

# **Hobey Ford's Golden Rod Puppets**

Sea Song

Study guide

# Sea Song

Hobey Ford's Golden Rod Puppets present Sea Song, the story of a boy discovering nature for the first time through a fascination with the life cycle of the sea turtle. When a city boy comes to spend his summer at the coast he is suddenly cut off from his digital world and turns his attention to the natural world of a remote coastal beach. Hobey Ford tells the story without words, performing his own hand crafted foam puppets in full view of the audience to the enchanting hang drum music of David Kuckhermann. Following in the style of his classic production Animalia, Sea Song will inspire and delight.

## BIOGRAPHY

Winner of puppetry's highest honor, the UNIMA Citation of Excellence, and recipient of three Jim Henson Foundation grants, Hobey Ford is known for excellence in puppetry performance and craft.

Hobey's intricate shadow puppetry work and creation of the original rod puppets, the "Foamies", have earned him a place on stages across the world. Hobey's performances incorporate a variety of puppetry styles including Bunraku, rod, marionettes, "Foamies", and shadow puppetry. Hobey adapts folk tales from various cultures for many of his performances, always adding a special "Golden Rod" twist. He uses his own voice to create characters and sound effects, tell stories, and sing.

Hobey is considered both an innovator in puppetry craft and a master storyteller. He has created both the "Foamies" and the clever hand puppet known as "Peepers". The "Foamies" are large animal puppets carved from blocks of foam. After studying each animal's characteristic movements, Hobey designs various control mechanisms to make the puppets themselves move in a life-like manner. The "Foamies" are presented using both stage and house performance space.

Hobey Ford's Golden Rod Puppets maintain a busy schedule performing and teaching in schools, performing arts centers, museums, libraries, and festivals. Hobey presents shadow puppet workshops for students and teachers. His teacher workshops include "Telling Folktales with Shadow Puppetry" and "From Larvae to Butterfly: Metamorphosis Through Puppetry". He lives in the North Carolina mountains with his wife, musician Sue Ford, and they have three daughters, all talented as well.

## ROD PUPPETS

Rod puppetry is traditionally an Indonesian form of puppetry. It is now used around the world. Rod puppets are named for the rods, sticks or wires which are used to make the puppets move. Most puppets we see on TV today are a type of rod puppet. If the puppeteer, the person who moves the puppet, uses their hand inside the puppet's head to make the mouth move, we called the puppet a hand and rod puppet. Rod puppetry has only been popular in the US for around thirty years. Before then most Americans were most familiar with hand puppets, puppets worn like a glove, with the head and hands of the puppet moved by the puppeteer's fingers within the puppet. Marionettes, or string puppets, were also widely used in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (around 1900- 1960). Muppets creator made hand and rod puppetry famous on the children's TV show Sesame Street. Today, rod puppetry and adapted bunraku are more popular than ever.

## **BUNRAKU-STYLE PUPPETRY**

Bunraku is a traditional Japanese form of puppetry. In bunraku, the puppeteers are dressed in black and perform in full view of the audience. Three puppeteers usually are needed to operate one puppet. The puppeteers must coordinate their efforts as they manipulate or move the puppet. It takes many years to master bunraku and master bunraku puppeteers are considered national treasures in Japan. Japanese bunraku is usually not for children. Today, puppeteers from around the world borrow this idea of working in full view and call it bunraku style or adapted bunraku. It is very different than traditional bunraku and is only loosely based on it. Hobey uses bunraku style puppetry in "Little Grandmother Spider Woman" and in the "Foamies".

## **THE FOAMIES**

These puppets are a form of puppetry, which Hobey developed. They are realistically carved foam rubber puppets, depicting animals. Sometimes the foam is covered with fake fur but more often they are painted with acrylic paints. The carved foam animals have rods or sticks attached which Hobey uses to fly, swim and run them through the air. Their environments exist in the imagination of the audience. The puppets are performed all over the performance space including into the audience.

## **SHADOW PUPPETRY**

Shadow puppetry is originally an Asian and Indonesian form of puppetry.

Traditionally, flat or two dimensional puppets were performed against a semi-transparent screen by the light of a oil lamp. The audience watched the shadows on the other side of the screen. Today Shadow puppetry is performed in many ways and in many lands. The puppets can be two or three-dimensional. They can be made out of anything from plastic to cardboard, to your hands. The light source can be diffused or a sharp focused electric light. You can make shadow puppets for the overhead projector or create huge shadows on fabric screens covering a whole theater stage.

## SHADOW PUPPET PROJECT

### MATERIALS AND TOOLS

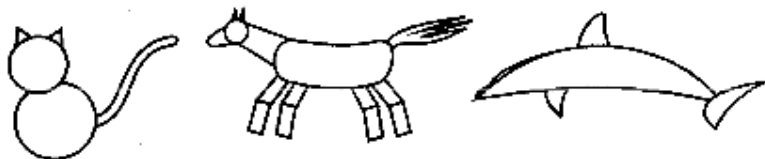
- Black (or blue, or green) poster board. One 7" X 11" or two 5-1/2" X 7" (poster board comes 22" X 28")
- Art tissue in assorted rainbow colors. One pack per 10 workshops
- Bamboo skewers. 12" length approx. one pack per 25 participants.
- 1/2" paper fasteners. 3/4" will work
- Masking tape. 1/2" width or 3/4" several rolls for convenience.
- Hole punch. 1/8" diameter is best, but regular 1/4" size is fine. Several for convenience
- Glue sticks, several for convenience.
- Pencil, one each
- Scissors, one each

### PREPARATION

- Cut poster board into (8) – 11" X 7" or 5-1/2" pieces. Allow for one or two pieces per student.
- Trim sharp ends off skewers using wire cutters (on pair of needle nose pliers or piers), metal shears or garden pruners.

