

The Dragon King



STUDY GUIDE and RESOURCE MATERIALS
for teachers and students

Basic Hand Puppet Pattern courtesy of The Puppet Showplace Inc., Brookline, MA

The Dragon King



GENERAL INFORMATION *for teachers and students*

THE PRODUCTION:

The Dragon King took over a year and a half to build. Here are some of the things we did when putting the show together:

- ❖ We decided we wanted to present a story that took place in Ancient China, and that used elements from Chinese folklore and myth.
- ❖ We read many Chinese fairy tales.
- ❖ We did research on the history and culture of China by reading books, using the internet, and watching TV programs, videos, and movies about China.
- ❖ We attended a play presented by a troupe of Chinese dancers; this play featured a Dragon Dance, which was very beautiful and inspiring to watch.
- ❖ We attended a Chinese New Year's Celebration to get ideas about costumes and music (and also to have fun!)
- ❖ We gathered all the results of our research and developed a plot, or story line, for our puppet play.
- ❖ We sketched each scene in sequence, so that we could envision the play. This is called making a storyboard.
- ❖ We designed and built the puppets, props, scenery and special effects. (This part took almost an entire year!)
- ❖ We hired actors and recorded the dialogue (what would become the puppets' voices) at a sound studio.
- ❖ We used a computer to mix music and sound effects into the recorded voices.
- ❖ We put it all together and rehearsed the performance every day for three weeks.

Phew! As you can see, sometimes a lot goes into making a puppet show!

THE SETTING:

The scenery for this play is in the form of a giant scroll. The scroll is made of one continuous piece of **canvas** that is four feet wide and about sixty feet long! Our scroll travels in two parts: the rolled-up "full" side (imagine a full roll of paper towels), and the "empty" side (imagine a bare, paper towel tube). Before the show starts, we hang the full side **horizontally** under our **bridge**. The empty side of the scroll is set under our stage, close to the floor. We then unroll a little bit of the full side and guide the edge of the canvas down to the empty side. This canvas edge is then securely attached to the empty side (usually with strong tape). As the show **progresses**, we transfer the painted canvas from the full side to the empty side by using a handle to turn it. At the half-way point of the show, each side of the scroll is half-full; by the end of the puppet play, the once-full side is now empty, and the empty side is full!

When you are watching the show, you won't be able to see the rolls themselves as they will be hidden behind the **masking**. All you will see is the painted canvas moving past as the show moves from **scene** to scene.

After you see the performance, try to remember how many different scenes were in the play.

Because the story of *The Dragon King* takes place in ancient China, we looked at traditional Chinese paintings for inspiration on how to paint our scroll. Chinese painting is often characterized by loose, flowing brushwork and delicate colors. Our scenic designer tried to **mimic** some of those qualities when painting the scroll.



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THE PUPPETS:

The human characters in *The Dragon King* are traditional marionettes. A marionette is a puppet whose movements are controlled by strings. These strings are attached to a control which is held above the marionette by a puppeteer. By moving the control and pulling on the strings, the puppeteer can make the marionette appear to come alive.

To make the human marionettes, we first sculpted the head and hands in clay, and then made **molds** of them by covering them in **plaster**. When the plaster molds were dry, the clay was removed and a liquid called **neoprene** was poured into the mold. After about twenty-four hours, the neoprene hardened. The molds were opened and the neoprene heads and hands were gently pulled out. Each head and hand was then coated with **gesso**, carefully sanded, and painted with acrylic paints.

The **torsos** for the human characters were made from blocks of rigid foam glued to a wooden **armature**. Arms and legs were made from shaped wooden **dowels**, and were **jointed** with rope.

After the human puppets were painted and dressed (or costumed), strings were attached to their heads, chins, shoulders, backs, elbows, hands, and legs. The strings were then tied to the control. Next, the strings were adjusted in length, or “tuned”, until the puppet felt balanced.

Besides the marionettes, there are also several rod puppets in this show. A rod puppet is a puppet whose movement is controlled by sticks, or “rods”. These rods are attached to various points on the puppet’s body. The puppeteer controls the puppet by moving the rods. Usually, rod puppets are worked from below and held up above the puppeteer’s head, but *The Dragon King* features several rod puppet fish that are worked from above.

