

LANGUAGE ARTS: HANDOUT D

Hands-on Visual and Performing Arts Extension Activity: Shadow Puppets

CHINESE SHADOW PUPPETS

Legend has it that shadow puppetry in China originated more than two thousand years ago. The emperor of that time is said to have been mesmerized by a performance with puppets lit from behind that featured an image of his favorite concubine. Often, there were musical scores for the plays, which also featured elaborate architectural and landscape sets; myriad animals, both real and imaginary; and a cast of human characters drawn from legend, popular novels, operas, daily life, and many other sources. Xuanzang's disciples, and Monkey in particular, are still popular figures for Chinese shadow puppet-makers.

The templates provided here can be used by students to construct their own puppets for class dramas out of tag board or manila folders.

Donna Kasprovicz has also used the shadow puppet project for her 6th grade India unit where students perform adventures of Monkey's South Asian "cousin"—the Indian monkey god Hanuman. Detailed construction steps and images from this project are available at:

<http://ias.berkeley.edu/orias/SEArama/WayangActivity.htm>

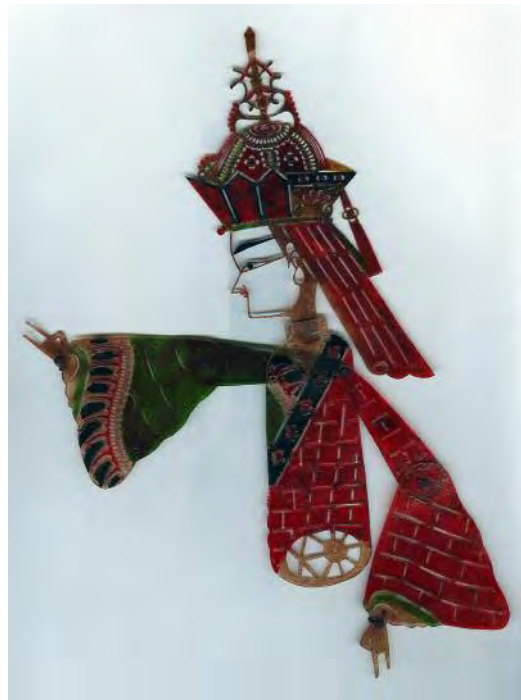
Although popularly known as "shadow" puppets, the Chinese puppets are actually backlit during performances. Because the puppets must be thin enough to be translucent yet rigid enough to be handled effectively, they are made of thin cured hide, most often donkey skin, though ox skin and sheepskin are sometimes used. Specially designed knives are used to cut the hide into the desired shapes; each figure is made of several pieces joined so it can be made to move in various ways. For instance, sections of limbs are tied together to create bendable joints. Heads, made separately, are usually attached through a slot at the neck. The finished figures are brightly painted with colors that serve both decorative and symbolic purposes. Rods with wires at the ends are used to manipulate the figures. The puppets range in size from individual figures only a few inches tall to complex sets of figures two or more feet wide and tall.

Monkey is a living folk hero and students can be encouraged to write their own adventures for a puppet script. A student script adaptation from the Ming novel, *Journey to the West*, is also available from Primary Source for a modest price:

Holmes, Meg. *Journey to the West: A Silk Road Play for Grades 4–12*. Watertown: Primary Source, 2003. <http://www.primarysource.org> (\$12)



Monkey King, 2005. China. Shadow puppet, pigments on hide, *Donna Kasprovicz Collection*



Xuanzang, 2005. China. Shadow puppet, pigments on hide, *Donna Kasprovicz Collection*



Sandy, 2005. China. Shadow puppet, pigments on hide, *Donna Kasprovicz Collection*



Pigsy, 2005. China. Shadow puppet, pigments on hide, *Donna Kasprovicz Collection*



Xuanzang's Horse, 2005. China. Shadow puppet,
pigments on hide, *Donna Kasproicz Collection*

Monkey King



Xuanzang



Sandy



Pigsy

Instructions: Make two legs and two arms.



Xuanzang's Horse

