



## Pathfinder Honour: Trainer's Notes

# Puppetry 1



### **Instructions to Trainers / Instructors of this Honour**

Thankyou for being involved with this Honour. These notes have been developed to assist in teaching / instructing this honour. We recognise that there is much more information available and we are grateful that you should share your expertise.

Please remember that Honours are designed to develop our Pathfinders in many ways; their interests, their knowledge and their relationship with their Saviour and Creator. Your enthusiasm and creativity will have a huge impact on those doing the honour.

To complete an Honour, the following (where applicable) must be completed satisfactorily:

- Physical and Practical Requirements.
- Honour Workbook.
- Honour Assessment Sheet. *(On SPD Honour Website but Leader's level access is required)*

### **Additional Reference Material**

### **Acknowledgements**

Dave Rupe -Western Australian Conference - 2007 (Friend of "Stuart", " Little Toot" and "Gopher" from Pathfinder Camporee appearances)

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## INTRODUCTION

Puppets have been used for centuries to communicate messages to people everywhere. Many countries have contributed to the craft. Stories were often told through puppetry in religious ceremonies when books were not available.

The great thing about puppetry is its infinite variety. It's a form of theatre where "actors" can vary from finger length to more than life-size. One human may operate two or more puppets, or two may be needed to handle a single puppet.

A puppet does not have a brain, heart, lungs, voice or ears of its own, so it is the puppeteer who needs to keep it thinking, living, breathing, speaking and listening.

Puppets can be whatever you want them to be by taking on different character traits and personalities.

A piece of foam or fabric can "come alive" and be an attention getting, believable character and can also be a great method of teaching and entertaining all age groups.

## BEFORE YOU START

### Puppet Care

Treat your puppets as fragile. Pack them away after performing, as others may not care for them as well as you would.

Remove any rods before packing.

Food, drink and puppets don't mix.

Use lightweight cotton gloves.



### Resources

Keep a file of puppetry information, suppliers, performances, scripts and things that "worked" or didn't.

*NOTE: As puppets don't have "souls", many Christian puppeteers prefer their puppets, not to receive salvation or pray. There are many views on what is suitable in a church setting, so be sensitive to others feelings in your planning. It may be also advisable not to have a puppet play the part of God or Jesus.*

*To be an effective puppeteer, keep working on the basic skills until they become second nature. Lack of preparation and poor skills will produce ineffective performance and negative views on puppetry as a ministry tool.*

**Remember: Practice, practice, practice and in your spare time, practice some more!**

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**REQUIREMENT 1: Name at least five types of puppets and explain how they are operated.**

Although there are many types to choose from, with each having its own special qualities and challenges, using a ‘moving mouth’ style of puppet is very effective.

## **Finger Puppet**

A very simple type of puppet usually made with a tube that fits over your finger.

## **Hand Puppet**

This style of puppet is also known as a Glove puppet. If the puppet has a moveable mouth then the thumb goes in the lower jaw and the four fingers form the upper part of the mouth.

## **String Puppet (Marionette)**

Usually controlled by eight strings or more from above; a form of puppetry that requires lots of practice.

## **Rod Puppet**

Manipulated by wire or rods attached to hands and neck. Can be controlled from above or below.

## **Shadow Puppet**

These are flat figures that cast a shadow between a light and a screen.

## **Hand and Rod Puppet**

Puppeteer's hand moves the mouth. Arms are operated with rods attached to hands. Can be “full” or “half body” size.

## **Hand and Glove Puppet**

Similar to hand and rod style, except that puppeteer's gloved hands become the puppet's hands, making handling objects easy.

## **Monster Style Puppet**

Usually very large and furry and can be operated by one or two puppeteers. One puppeteer controls one arm, the head, mouth and voice. The other puppeteer operates the other arm. It requires coordination but is very effective. Often referred to, wrongly, as a MUPPET style of puppet (The word Muppet is legally trademarked).

## **Ventriloquist Figure**

Has a slotted mouth that is moved by a trigger. Eyes and eyebrows can also be manipulated. Operator appears to ‘throw’ voice.

## **Junk Puppet**

Just about anything can be transformed into a puppet – Boxes, socks, paper plates, tubes, shoes, mops, hats etc. Just pick up an object and imagine what it can become.

Other types of puppets can be remotely or mechanically controlled

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**REQUIREMENT 2: Make one puppet and obtain (or make) two others. At least one puppet must have a “moving mouth” and one must be an animal.**

Just do your best and remember, it is how you bring your puppet to life that is important, not how skilled you are at making puppets.

Check your community or school library for books on how to make puppets or simply check out the great web sites.

Always make your puppet with the thought of how the audience will see it from a distance. The puppets must be large enough to be seen by all the audience.

