

## Use of Puppetry in Teaching Language

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Language is the most important tool in a child's learning experience. Children are introduced to languages other than their mother tongue at a very early age. Most schools choose English as the medium of instruction because parents (and the public) want children to be exposed to English as early as possible, as it is seen as a stepping stone to success.

Teachers often label children as dolts and feel their I.Q. is low if they don't know English. In their anxiety to teach English, teachers feel that shouting commands, making a child write something five or six times, and constantly giving instructions without interaction with the children, will somehow make them learn the language.

An important method of learning any language is the Language Experience Approach.

The components of this method are :

1. Motor control
2. Visual discrimination
3. Auditory discrimination

These three components develop the main language skills that are: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Puppets can be used effectively in this approach of teaching language.

Why Puppets?

Anything a teacher can do, a puppet can do too! Puppets can dance, talk, sing, jump, read, write and teach too! A classroom comes alive with puppets.

The children in turn:

- Communicate with others, practice good listening skills, use language as a social tool, appreciate and enjoy good literature, use grammatically correct language, are fluent and natural in their expression and speak distinctly without shouting.

- Learn written language if labels and signs are used along with the puppet.
- Find the combined visual, aural and kinesthetic way of learning hard to resist.

The way children respond to puppets is fascinating: they are willing to suspend belief and react to the puppet as if it were real. Many teachers have a puppet that 'speaks only English' and use it effectively to encourage their children to speak in English. Puppets promote communication, as children attempt to discover their names, ages, likes and dislikes.

Children sometimes use puppets as their mouthpieces and lose their reticence, participating in a way that they would not have if they were asked to act out the part themselves. Puppets also enable children to take on new and different roles. Puppets add variety, and sometimes a touch of magic to the class. You may find that children who are not always cooperative, or who do not show a great deal of interest in class, respond very positively to puppets.

Puppets can be used for general warming up, chatting, giving instructions or introducing language. They can be used in songs, chants, conversations, improvisations, and plays.

Puppets can be used even in a confined space. Elaborate characters - even ghosts, monsters, dinosaurs - normally difficult to represent on the stage, can be made into interesting puppets. They can be used with stories you tell the children and ones they invent themselves.

Using puppets calls for some skill in acting like using different voices for different characters. Puppeteers need to learn how to manipulate the puppets, open their mouths synchronous with what the puppets are saying; sometimes the puppet has to be still, or turn and move appropriately, as well as enter and exit with care. However, children only need to control the

puppets enough to make their play interesting and understandable to an audience of their peers.

#### Making Puppets

Children have to follow instructions while making puppets. Puppets made by the teacher / children have two advantages over ready-made ones: First there is 'the fun' of making them and second, 'the challenge' of developing their characters. It is often easier for children to make 'animal' rather than 'people' puppets.

The process of making a puppet is a rewarding craft activity in itself and the end product - the puppet - plays a key role in subsequent activities.

#### Using Puppets Effectively in the Classroom

- Use puppets to help introduce or reinforce a concept or activity. Just hold the puppet still, as you interact with a group of children. Look towards the puppet as you speak. When the puppet replies move its mouth or body as it speaks to the children. Again, remember to hold it still when you or another puppet speaks.
- Some puppets are only for the teacher to use in directed lessons. These are usually large, special puppets and can become the class mascot. They can emerge to brighten your day or disappear if they are frightened by too much noise in the room.
- Making puppets can be messy in the classroom. This experience may get the children excited. Work with small groups in an independent or as a teacher-directed activity.
- Be flexible and allow the children to be innovative in the puppets they make.

#### A Conversation Class Using Puppets

1. Make the puppet take a lesson. Let the children ask the puppets questions in English. The puppet can ask questions too. You can write the questions on the board.
2. Let each child make a simple puppet, with the material provided in about 30 minutes.

While the children are making the puppets there is an opportunity to use language. That's nice. Cut carefully. This can be the head. Are these his legs?

3. As the children finish their puppets they can show them to each other and talk.
4. When all the puppets are ready, ask the children to sit in a circle. Let them talk through the puppets to the child next in the circle. Help them when they are stuck for words.
5. Each pair of children then joins another pair and a conversation takes place between four puppets.
8. All the children now walk about the room talking to each other's puppets.
9. Each child should now draw a picture and write about their puppets.
10. Having established the character of their puppets, they can now make up a play. Guide them with a story line.

