

Study Guide

A comprehensive study guide for teachers to help prepare students for performances by

The Cashore Marionettes



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This guide has been prepared by THE CASHORE MARIONETTES.

Questions regarding the content of the study guide or performances by THE CASHORE MARIONETTES may be addressed to:

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Introduction

This show is perhaps different from other puppet shows your class may have attended. Without the use of words, the marionettes create images and evoke emotions which are often humorous or whimsical but which, at times, may be quiet or serious. The effect is powerful, yet fragile. Audience behavior that might be acceptable in a different theatrical context may easily disrupt the mood of these performance pieces.

Please take some time before the show begins to tell your students of the important role they play as audience members in ensuring the success of a live presentation. Assure your students that they can discuss everything they see with you (and each other) after the performance is over. But during the show they should quietly focus on the puppets. Perhaps you can brainstorm ways to minimize distractions: such as closing doors silently, turning off beeping watches, not saying “Shhh,” etc.

Also let your class know that performers are attuned to audience reaction. Applause and laughter are the audience’s way of letting the performers know if they are doing a good job.

The Program

The performance, *Simple Gifts*, consists of a series of character portrayals and scenes from everyday life. Each piece sensitively portrays a theme by way of a close-up look at the life of a character - whether it be a homeless man rooting through the trash, a mother playing with her newborn baby, or a young boy flying a kite. The marionettes’ graceful and refined movements join with classical music and meaningful content to delight and amaze the audience.

Synopsis of the Program

Please do not discuss the characters or the specific content of the pieces with your students before they have seen the performance.

Due to time constraints or staging limitations, the following program is subject to change.

Maestro Janos Zelinka in "The Lark Ascending"

Music: The Lark Ascending by Ralph Vaughn Williams

A classical violinist appears to play a solo note for note.

Elmo in "The Stand-In"

Music: The Blue Danube Waltz by Johann Strauss

We see what happens when a volunteer from the audience fills in for an ailing circus performer.

Mother and Baby in "A Lullaby"

Music: Concerto in D Major, Largo by Antonio Vivaldi

An exploration of the tenderness between a mother and her newborn infant.

Ramul in "The Encounter"

A spiritual character out for his morning meditations becomes distracted by a chance encounter.

Old Mike in "Old Mike - No Address"

Music: Corral Nocturne by Aaron Copland

Examines the plight of the homeless as it exists in our cities.

Sara in "The Scholar"

A humorous piece on the theme of distractions examines what really happens when a young girl is sent to do her homework.

Cyclone in "A Pastoral"

Music: Symphony No. 6 in F Major by Ludwig v. Beethoven and The Moldau by Smetana

While enjoying his freedom out in the pasture a horse is bothered by a troublesome dragonfly.

Bo in "Simple Gifts"

Music: Calm and Flowing by Aaron Copland (Simple Gifts, a Shaker melody)

A young boy with spirits high flies his kite.

"The Quest"

Music: The Flying Dutchman by Wagner and The Triumphal March from *Aida* by Verdi

A venturesome young man attains an objective.

Biography

Joseph Cashore experienced his first “magical puppet moment” at the age of eleven when he made his first marionette fashioned from clothes pins, wood, and a tin can. Joe notes, “even though it was a simple puppet, for brief moments it almost seemed to be alive.” Since then Joe has sought to extend that magical moment of life.

After graduation from college Mr. Cashore made his second marionette, a traditional figure carved from wood with a movable mouth and horizontal control bar. He quickly discovered that in order to obtain the fluid motion he sought, he would have to create his own design. For the next nineteen years, while pursuing a career in oil painting, Joe experimented with marionette construction and devised completely new control mechanisms. He recalls, “As I began to solve technical problems and gain subtle control of the marionette body, I saw the possibility for greater depth of expression with marionettes.”

Joseph Cashore lives in Colmar, Pennsylvania. He graduated from the University of Notre Dame in 1971 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. Joe has been making marionettes for over 30 years and started working with them full-time in 1990. He performs in schools, theaters, and festivals throughout the United States and Canada as well as in Europe and Asia.

Awards

- 1991 Received a Henson Foundation Grant, an award intended to help promote puppetry to adult audiences.
- 1995 Awarded a Citation of Excellence, the highest honor an American puppeteer can receive, from UNIMA-USA, the oldest international theater organization in the world. UNIMA-USA states that Citations are “awarded to shows that touch their audiences deeply; that totally engage, enchant and enthrall.”
- 1996 Awarded a Pew Fellowship for Performance Art by the Pew Charitable Trusts based upon artistic accomplishment.

Vocabulary

Puppet

Any inanimate object which is manipulated in order to show an idea.

Hand Puppets

These are worn over the hand like a glove. If the puppet has arms, then the index finger works the head, and the thumb and middle finger work the arms.

