

# The World Through Wooden Eyes

## Occasional Papers

### **Creative Thinking and the Puppeteer**

Based on the question from so many puppeteers 'how do we start', I tried to outline some of the most important elements to analyse this question. Fundamental to answering this question is creative thinking. Although this may seem obvious, it is surprising how this element of the creative process and the initial planning of a production are missing.

The time spent on proper planning is priceless; it can save time and frustration, as well as money. Although most of us subconsciously know the importance of thinking, production deadlines and other frustrations lead to us not using this valuable resource. So this should always be our starting point.

The puppet theatre is a visual theatre where design aesthetics have the greatest impact. Develop design projects for each production as a means of ensuring that a production has a well thought out cohesive overall style. Pay particular attention to the body language of the puppet and its expressive hands and faces that can be read over distances.

Searching for new methods of working and ideas, creating new puppet productions combines two important elements, dramaturgy and scenography, often seen as two separate subjects, in the puppet theatre they work together. Also of the most important ingredients of the puppet theatre invention and a surprise are essential.

In an educational context we get used to dealing with scientific ideas developed to solve problems; the puppet theatre is no different. Creative and rational thinking is essential to achieving aims and objectives required by the demands of the established idea. New and effective ideas are the result of the pleasure and a sense of achievement in discovering them and applying them to a production that really works.

Ideas come in many ways, shapes and forms and can be applied to many aspects of a production, and they are directly linked to the imagination and creativity of the individuals involved in the creative process of producing new and original work. Thinking, and the development of a logical train of thought to test, and realise ideas or concepts is essential. Everyone is different and has different ways of thinking and working, even so, thinking, logic and reasoning are essential to achieving desired results.

Invention has resulted in virtually everything that we make use of in our daily lives, why shouldn't invention be a fundamental requirement in the creation of new work and ideas for puppet theatre production. The discoveries that we make during the creative process enriches both the creative team and the audiences who are the prime receivers of our efforts.

New and innovative work and ideas will always be needed to ensure the future of the ancient art and craft of the puppet theatre and future generations of puppeteers.

Generations of creative artists of all disciplines have left us a legacy of inspirational material and ideas that generate new thinking and ideas, but most puppeteers make very little use of them. Without new ideas the puppet theatre will never survive. New ideas will only secure a future, and the basis for new developments.

New and innovative work and ideas enable us to find simpler and more efficient ways of working and producing more inspiring productions. Creating new work is an expression or evidence of the human soul that inspires and entertains people. Finding new and innovative ideas is a fundamental part of the creative thinking process. Many of the finest puppet productions deal with the greatest ideas and ideals of human kind and explore the beliefs and values of individuals.

The puppet theatre is a composite of languages of expression, and not just words, or the spoken word. Words can have many connotations and different meanings. One of the basic techniques used preparing puppet theatre productions is that of a brainstorming exercise using single words, or combinations of words, related to a topic. Invented language, vocal sound patterns, or the use of single words by applying a range of intonations to express different meanings and emotions. Use visual imagery for inspiration.

In the same way as you take a line for walk, take a word for a walk. When creating characters, give them a history before trying to develop dialogue. Watch and listen to characters in different situations. Listen to the speech patterns and rhythms. Malapropisms are interesting, as are combined words. I well remember a Polish puppeteer using the non-existent word 'entwitched'. Meaning entertained and bewitched.

When identifying an argument to develop or putting a series of ideas or arguments together to provide a line of reasoning, keep it as objective and simple as possible. Find arguments that can provide for the development of ideas being proposed. Avoid elaborate dialogues, the puppet cannot sustain them. How can you use visual expressions to project ideas? When starting out to develop a scenario use the basis of the well made play; a beginning, where all of the characters and actions are introduced at a slow pace; middle, where dramatic conflicts are developed; and an end, where conflicts are resolved and ultimately end in peace. This is based on an ancient Japanese structure Jo-Ha-Kyu to be found in all Japanese arts and theatre performance.

The process of creative thinking in the development of a puppet theatre production can often be a solitary experience unless there is a collaborative creative team. The puppet theatre can also suffer from the lack of well informed critics fully conversant with the development of the puppet theatre and the finest examples of puppet theatre productions. In most cases puppet theatre productions lack the luxury of a director or experienced artistic leader whose selective eye, and cultured mind, not only shapes the production, but also functions as the intermediary between the production and the audience that has a substantial role to play as part collaborator in the process. When the production leaves the rehearsal space where the works structure has been created. The meeting of production and audience for the first time is the start of another part of the process of the evolution of a work which should change to continue to keep it alive.

