Large Scale Props and Puppets

**Presented By:**

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**How did the large scale puppet project begin?**

<http://ashstpuppetworks.com/>

Ruthie watched the puppet heads being constructed over a period of several days at Mountain Jam Music Fest. Angelyn had experienced using large puppets at a local festival and saw how the bodies were designed and worn. We decided that the puppets made a perfect cast for our Third grade production which was based on poem about a party.

**Head Construction OR Large Scale Paper Mache’**

**MATERIALS:**

Balloons or select extremely lightweight structures for the base

Punching ball balloons are great as the size diameter when inflated is so wide and they are sturdy

Bubble wrap, foam egg cartons, water bottles etc.

Old vinyl flannel backed table cloths to protect work surface

Margarine tubs to hold flour and water mixture

Donated bags of flour CHECK FOR WEEVILS I did not encounter any- however do not just randomly keep flour which you have not checked.

Newspapers – not sale flyers or “slick” papers- stick to the black and white

Leftover newsprint from newspaper print shops

Latex drywall primer or white flat latex to seal exteriors of puppets prior to painting

**Construction-**

Cover the tables to make clean up easier.

Tear up long strips of newspaper which you will use to create layers.

Blow up balloon base or tape together base structure for the sculpture.

Mix together flour and water until you get a pancake batter consistency.

Dip the strips into flour mixture and using your fingers slide the strip of newspaper through your fingers to allow excess liquid to drop back into container and begin applying the layers in a crisscross fashion over surface of the base when you can no longer see blank spots of structure base allow drying thoroughly. Continue this process at least 2 more times check when dry for areas of thin coverage. The last layer of strips uses the plain newsprint if available to get more of and even color in last application. Next, when the final layer of (newsprint & flour and water) is dry, use a paintbrush to cover the sculpture with a layer of latex primer or a layer of latex paint to seal the newspaper shape.

. You can form details with model magic and paint right over it on the latex primer or paint.

This creates an extra durability and helps to smooth the top layer of surface in preparation for paint or other adornment.

I painted the exteriors of most of the puppets with jazz gloss tempera. It dries fairly quickly and creates a shin y finish. Acrylic paint is also an option for the sculptures surface.

Final embellishments were glued on with Aleene’s tacky glue or Glue Dots.

Body Building

**Materials and instructions for building giant puppet bodies:**

**Pig:** Giant Box, bubble wrap, Packing Tape, rope, pink material, box cutter, 2 pairs of pink tights.

A big hole was cut in the front of the pig so the student could reach their hands through to hold the pig’s head. (The head was built with a big mouth for the student to look through.) And the bottom was left open so two students could put it over their head. The rope was attached at the back of the box and left long enough to tie around the waist of the child who was at the back of the pig to keep it from tilting. The outside of the box was first bubble wrapped, to make it more round - and then covered with the pink material. Both were folded into the inside of the box and were attached with a staple gun.

**Unicorn:** Bamboo, different size hula hoops, duct tape, large material to cover the body, zip ties, safety pins

Cut two pieces of bamboo long enough to be the length of the horse’s body. Lay them parallel to one another. Use a zip tie to attach two hula hoops together at the sides and pull them apart to be the shoulders of the horse. Tie two more hula hoops together and take a third hula hoop ad cut it in half. Separate the two hula hoops and duct tape the half so that it creates a rounded shape to be the rear. Attach the bamboo to the inside of the outer edge of the hoops using duct tape. The student in the front should be able to stand in between the two hoops in the front with the bamboo resting on the shoulders. The student at the back should stand in front of the three gathered hoops and carry the frame by the bamboo sides. Use a large enough piece of material to cover the structure and safety pin it around the hips and rear to give it shape. Cut a hole in the front for the head of the student that is the head.

