

15 SUGGESTIONS FOR WORKING WITH A PUPPET IN CLEAR VIEW OF THE AUDIENCE

by Glenda Bonin © 2009

- (1) Find a puppet that appeals to you, fits your hand and makes you smile.
- (2) Take some time to think about the puppet and get to know it. Stand in front of a mirror with the puppet on your hand to see how it looks from the audience point of view.
- (3) Look closely at the puppet and imagine what sort of a character it can be: young or old, male or female, timid or bold, happy or sad, loud or silent, hesitant or quick, serious or silly, friendly or bashful, curious or knowledgeable, etc.
- (4) If you have decided your puppet will speak out loud, experiment with a few voices. Take turns talking to the puppet in your own voice, and then answering in the puppet voice. You will soon be able to find the voice that best fits your new performance partner.
- (5) If your puppet's mouth does not move, it is perfectly fine to give it a voice. The trick is for you to always look at the puppet and react to it when it is speaking. Your audience will accept that the words you are saying are coming from the puppet, but only if you are willing to suspend your disbelief.
- (6) If your puppet has a movable mouth (the sock puppet type), you will need to practice opening and closing the puppet's mouth so the words you say are close to the way words are formed when we say them. This takes time to perfect, so be patient.
- (7) In all cases, when you are standing in front of an audience with a puppet on your hand, it is important to be unconcerned about the fact that your mouth is moving and in clear sight of the audience. You are not trying to be a ventriloquist, and the sooner you accept this, the sooner the audience will forget about you, the puppeteer, and focus on the puppet.
- (8) Spend about 30-minutes each day to practice with the puppet. Remember, your puppet may become an important part of your storytelling or teaching team, and you need to get to know each other.
- (9) Try out different ways your puppet might show emotion or silently communicate. See if you can get the puppet to wave, clap hands, cover eyes, pick up something, look up, look down, glance all around, show surprise, be sad, sob, giggle, and take a bow. Each puppet is different, and you need to know what your puppet can and cannot do.

(10) Once you think you have found the puppet's personality, give your new friend a name.

(11) Consider where and when you might best use the puppet. This could be a time as simple as saying hello or goodbye, announcing a change in the routine, talking about something new or starting a discussion about a problem.

(Librarians and Pre-K teachers might use a puppet to signal to the kids that story time is about to start.)

(12) Once you have decided when you will use the puppet, look around for an interesting place for your puppet to "live." By this, I mean a place where you will put the puppet out of sight when you are not working with it. This could be a little suitcase, a pillow case, a backpack, a lunch box, a basket, a duffel bag, a toy box, etc. The idea here is to have a safe place to store the puppet so you are better able to control when the puppet will appear. Of course, this puppet place will be off-limits to the children, and it is not too difficult to establish his rule.

(13) Introduce the puppet to the class, or a small group of children.

(14) Ask the kids for feedback – they will be eager to help you.

(15) After presenting your puppet to an audience, try to present or practice at least once a week. This way you will continuously improve your performance techniques and develop new routines for your repertoire.