

A PUPPETEER'S JOURNEY IN ACADEMIA: CURATING EXPERIENCES

KELLY D. SWITZER, MFA

MASS MEDIA, COMMUNICATION, AND THEATRE

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY-COMMERCE

**MEMBER, PUPPETEERS OF AMERICA
AND THE US INSTITUTE OF THEATRE TECHNOLOGY**

SPRING 2014, INAUGURAL PUPPETRY CLASS



Found Object Work Day, January 2014

DEGREE-GRANTING UNIVERSITIES, US: PUPPETRY

BA/BFA

- University of Hawaii
- West Virginia University

MFA

- University of Hawaii
- University of Connecticut

COURSE OFFERINGS, US: PUPPETRY

- CalArts
- Central Washington University
- Evergreen State College (Washington)
- George Mason University
- California Polytechnic
- UC-Santa Cruz
- Cal State-Sacramento
- Dell-arte School of Physical Theatre (California)
- St. Edward's University (Austin)
- Texas Women's University

SYLLABUS SEARCH

Most courses seem to emphasize:

- **Puppeteer Techniques**
 - Creating character, character movement, maintaining focus, voices, etc.
- **Puppet Construction**
 - Hand, rod, clay, body, shadow, and marionette
- **History of Global Puppetry, Connections to Culture**
- **Live Performances, observation of and participation in**

CULF 1319.12

UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATING THE ARTS: PUPPETRY

SPRING 2011

Classroom: ARTS 140

Class time: TUESDAY – THURSDAY 11:00am – 12:15pm

Instructor: Margita Penčevová **Email:** margitap@stedwards.edu
pencevova@gmail.com

Mobile Phone: 512-669-2216 **Office Hours:** By appointment

Syllabus Spring 2013
California State University, Sacramento
Multicultural Puppetry, THEA 115A

Class Location: SHS 300 (The Puppet Lab)

Instructor: Art Grueneberger

E-mail: grueneberger@csus.edu

Phone: 916-278-7303

Office: SHS 262

Office Hours: By Appointment

Course Objectives

Puppetry has been found to be an excellent tool for the teaching of multiculturalism to children. Students will learn basic techniques used in creating live puppet theatre so they can use puppetry

WHAT I SPECIFICALLY WANTED TAMUC STUDENTS TO LEARN:

- **Global Puppetry History:** *Puppetry, a World History* by Eileen Blumenthal
 - YouTube curating—41 short clips over the course of the semester
- **Puppeteering Techniques:**
 - 6 presentations—three in-class, two for audiences, one filmed
 - Post-presentation feedback
 - Sock Puppet workshop
 - Puppetry Directing workshop
- **Puppetry Construction:**
 - Rod and/or hand puppets
 - Sculpted head puppets
 - Shadow puppets
 - Found object puppets
- **Performance**
 - Children/Adults
 - BooTown
 - Filmed Interviews: Joel
 - Orr, Child Experts
 - Collaboration
 - School of “Figure It Out”



Puppetry
by Kelly Switzer • 34 videos • 4 views • 3 hours, 42 minutes

[Add a description](#)

[Play all](#) [Share](#) [Playlist settings](#) [Add video](#)

1		Punch and Judy	lincolnshireecho	2:16
2		Japanese Bunraku puppets	Tony Begbie	2:35
3		The Wayang Puppet Theatre	unesco	5:36
4		Puppet Show - an Indian String Puppet Show in Jaipur	jaipurthepinkcity	3:43
5		Puppetry, Bhats, Puppets, Heritage, Rajasthan, Surajkund Crafts Mela, India	indiviadeodotorg	2:10
6		Journey- A solo puppet show with small rod puppets	Maggie Winston	37:44
7		Puppet show- The Mania of Bonaparte: A One-Sided Epistolary Romance	Dream Kitsch	9:01

FOUND OBJECT ASSIGNMENT

Found Object Puppet

Due: Jan 28

Points: 100

Name: _____

Puppet name: _____

Directions: Create a puppet using primarily found objects--these could be anything that you find or acquire but DO NOT BUY. It is permissible to purchase wire, glue, paint or other materials to join or finish your piece, but the bulk of the puppet should be, in essence, junk. Think about the Jim Henson video we watched in class and how he turned everyday objects into characters with a personality, voice, and specific traits.

Think about this object you have created and give it a life. Determine how it speaks, how it moves, what its personality might be like, who it would have voted for in the last election, etc. In other words: breathe life into this inanimate object.

When presenting your found object puppet to the class you will:

1. Have the puppet introduce itself by name and tell us what it's made of.
2. Have the puppet tell a joke.
3. Have the puppet dance and/or sing--if you'd like musical accompaniment bring your phone, tape deck, guitar, etc.
4. Attempt to evoke an emotional response in the audience.

Grading Rubric:

Instructions followed _____/25 pts

Functionality _____/25 pts

Creativity _____/25 pts

Performance _____/25 pts

Purpose: A slow introduction to puppet construction using less intimidating materials. Students had to think outside of the box and use what they have available, a lesson I hoped they would carry into their other projects.

This assignment was consistently ranked as the first or second most effective assignment in their student surveys.