**REQUIREMENT 3: Demonstrate at least five key points in making a puppet “come alive”**

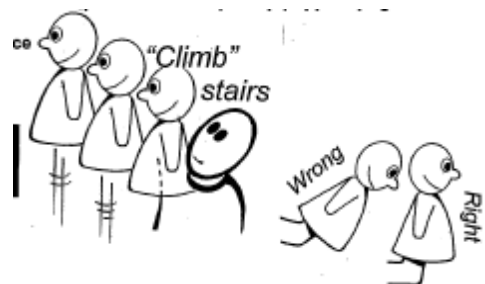
This is the fun bit. Until you add movement and voice, your puppet is just a lump of fabric.

So, you’ve made your puppet, now for the big performance ... wrong! Please don’t even consider letting your puppets loose on the public until you are satisfied with your competency in the following areas:

## Entering and Exiting

Don’t just “pop up” or “drop down” (unless the script calls for the puppet to “creep” on or “appear suddenly”).

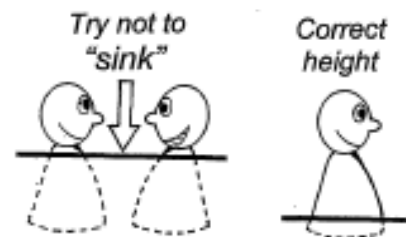
Entries look more believable if a puppet enters as if it has feet and is ‘walking forward’ up a set of stairs, either from the sides or back of the stage. Usually about four steps are sufficient. Keep puppet upright with head tilting slightly down as if looking at first row of audience.



Exits are the reverse, with the puppet appearing to “walk” downstairs. If there are more than one puppet, plan ahead which direction all will leave to avoid banging into each other.

## Posture / Positioning

Watch your puppets height above stage. New puppeteers who have not developed endurance, may find their puppet “sinking”. Pretend your puppet has a “tummy-button” and try to keep it level with the top of the stage. Why make a whole puppet if you are only going to show its head?



Initially your arms will get tired, so a good idea is to begin with scripts only a few minutes long. It gets easier with practice. Constantly leaning or resting on the stage will not help you develop strength in your arm muscles and restricts the movement of the puppet. Try to keep the puppet about a hand’s width back from the stage (sneak a rest on stage only if you think your arm is going to drop off).

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Alternatively, include in your script a reason for puppets to leave the stage occasionally.

Keep puppet upright. Find the best position for you, the puppeteer. It may be kneeling, squatting, sitting on a chair, or with some stages, standing.

## Eye Contact

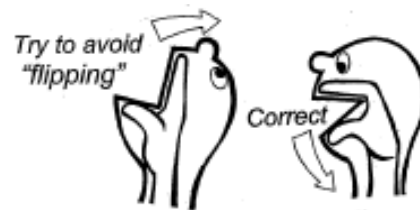
Eye contact is an important feature, whether speaking to the audience or another puppet. Eye contact can make the puppet appear to be listening or thinking.

Make sure your puppet makes eye contact with whoever it is talking to (unless the script calls for it to “sulk” or “ignore”. Try to avoid “stargazing” (looking at ceiling or above audience’s heads).



## Mouth Action:

Most movement should be with the puppets lower jaw. Practice opening the puppets mouth by moving the thumb downwards while trying not to move your fingers upwards. Try to avoid “flipping” the head back



## Lip-Sync

Lip-sync is the ability of the puppeteer to synchronize the opening and closing of the puppet’s mouth with the words being said. The mouth moves once for every syllable of a word. The word “mar-ga-rine” has three syllables. Your mouth should open at the beginning of each syllable and close at the end of each one in time with the voice. A great way to develop this is to mouth the words of a song

When a puppet’s mouth is out-of-sync, it looks like the puppet is “biting” its words or “yapping”. Don’t open the mouth all the way with each word. Save the “wide openings” for loud or exaggerated expressions

Even though the puppets mouth is closed when not speaking, you can still keep it “alive” by reacting to what other puppets are saying, with a nod or a look to the audience.

Practicing in front of a mirror really helps.

Essentially, the sound of the voice needs to look like it is coming from the puppet’s mouth.

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## Voice

Can't do voices? Of course you can. When you get excited or upset, your voice goes higher or lower, so just exaggerate it for the puppet.

A puppet's voice should reflect the character it is portraying, be easily understood and have a kind of "cartoony" sound to it. Your voice and words convey the emotion and can either keep or lose the audience's attention.

Don't strain your voice.

Be aware of the diction. Speak slowly and pronounce your words clearly. Don't create a voice for your character which would be hard for the audience to understand.

You can learn to "put-on" a voice by listening to and mimicking interesting everyday voices.

Don't try too many voices too fast.

It is usually best to perform with a microphone if possible. You are behind a wall, so speak much louder than normal.

