

*Hobey Ford's
Golden Rod Puppets*

WORLD TALES

Study Guide

THE PERFORMER

Hobey Ford, the creator of the Golden Rod Puppets, designs builds and performs puppet productions throughout the US and Canada. Today he is based in the mountains of Western North Carolina, near Asheville, but he was born in coastal Connecticut. He began working with puppets at The State University of New York in Purchase, where he studied art.

Ford founded the Golden Rod Puppets in 1980 after moving to North Carolina, and since that time he has worked at such venues as The Smithsonian Museum, The Kennedy Center, The Jim Henson International Festival of Puppetry, The Detroit Institute of Arts as well as schools, festivals, libraries and theaters across the country.

The Golden Rod Puppets are named for their focus on *rod* puppetry, including many related styles of puppetry, which involve the use of rods. Ford works with traditional European style rod puppets, shadow puppets, adapted bunraku puppets, as well as contemporary hand and rod puppets. Ford serves as rod puppetry consultant to Puppeteers of America.

Drawing on art, woodworking and basic engineering skills, Hobeey designs and crafts his puppets. He is renowned for his techniques of carved foam rubber, which he uses in his “foamies”, finely articulated realistic animal puppets. Ford employs complicated mechanisms and careful manipulation, while using his own voice and storytelling skills to bring his puppets to life.

Ford has won numerous awards including three Jim Henson Foundation grants, and puppetry’s highest honor, a Citation of Excellence from Union International de la Marionette. He also teaches nationally through The Kennedy Center’s Professional Development for Teachers program.

THE AUDIENCE

A good audience is as important as the performer to make a performance go well. It is important to listen quietly and not to talk unless the performer invites the audience to do so. If you are sitting on the floor you should sit cross-legged and not on your knees, so the children behind you can see. Clapping at the end of a story or at the end of the show is always appreciated. Good audience skills are an essential for the success of the show, so have fun but remember your audience manners.

THE STORIES

A STORY A STORY

This West African Anansi story tells how Anansi becomes a storyteller by winning the golden box, the source of all stories. Anansi, is a “trickster” character, who is always playing tricks on the characters he meets. Do you now any trickster characters from cartoons?

You may be familiar with Gail Haley's Caldecott award winning book, "A story, a Story". It is probably at your school library. Gail is a friend of mine and gave me permission to use her art as the design for my adaptation of her book. Gail is also a puppeteer and there is a puppet in the story.

Anansi stories are ancient. They have been told for hundreds of years. A Story, a Story is about a man who can spin a spider's web. Sometimes when we talk about stories we speak of spinning a tale, like spinning a web. Sometimes when we get into a story, we don't want the story to end. We get caught up in the story almost like a bug gets caught in the spider's web. Have you ever heard of the "world wide web"? It gets its name from the same idea: people communicating through computers that are connected like a spider's web. Storytelling is an "oral" tradition, which connects people to histories, cultures, and the imaginations of others.

The puppets in this Anansi tale are two-dimensional which means they are flat. They are like paper dolls but have moving parts. I made them from cardboard and painted the artwork on them. I make them move with rods and string from below. They are rod puppets.

The Ant and the Grasshopper

This story is from a very old tale by the storyteller named Aesop, who lived in Greece, 2600 years ago. Aesop told fables, which are moral tales with lessons about the strengths and weaknesses of people. The Ant and the Grasshopper is a story about the importance of hard work and being prepared. I have adapted the story, which means I have changed it. Because the Grasshopper plays the fiddle or violin, and I like music and the arts, I decided to see what would happen if the grasshopper worked hard instead of being lazy, like Aesop's grasshopper. I have added to Aesop's lesson about hard work, by showing the importance of the arts and how they enrich our lives.

The puppets in this story are not flat 2D like the Anansi puppets, but are 3D or three dimensional, which means that they aren't flat. They are rod puppets. I get them to move by rods or wires, which I control from below.

Little Grandmother Spider Woman

We don't have to travel to far for this tale. It is a Cherokee tale. The Cherokees are a Native American tribe who live in the southern Appalachian mountains and Okalahoma. Long ago when they all lived in what we now call North Carolina, North Georgia, and Eastern Tennessee, their storytellers past down stories about animals. These stories often described in humorous ways how different animals came to look like they do today. These stories usually contained messages about the natural world and sometimes warnings about danger or moral weakness.

The story of *Little Grandmother Spider Woman* is about the danger of fire. It is also about false pride and boastfulness, or in other words, bragging. The story also teaches us an important craft of the Cherokees: *pottery*.

