How To . . . Use Puppets

Value: Puppets can be a great asset to any children’s ministry program. They are often used to help teach a Biblical truth in a manner which the audience can easily identify with and understand. Children respond to puppets, despite their mood or circumstances.

Purpose: Develop a purpose for your puppet ministry which will serve as a guiding tool for your scripts, lessons, songs, stories, and general interaction.

Philosophy: Each puppet ministry philosophy will probably be a little different. You need to decide why you have a puppet ministry and what you want to accomplish with it.

Ideas for use: Puppets can be used in a variety of ways. The following is a list of some ideas:
1. “Sing” a special music number
2. Help lead songs during song time
3. Teach a Bible verse for the theme of the day
4. Humor
5. Question and Answer time
6. Tell a story
7. Act out a skit dealing with a particular theme

Do not have extremely lengthy puppet scripts and stories. It can bore the kids and cause them to be distracted by something else

Tips and Tricks: Becoming a “Master Puppeteer” does take some work, but with a little effort puppets can play “big” in your ministry. Here are some helpful ideas for you to consider and practice when you are working with puppets:
1. Puppet care
   a. Do not lay them on the floor.
   b. Keep food and drink away from the puppets.
   c. Treat the puppets with care. They are easy to damage.
   d. Always put the puppets away when you are done using them.
   e. Store the puppets properly. Do not just throw them in a box.
2. Hand movement
   a. As you move your hand, you should keep your hand flat and only move your thumb.
   b. Moving your other fingers results in “flipping the lid,” which is when the puppet’s head moves back and forth instead of just his mouth.
   c. One way to help prevent “flipping the lid” is to cross your middle finger over your index finger and then move your thumb
   d. Open the mouth wide enough to emphasize the words you are saying
   e. Make sure you speak loudly from behind the stage so the audience can hear you.
3. Arm position
   a. The arm used to manipulate the puppet should be held straight in the air, locked in position by your head.
   b. Your hand should be slightly angled downward so the puppet can have eye contact with the audience.
4. Lip synchronization
   a. Start each word with the puppet’s mouth closed.
   b. Be sure to speak each syllable.
   c. Practice saying your name and counting to fifty.
5. Your eyes
   a. Keep your eye on the puppet you are manipulating. This will help you make any adjustments necessary.
   b. Do not be a distraction to other puppeteers.
   c. Pay attention to what is taking place.
6. Entrances and Exits
   a. Entrances and exits should be a gentle stepping motion, not an elevator motion.
   b. Make the puppets appear life-like and natural.
7. Eye contact
   a. The puppet should make eye contact with the audience as well as with the puppet(s) to whom he is speaking.
   b. Do not get caught having your puppet talking to the ceiling or to the floor.
8. Proper height
   a. Your puppet’s “belly button” should be at the height of the curtain bar for your stage.
   b. It is easy to be too high and have your arm show, or to be too low and have your puppet shrink.
9. Proper spacing
   a. When working with several puppets at one time, you want to be sure to space the puppets out: you do not want them to be too close, nor do you want them to be too far apart.
   b. Make sure that you do not lean on the stage; it could fall over.
10. Puppet’s posture
    a. Keep his back straight
    b. Be careful about his leaning forward, back, or to the side.
11. Puppet’s movement
    a. Remember—Transfer your life into the life of the puppet
    b. A puppet’s movements can make him seem realistic
    c. Caution: Do not overdue the movements
    d. Practice the following:
       1) Walking—gentle bounce
       2) Running—quicker bounce
       3) Skating—a gentle glide from side to side
       4) Jumping—a short run, a jump and gliding motion with a little lean forward on the landing, then a gentle stop
12. Rod arm movement
    a. Rod arms are useful in helping the puppet come alive.
    b. The key here is to practice using one rod at a time until you feel comfortable using two.
13. Practice, Practice, Practice, Practice, Practice, Practice

Odds and Ends: Miscellaneous information
1. Character Puppets:
   a. Choose a voice that you will use for that puppet all of the time.
   b. Choose a name for the puppets that will be easy for the kids to remember.
   c. Be creative in developing the character’s character. Will he be smart, slow, old, young, talk with an accent, etc.?
2. Puppet Stages:
   a. Puppet stages can be very expensive to purchase, but you can make your own for very minimal costs.
   b. There are some material that can be purchased to give you plans for making a puppet stage to suit your needs.
3. Proper Care:
   a. If at all possible, keep your puppets off the floor; this will help them keep clean and prevent them from being stepped on or sat upon.
b. Keep food away from your puppets and make sure your hands are clean when you are using your puppets.
c. Always be cautious when handling puppets. Treat them with care.
d. Storage ideas:
   1) Store them in a flat storage box, which is easy to stack and transport.
   2) Store them in a plastic storage bin. I wrap them in a plastic bag and then place them in the bin. (Labeling the box also helps you know where each of your puppets goes.)
   3) Construct a puppet rack with a 1” x 6” block and a dowel rod. You can place the puppets on the rod and cover them with a bag to keep them clean.
   4) Store them in a packing trunk.

4. For the shorter puppeteer, kneeling pads are a nice thing to have. Large pieces of foam stacked up works very well, and it is also comfortable.

5. Puppet Resources:
   a. One Way Street, Inc., P.O. Box 5077, Englewood, CO 80155-5077, Orders: 1-800-569-4537; Customer Service: 303-790-1188; Web: www.onewaystreet.com
   b. Puppet Productions, P.O. Box 1066, DeSoto, TX 75123-1066, 1-800-854-2151
   c. Christian Book Distributors, P.O. Box 7000, Peabody, MA 01961-7000, 1-800-247-4784; Web: www.Christianbook.com
   d. Axtell Expressions, Inc., 230 Glencrest Circle, Ventura, CA 93003-1305, 805-642-7282; Web: www.axtell.com
   e. The Train Depot, 5015 Tampa West Boulevard, Tampa, FL 33634-2423, 1-800-229-KIDS

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