Performing behind a stage muffles your voice so try watching your puppet while you are speaking (You should be watching your puppet most of the time anyway). This will allow your voice to project up and over the stage. Video your performance if you want to know how it sounded on the "other side".

Over time, try to develop a voice for these characters: giant, baby, elderly person, mad scientist, goofy person, snob, bird, sheep, frog, chook, snake etc. Try various accents.

## Developing Characters

This requires time, practice and effort.

Anything can talk when it is a puppet - animals, everyday objects, vegetables etc.

What type of a personality do you want your puppet to have?

How will it look?

What mannerisms or uniqueness will it possess?

Try writing a script around the characters you create.



## Movement

Movement is the "key" to puppetry, so mastering movement or manipulation is essential.

Don't allow your puppet's head to be constantly moving up and down and all around without a reason. This can distract from the other puppets and your presentation

"When you are UP, you are always ON!". So be animated, but use your movements carefully.

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It is easy to concentrate so much on the script or your “tired” arms, that you forget what is going on “up there”.

Keep your puppet animated. Don’t overdo it and make the movements jerky. Just respond naturally to whatever is going on.

Attaching a rod to one or both of the puppet’s wrists, greatly increases the range of movement.

Animation can be as simple as a slight movement, leaning forward to hear or tilting the head.

Keep movements as close to life as possible. Try practicing these emotions: fear, excitement, disappointment, anger, tiredness and surprise.

There are many motions to give expression. Have a go at these: wave, blow a kiss, cough, brush hair, rub tummy, take a bow, yawn, clap, sneeze, laugh, cry, concentrate, scratch head. Use your imagination

## Staging

Depending on the performance and puppets involved, a stage can be anything from a simple sheet to a multi-level design and should be lightweight and portable.

Its purpose is to hide the puppeteer and highlight the puppet.

Don’t make the stage so fancy that it detracts from the performance.

A general height, if kneeling, sitting or squatting, is 1000mm – 1200mm high to top of stage.

Remember to keep your head down and keep any noise or activity behind stage to an absolute minimum. You are seeking to give the impression that the puppets are the only ones behind stage. Placing small "peep-holes" in the stage can be helpful.

Don’t encourage the audience to come backstage.

Most puppeteers prefer to pack their puppets away immediately after the performance to help maintain the mystery of “how it all happens”.

## Costuming, Props and Scenery

Help the puppet “come alive” by dressing the part to fit a particular theme or setting. It’s easy to change a puppet into another character by using costumes, wigs, hats and beards etc. This enables you to have many characters using only a few basic puppets.

Props and Scenery help to establish the theme and add interest and variety

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## **REQUIREMENT 4: Develop two puppet characters with their own voices.**

See previous Requirement.

## **REQUIREMENT 5: Write two short scripts with an object lesson included.**

### **Hints for Script Writing**

Even if you master all of the manipulation techniques, your puppet program will not have quite the impact if you don't have a meaningful, well written script.



Keep the audience age level, attention span, your ability and endurance and the characters in mind when choosing or writing a script.

Simple, short interactive dialogue is better than long and complex.

Audiences identify with scripts that relate to life in some way.

Dialogue should pass quickly from character to character. A monologue of only about four lines each. Less, is preferable.

Probably two or three characters are enough to begin with.

Try to have a distinct message content or an object lesson.

Would music "add" to the performance? Include humour but don't overdo it

Try a broad range of material: serious, comic, dramatic, musical, taped, live and seasonal.

**Resist the urge to give "impromptu shows"**

## **REQUIREMENT 6a: Perform to an audience (not family or immediate friends) at least two times using a "moving mouth" style of puppet.**

Here's some hints for making your performance something special.

### **Sound Reproduction**

All your work will be for nothing if you can't be heard. A microphone would be an asset but keep working on your voice projection.



### **Lighting**

Consider how the audience sees the puppets. Will lighting enhance the puppets or help with the performance?

### **Ad-Libbing**

If something goes wrong or you forget your lines, try to keep the "action" going. Make something up. Don't just leave the puppet sitting up there speechless.



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**REQUIREMENT 6b: Obtain an assessment of each performance (by someone not related to the puppeteer) using the Puppetry Performance Evaluation Checklist**

## **ADDITIONAL NOTES**

### **Ways Puppets have been used in Kid's Church and Holiday Club Programs**

- Puppet asks if it can do the welcome etc. (gets everything mixed up and has to ask for assistance)
- Pops up with "spot messages" (announcements or just fun stuff)
- Announces news Flashes
- Receives phone calls during program
- Occasionally interrupts to clarify something
- Conducts "spot quizzes"
- Gives out prizes.
- Shows a work of art or craft
- Puppets applaud or settle audience down
- Announces birthdays
- Asks to be shown "actions" during sing-a-longs
- Chooses a favourite song
- Conducts interviews.
- Puppet asks leaders "What's next in the program?"