There are also a few puppets in the show that are controlled by using both strings *and* rods.

While you are watching the performance, see if you can discover which puppets are string puppets, which puppets are rod puppets, and which puppets are a combination of both rod and string!

GLOSSARY:

canvas: A strong, coarse cloth of cotton, hemp, or flax

horizontally: parallel to the horizon (the line where the earth and sky meet)

bridge: in this use, a piece of staging that is constructed above the puppet stage floor, and which allows the puppeteers to stand above and behind the marionettes.

progresses: moves forward, advances

masking: a piece of fabric used to hide a part of the stage from an audience

scene: a subdivision of a play (plays are made up of scenes the way books are made up of chapters)

mimic: to copy or imitate closely

mold: a hollow form for shaping a liquid or soft substance

plaster: a white powder that forms a paste when it is mixed with water and then hardens into a solid

neoprene: a liquid casting compound that hardens into a tough shell

gesso: a liquid mixture of plaster and glue that is used to prepare and seal a surface for paint

torso: the human body excluding the head and limbs

armature: A framework serving as a support

dowel: a cylindrical wooden rod

jointed: connected in such a way so as to allow movement

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SUGGESTED READING

Tales of a Chinese Grandmother, by Frances Carpenter. Tuttle Publishing, 2001

A selection of Chinese folk tales as told by a grandmother to two young children as they grow up in old China. The stories are endearing, but this book also provides a fascinating glimpse into Chinese culture of the time.
Ages 9-12

Chinese Fairy Tales & Fantasies, translated and edited by Moss Roberts. New York, Pantheon Books, 1979

A nice collection of Chinese wonder tales and fables, most of ancient origin. Similar to an Aesop or Brothers Grimm collection. Ages 9-12

The Dragon Prince: A Chinese Beauty & the Beast Tale, by Laurence Yep (Author), and Kam Mak (Illustrator). HarperCollins, 1999

A fresh and beautifully illustrated adaptation of the classic Beauty and the Beast tale, based on ancient Chinese mythology. Ages 5-8

Dragons, by Peter Hogarth. Penguin Books, 1980

A brief history of the dragon as found in many different countries and time periods. Excellent photographs and clear text. Reference.

Land of the Dragon: Chinese Myth. New York, Barnes & Noble, Inc., 2005

Volume 12 in the Myth & Mankind series. A collection of myths presented in the context of the history and culture from which they evolved. Beautiful color reproductions of Chinese art and artifacts. Reference.

The Chinese Puppet Theatre, by Sergei Obraztsov. Boston, Plays Inc., 1975

An anecdotal look at Chinese puppetry by a Russian master puppeteer. Black and white photographs.

Puppetry of China, by Diane Kempler. Atlanta, Center for Puppetry Arts, 1984.

Companion catalog to an exhibit featuring the four styles of Chinese puppet theater, held at the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta, GA in 1984. Beautiful black and white and color photographs of Chinese hand, rod, string, and shadow puppets.

Monkey King: A Celestial Heritage; *An Introduction to Chinese Culture through the Performing Arts*, by Jo Humphrey. New York, St. John's University, 1980.

Another companion catalog, this time to an exhibit covering a wide range of Chinese performing arts. Dance, music, opera, and masks are featured, as well as puppetry. Black and white photographs.

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RESOURCES *for teachers*

PUBLICATIONS:

The Enduring Legacy of Ancient China; Primary Source Lessons for Teachers and Students, forward by Michael Puett. Boston, Cheng & Tsui Company, 2006.

[From the website] Published in May 2006, this new publication offers a wealth of primary sources and lessons for teaching about ancient China. Ideal for grades 5-9, and readily adaptable for high school students, the book comes with a CD-ROM. More information about this publication can be found at <http://www.primarysource.org>

Setting the Stage for Chinese, by Yuanchao Meng. Boston, Cheng & Tsui Company, 2008.

A compilation of bilingual plays that introduces students to Chinese language and culture as they read each story and perform their roles on stage. Ideal for beginning and intermediate learners of Chinese in grades K-6. Read more about this publication at <http://www.cheng-tsui.com>

INTERNET RESOURCES:

<http://www.primarysource.org>

This website offers an online curriculum which includes in-depth lesson plans and other resources for East and Southeast Asian studies. Various grade levels. See especially ***THE CHINESE DRAGON: A Powerful Metaphor in Chinese Cultural History***, a curriculum unit developed for Grade 4. A list of internet links pointing to a wealth of information on dragons, both Eastern and Western, can be found as an addendum to the above web unit.

