeps that imagination alive.

In one study at Wayne University, young children who had been involved in pretend play showed marked superiority four years later in concept learning and in inhibiting impulsive behavior.

**PUPPETRY ALLOWS THE CHILD TO TEST LIFE SITUATIONS VICARIOUSLY**
Puppets enable the individual to experiment with ideas and desires that have not yet been faced in actual life. Puppets provide the opportunity to indulge in fantasy in a healthy way and to practice short term goals.

**PUPPETRY HELPS CHILDREN TO RECOGNIZE THEIR OWN BEHAVIOR - TO SEE THEMSELVES.**
Children can watch various behaviors exhibited in a safe way through puppetry and have the chance to identify alternative ways of behaving.

**PUPPETRY OFFERS THERAPEUTIC VALUE THROUGH DRAMATIC PLAY BY EXPOSING HIDDEN ANXIETIES, RELEASING TENSIONS, ETC.**
Puppets provide individuals under stress with an opportunity for projecting on inanimate objects. Children will often confide in puppets things they will not tell other people.

**PUPPETRY AIDS IN DIAGNOSTIC WORK DONE BY SPEECH THERAPISTS, PLAY THERAPISTS, PSYCHOLOGISTS, AND SOCIAL WORKERS.**
Through the use of puppets, children may reveal subconscious attitudes and indicate certain problem areas.
Puppetry offers the child an avenue of expression without fear of rejection. This partially accounts for so much of the hitting often done by puppets. In addition, puppets don’t have to sing on key, or be able to pronounce their words correctly or be perfect in any way. A puppet represents security.

Puppetry takes pressure of blame off the child after mistakes have been made
Children really can and do disassociate themselves from their puppets’ mistakes. They can “help” the puppet learn to behave appropriately, or learn the correct information, etc., taking on the role of the “one in the know”.

Puppetry frees youngsters from self consciousness thus helping overcome shyness and stuttering
Often, children will not stutter as long as they keep their eyes on the puppet who is talking for them. Shy children are usually more outgoing with a puppet in their hands.

Puppetry encourages development of communication skills
The child is required to think out his or her words carefully so that his ideas will be understood by others.

Puppetry develops critical listening skills and the ability to think quickly
Children involved in skits and songs are challenged to listen attentively to respond appropriately and rapidly.

Puppetry increases attention span
Teachers are often amazed at how much longer children listen when a puppet does the teaching!

Puppetry aids in learning
The novelty of the puppet helps children retain new information. This is true whether the teacher or the child is using the puppet.

Puppetry provides opportunity to work cooperatively and share ideas with peer
A puppet show is a tremendous means of encouraging teamwork in the classroom.

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PUPPETRY OFFERS OPPORTUNITY FOR PROBLEM SOLVING
Rather than dealing with theoretical problems, puppetry provides youngsters with much needed exercise in practical problem solving. If the challenges of puppet making, script creating and staging involve the children and not the adult, there will be an endless array of meaningful problems for them to cope with.

PUPPETRY CONTRIBUTES TO POSITIVE SELF ESTEEM
Self esteem is positive self acceptance. Often, children can accept positive affirmations from a puppet that he cannot accept from an adult. Puppets can treat children as if they already are all they are able to be.

PUPPETRY HELPS BUILD POSITIVE SELF IMAGE
Self image involves how we see ourselves. There are so many aspects to puppetry that usually a child will find some area to excel in – script writing, prop ideas, puppet design, use of voice, etc.

PUPPETRY ACTS AS A VEHICLE FOR BUDDING ARTISTIC AND DRAMATIC TALENT
Puppets can aid children in learning all phases of drama, and there is not end to the art media that can be employed in constructing puppets.

PUPPETRY INTEGRATES SUCH INSTRUCTIONAL AREAS AS ART, LITERATURE, SPEECH, MUSIC, SOCIAL STUDIES, SCIENCE, ARITHMETIC AND OTHERS. This integration compounds the educational value of the material studies and makes for more thorough learning.

PUPPETRY IS FUN....

PUPPETS IN SCHOOL
Puppetry should begin in nursery school. Teachers can teach finger plays with simple finger puppets and hand puppets can act out familiar nursery rhymes. Music time is enhanced by a puppet leading the singing and other puppets joining in. The shy child who is reluctant to sing will often participate enthusiastically though a puppet. Puppets enjoy leading children in many follow the directions games, which can become “Puppet Says.”