The puppets in this story are also three dimensional rod puppets, but are different than the Ant and the Grasshopper puppets. I use rods stuck into each moving part of the puppets. I operate these puppets in full view acting as storyteller and puppeteer. This way of doing puppets is called adapted bunraku. Bunraku is a classical form of puppetry from Japan. Adapted bunraku borrows the Japanese idea of working in full view.

ROD PUPPETS

Rod puppetry is traditionally an Indonesia 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 20th century (around 1900- 1960). Muppets creator, Jim Henson, 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.

I use bunraku style puppetry in "Little Grandmother Spider Woman" and in the "Foamies".

THE FOAMIES

These puppets are a form of puppetry, which I 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 I use 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

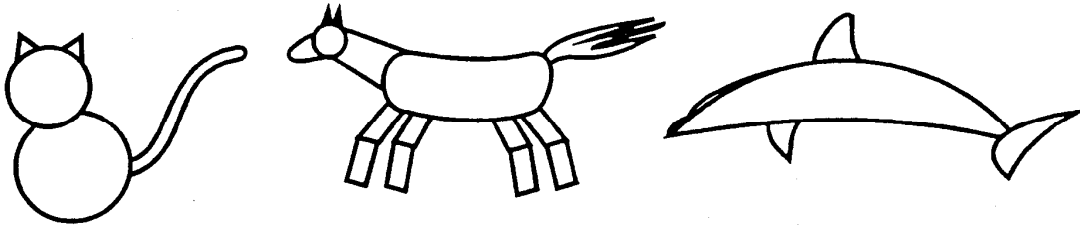
- Black (or blue, or green) poster board. One 7" X 11" or two 5-1/2" X 7"(poster board comes 22" X 28")
- Art tissue in assorted rainbow colors. One pack per 10 workshops
- Bamboo skewers. 12" length approx. one pack per 25 participants.
- 1/2" paper fasteners. 3/4" will work
- Masking tape. 1/2" width 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.

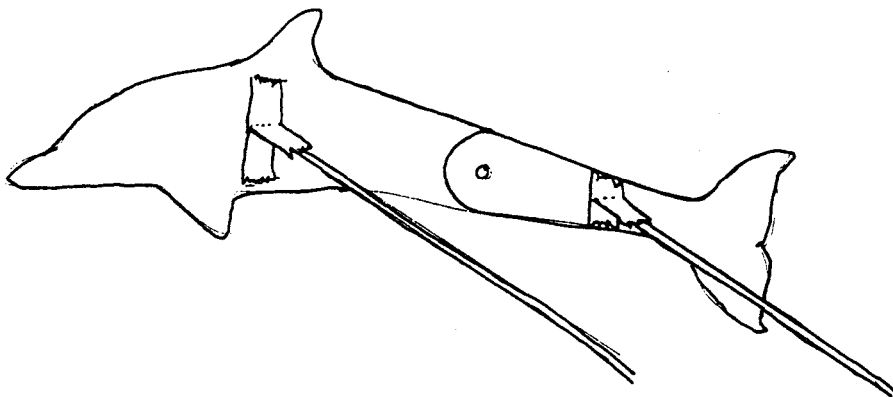
MAKING SHADOW PUPPETS

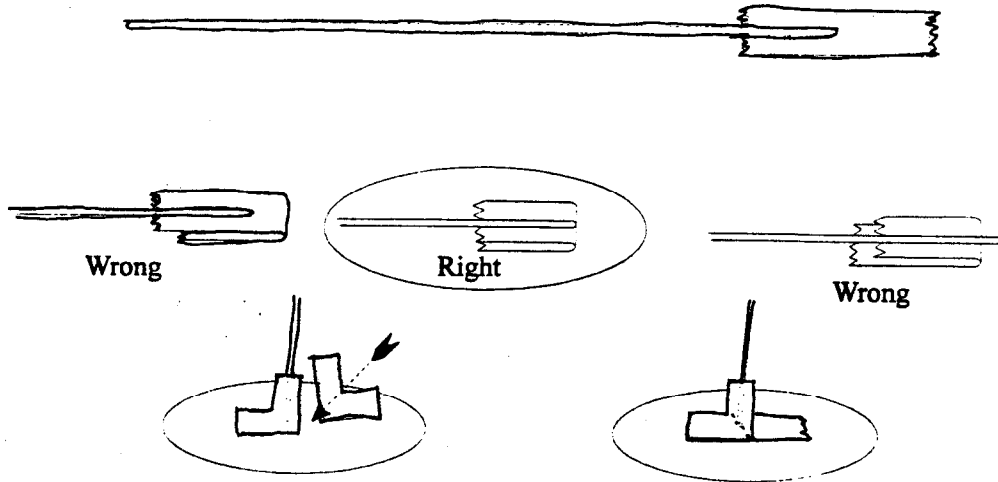
Have students draw the outline of a person or animal on their piece of 11" X 7" poster board, making the drawing as large as possible. Drawings smaller than their flat hand are difficult to work with.