<http://www.cheng-tsui.com>

[From the website] Independent publisher and distributor of English and multilingual educational materials about Asia. For over twenty-five years, we have been "Bringing Asia to the World" with a wide range of Asia-related products: language textbooks, literature in translation, scholarly works, curriculum support materials, computer software, films, and educational games and tools that make cultural learning fun for all age groups.

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STORY SYNOPSIS

Our tale begins with Grandmother (or “Lao Lao”, as she is affectionately known to her family), telling the story of the Dragon King to her grandson, Xiao Long. The Dragon King, she relates, is the ruler over all things water, and every spring he flies into the skies to bring forth the rain from the clouds. Xiao Long wonders why the Dragon King has not come in such a long time, for the land is dry and parched and suffering from drought. Grandmother does not know the answer to Xiao Long’s question, but she knows that the lives of her family and people depend on the rains brought by the Dragon King. She resolves to journey to the his underwater palace to seek an answer from the Dragon King himself.

The journey is long and hard for an old woman, but Grandmother eventually makes her way to the shores of the Eastern Sea. While trying to think of a way to get to the underwater kingdom, Grandmother notices a basket of freshly-caught fish set down nearby. She sees that the fish are still struggling for life, and, taking pity on the creatures, she begins to toss them back into the ocean. A fisherman comes upon her and is aghast, for the fish that she is throwing into the water are the same fish that he has spent all day catching. She mollifies him by telling him a story of a magic fish, and he is so caught up in the tale that he even begins to help her toss his own fish back into the sea. Unbeknownst to both Grandmother and the fisherman, however, is that one of the rescued fish is in truth a magic fish. This magic fish appears from between the waves and offers three wishes to Grandmother as a reward for saving his life. As her third wish,

Grandmother wishes to be able to breathe underwater so that she may descend to the sea floor and visit the Dragon King.

Once underwater, Grandmother encounters an endearing Hermit Crab whom she helps and who helps her in turn when she becomes trapped in a forest of seaweed. Eventually, she makes her way to the imperial palace and discovers the secret to why the Dragon King is no longer visiting the world above. She learns that the Dragon King has lost his most precious possession: his Magic Pearl of Wisdom.

Resolving to help the Dragon King, Grandmother swims even deeper into the ocean to seek the Magic Pearl, and there she encounters a young Squid. The Squid has found the Pearl, yet she wants to keep it for herself. Grandmother strikes a bargain with the Squid. She helps the lonely Squid to make some friends, and the Squid gives the Pearl to Grandmother as a reward.

Grandmother returns the Pearl to a grateful Dragon King, and the Dragon King at last brings the rains to a grateful world.



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PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

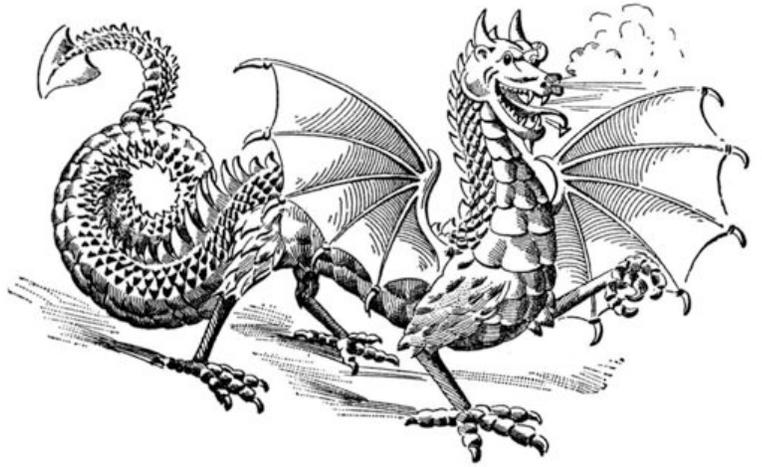
PRESENTATION:

A school or class could prepare for the puppet show by designing posters or flyers to be distributed throughout the school.