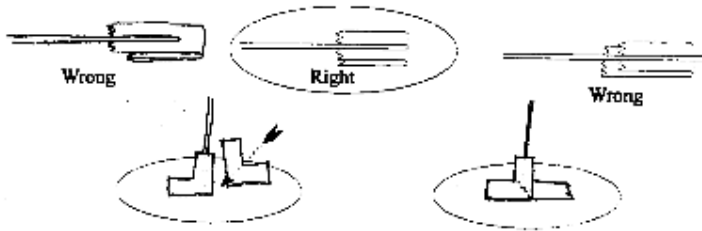
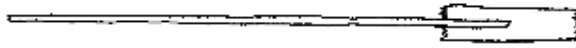
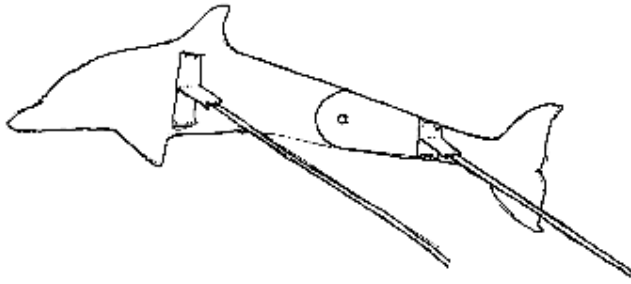
### MAKING SHADOW PUPPETS

Have students draw the outline of a person or animal on their piece of 11" X 7" poster board, making the drawing as large as possible. Drawings smaller than their flat hand are difficult to work with.



Cut out drawings with scissors. For students above 2<sup>nd</sup> grade consider having moving parts on the shadow puppet. Moving parts can be attached using a hole punch and a paper fastener. Bend fasteners over the tip of a scissor to create a loose and freely swinging joint.

Tape on rods to make parts move. Try to limit students to two rods, unless three rods are necessary to control the puppet. Often it is sufficient to let the legs of a puppets dangle and swing without any rod.



# SHADOW PUPPET THEATER

## MATERIALS AND TOOLS

- Card board project display board. Available at office supply.
- Shower curtain liner or white bulletin board paper.
- Sturdy yard stick.
- Lamp extension cord, a power strip will allow you to turn it on and off easily, or you can install a switch or dimmer in the cord.
- Plug in light socket (see illustration 1.)
- Duct tape, to tape the screen onto the theater.
- Rubber bands, 2-3" diameter 1/4" width approx. 2 or 3 will do.
- Aluminum foil, 3 feet of it.
- Utility knife, a nice new sharp disposable one for cutting out proscenium
- Two pencils

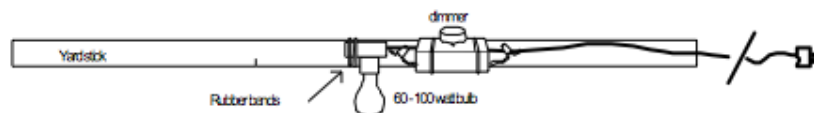
## I. PROSCENIUM

Make a compass for drawing a 24" circle. You can use a couple of pencils and rubber bands to fasten the pencils a foot apart on a yard stick as in the illustrations of the shadow puppet theater construction. After scribing the circle onto the display board, use a utility or razor knife to score the circle and then cut deeper until the circle is removable.

Decorate the façade of the theater at this time if you wish.

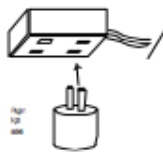
## II. SCREEN

Lay a piece of either paper or shower curtain liner over the proscenium opening and mark and cut out the screen material in a square so that it overlaps the edges of the circle by an 1-1/2". Tape the corners with duct tape, stretching the screen as you tape. Next stretch and tape the middle points of the top, bottom and side edges. Now lay duct tape along the whole perimeter of the screen as shown in the illustration.



## III. LIGHT BAR

Cut notches on the top edge of each wing of the display board, 1-1/4" deep and 1/4" wide, 8" from intersection with the center panel. These notches will hold a sturdy yard stick which will carry the light fixture.



Plug the light socket into the extension cord into the outlet slots closest to the end which the wire comes out of, on the side of the extension cord which has two spaces for plug ins. Refer to the illustration. Attach the socket/ extension cord to the center of the yard stick, using a rubber band, as shown in illustration.

Install a 60 to 100 watt light bulb into socket. Make a lamp reflector out of a piece of aluminum foil 3 ft. long, folded into a rectangle approximately 6" X 8". Attach the visor to the light socket with a rubber band.

#### IV. DIMMER SWITCH

Adding a dimmer switch to the extension cord on your light bar adds versatility to your theater. If you want to skip this detail, you can either unplug the cord to turn off light or plug the cord into a power strip which will give you an easy on off switch.

Locate the spot on the extension cord where you want to install the dimmer switch. With the cord UNPLUGGED cut the center crease between the wires several inches, referring to the illustration. Cut one of wires and strip the ends around 1/2". To each stripped end, twist together one of the wires coming off the dimmer switch. Twist on wire nuts, which usually come with the dimmer switch.



# Shadow Puppet Stage