Cut out drawings with scissors. For students above 2nd 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

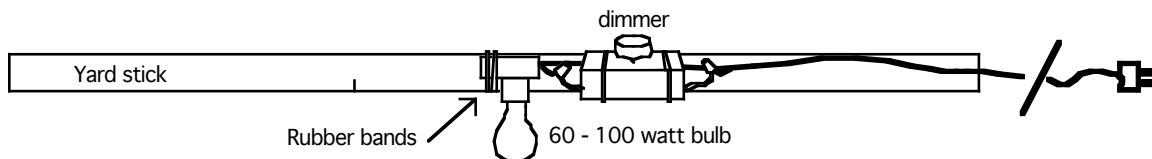
Make a compass for drawing a 24" circle. You can use a couple of pencils and rubber bands to fasten the pencils a foot apart on a yard stick as in the illustrations of the shadow puppet theater construction. After scribing the circle onto the display board, use a utility or razor knife to score the circle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

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

II. SCREEN

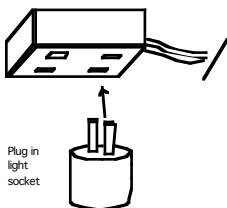
Lay a piece of either paper or shower curtain liner over the proscenium opening and mark and cut out the screen material in a square so that it overlaps the edges of the circle by an 1-1/2". Tape the corners with duct tape, stretching the screen as you tape. Next stretch and tape the middle points of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

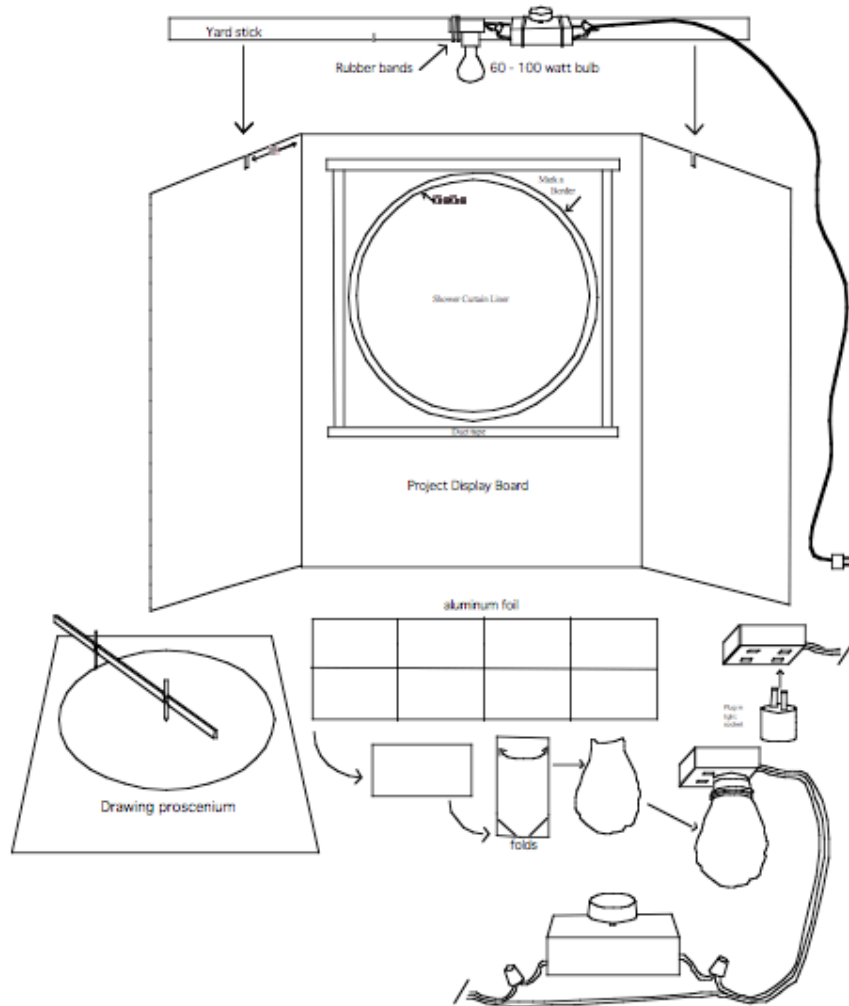
Install a 60 to 100 watt light bulb into socket. Make a lamp reflector out of a piece of aluminum foil 3 ft. long, folded into a rectangle approximately 6" X 8". Attach the visor to the light socket with a rubber band.

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



Wiring a dimmer switch into an extension cord

choose dimmer location