**Frame Back Pack Bodies (used for cats, rabbit, rooster characters)**– Frame Back Pack, solid and shear material, bamboo, zip ties, duct tape, wire, drill with small bit, Velcro, safety pins, craft glue, serrated saw, foam soccer balls, tennis balls, garden gloves, sewing machine (optional)

You want the bamboo to be in very long pieces. The first thing you want to do is attach the head to the end. Begin by digging a hole into a foam ball using the end of the bamboo. You want the bamboo to be very snug and over half way through the ball. (You made need to use scissors to dig out some of the foam) With the stick removed, secure the ball into the inside of the puppet head (Hole facing out) using a large piece of sticky Velcro. Place the head on the end and determine where you want the shoulders to be. Cut a second piece of bamboo to the width that you want the shoulders and drill a parallel hole about a half inch from the end of each side of the stick. Cross tie to the “spine” using zip ties - then secure with duct tape.

Attach the spine to the frame pack next. WARNING: Have someone put on the frame pack and measure how tall you want the puppet to be before you attach the spine. Attach the bamboo by cross tying it with zip ties and duct taping it to the frame in as many places as possible. If necessary, place foam or rolled up paper between the bottom of the frame and the bamboo to tilt the head more forward.

Secure the shoulders by cutting two more pieces of bamboo that are long enough to go from the end of the shoulders to where the spine is attached to the frame pack. Duct tape the bamboo at the end of each shoulder and to the spine to create a triangle shape.

Decide how long you want the arms to be and cut two pieces of bamboo to that length. Drill a parallel hole about a have inch from the end on one side of the two pieces of bamboo. Attach the arms by threading a zip tie through the holes at the end of the arms and through the holes at the end of the shoulders. Build the outfit BEFORE attaching the hands.

For the clothes you need a piece of material wide enough to cover the width of the shoulders and long enough to go from the shoulders to the bottom of the back pack when folded in half. Cut a small hole in the middle of the fold for the bamboo end that the head will attach to, to go through. Drape material so that the fold covers the shoulder and the material hangs to cover the front and the back. Have someone put on the backpack while underneath the material to see where they will need to be able to see out. Cut a large enough hole in the stomach area of the material for the person to see out. Measure a large enough piece of the sheer material to cover the hole and glue or sew the material over where the hole is.

For the sleeves you will need a piece material about 20 inches wide and long enough to cover the length of the arms. Attach the sleeve to the shoulder of the body material by lining up the middle of the sleeve to the fold of material hanging from the shoulder. You may want to sew the length of the sleeve and then slip the sleeve on and attach it to the body material – or you can attach the sleeve then staple or tape up the sides of the sleeve – it will depend on the size and material type which will work best for you. After attaching the sleeve build the hands. Fill a garden glove with stuffing and duct tape to the end of the arm.

**Chicken and Rabbit Body Shape -** To give the body of the chicken shape, different sized hula hoops were attached to the spine. (Smaller on top, bigger on the bottom, three hoops total used.) Hoops can also be sewn onto the clothing. (One was used at the base of the rabbit’s body)

**Making movable arms (The Cats):** tennis balls, rope, bamboo, wire

Do not attach the arms using zip ties. Instead use wire to create two rings to go around the ends of the shoulders that is about 4 inches in diameter. Next slit a hole in two tennis balls wide enough to fit on the ends of the bamboo for the shoulders. Take one of the bamboo sticks for the arms and slip it through the wire ring. Then tie a piece of rope around the end long enough for the puppeteer to be able to reach the end. Slit a hole in another tennis ball to place over the end of the bamboo for the arm. Lift the arm by pulling the string – repeat the steps for the opposite arm.

**Collecting Unusual Supplies**

Frame packs are an expensive item. We were able to borrow ours from another group of puppet builders. Other places to check are parents who may be willing to loan them, army surplus stores, second hand shops and internet sites such as Craig’s list.

Multiple sized hula hoops can be purchased at the dollar store though they are generally available only in the summer and spring seasons. However, tubing that you can cut and shape yourself is available at local hardware stores.

We highly recommend you keep an eye on whoever handles shipping at your school so that you can collect styrofoam, bubble wrap and other packing supplies for shaping paper mache’.

To get newspaper print, contact your local newspaper distributor and ask when they put out their end rolls. End rolls are free to collect and generally have a lot of paper still left on to use.