Rod puppets

These are worked from below the puppet by sticks called rods. One rod comes down the middle of the puppet from inside the head. Other rods are usually attached to the hands.

Hand and Rod Puppets

The head of this kind of puppet is worked like a hand puppet, but rods are used to control the hands.

Shadow Puppets

These may be the oldest kinds of puppets. They usually are flat cut-outs with rods attached to any movable parts. They are performed behind a screen which is a thin sheet of cloth or paper. Light coming from behind the puppet makes the shadow of the puppet appear on the screen. The audience sees the shadow, not the puppet.

Marionette

The most complicated of all puppets, these are worked by strings or wires which are attached to the puppet. The strings go up to an arrangement of sticks called a control or controller which the puppeteer uses to work the marionette.

Bunraku

This kind of puppetry is honored by being designated as one of the National Treasures of Japan. The puppets stand about 4 feet tall and are Japanese men, women, or children in traditional costume. Most of the puppets are worked by 3 people: the main operator works the head and right hand; another works the left hand; and the third works the feet (or for female puppets, which have no feet, he works the bottom of the costume). The puppets are held in front of the puppeteers who are dressed all in black. They wear hoods over their faces except for the main operator. It takes more than twenty years before a puppeteer can become the main operator, so to honor his accomplishment his face is allowed to be seen. A Bunraku puppeteer must choose whether he will work male or female characters and must stick with that choice for his entire career. See the bibliography for a fictional book by Katherine Paterson about a young boy who aspires to be a Bunraku puppeteer.

Background

Origins People have been making puppets for at least 4000 years. The earliest were probably shadow puppets that originated in ancient China and India and other Oriental and Middle Eastern countries. Puppets have been found in the tombs of ancient Egypt and in the ruins of ancient Greece and Rome.

Marionettes The ancient Chinese used marionettes with movable mouths, eyes, eyebrows, and even fingers. The word marionette means “Little Mary”. In Europe about 1500 years ago, very few people could read or write, so puppet shows were used instead of books to teach people stories from the Bible. The stringed figure of Mary was called a “Little Mary” or, in French, “Marionette”. The name stuck and came to mean any puppet worked by strings.

United States In the U.S. the first puppeteers were the Native Americans. Many of the puppets they used probably started out as masks. Later, people from many different countries moved to the U.S. and brought their different forms of puppetry with them. The art of puppetry suffered a setback during the 1930s because of the Great Depression. Then came the invention of motion pictures, or movies, which became very popular and took away much of the audience for live theater. When puppetry became popular again, it was as entertainment for children. Puppets began to be seen on children’s TV programs. Popular ones included *Howdy Doody*, *Kukla, Fran and Ollie* and, of course, *Sesame Street*. Thanks to TV, the Muppets have become the most famous puppets in the world.

Organizations There are groups which help people learn about puppets and help puppeteers improve and meet each other. The Puppeteers of America is an organization with members throughout North America. Besides publishing a magazine, the Puppetry Journal, they host a National Festival that takes place in a different city each year. During festivals there are performances, workshops, puppet exhibits and sales, and many friendly people who share an interest in puppets. (Many teachers attend festivals to learn more about the unique role puppets can play in motivating and liberating students.) The organization is divided into 8 geographic regions, and each region also has its own Regional Festival every year. Many regions have scholarship programs which provide selected students with free registration at their festival.

Another important organization is UNIMA (Union Internationale des Marionnettes) which has members all over the world.

For more information write to:
The Puppeteers of America, Inc.
#5 Cricklewood Path
Pasadena, CA 91107

After the Show

Post Performance Areas for Further Examination or Inquiry

COMMUNICATION WITHOUT WORDS

Sample Discussion topics:

- Did you understand what was happening in each vignette even when no one was speaking? Why?
- Choose a puppet and list your impressions of some of the character's feelings and personality traits.

Sample Activities:

- Choose an emotion and try to demonstrate it without using words.
- Choose an emotion and try to demonstrate it without using any facial expressions - or use a mask to hide your face.

INTERPRETATION OF MUSIC

Sample Discussion topics:

- How did the music contribute to each vignette?
- What were some of the moods suggested by the music?
- Could the pieces of music have been interpreted/used in a different way?

Sample Activities:

- Choose a piece of music and have the students...
 - describe how the music makes them feel
 - describe a wordless scenario suggested by the music
 - write dialogue or a monologue with the music as background

Creative Writing

Sample Activities:

- Letter writing
 - to Mr. Cashore
 - to one of the characters expressing feelings about the piece
 - to one of the characters giving advice.
- Story continuation (What happens next...)
- Students use their imagination to construct a future for one of the marionettes in the performance.

Note: We particularly enjoy getting copies of the students' writings. If the students are writing to us directly please let them know how much we appreciate and enjoy their letters. Also please let them know that due to our very heavy touring schedule we generally are unable to write back. Please send correspondence to:

**The Cashore Marionettes
c/o Baylin Artists Management
18 West State Street, Suite 203
Doylestown, PA 18901**

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

Often students will have questions that they did not have the opportunity to ask during our question and answer session. We have therefore provided the answers to the questions we are most frequently asked.

