

BRIGHTER FUTURES

Puppet Creation & Animation

A practical workshop guide

For teachers, youth workers and community facilitators

Originally developed by Rainbow Action Group
Revised by Brighter Futures - August 2026

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About this guide

This guide sets out a practical programme for creating and animating puppets with children. The full programme contains 11 sessions, but facilitators can adapt the sequence, pace and level of support to suit their group.

The activities begin with simple paper puppets, move on to puppets made from found objects, and finish with sock puppets, character work and short group performances. The emphasis is on making, imagination, communication and working with other people.

Important

This is a creative learning resource, not a therapeutic or clinical intervention. Children should never be pressured to disclose personal experiences. Facilitators should follow their organisation's safeguarding and health and safety procedures at all times.

A note on the original resource

This workshop was originally created under the Rainbow Action Group name. This revised Brighter Futures edition removes the original photographic material and makes the activities self-contained so that the guide can be used without relying on particular films, characters or external media.

Workshop aims

The workshop is designed to give children opportunities to explore dramatic play, character building, making and communication through puppetry.

Core aims

- Create puppets from paper, socks and found or reused objects.
- Bring puppets to life through voice, movement and gesture.
- Make choices about shape, colour, materials and character.
- Use puppets to communicate and interact with other children.
- Develop confidence in creating and presenting an original character.
- Work with others to devise and perform a short story.

Questions to keep returning to

- How can we make an inanimate object seem alive?
- What can shape, colour, texture and movement tell us about a character?
- How can a puppet communicate without using words?
- How does a puppet change when we give it a voice, a history and a personality?
- How can two puppets interact to create a story?

What children may practise

- Designing, making and operating a simple puppet.
- Using voice and movement to communicate character.
- Listening and responding during improvised exchanges.
- Working collaboratively when creating a short performance.
- Reflecting on creative choices and describing why they made them.

Observation rather than testing

There is no need to grade the work. Facilitators can look for growing willingness to take part, make creative choices, communicate through a puppet, listen to others and contribute to a shared activity.

Why puppetry?

A puppet gives a child something concrete to make and operate. It can also create a little distance between the child and the character they are presenting: the puppet can speak, move, joke, disagree or invent a story in ways that may feel different from speaking directly as themselves.

For this reason, puppetry can be a useful creative route into imagination and communication. The aim of the workshop is not to analyse what children create, but to give them space to experiment with character, voice, movement and storytelling.

The programme deliberately uses simple and inexpensive materials. Found and reused objects are encouraged where appropriate, helping children see that a character can be created from ordinary things rather than specialist equipment.

Workshop overview

Stage	Sessions	Main activity
1. Paper Puppets	2	Make a simple paper puppet; explore voice, movement and introductions.
2. Found-Object Hand Puppets	3	Create a puppet from reused objects; develop a character and short introduction.
3. Sock Puppets and Short Plays	6	Plan and make a sock puppet; work in small groups to devise and perform a short play.

Suggested materials

- Paper, card, pens and drawing materials.
- Tape, glue and suitable decorative craft materials.
- Clean found or reused objects that are safe to handle.
- Socks and simple materials for adding features.
- A simple puppet stage or a length of dark fabric, if available.
- Paper for character notes and short scripts.

Workshop mapping

1. Puppetry introduction - 2 sessions

Begin by discussing what puppets are and how they can be brought to life. A facilitator can demonstrate several simple examples made from paper or everyday objects. Ask children to notice how movement, voice, shape and colour affect what they think about a character.

Children then make simple paper puppets, add features and use them to greet and speak to other puppets. The aim is to make the first experience quick, playful and achievable.

2. Understanding and making found-object hand puppets - 3 sessions

Children move on to creating a more developed hand puppet using at least one clean found or reused object. Encourage them to think about why they chose an object and what it suggests about the character.

Once the puppet is made, each child plans a short introduction. They can decide the character's name, age, interests, family, home and other details. The short presentation gives them a reason to practise movement, voice and character choices.

3. Sock puppets and short plays - 6 sessions

The final stage brings together the skills from the earlier sessions. Children plan and make an individual sock-puppet character, then form small groups to create a short play with a beginning, middle and end.

Time is allowed for planning, making, writing or improvising, rehearsing and performing. The programme ends with a shared reflection on what the group has made and learned.

Adapt the programme

The session numbers come from the original workshop plan. A facilitator may shorten or extend activities according to the age of the group, access needs, session length and the time available.

Section 1 - Paper Puppets

2 SESSIONS

The first stage introduces the basic idea that a simple object can become a character through design, movement and voice.

Children will have opportunities to

- Create a simple paper puppet.
- Notice how features, colour and movement change the character.
- Give the puppet a name and a voice.
- Use the puppet to greet and speak to other puppets.
- Begin building a simple background and personality for the character.

Session 1 - Introduction to puppetry

Begin with a short facilitator demonstration and an open discussion. Useful questions include:

- Where have you seen puppets before - live, on television, online or in films?
- What different materials could a puppet be made from?
- How can hands, body movement and voice make an object seem alive?
- What do shape, colour and texture suggest about a character?
- Can a puppet communicate without speaking?