One or two students might observe the puppeteers loading in and setting up the stage, puppets, and equipment. If there is a school publication, an article could be written describing this “behind-the-scenes” process.

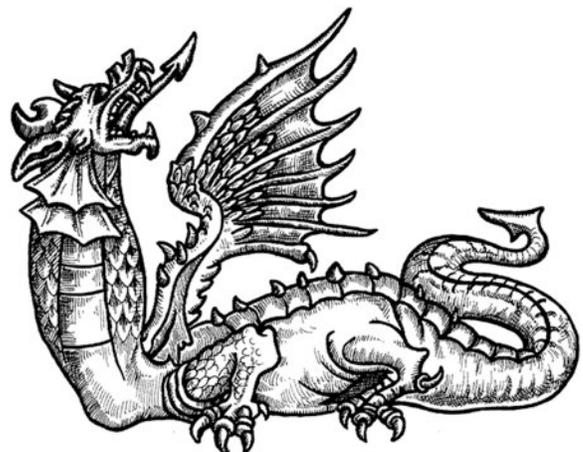
One or two students might interview the puppeteers, either for a school publication or a class project. The interview questions should be prepared in advance, with help from the entire class if this is a class project. A class discussion about careers in the arts could follow the interview.

Individual classes might talk about what it means to be an audience.



TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What is the difference between a “live” performance, and a “pre-recorded” performance? What are the positive things and negative things about each type of performance? Which type do you prefer, and why?
2. Dragons feature prominently in both Western and Eastern mythology. Describe what you know about dragons. What does a dragon look like? Where does it live? Does it have any special powers? What is its temperament?
3. The heroine of our story is a Grandmother who undertakes a long journey to help the ones she loves. Do you think it was an unusual choice to choose an old woman to be the leading character of our play?



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POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

LANGUAGE ARTS



POP QUIZ!

- 1.) How many different scenes were in the play?
- 2.) How many different puppets were in the play? (Hint: we have TWO Grandmother puppets – one who walks and one who swims.)
- 3.) What was Grandmother's nickname?
- 4.) What did Grandmother choose for her three wishes?
- 5.) What was the Hermit Crab's special talent?
- 6.) What kind of creature was the Lord Chamberlain?
- 7.) Why was the Dragon King sad?
- 8.) Who first found the Dragon King's lost Pearl?

Answers to the Pop Quiz can be found on the next page

VOCABULARY LIST

kelp
imperial
tentacle
pearl

dragon
abyss
gratitude
ancestor

drought
honorable
decree
festival

SOME WRITING EXERCISES

1. Write a **REVIEW** of the puppet show. What was your favorite part? What was your least favorite part? If you didn't like the show, what changes would you make? If you did like the show, explain why. (Imagine that you are writing your review for a person who has never seen *The Dragon King*.)
2. Use some or all of the of the **VOCABULARY** words in sentences. Try to use the word so that a person reading the sentence can get an idea of what the word means.
3. After researching the topic, make a **LIST** that **COMPARES** and **CONTRASTS** Western (European) dragons and Eastern (Asian) dragons
4. Write an **OPINION ESSAY** that answers the question: Do you think American society values youth over age? If so, why? If not, why not? What about in other countries?



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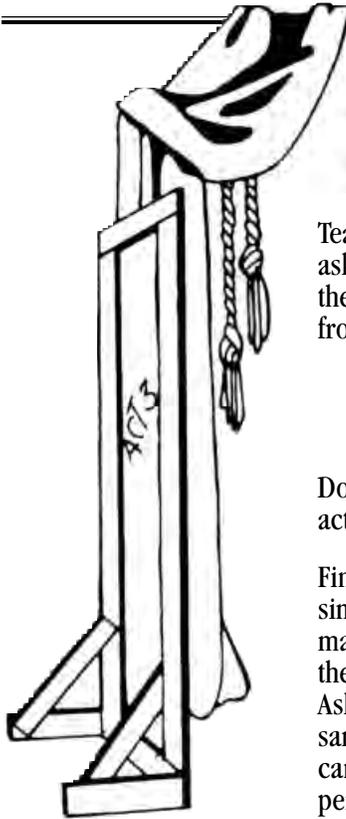
POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

