

PUPPETRY - THE PRESENTATION

HOW TO MAKE A BOOTH

Here are instructions for making both a cloth and a wooden booth. The cloth booth is like a tent, can accommodate 2 operators, and can be folded away and put in the back of a car for ease of transport. However it takes five minutes or so to erect. The wooden booth can accommodate 3 - 4 operators and is ready as soon as it is in place. However it cannot be transported in a car.

THE CLOTH PUPPET BOOTH

I am describing the booth I use myself, with the materials I used at the time. Please feel free to adapt the measurements and materials to suit yourself, as I would if I was making another. I used some curtain material a friend had finished with for making my first booth. You could also use scraps of different material and make a "patchwork " booth. The materials for the stage and frill can be picked up in a market or from old clothes picked up at a jumble sale. So recycle and be creative.

MATERIALS

Brightly patterned curtain material for front of booth - Stripes look good

Plain dark material for roof and back

Scraps of material for stage and frill

2 metres braid to decorate the stage.

Recommended - I used wadding and beads to quilt and decorate and at the same time strengthen the sides and top of the stage.

1 metre of velcro

1 metre of binding tape

Foam to kneel on - roughly 80cm x 40cm x 8cm.

90cm x 80cm x 1cm thick plywood for base

2 lengths of wood 80cm x 11cm x 5cm thick for nailing to either end of the base - these are for holding the upright poles

A 1" drill bit will be required to make the necessary holes

4 broom handles cut into 8 x 1metre lengths

4 cup hooks

60 cm chrome tubing cut into 4 x 15cm lengths

4 lengths of wood 92 cm x 5cm x 1.5 cm thick for the cross struts

1 length of 1 cm dowelling 75 cm long to strengthen the lower edge of the stage

THE BOOTH

1. For the front and sides of the booth, join pieces of the chosen material until you have a rectangle 167cm long and 300cm wide. Hem the top and bottom edges, and the two side edges taking 2.5cm seams.
2. For the wooden poles at the back of the booth sew two casings taking 25cm of material at either side of the booth.
3. Measure 60 cm from each side casing, and taking 25cm of material, sew two more casings for the front poles.
4. To make the stage opening on the booth front, pencil mark an outline 45cm x 35cm draw another rectangle 1.5cm inside the first one, then cut this out; snip to the corners of the large rectangle then turn fabric to right side of booth and press. Turn in raw edges 1.5cm and stitch down all round rectangle.
5. For the sides of the stage cut two fabric strips 40cm x 15cm. Turn in short edges 2.5cm and tack. Sew these pieces in position keeping them within the casing seams and slightly overlapping the stage opening.
6. For the top of the stage cut a fabric strip 80cm x 21cm. Trim one long edge to a curved shape (See booth sketch 1). Now cut another piece the same for lining. Join top pieces round edges taking 2.5cm seam and leaving the long straight edges open. Trim seams, turn right side out and press. Turn the long straight edges in 2.5cm and topstitch. Sew on braid as shown in the sketch of the booth.
7. Pin the top in place on booth front with long straight edges level with top front of stage. Sew in place taking stitching all round edges of top piece including the top curve. Slipstitch back of curved piece to top edge of booth front. Sew on braid to cover lower edges (see booth sketch 1)
8. For the frill cut a piece of fabric about 180cm x 25cm. Take narrow hems at side edges and a 2.5cm hem on one long edge. Gather remaining raw edge to fit across the booth below the stage; sew in place. Sew on braid to cover raw edge of gathered frill (see sketch of booth)