They are also excellent for concept teaching and can help clarify abstract concepts and demonstrate concrete concepts. For instance, in the preschool, the concepts of above, below, behind, in front of, etc. can be clearly shown with the puppet.

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With older children, puppets can help illustrate concepts related to such areas as self-esteem, friendship and creative thinking. The more important an idea is, the more the teacher might consider using a puppet to explain it.

At any grade level, teachers can find puppets a real aid in dealing with problems of social behavior. Children easily recognize themselves in “misbehaving” puppets.

Puppetry is also a wonderful means of stimulating creative writing in older children or story telling with younger ones. Open ended stories, to be completed with puppets, also encourage creative thinking and writing.

Teachers find good use in puppets as icebreakers to relieve classroom tensions. Puppets just love to tell jokes and the latest riddles to children. They are also useful for informal quizzes. If children can’t answer a question asked by a puppet, they don’t feel as bad as when they can’t answer an authority figure. If a child is responding with a puppet, it’s his or her puppet that doesn’t know the answer and not the child. Research concludes that oral reports of any type are usually easier for the shy child with the use of a puppet.

The retention of health and safety rules when taught by a puppet is impressive, as is the recall ability of any subject taught with the use of a puppet.

There is value in integrating subject areas, and puppets are a perfect way to do this.

**MUSIC and PUPPETRY**
Children + puppets + music = MAGIC! It has already been shown that retention and recall are enhanced with the use of puppets…add music and we have an even greater teaching tool. Music alone makes learning easier and more fun .add puppets with their own magic, and we have a powerful, creative, fun teaching tool.

**SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS FOR CLASSROOM PUPPETRY**

- Create a classroom puppet library- a collection of puppets available to the students at all times, to be borrowed and returned
- Put together a puppet center – Puppet Stuff Box, props, theaters.
- Provide a home for each child’s puppet, a box in which the puppet can have additional costumes and props.
- Consider having a specific puppet for each subject area. This puppet could remind the class that it’s music time, for instance, and be used to give directions and explain new concepts. Also, if it’s a bright puppet, it might help teachers by giving math drills, spelling tests, or whatever its specialty is. If the puppet has trouble in a subject area, the children can teach it.

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• Transfer some of the responsibility for classroom discipline to the puppet. It can act as the signaler for quiet time or for paying attention, so that the teacher is not always in the position of reprimanding.

• Puppets for praise are used in various ways by teachers. A special puppet can choose one child each day to honor in some special way.

• Self-introductions are more comfortable when performed through a puppet. Children choose a puppet from the box and then the puppet and child talk together to get acquainted. Then going around the room, the teacher calls on the puppet to introduce its new friend to the class.

• A Surprise Box Puppet can be popular. Each week it is responsible for bringing something new and interesting to its surprise box.

• Felt boards and puppets work well together. A puppet with hands can effectively help the adult put piece on or take them off the felt board.

• Phonics puppets are very successful in kindergarten classrooms. The teacher has one for each letter, and the puppet can only say words beginning with its letter or eat foods beginning with its letter. “Larry Lion loves licking lovely licorice lollipops”

• Puppets enliven science experiments by discussing them or performing simple ones. Puppets can be used in the natural sciences to represent the elements involved in a particular environment, such as a chemical compound, air or water.

• Social studies is a natural area for puppets; they present countless opportunities to dramatize historical events, represent particular cultural groups being studies, or portray the roles of various community helpers.

• Choose songs for each unit and have the children act out the songs with the use of their puppets. You can create special puppets for special songs i.e. Itsy Bitsy Spider with a black pom-pom and pipe cleaner legs suspended on a string along with sun puppet and rain drops.

• Reading via a puppet brings results. Teachers report that students who dislike reading are able to read a little more easily and more happily with a puppet on one hand.

Librarians have long had an affinity for puppets who are so effective in storytelling. The preschool story hour is often enlivened by the imaginative use of a puppet or two, who many talk about the stories before and after they...

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are read or even actually tell or read a story. Puppets are so useful for keeping children’s attention focused and for leading group discussions.

When children make puppets to use with original or adapted stories, they become familiar with manipulation, characterization and the other elements of the drama., as well as developing a greater understanding of the meaning and emotions of the story.

- Therapists and counselors often use a wide variety of puppets, including entire families of puppets. Knowledge can come from feelings as well as feelings from knowledge, and puppetry is a superb way to get those feelings out, look at them, and learn from them under the guidance of a professional.