

# How to Make Javanese Shadow Puppets



**Aurelia Gomez**

## Motivation

Ask students to name all of the different types of puppets that they are aware of. What are puppets for? Explain that *wayang kulit* are shadow puppets made in Java out of water buffalo hide. They tell epic stories that are very important to their culture. What are epics? What stories are important to the students? Look at *wayang kulit* or images of *wayang kulit* and discuss the aspects of the puppets, their characters, their features, and the way that they are highly decorated, even though they are designed to appear in shadow. Tell your students to think of a character that has something really important to say that they would like to make into a puppet.

## Procedures

1. Have students sketch out their ideas for figures on scrap paper. Encourage them to think about the main shape of the figure and how that form will convey a sense of attitude, an emotion, or a value. Have them draw one shape for the body and legs. Draw the arms separately. Older students can draw the arms in two pieces—one from the

shoulder to the elbow and the other from the elbow to the hand.

2. Cut out the scrap paper and place the shapes on the stiff paper or used manila folders. Trace around the shapes and cut them out.
3. Punch holes in the shoulders for the arms and at the tops of the arms and again at the elbows if they made the arms in two pieces.
4. Use paper fasteners to assemble the pieces.
5. Use small nails to puncture patterns where light can go through the puppets.
6. Have students color their puppets with markers.
7. Use tape to attach the dowels or thin sticks to the puppet body and the arms.
8. Make or find a shadow screen or a light source and look at the shadow of the puppet.

## Evaluation

- Have students share their puppets by holding them up and talking about their characters. Use or make a shadow screen for this event.
- Make a puppet display and have students write descriptions of their puppet character.

- Stage a shadow puppet play using the entire class and their puppets.
- Have students work in small groups to write an original play that they can perform with their puppets.
- Create a tableau on a bulletin board by arranging the puppets in different positions. Use it as an inspiration for writing or storytelling. 🌀

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## WEB LINK

[moifa.org/exhibitions/dancingshadows.html](http://moifa.org/exhibitions/dancingshadows.html)



Left: Ki Enthus Susmono, designer and performer, Rasimin, carver and painter, Rama and Sinta. Rama and Sinta are the two protagonists in the Ramayana, Solo Central Java, Indonesia, 1992. Rama, 33 x 14" (84 x 35 cm); Sinta, 24 x 9" (61 x 23 cm). Water buffalo hide and horn, water-based paint, colored dyes, fish glue, gold leaf, metal, cotton. International Folk Art Foundation Collection, Museum of International Folk Art, DCA, Santa Fe, NM. Photo by Blair Clark.

Below: Ki Enthus Susmono, designer and performer, Rasimin, carver and painter, Brahalala Ireng, Black Brahalala, a black giant in the Mahabharata who is an incarnation of Krishna. Solo, central Java, Indonesia, 1992. 50 x 27" (127 x 69 cm). Water buffalo hide and horn, wood, water-based paint, colored dyes, fish glue, gold leaf, metal, cotton. International Folk Art Foundation Collection, Museum of International Folk Art, DCA, Santa Fe, NM. Photo by Blair Clark.

### Objectives

Students will:

- understand how *wayang kulit* (Javanese shadow puppets) are used in Java to tell epic stories that include references to contemporary life.
- learn about the materials and methods used to create *wayang kulit*.
- find their own solutions in the process of creating shadow puppets by exploring materials, shapes, patterns, forms, and color.

### Materials

- scrap paper for drawing
- stiff paper (used manila folders work)
- pencils
- eraser
- scissors
- hole punches
- paper fasteners
- 1/8" dowels or thin sticks
- masking tape
- small nails
- 4 x 6" (10 x 15 cm) foam pieces