ANSWERS to the POP QUIZ

- 1.) There are eight main scenes:
 - a.) Grandmother's House
 - b.) Tortoise and the Hare
 - c.) By the Shores of the Eastern Sea
 - d.) Underwater At Last
 - e.) The Kelp Forest
 - f.) At the Palace
 - g.) The Abyss
 - h.) Home Again
- 2.) 21 (or 27 if you include the puppets in the Squid's puppet show):
2 Grandmothers, Mother, Grandson, Hare, Tortoise, Fisherman, Magic Fish, Eel, Hermit Crab, 2 Court Ladies, Lord Chamberlain, 3 Jellyfish, Squid, 3 Young Fish, Dragon King.
- 3.) Lao Lao (which translates to "old, old one")
- 4.) For her first wish, Grandmother asked for the Fisherman's basket to be filled with gold. She gave her second wish to the Fisherman (who used it to ask for a child). Grandmother used her third wish to ask to be able to breathe underwater.
- 5.) Using his claws to snip, trim, shape and mow!
- 6.) A sea turtle
- 7.) He had lost his Magic Pearl
- 8.) The Squid

PERSEUS AND MEDUSA

DRAMATIC ARTS



ACTING BASICS

Teachers: write the following words on cards. As you show each card to students, ask them to dramatize the word using gestures, facial expressions, and voices. After the students have reviewed each word as a group, ask volunteers to choose a word from those displayed and dramatize it while others guess which word it is.

**sad - sneaky - jealous - drowsy - happy - afraid - hopeful - confused
spellbound - impatient - angry - bored - hungry - adoring - skeptical**

Do the same exercise, but this time, don't allow students to use their voices when acting out the words.

Finally, have a generic mask available, or make a simple mask from a paper plate. Explain that many puppets (ours included!) cannot move their faces and can only have one expression. Ask for volunteers to dramatize some of the same words with a mask. Discuss how gestures can be used by actors (or puppets!) in dramatic performances.



MAKE SOME NOISE

Warm up your voice by making nonsense sounds. Practice other vocal sounds by making pops, squeaks, hisses, clicks, etc., with your mouth, lips, and tongue.

Create some Character Voices:

Choose a sentence in a book. Try to read that sentence as though you were a:

brave hero · jealous queen
old woman · little child · ghost
teenager · monster · coward
fairy · evil sorcerer · space alien

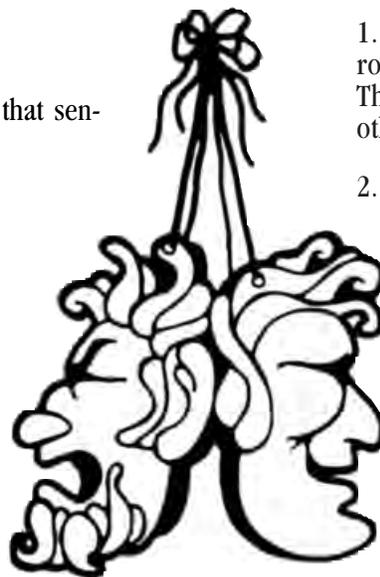
Make some Animal Noises:

Roar · squeak · whinny · cheep
cluck · caw · grunt · squawk
gobble · meow · hoot · bark
howl · trumpet · honk · chitter

Practice Vocal Sound Effects:

Use your voice to sound like:

wind · police siren · ocean waves
crackling fire · footsteps · rain
airplane · creaky door · fireworks



A Game using Vocal Sound Effects:

1. Have two volunteers come to the front of the room. One will stand facing the class/audience. The second volunteer will stand behind the other, with his or her back to the audience.
2. The class will come up with a title to a story.
3. The person facing the audience must create a story from the given title while the other volunteer creates sound effects. The sound effects can either accentuate the story or encourage it.

Students may wish to do the above activities again, this time with a puppet! Have each child make a puppet using the included patterns. If a puppet show is to be performed using the puppets, try to decide on the story and characters before making the puppets.



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BASIC PUPPET PATTERN

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TOOLS YOU WILL NEED:

- 1: This pattern.
- 2: Scissors to cut paper & felt.
- 3: A soft pencil or soft white chalk to draw on felt.
- 4: Needle and thread.
- 5: Strait pins.

