

Make:
technology on your time

Weekend
Projects



Making Shadow Puppets

In this Weekend Projects, you'll learn how to make simple paper puppets and some more complicated polycarbonate puppets. (Lexan is the brand name for polycarbonate.)



Shadow puppets are easy to make and are one of the quickest ways to bring a story to life in a performance. After working on puppet movies, I got started with shadow puppets teaching puppet workshops to young people which led me to become an art teacher in Seattle Public Schools for seven years!

Making Shadow Puppets Out of Paper



Let's start with paper shadow puppets - We'll cut out characters out of black construction paper and mount them on a control rod. There is a little bit of masking tape kung fu that goes on with attaching the control rod to watch in the video. With paper puppets that don't have moving parts, you have a limited movement vocabulary to work with. Running, hopping, summersaults, flipping, jumping, and sinking into quicksand, are some of the things you can do without extra parts. If you use this vocabulary creatively, the theatrical world is your puppet oyster.

Rip paper puppets for a natural edge that looks really cool and has more natural look. You can also use wire, string, brass fasteners, and pop rivets for the joints of the moving parts.

Even though your paper puppets may not have moving parts, you don't have to make your character jiggle every time it talks, we don't jump up and down every time we talk! Use motion for emphasis and direction and punctuation.

Don't make necks too thin, the head will fold over from the weight of the head! Use theatrical gels or colored plastic notebook covers for colored highlights.

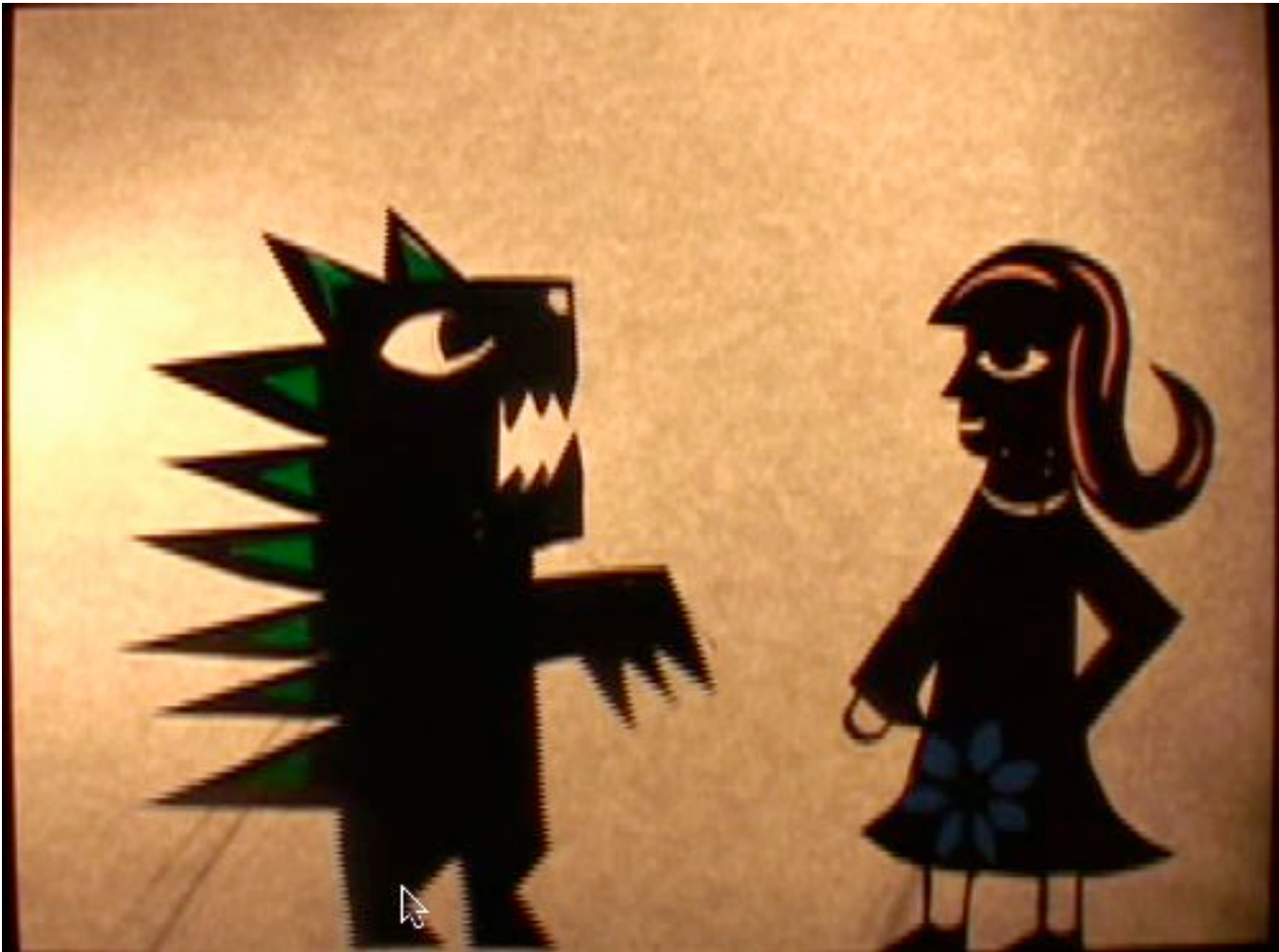
Don't have construction paper on hand? Use what you've got. A German shadow puppeteer makes all her puppets on the spot with newspaper.

Go watch Lotte Reiniger's Prince Achmed video for inspiration. It is one of the first animations done in Germany in the 20's and it's fantastic and beautiful and will give you lots of ideas!