#### Bird Finger Puppets

Bird finger puppets can be used to teach the following poem :

"Two little blackbirds sitting on a hill.  
One named Jack and one named Jill  
Fly away Jack, fly away Jill  
Come back Jack, Come back Jill."

[Traditional folk song]

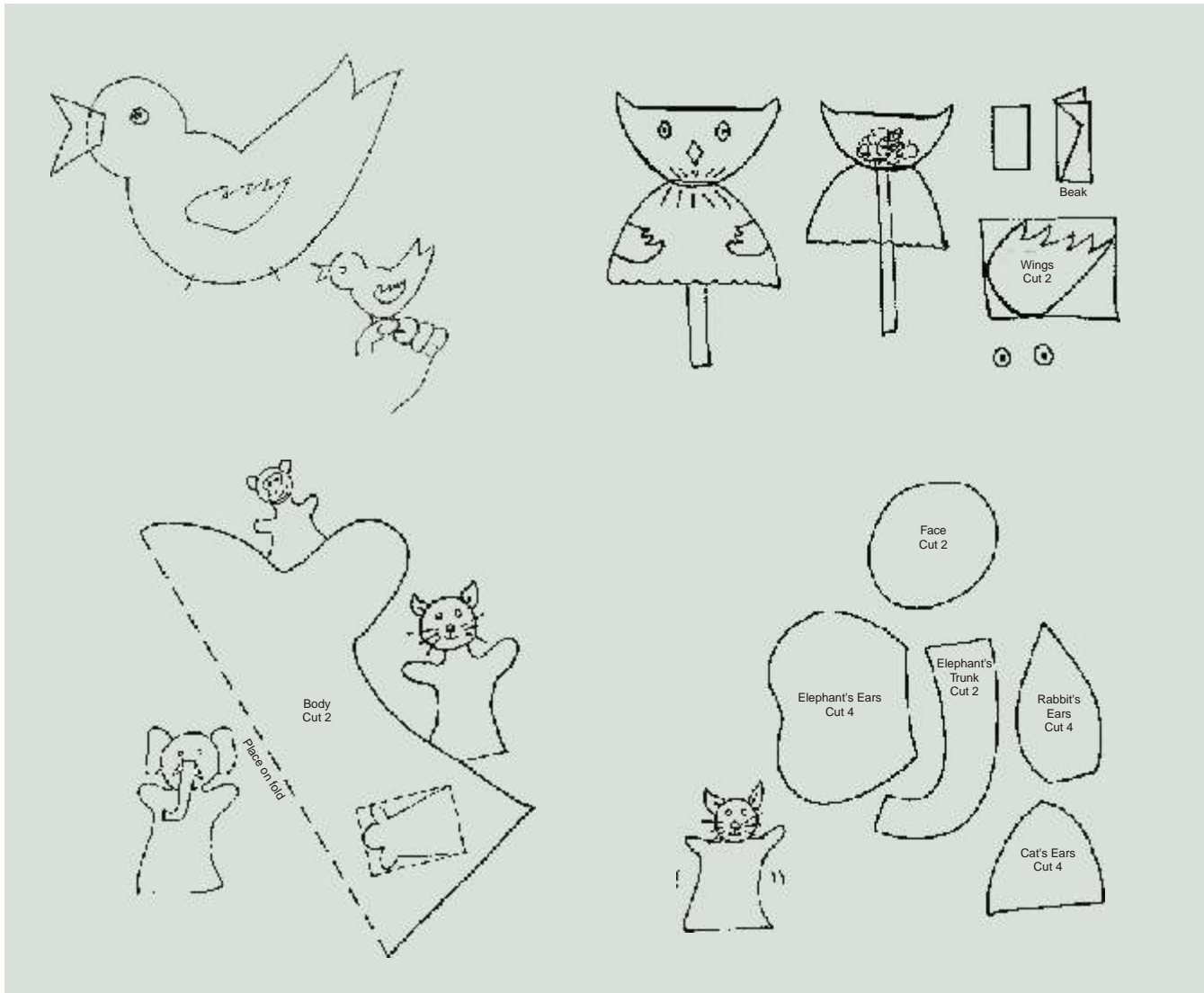
You will need two bird finger puppets, one for each hand. Say the poem with the action of hiding and bringing back the puppets.

This poem can be modified to teach opposites.

Change the names of the birds and the last word of the first line, for example :

...cloud. One named Quiet and one named Loud.

...bell. Sick-Well,  
...kite. Heavy-Light,  
...park, Light-Dark,  
...gate, Love -Hate  
...bend, Start-End.



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