MATERIALS:

- 1: 2 felt craft squares of the same color
- OR**
- 1/4 yard (9 inches) of felt from a fabric store.
 - 2: 1 white felt square. 3: Buttons for eyes
 - 4: Cotton or orlon for stuffing.
 - 5: Yarn for hair. 6: Buttons, feathers, beads, ribbons, pompoms, lace, trims, scraps of felt, for decoration.



DIRECTIONS FOR THE BODY:

- 1: Cut out pattern on the line. 2: Place 2 squares of felt neatly together and pin them. 3: Place the pattern on the top. Draw around the pattern. Take away pattern and re-pin the felt with the pins all inside the lines. 4: Cut through both squares of felt 8 inch outside the lines. Leave the pins in place. 5: Thread the needle and sew, starting at lower left side of the puppet's body, with an overcast stitch, using the pencil line as a guide for the needle. Sew around the puppet to the lower right side of the puppet, leaving the bottom open. Remember to knot the thread at the end. 6: Take out the pins. 7: Stuff the head with cotton or orlon.
 - 8: Put your hand inside. (See small sketch above) This is your basic puppet.
- Think about your puppet character before you make a face for it.

THE FACE:

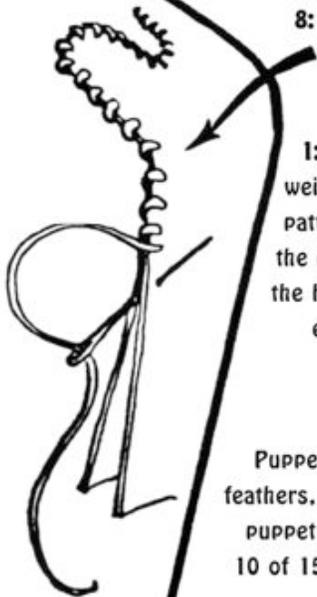
- 1: Decide what kind of puppet character you want to make: animal, person, weird creature, who or what? 2: For the whites of the eyes use a quarter for a pattern, place it in the corner of the white felt square and draw around it with the pencil. Draw a second circle next to it. Cut out the circles and sew them to the head of your puppet. Sew through the top felt only. 3: Select buttons for the eyes. Sew the buttons onto the white circles and the eyes are complete.
- Other details may be added.

HAIR:

Puppet hair may be made of many things: yarn, cloth, cotton, fake fur, ribbons, felt, feathers, string and even curly metal pot cleaners. The one thing that doesn't make good puppet hair is real looking hair from wigs. For yarn hair, wind yarn around your hand 10 or 15 times, and tie in the middle. Cut the loops. Sew 2 or 3 bunches on the head. Make longer loops for longer hair. Experiment!

MAKE PUPPET AT LEAST 1 OR 2 INCHES LONGER THAN THIS PATTERN

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Stephen Hancock 07

WALKING BIRD MARIONETTE

MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT NEEDED

Two styrofoam balls or egg shapes, one about 1 1/2" diameter, the other about 2 1/2" diameter

Narrow strips of wood (molding works well): one 6" piece and one 4" piece

3" string of plastic beads (these beads, fused to a connecting string, are sold in decorator shops and drapery departments)

Masking tape

Felt scraps for making beak and feet

White glue

5 or 6 large, brightly colored feathers

Straight pins

Beads, sequins, etc. for features & trim

Hammer and small nails

Large needle

Six 3" lengths of pipe cleaner

Two metal washers, about 3/4" - 1" diameter

Two 6" lengths of thick yarn

Black carpet thread

Tracing paper

Pencil

Ruler

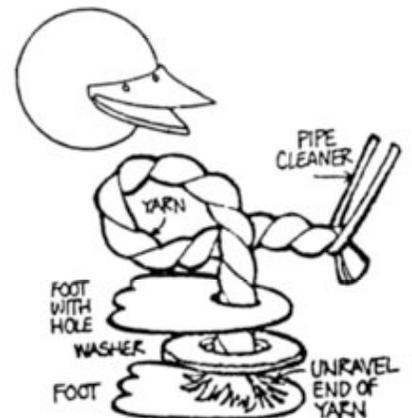
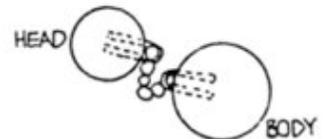
CONSTRUCTING THE MARIONETTE