Where there is no director, the competent arts critic can be invaluable to perform the role of intermediary between actor/puppeteer and the audience. For many years there have been discussions about the role of the critic and the puppet theatre and many puppeteers have expressed the view that puppet theatre doesn't need them.

A check list

Keep note books, sketch books, and albums of inspirational pictorial references and ideas. Study cartoons and caricatures.

Thinking clearly, logically and creatively is fundamental to a successful result.  
Conceptualise. I have a concept, but do I have the knowledge, skills and experience to realise it?  
Do a SWAT assessment (strengths, weaknesses opportunities and threats)  
Develop a sense of ownership  
Use reasoning and memory recall, calculative reasoning.  
There is no one way of doing things.  
Learn through self discovery. Self realisation.  
Apply what you think and learn.  
Value first thoughts and ideas.  
Learn to think effectively; learn to make connections between different thoughts and experiences. Memory recall is essential in the process of development and discovery and the understanding of concepts. Think outside the box – the one that you usually inhabit.  
Develop a logical approach to research and discovery. Critical and analytic thinking is important.  
Make thinking time. It is an integral part of the process of developing ideas. Develop thinking time without distractions. Evaluate your thinking time – what did you learn?  
Where do you think that you might go next? What could or should be done next? Keep on questioning. How could it be done differently? How could it be done better? How well does the project work?  
Seek inspiration from the riches that we are surrounded by.  
Use inanimate objects to discover their inner actions, lives, motivation and language. What are inanimate objects trying to tell you; their structural language?  
Think of different and exciting ways of approaching ideas and concepts.  
Use the basic three part structure of the well made play. The beginning where the main characters are introduced; the middle where conflicts develop; the end where the conflicts are resolved.  
Word limits. Don't 'do' what you can say better, don't 'say' what you can do better. Create word pictures. Use 'doing words'. Words that can be visualised and physicalised. Turn words into pictures. Focus on images and body language. The importance of editing – try to say things with only 50% of what you have written.  
Study all forms of music and the importance of music in the puppet theatre. Listen to music – not normally the type of music that you usually listen to.  
Doodle – take the line for a walk.  
Try not to create puppet characters that do what humans can do better. Look for puppetesque qualities.  
Study the different dance, mime and movement techniques.  
Always ask three key questions. Why do I want to do it? How am I going to do it? For whom am I going to do it?  
Remember that the audience is part collaborator in the development of a successful performance.  
Give the audience what they want and more.  
The puppet theatre, in all of its forms and function is the central means of expression.  
When performing with a puppet neutralise yourself to avoid distraction during their performance.  
Learn to be self-critical. Get feedback. Explain or discuss your ideas with others – children are great critics.  
Remember that the actor in the puppet theatre requires a wide range of performance skills.  
Discover the roles and functions of the actor on the puppet stage.  
Take risks – make each project a challenge.  
Don't copy. If you cannot improve on an idea don't copy it.  
Don't deliver studio workshops for a paying audience.  
Be passionate about what you do.  
Beware of fashionable tendencies.  
Most puppeteers lack good vocal skills. There are many ways of developing a sonorous

voice. There are many basic voice training programmes on the internet, also good voice workshops available elsewhere. Make use of them.

Learn the basics of stage craft and the craftsmanship of performance.

Maintain production values; study these values in other forms of entertainment.

Study the vast riches of the discoveries of previous generations of puppeteers worldwide.

Develop a passion for the art and craft of the puppet theatre.

There is no success without endless hard work and rehearsal.

Add something new no matter how insignificant.

The World through Wooden Eyes and the Ideas Store has one of the finest resources available to all who wish to achieve the highest professional levels of skills, knowledge and experience in the creation of creative puppet theatre. We have an ongoing mentoring programme dealing with all component elements in large and small scale puppet theatre production.

Do contact us on: [www.theworldthroughwoodeneyes.co.uk](http://www.theworldthroughwoodeneyes.co.uk)

John M. Blundall

August 2010