

# Puppets

A teacher who works with young children and doesn't use puppets is like a carpenter without a hammer. Children love puppets! Young children do not yet understand the difference between fantasy and reality. To a child a puppet is a real living thing. Thus, their imaginations are stimulated, when you use a puppet.

Your role as a puppeteer is to bring the puppet to life. You must give it a character and a voice. That means you might have to practice in front of a mirror at home. Just change your voice a little bit. Try talking with your mouth partly closed. Try to keep the voice you give to the puppet the same every time. Shari Lewis, the internationally known puppeteer and television star, created Lamb Chops, Hush Puppy and Charley Horse. She has some simple words of advice. "You can't make a puppet talk! You have to let the puppet talk."

A teacher should have puppets in the classroom for the children as well. **But the teacher's puppet should not be available to the children!** Keep it in a drawer or bag or box or somewhere they can't get at it. When you bring it out of its place, it's like waking it up from nap. Returning it to its place is like putting it down for a nap. You are creating an illusion, that the puppet is actually alive. Talking to your puppet will not get you into an insane asylum. In fact when times get really crazy in school, the puppet will help return your group to the place where you once again have them under your wing. They follow you anywhere. Just use puppets!

Stuffed animals are not puppets, but they can be! Thrift stores and garage sales often have great stuffed animals bought as expensive gifts. You can take a seam ripper and open up the back seam. Take out some of the stuffing and insert a sleeve or pant leg from a child's sweat pants. Attach one end to the face or mouth of the

stuffed animal. Sew the elastic end on both side of the seam you cut. Before closing the whole, stuff some of the stuffing back into the cavity. Wah! You have a puppet!

One important aspect of puppetry and young children may save you some grief. The children can become fearful of a puppet with teeth and a mouth that opens and shuts. The children think the puppet will eat them or bite their nose off! If you have a puppet with an opening mouth, you can prevent this fear if you pretend that you are feeding the puppet. Use pretend crackers, or carrots and your imagination! Put your hand right into the mouth of the puppet. Then let some of the children try it. They just love feeding puppets. Those puppets with no opening mouth are great for the kids to use in the classroom. If they have the mouth, the children will pretend that the puppet is biting the other kids!

Animal Puppets are great as well as puppets that represent a child or grown up. The variety that are available is quite endless. You can also make a puppet out of a sock! Put a clean white sock on your non dominant hand. draw eyes, eye lashes, ears and nose. Then take a rubber band and put it where the mouth would be. Wah lah! A puppet. The children can make these as well.

Teaching Puppets. I have often used puppets to teach. I have an Iguana puppet that can only speak Spanish. The only way the children could talk to the puppet was in Spanish.

Puppet Lessons. Sometimes the children stop listening to the teacher. No matter how many times you say stop this or don' do this, they just don't listen. It's time for super-puppet! The children love the puppets, and when the puppet chastises them for their actions, they hear it much better. Imagine the puppet telling the children, "You haven't been very nice, you were hitting each other in the playground, I'm not going to visit you today" Back into the bag goes the puppet. No matter what you say they just won't

come out. All you tell the children is, "maybe the puppet will come out tomorrow."

## **Using Puppets to Teach Singing**

For the past 30 years, I have used a turtle puppet to encourage, entice and enchant children into singing.

The turtle sings "Good Morning". If the children don't sing back, the turtle complains, "Nobody sang good morning to me." He tries again. He then calls out, "I like apples!". Hopefully, the children respond. If not the turtle says, "Do you like apples?". This banter continues with "I like bananas", "I like cherries", and then, "I like worms!". This often gets the children saying "ewwww!" This silly phrase is the hook, that keeps children responding to turtle. Then he might sing, "I like broccoli, I like carrots, I like celery, I like slugs!" The children love this! "I like", is an affirmation. If you have turtle or some other puppet do this, the children just might like vegetables.

Another routine I use to get the children singing, is Sleepy Bear. He comes out of the bag complaining, "You kids woke me up, I was trying to take a nap." Then he asks them the season, "Is it spring?" Then the little bear proceeds to tell the children he is going to climb a tree, or swing on the swing etc. Then he says, "but first I am going to take a nap" He plops down and pretends to sleep. The children begin to sing  
Wake up Sleepy Bear, Wake up Sleepy Bear, Wake up Sleepy Bear,  
Sleepy Bear Wake Up!

The bear wakes up and continues asking questions and then goes back to sleep. The children love this!

A puppet is so endearing to a child, that they are willing to sing to it. So if you have a shy puppet, maybe the children would sing it a song.



My pal Billy Bear!