

Wayang Kulit Shadow Puppetry

Tell a story through a traditional Indonesian shadow play

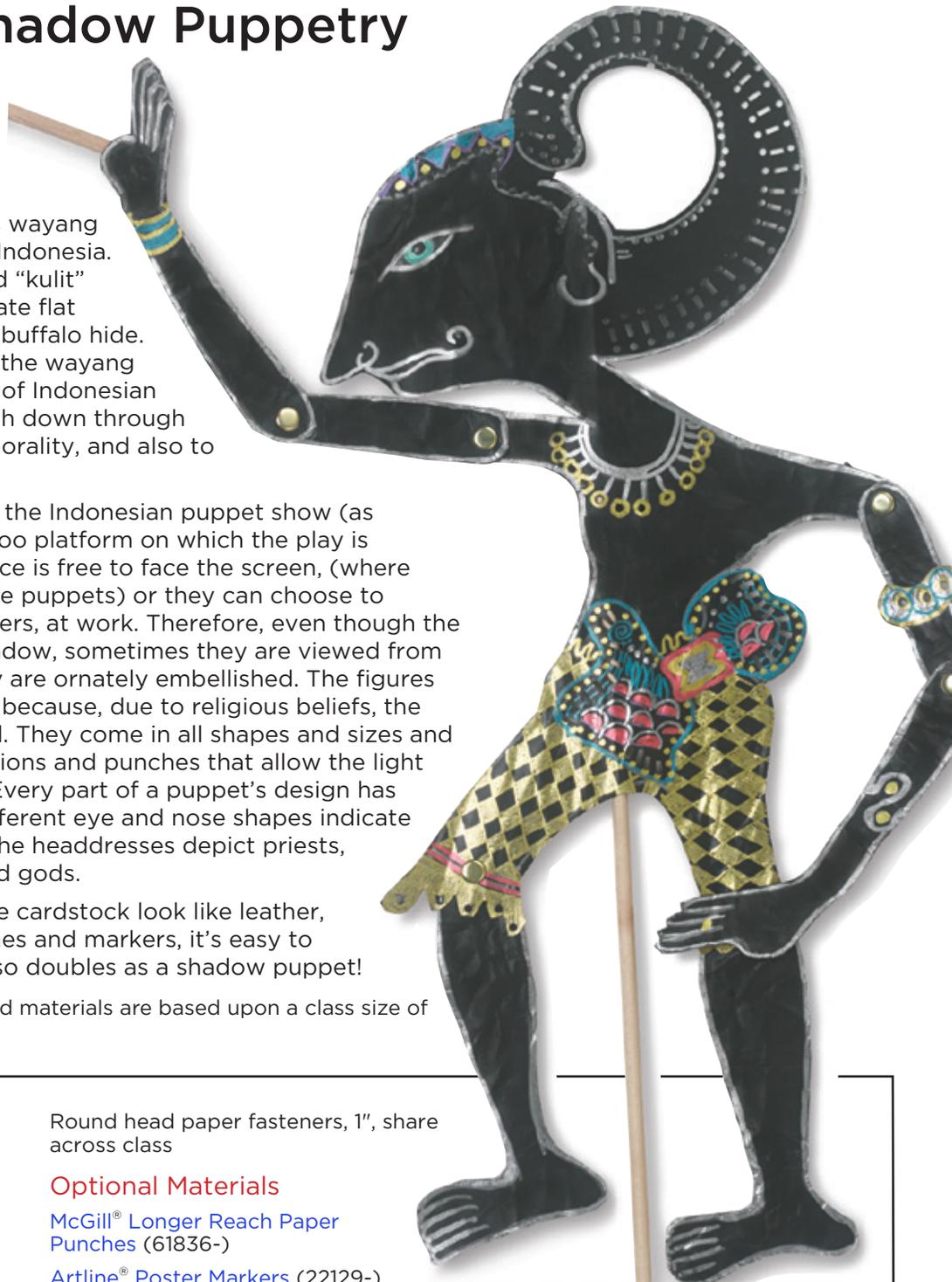
(art + social studies)

The shadow puppet plays known as wayang kulit are wildly popular throughout Indonesia. “Wayang” translates as shadow, and “kulit” means skin. The beautiful and intricate flat puppets were traditionally made of buffalo hide. Far more than mere entertainment, the wayang kulit is an extremely important part of Indonesian culture, serving to pass cultural myth down through the generations, teach lessons on morality, and also to provide a religious experience.

