

# Basic Puppetry

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## Suppliers

**Puppet Productions** is the originator of the modern church puppet ministry and, in my opinion, has some of the best puppets and puppetry resources out there.

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## Organizing a Puppet Ministry

### *Purpose*

There are a number of possible reasons for having a puppet team. These include...

## **Inward Purposes**

A puppet team can serve as a discipleship group to help encourage spiritual growth in its members.

It is a great way to get people actively involved in ministry.

## **Outward Purposes**

A puppet team can enhance your children's church, VBS and other children's ministries.

It can be a powerful outreach tool for events such as Backyard Bible Clubs.

You can perform small programs regularly in your own church, or put together a larger program to take on tour.

## ***Organization***

Puppet teams can be organized with adults, youth, and even older children as puppeteers. No matter which route you choose to go, set high standards. Require puppeteers to commit to the team. School sports and other extra-curricular activities require a high level of commitment. For example, you can't be on a sports team if you miss practices. It is reasonable for church activities to require the same level of commitment. Put together a high quality program and you'll attract high quality people who are willing to put in the work to make it a success.

## **Recommended Approach for Starting a New Team**

- Acquire puppets and equipment
- Make announcements and build interest
- Schedule a training meeting.
- Hold Auditions. Use pre determined standards, including technique, attitude, availability for rehearsals and self-discipline.
- Use a "contract" with your members to define the expectations of membership. (For youth or children, it's a good idea to have the parents sign the contract as well.)
- Begin rehearsals. Always hold rehearsals at the same time.
- Perform! (Be sure to schedule adequate rehearsals to be able to maintain high quality performances. On the other hand, if you don't perform enough, the puppeteers will get burned out on practicing. So, it's important to strike a balance.)

## **Basic Technique**

There are many types of puppets. This workshop will cover the basic techniques for moving mouth hand puppets. One hand should be inserted through the body of the puppet into the head. The fingers should be above the roof of the puppet's mouth, and the thumb in the puppet's jaw. Some puppets have an elastic straps that go above your fingers.

The goal is to make the puppet seem alive. It should mimic the natural movements of a real person.

### ***Mouth Action***

#### **Lip Sync**

Keep the mouth closed when the puppet is not speaking. Open the puppet's mouth once for each syllable spoken. (If the puppet is speaking or singing quickly, it is acceptable to open the mouth once for every syllable.) Don't open the mouth all the way, unless the puppet is yelling.

#### **Word Biting**

This refers to keeping the mouth open, and closing it for each syllable spoken. It is a common mistake for beginners. It looks very unnatural.

#### **Lid Flipping**

This refers to the puppet flipping the top of its head up instead of dropping its jaw. When a person speaks, he holds his head still and drops his lower jaw. Puppets must mimic this natural action. This is very difficult, because the muscles that pull down the thumb are weaker than the ones that raise the fingers. It takes time to develop the thumb muscles enough to correct this.

#### ***Posture***

The puppet should stand up straight, and not lean to the side or on the stage. In order to look natural, the puppet needs to maintain eye contact with the audience or the character he is speaking with. Beginners tend to have the puppet stare at the ceiling.

#### ***Height***

When on stage, must be held high enough to be seen, but not so high that the puppeteer's arm is exposed. Generally, the puppet's bellybutton should be level with the top of the stage. Keep in mind the sight-lines of the audience. If the audience is lower than the stage, for example, puppets toward the back of the stage must be held higher to remain visible.

## ***Entrances and Exits***

It looks very odd for a puppet to just pop into or out of view on stage. The most natural entrance is to come up stairs. The puppet should "bounce" up and down as it moves forward into view. Generally, it should take about three to five "steps" to enter. (Be sure to bounce the entire puppet, and not just nod the puppet's head.) To exit, turn the puppet around and reverse the procedure.

## ***Arm Movement***

There are a couple of different ways puppets arms can be controlled. The most basic is to use rods attached to the puppets arms. Beginners should only operate one arm at a time, and allow the other arm to hang naturally at the puppets side.

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