Here's a link for you to go check out the dvd:

http://www.amazon.com/Adventures-Prince-Achmed-Carl-Koch/dp/B0000714B2/sr=8-1/qid=1160170362/ref=pd_bbs_1/104-1915808-3765528?ie=UTF8&s=dvd

Polycarbonate Shadow Puppets

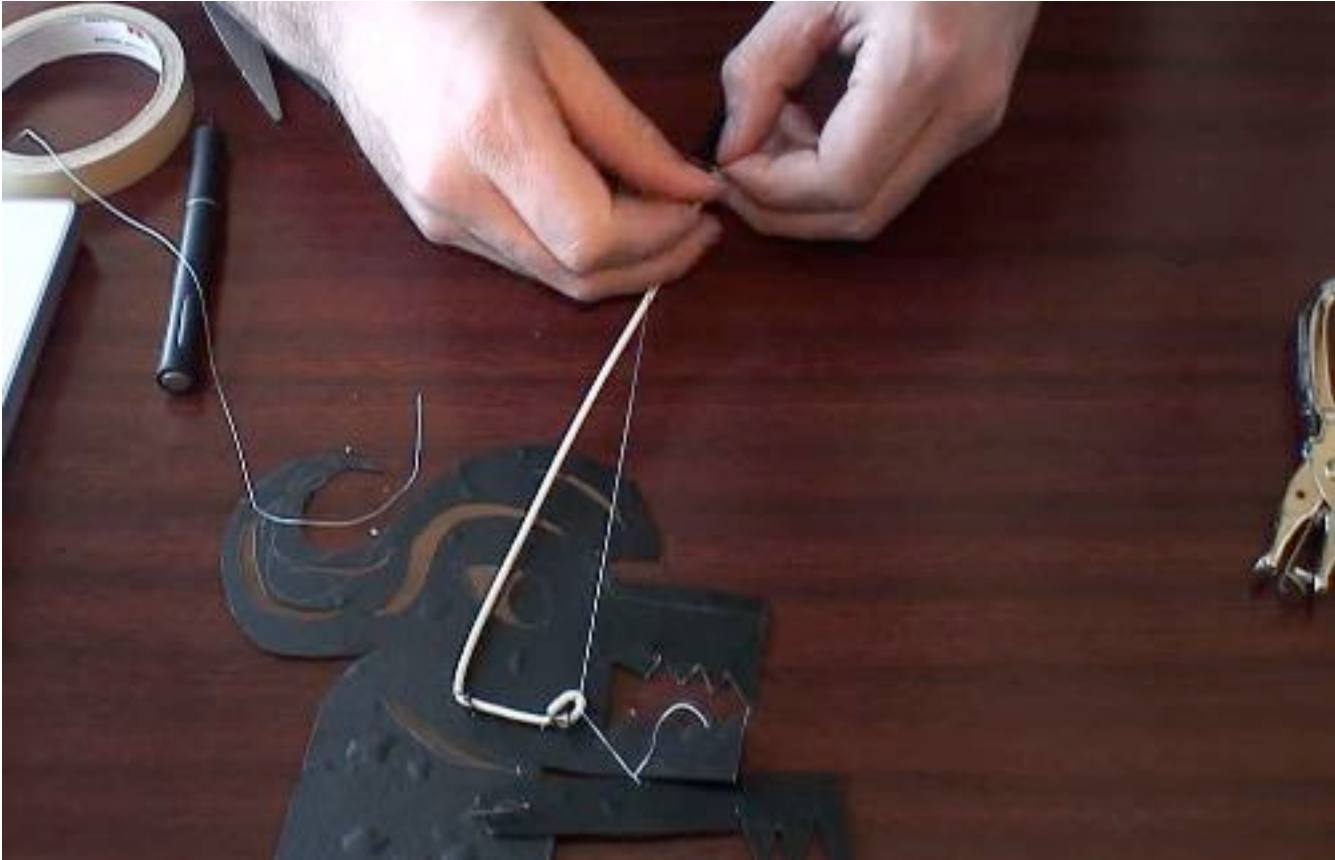


Polycarbonate is a window product that is used as bullet proof glass when it's thick enough. The great thing about polycarbonate is that you can cut it with scissors and it won't shatter. I love this stuff.

First, apply contact paper to the polycarbonate, draw out your monster design and cut the shape out and then use a craft knife to cut out the shapes that will be see through and peel off the contact paper. You can make them colorful with gels that you can get at a theatrical supply house. A lot of times, they have little books full of lots of colors that they will give you for free! If you want a moving part, cut out a limb or a moving part like a

mouth or hand. I imagine that you could make some really amazing contraptions and moving parts. You can be as sophisticated a puppet engineer as you want to get.

Make your trigger/control mechanism and attach it to the control rod and make it all work with string. Use rubber bands to make your flexible arm stay up or stay in place.



To make a puppet theater, use foamcore, cardboard, or wood. It will be helpful to have a playboard where the puppets can put their feet so that they can walk across the bottom of the theater.

When you make up stories for your characters, make sure to have a lot of action. For more snazziness, make more than one puppet per character, you can make close up puppets for talking and winking and you can have small puppets for establishing shots with scenery.

Golden Nugget: Go see Deb Chase of the Oregon Shadow Theater <http://oregonshadowtheater.com> perform. She is amazing and comes up with the most beautiful shadow puppets ever. She's done some work with polarized filters that makes the character be able to be make out of light and the background be dark. My favorite puppet show that she has done is *Jacque Cousteau Meets the Creature from the Black Lagoon*, which she performs in a peep show shadow box. Her innovation is inspiring.

If you make a shadow puppet show, take pictures and video and upload them to the Make flickr pool and put your videos up the internet and put the url for the video in the comments.

I can't wait to see what you come up with! Make some puppets, put on a show and share your work!