

# TEACHING CHILDREN TO USE PUPPETS

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## INTRODUCTION:

An effort is being made today to better prepare our young people to be the leaders of our future churches through instruction, example, and personal involvement. A problem arises when you do not have a teacher in an area that is qualified. Teaching a young person how to become an accomplished puppeteer needs to come from someone who knows the proper progression to develop a puppet character and program. In essence, the teacher must be an accomplished puppeteer before he/she can teach the younger generation to be the same.



There are real benefits to challenging young people to use puppets effectively. Puppets are one of the most diverse visuals available to the teacher in the local church. It is also an area that children can be an active part of the class and the learning process.

## I. MAINTAIN INTEREST

Becoming an accomplished puppeteer is consistency and hard work. Even adults often become discouraged. It is very important that young people enjoy learning to become a puppeteer. It becomes the teacher's job to make learning fun, profitable and eternally beneficial. You will never maintain the interest of a young puppeteer if they don't enjoy working with puppets.

## II. AVOID \_\_\_\_\_

To avoid discouragement in the young person who is attempting to become a puppeteer it is extremely important to evaluate them based on gender, size and body strength. The puppet chosen needs to be within the hand and arm size, voice range and body strength to be manipulated effectively.



## III. POSTURE - \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_ STRENGTH

A. Get comfortable and avoid bad habits.

- B. Proper technique and manipulation is a large percentage of becoming a great puppeteer. If you are teaching several children at one time or even if it is only one young person, it is suggested that they start with a simple sock on their dominant hand.
- C. Proper posture is learned only through instruction and practice. Teach the young people to hold their arms at a 90 degree angle. Allow them to talk in their own voices and get used to opening and closing their hand in sync with their words. Watch their posture and the angle of the hands and their hand to mouth coordination. The puppets mouth should begin closed and end closed. The mouth should open and close once per syllable. A word with three syllables would open and close three times. Teaching good habits in posture is half the battle of being a good puppeteer.
- D. Hand strength is determined by use. Using \_\_\_\_\_ wrapped around the fingers and thumb and flexed repeatedly at home and in class can strengthen the hand.

#### IV. DEVELOPING A PUPPET

\_\_\_\_\_.

In the development of a character, you as a teacher need to lead the young person in a decision based on their level of skill, maturity and confidence.

- A. Will the character be a teaching, supporting, or a learning character? A teaching puppet is often stronger in character and more positive in its personality traits. A supporting character is ideal for the young puppeteer because they can follow the lead of the teaching puppet or the teacher in the class. The learning character is also a valuable tool for the young person to use because of the variety of positive and negative traits the puppet can convey.
- B. Help the student determine the age, gender, and natural appearance of the puppet. Remember that the achieved skill and voice range of the student sets limitations on their chosen character.

#### PUPPET PERSONALITY

- A. Shy
- B. Commanding or authoritative
- C. Rude, Obnoxious
- D. Sarcastic
- E. Selfish
- F. Loud
- G. Proud
- H. Afraid
- I. Kind
- J. Gentle
- K. Meek
- L. Humorous
- M. Crude
- N. Simple or Slow
- O. Irritating
- P. Aged, Mature
- Q. Adolescent
- R. Knowledgeable

- C. Key words that define the character are culture, ethnic origin, education and knowledge.
- D. An exaggerated character limits movement. A puppet with little character is usually over moved and uninteresting.
- E. Fine-tuning the puppet character over time and remaining in the boundaries of the puppet's personality will give you a puppet that will be dependable. You will find yourself building scripts around him because of his depth and strength.

**V. DEVELOPING A PUPPET \_\_\_\_\_.**

When the youth is comfortable with their puppet movements and puppet pantomimes, the puppet personality is completed with the development of a voice.

- A. The voice limitations of the puppeteer should be listened to and recommendations should be made concerning the pitch range that the young person can operate in. (Most children are in the high pitch range.)
- B. Review the voice stems and pick or combine the stems for a voice that will complement the character of your puppet.
- C. Adults and children both have difficulty switching from their own voice to the chosen voice of the puppet. One of the best devices for getting into a particular character voice immediately, and without any trace of a previous voice, is to use a characteristic word, noise, or gesture as the first thing the puppet does or says.

<b>BASIC VOICE STEMS</b>
<b>GUTTURAL VOICE</b>
<b>GOOFY VOICE</b>
<b>WHISPERED VOICE</b>
<b>NASAL VOICE</b>
<b>MELODIC VOICE</b>
<b>FALSETTO VOICE</b>

**VI. PUPPET \_\_\_\_\_ AND DIALOGUE**

Experience has taught us that if a puppeteer is started with a script in front of them, they will be dependent on that script and suffer a lack of confidence. You build a character with any puppet before you start using it. Most puppeteers never build a character. Scripts are the last step in preparing for a puppet program, not the first.

- A. Teach the child or children to talk openly in character with their puppet.
- B. Place the puppet in circumstances and discuss how that the puppet would react in the circumstance. Now apply the puppet's position. Is he/she teaching, learning or supporting? The response of the puppet should become immediate. Everyone should know how

that puppet would respond because his/her character is so strong, exaggerated and defined.

- C. Now you are ready to write a script. The lesson or point that is to be made to the class through the puppet presentation is defined. The character is defined, so all that needs to be done is creating a circumstance that will allow the personality of the puppet to be used to make your point. The script will write itself.
- D. Keep the presentation short but long enough to make your point. Keep puppet sentences short and to the point always remaining in the puppets character.
- E. Have fun writing the dialog.

## **VII. ADULT \_\_\_\_\_ IN PUPPET DIALOG**

More often than not the success or failure of the puppeteer's development is dependent upon the front or straight person. We always use a teacher or straight person out front anytime we do a puppet production.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The problem with not developing great puppeteers in our churches is that they are not getting to see or work with accomplished adult puppeteers. How can we teach a young person to be proficient if the adults are not attempting to become skilled puppeteers also? Learn together, laugh together and enjoy the experience of becoming a great puppeteer for the glory of the Lord.

**ANSWER KEY:** Discouragement Arms & Hand rubber bands Character Voices Scripts Interaction