There is no hiding the mechanics of the Indonesian puppet show (as in Western theatre) since the bamboo platform on which the play is performed has no sides. The audience is free to face the screen, (where they will see only the shadows of the puppets) or they can choose to watch the “dalang,” or puppet masters, at work. Therefore, even though the puppets are mostly only seen in shadow, sometimes they are viewed from the other side of the screen, so they are ornately embellished. The figures of most puppets are highly stylized because, due to religious beliefs, the human form should not be depicted. They come in all shapes and sizes and often include very intricate perforations and punches that allow the light through and enhance the shadow. Every part of a puppet’s design has symbolic meaning. For example, different eye and nose shapes indicate nobility, patience, or loyalty, while the headdresses depict priests, princes, queens or kings, deities, and gods.

By employing a fun method to make cardstock look like leather, and then using various paper punches and markers, it’s easy to create an ornate work of art that also doubles as a shadow puppet!

GRADES K-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.



Materials (required)

Blick® 140 lb Premium Cardstock, black, 18" x 24" (11408-2009); share one sheet between two students

Prang® Metallic Art Markers, 6-color set (21281-0069); share six sets across class

Plaid® Mod Podge, matte, pint (02916-1016); share one among class

Blick® Scholastic Short Handle Golden Taklon Flat Wash Brushes, size 1" (05859-1001); need one per student

Fiskars® Hand Punches, assorted shapes (58923-); share 10 across class

Fiskars® Recycled Scissors, bent (57097-1108); one pair per student

Round head paper fasteners, 1", share across class

Optional Materials

McGill® Longer Reach Paper Punches (61836-)

Artline® Poster Markers (22129-)

Black Ink™ Embossed Reptilian Papers, assorted colors, 4" x 36" (12479-)

Hygloss® Paper Doilies (60948-)



Preparation

1. Research Indonesian Wayang puppet history and design.

Process

1. Using a silver metallic marker, draw the puppet parts onto black cardstock. If creating a figurative puppet, divide the arm at the elbow into two pieces, and the leg at the knee. These parts will be jointed later.
2. Cut out the puppet pieces with scissors. Now, dampen the pieces in water until they are moderately saturated on both sides, then crumple the pieces. Open them and crumple again. The wrinkles that result will mimic the natural veining in leather. Don't worry if the silver marker has faded. It can be reapplied later. Press flat to dry.
3. When the pieces are dry or nearly dry, coat the top with Matte Mod Podge using a brush. When dry, the puppet parts will look like leather!
4. Now, add holes with various punches in areas that warrant some embellishment, or just to add detail with light. Another option is to glue pieces of doilies to the back of the puppet to add detail. The doilies can be stiffened with paint and a coat of Mod Podge. After the punching is complete, add further embellishments with metallic and bright-colored markers.
5. Assemble the puppets by punching a hole in each part that will be jointed. Overlap the holes and secure with a round head paper fastener. Glue dowels to the backs of the main body of the puppet, the arms, and the legs to allow movement.

Options

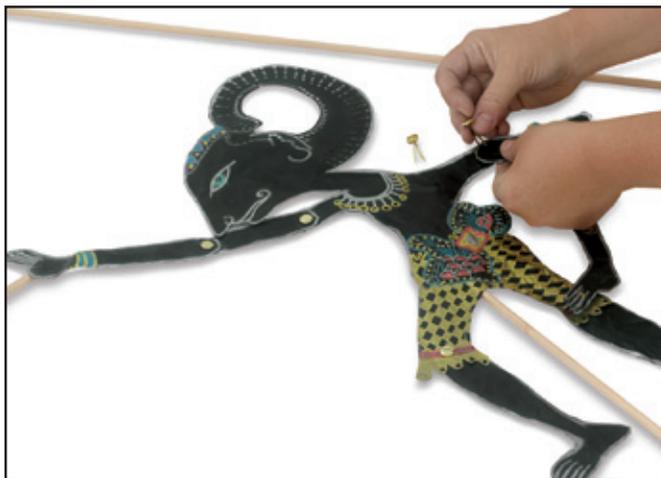
- Younger students can create a shadow puppet of a simple silhouette attached to a single stick.
- Use paper doilies painted black to add punched details, thus eliminating paper punches.
- For the look of real leather, use Black Ink™ Embossed Reptilian Papers. Glue to cardstock for rigidity.



Step 1: Trace parts onto cardstock and cut out. Moisten parts with water and crumple to create wrinkles. Lay flat to dry. Brush on matte Mod Podge and allow to dry.



Step 2: Embellish with metallic and brightly colored markers. Use various paper punches to add detail and interest to the shadows.



Step 3: Punch holes where joints should be. Add round-headed paper fasteners to secure. Glue body and appendages to dowel rods.



National Standards for Visual Arts Education

Content Standard #1 — Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes.

K-4 • Students describe how different materials, techniques, and processes cause different responses.

5-8 • Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas.

9-12 • Students apply media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks.

Content Standard #4 — Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures..

K-4 • Students know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationships to various cultures.

5-8 • Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures.

9-12 • Students differentiate among a variety of historical and cultural contexts in terms of characteristics and purposes of works of art.