Did you make the marionettes?

Yes, I made all the puppets, costumes, and props.

How long does it take to make a marionette?

The marionettes you saw in the show took about 6 months each to make. However, you can make a simpler marionette in a lot less time.

How many marionettes do you have or have you made?

I have made maybe 100 marionettes but now I only have about twenty. I used to sell them to other people but those were very simple marionettes compared to the ones I make now.

How do you learn to be a puppeteer? Is there a school?

Most puppeteers are self-taught. You can start out reading about puppetry in the library or you can just try to make a puppet yourself. The fun part for me was figuring out ways to improve the puppets, to get more realistic movements, and to make the marionettes do things I had never seen puppets do before. You can learn about puppetry in college but only at a very few places. I studied art in college and learned about sculpture, painting, and anatomy, which are all important for making marionettes.

How old were you when you made your first marionette?

I made my first marionette when I was eleven. I used a chunk of wood for the body, clothespins for the arms and legs, and a small tin can for the head. It was a very simple puppet but it was funny and it was easy to imagine that it was alive.

When I graduated from college I made another marionette. As I played with it I started to see ways of improving it. So I made another and the same thing happened. Eventually I had a lot of marionettes and thought I should put on a show.

Is it hard?

It does take a lot of work and a lot of practice to make marionettes and put on a show. But the work does not seem hard because I enjoy it so much. It is hard to control the marionettes at first but as I practice it gets easier.

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

How many strings do the marionettes have?

That depends on what the puppet has to do. A simple, yet functional, marionette can have as few as 9 strings: 2 on the head, 2 on the shoulders, 2 on the hands, 2 on the knees, and 1 on the back. If you want to, you can add 3 more strings; 2 on the elbows and 1 on the nose. For more specific or refined movement more strings are needed. Most of the puppets in the show today had twenty-some strings. The horse and the boy who flies a kite each have 36 strings each.

Do the marionettes ever get tangled?

The marionettes are transported in special cases that I have built so that they cannot get tangled during transportation. Then before the show I check every puppet to make sure all the strings are okay. But sometimes a string will end up in the wrong place during the performance and then I try to fix it without letting the audience know I'm having a problem.

Where do you get your ideas?

My ideas for characters come from everyday life. I keep a sketchbook and whenever I have an idea I write it down. I make many drawings of the different gestures the marionette will have to make in order to communicate its character.

Do your hands or arms get tired?

My hands and arms don't get tired but by the end of the show my right shoulder needs a rest. Try holding your arm straight out in front of you for a few minutes and you'll know what I mean.

Which is the hardest puppet to control?

Both the boy who flies a kite and the horse are difficult to control.

What are they made out of?

The heads, hands, and feet are made of papier mache or neoprene. The bodies are made of wood, wire, or different types of foam.

Why do you wear black?

I wear black to make myself less noticeable against the black background.

Bibliography

The Complete Book of Puppets and Puppeteering by Robert Ten Eyck Hanford (Sterling Pub. Co., NY, 1981)

Excellent for the serious beginner. Good philosophy and ethic. Touches on important basic points and common mistakes that are not always addressed in how-to books. Includes some history. Stresses importance of presentation and good manipulation. Good introduction to organizations and individuals working in puppetry on a full time basis. Not a lot of emphasis on puppet construction but good background for novice who is serious in a career/vocation in puppetry. Obtaining and constructing a puppet is only a first step.

Marionette Sourcebook by Luman Coad (Charlemagne Press, Vancouver, 1993)

Very good for the serious beginner. Hundreds of practical ideas and useful tips for designing, constructing, stringing, and manipulating marionettes. This and many other good puppetry books are available from The Puppeteers of America, #5 Cricklewood Path, Pasadena, CA 91107.

Making Puppets Come Alive by Larry Engler and Carol Fijan (Taplinger, NY, 1973)
Good book for hand puppet manipulation exercises.

Puppeteer by Kathryn Lasky (MacMillan Publishing Co., NY, 1985)

Follows puppeteer Paul Vincent Davies for one year through the development of his solo performance "Aladdin And His Wonderful Lamp," through conception, script writing, character voice development, puppet construction, costuming, and rehearsals with director to opening night. Lots of B&W pictures.

Puppet Factory by Imogene Forte (Incentive Publications, Nashville, 1984)

Many very simple puppets in a variety of types and media. Good for lower school. Good skin and bones show ideas which allow for much student creativity and imagination. User friendly with big pictures and minimal words.

The Master Puppeteer by Katherine Paterson (Crowell, NY, 1975).

Fictional story appropriate for middle school and up. The main character is a young boy who aspires to be a Bunraku puppeteer like his father.