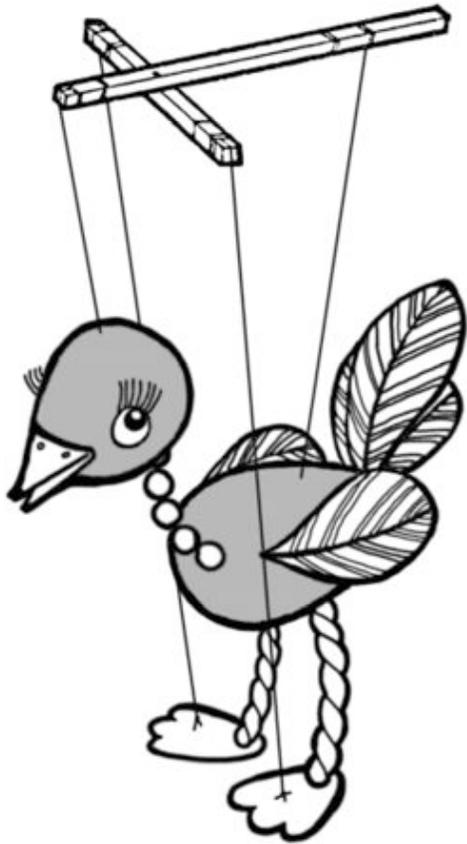
1. Trace the foot and beak patterns, and transfer them to scraps of felt. You will need one beak shape and four foot shapes. Cut these shapes out. In two of the foot shapes, cut holes as indicated by the circle on the pattern. Set the feet and beak aside for now.

2. The beads form the neck which connects the styrofoam head and body. To attach the beads to the styrofoam, wrap a separate pipe cleaner piece 1 1/2 times around each end of the bead chain, as shown, then press the ends of the pipe cleaner pieces into the head and body shapes.

3. Use two straight pins to attach the felt beak to the head.

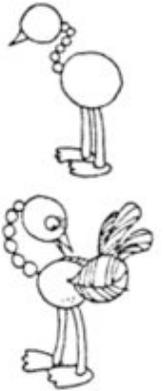
4. The two pieces of yarn form the legs. Bend a pipe cleaner piece around one end of each leg, as you did with the neck. Slide a felt foot piece with a hole onto the other end of each leg. Then add the metal washers, which give the feet weight and make them easier to control. Pull apart and spread out the end of the yarn piece. Spread glue onto the bottom foot pieces (without holes) and glue each pair of foot pieces together with the washer and yarn in between.





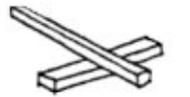
5. Attach the legs to the body by inserting the ends of the pipe cleaners into the styrofoam. Be sure that the feet face forward.

6. Poke feathers into the body shape to form the tail and wings. Make eyes of felt, beads, sequins, etc., and attach them with straight pins.



STRINGING THE MARIONETTE

First, build the control by joining the two strips of wood at right angles as shown, using small nails or tacks.



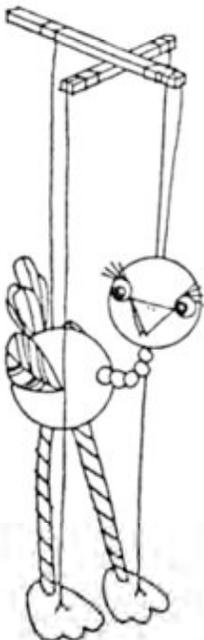
cut two 16" lengths of carpet thread, one 10" length, and one 8" length. Use a needle to attach one 16" thread to each foot, making a big stitch and tying it. Bend the two remaining pipe cleaner pieces into "v" shapes and tie one



of the shorter threads to each one, as shown. Poke the pipe cleaner with the 10" thread into the body about 2/3 of the way back; poke the pipe cleaner with the shorter string into the top of the head. String placement may be adjusted later for balance.



Attach first the body string, then the head string, then the leg strings to the control as shown, using strips of masking tape. This type of control is called an "airplane" control.



MANIPULATION

Tilt the "wings" of the control to make the puppet walk. Move the head and body by tipping or twisting the "body" of the control. Can you make your puppet dance? Walk up or down stairs? Take a bow? Stamp its foot? Walk backwards?