Show a few simple examples or demonstrate with an everyday object. Keep the emphasis on observation and experimentation rather than on copying a particular character.

Session 2 - Make and animate a paper puppet

Give each child a square sheet of paper and demonstrate a simple fold-and-tape method that creates a moving mouth or puppet head. Children then add eyes and other features using the materials available.

Ask each child to give the puppet a name. Once the puppets are ready, bring the group together and begin with very simple interactions:

1. Walk around the room and have the puppets say hello to one another.
2. Introduce the puppet by name.
3. Pair up and allow the puppets to have a short conversation.
4. Give the character a few basic details, such as where they live, favourite activities or food, and something they like doing.

At the end, children can write down a few facts about the character they have created. Keep the puppets and notes together if they will be used in later sessions.

Section 2 - Found-Object Hand Puppets

3 SESSIONS

This stage asks children to develop a more individual character using at least one clean found or reused object.

Children will have opportunities to

- Explore how ordinary objects can be repurposed creatively.
- Make design choices that suggest a particular character.
- Develop a character through voice, movement and background details.
- Prepare and present a short character introduction.
- Reflect on the choices made during the process.

Session 1 - From object to character

Ask the group to suggest everyday objects that might become part of a puppet. Discuss how an object changes when it is given eyes, a mouth, hands, hair, clothing or a particular way of moving.

Encourage each child to choose at least one found object. This can be something brought from home or selected from materials prepared by the facilitator. The object does not need to look like a puppet at first; part of the activity is imagining what it might become.

The facilitator can demonstrate one simple method of constructing a head, body and hands from reused materials before children begin their own designs.

Session 2 - Complete the puppet and develop the character

Children continue making their puppets, then start building the character behind them. Ask them to consider details such as:

- What is the character called?
- How old are they?
- Where do they live?
- Who is important to them?
- What do they enjoy?
- How do they move and speak?
- Is there anything unusual or funny about them?

Each child then plans a short introduction of around 30 seconds to one minute. This may be written down or rehearsed informally, depending on the group.

Session 3 - Character introductions and reflection

Allow a little rehearsal time, then invite each child to introduce their puppet to the group. A simple puppet stage can be made using dark fabric, but this is optional.

After each introduction, encourage supportive attention from the rest of the group. Finish by asking children to reflect on what helped make their puppet feel like an individual character: the object they chose, the colours, the voice, the movement, or something else.

Section 3 - Sock Puppets and Short Plays

6 SESSIONS

The final stage brings together making, character work, communication and group storytelling.

Children will have opportunities to

- Plan and create an original sock-puppet character.
- Use verbal and nonverbal communication to animate the puppet.
- Work in a small group to build a complete short story.
- Rehearse and perform a short puppet play.
- Talk about the creative process and the experience of working together.

Session 1 - Plan the puppet

Begin by looking at a few facilitator-made examples or by demonstrating how a plain sock can become a character. Ask children to think about what makes a puppet appear lively and individual.

- What might the character be called?
- What kind of personality do they have?
- How do they move?
- How do they speak - quickly, slowly, loudly, quietly?
- What colours, textures or features fit the character?
- What does the character like or dislike?

Give children time to sketch or write down ideas before they begin making.

Session 2 - Create the sock puppet

Use one session for making. Each child starts with a sock and uses the available materials to add features that fit the character they planned. Encourage children to test the puppet as they work: a feature that looks good on the table may move differently when the puppet is being operated.

Sessions 3 to 5 - Create and rehearse the plays

Form small groups, with up to four children in each where practical. Each child introduces their puppet to the others. The group then decides what kind of story could bring the characters together.

The only essential structure is that the story should have a beginning, a middle and an end. Children can write a simple script, use notes, or develop the scene through guided improvisation, depending on what works best for the group.

Across these sessions, allow time to:

1. Decide what happens in the story.
2. Make sure each puppet has something useful to do.
3. Work out where the puppets enter and leave.
4. Practise voices and movement.
5. Rehearse the complete play several times.
6. Make changes when something does not work as expected.

Session 6 - Perform and reflect

Set up the performance space with the group. Each small group performs its play for the other participants. After each performance, allow time for a few questions or positive observations about the characters, story and puppetry.

Once all groups have performed, bring everyone together for the final reflection.

Keep performance low-pressure

The aim is participation rather than polish. If a child does not want to perform in front of the full group, consider another role or a smaller audience rather than forcing participation.

Closing reflection

End the programme by asking children what they discovered about making and operating puppets. Questions might include:

- Which puppet-making technique did you enjoy most?
- What made a puppet feel alive?
- Was it easier to create a voice, a movement or a personality?
- What was different about working alone and working in a group?
- What would you do differently if you made another puppet?
- What are you most pleased with?

The finished puppets can be kept for future creative work, display or further storytelling activities, subject to the arrangements of the group or organisation.

Brighter Futures

Wellbeing, creativity and connection in East Sussex.