9. To make the casing to take the 1cm dowelling to reinforce the lower edge of the stage, cut a piece of material 78 cm x 6cm. Take a 1.5cm seam on all sides, press and sew. Taking care to lift the frill clear sew casing onto the wrong side of the booth, leaving one short end open to insert the dowell.
10. For the roof and back you need a piece of plain dark material 227cm long and 80cm wide. Take a 2.5cm seam on all four sides and press. Slipstitch one short side onto the top back of the booth below the curve. (See booth sketch 2) Attach a loop of binding tape to the sides of each front casing to help secure the roof of the booth to the poles. Slip stitch parts of the long sides to the side edges of the booth. When you get to the back casings, attach another loop of binding tape to the sides of each. (see booth sketch 2)
11. The rest of the long sides form the back of the booth. To hold the flap in place, sew velcro strips at intervals to the back flap and booth.
12. For the cushion, wrap your material around the foam, right side of fabric next to the foam. Pin the material neatly around the foam leaving one side open. Tack these seams, remove the foam and then sew the seams again leaving one side open. Trim seams, turn right side out and press. Replace foam inside cushion and slipstitch remaining seam. (See booth sketch 2)
13. Attach the two 5cm thick pieces of wood to the sides of the plywood base 75cm apart, after drilling two holes 60cm apart for the poles.
14. Drill holes in the four 1.5cm thick pieces of wood now to form the struts. The holes for the two struts should 60cm apart; and the front and back struts 75cm apart. The side struts are specially designed to overlap the front of the booth so that clip on spotlights can be attached. (see booth sketch 2)
15. The 4 cup hooks are attached to 4 of the 1 metre poles, and the 4 lengths of 15cm chrome tubing are attached to the other 4. They are assembled in the same way as tent poles. The hooks are for holding the loops attached to the booth.
16. The booth sketch shows how it all comes together - easy really! So go on have a go - for lots of fun and experiential learning.

TRANSPORTING THE BOOTH

To keep all the pieces of the booth together I use two carrying bags made from scraps of material and cardboard boxes, one for the booth and cushion and one for the pieces of wood to keep them safely together.

LIGHTING AND SOUND EFFECTS

After a two years of presenting puppet plays, I was persuaded to invest in a couple of spotlights. The effect is superb and I would strongly recommend them. A darkened room with spotlights on the puppets provides atmosphere, and aids the imagination, a most essential ingredient in a puppet show.

Music and sound effects also add much to the enjoyment, carrying the audiences' imaginations away to another time and place. I have used a stereo cassette recorder with detachable speakers standing outside the booth.

BACKGROUND

For background I use various materials about 1 metre square which I pin to the booth's back flap. The colours and designs of each background will vary according to the presentation - plain fabric; a collage; an appropriate poster.

THE TOY THEATRE

The toy theatre can be made from an open wooden or cardboard box. The illustration shows where to cut the openings in the sides and front. The stage could be made with the box lid pushed down onto the base and secured, and a curtain can also be added. A backdrop can be painted and held or secured to the back, whilst the characters in the play are attached to rods for putting on/off stage, or string for dangling from the top.

THE PUPPETS AND PRESENTATIONS USING SCRAP

The junk puppets can easily be made from whatever materials you have available, just letting your imagination do its work. I have illustrated a few examples of the sorts of puppets most frequently made at the centre

- Paper bag puppets
- Spongies
- Sock puppets
- String puppets or marionettes
- Puppets and the diorama for the Toy Theatre

When organising a puppet-making workshop divide the participants into interest groups and let them use the materials available at each work station according to the type of puppet they want to make. I would usually allow a half to one hour for this activity, although it has been known to go on for 2 -3 hours! (see stories section)

THE SCRIPT

Usually during a puppet-making workshop the participants are talking about their puppets and the characters they represent so the process of script writing can very easily and naturally begin. Don't worry if all of the puppets required for the play don't fit the stereotypic image. For example, I remember well a group of children staying at the centre who decided to present the story of Jack and the Beanstalk with their puppets. All of the puppets had a part, and in the absence of a sufficient number of "human" ones, the part of Jack was played by a sheep - the audience loved it.

THE PRESENTATION

The methods of presentation can similarly be as variable as the materials available and your imagination will allow. I have drawn a picture of the materials used on one occasion during a concert at Corrymeela following a puppet-making workshop. You can see how the use of two tables on either side of a screen covered with a background scene (the proscenium), the table at the front being the stage draped with a curtain to hide the operators, could be very easily adapted to suit your own situation. The story of how we got to that "stage" appears in the next section on "Using puppets"