Outcome: will use again

FOUND OBJECT ASSIGNMENT



EXPRESSIVE FACE PUPPET

Expressive Face Puppet

Due: February 4

Points: 100

Name: _____

Puppet name: _____

Emotional state: _____

Directions: Create a puppet head using air dry clay. This face should be expressive of an emotional state--as you saw in Chapter 4, even puppets with no moving facial features can express emotion through facial expressions, color, and head movement. You can choose to create either a "dumb" puppet head (mouth does not move) or one that is articulated. Either way, for a later assignment this head will be joined to a rod puppet body, so bear in mind that you will need a neck or other way to join and operate the head.

You will have a chance to work on your puppet in class on January 31. Please bring your sketches of the head and the materials to create it. You will want an armature to layer the clay on; foam balls, wadded tin foil, wire can all make suitable armatures. Clay does require time to dry, in most cases 24-48 hours (read your packaging!) so please budget enough time to have the clay dry before you paint and finish your puppet.

Think about this object you have created and give it a life. Determine how it speaks, how it moves, what its personality might be like, who it would have voted for in the last election, etc. In other words: breathe life into this inanimate object.

When presenting your found object puppet to the class you will:

1. Have the puppet head introduce itself by name and tell us what its emotional state is.
2. Have the puppet tell a joke.
3. Have the puppet sing--if you'd like musical accompaniment bring your phone, tape deck,

Purpose: An introduction to the use of clay over armature to create a puppet that expresses a specific emotion. Emphasis on the communication of character through appearance.

This assignment's ranking was inconsistent among student surveys.

Outcome: will use again with the modification of Sculpey instead of air dry clay and a dictation of expressions.

EXPRESSIVE FACE PUPPET



SOCIAL COMMENTARY PUPPET

Social Commentary Puppet

Due: February 11

Points: 100

Name: _____

Puppet name: _____

Topic: _____

Directions: Create a rod puppet using your Expressive Face Puppet head. This puppet should be used to address an issue, concern, or cause for which you have an affinity or connection. A rod puppet is usually operated by rods/poles/stiff wires or handles. You are welcome to create a puppet that is part rod puppet and part hand puppet (see a puppet like Kermit). You will be presenting a monologue, or a dialogue with a partner, this is up to you.

You will have a chance to work on your puppet in class on February 7. Please bring your sketches of the puppet and the materials to create it.

Think about this object you have created and give it a life. Determine how it speaks, how it moves, what its personality might be like, who it would have voted for in the last election, etc. In other words: breathe life into this inanimate object.

When presenting your found object puppet to the class you will:

1. Have the puppet head introduce itself by name and tell us what its social commentary is about.
2. Have the puppet present a 1-2 minute monologue or dialogue. You do not need to be off book, but please rehearse your performance enough that you can adequately manipulate the puppet while keeping an eye on your script.
3. This monologue or dialogue should illustrate your social commentary. It could be a harangue, a lecture, an argument, an example, an object lesson, etc.

Grading Rubric:

Purpose: Creating a puppet that speaks to a social issue. The Expressive Face Puppet becomes a hand and/or rod puppet.

This assignment was ranked 3-4 by the student surveys, least effective.

Outcome: undecided. My original intent was to push them to think of puppetry as more than just “for children” or “for entertainment”, but the translation from a previous assignment seemed detrimental.

CHILDREN'S PUPPETRY SHADOW PUPPET SHOW AND FILMED PIECES



SKYPE INTERVIEWS



PERFORMANCES

Watch

- YouTube and other online performances, DVDs
- BooTown invited shadow performance

Make

- In-class presentation of puppets
- Shadow puppets for children
- Filmed puppet piece
- 2014 Puppet Festival



Students interact with BooTown's puppeteers post-performance

2014 PUPPET FESTIVAL, MAY 2&3

Designed as the “capstone” of the course, students will: conceive, write, cast, build, advertise, and perform 5 puppet shorts (10-20 minutes) for TAMUC’s first Puppet Festival. Graduate students will serve as Production Assistants and manage scheduling, advertising, and technical issues.

Currently

Students have:

- Pitched their ideas and chosen 5 to produce
- Broken into groups based on interests and abilities
- Written their rough drafts
- Received critiques from myself and their peers

Next

Students will:

- Create their puppets
- Cast and rehearse their plays
- Create an advertising package for the festival, one of which will be chosen for production, additional PR as needed
- Manage the running of the festival



STUDENT SURVEYS

Administered April 2nd (specifically for this symposium) and a similar survey will be re-administered at the end of the semester for feedback in creation of the next Puppetry course. 1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree

This class taught me (circle one):

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The history of puppetry. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. The connection between society and puppetry. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Basic puppetry construction techniques. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Basic puppeteering techniques. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

This class (circle one):

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5. Will be valuable in my studies/career as a thespian | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Was more rigorous than my other theatre classes. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Revealed abilities in myself that I had not previously known. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please rank the following assignments from least effective (4), in your opinion, to most effective (1).

- _____ Found Object Puppet
- _____ Expressive Head Puppet
- _____ Social Commentary Puppet
- _____ Filmed Piece

Effectively, this survey gives me data on the first half of the course (instructional and lab-based). We have just begun the second half (production of the puppet festival) and results have not been determined.

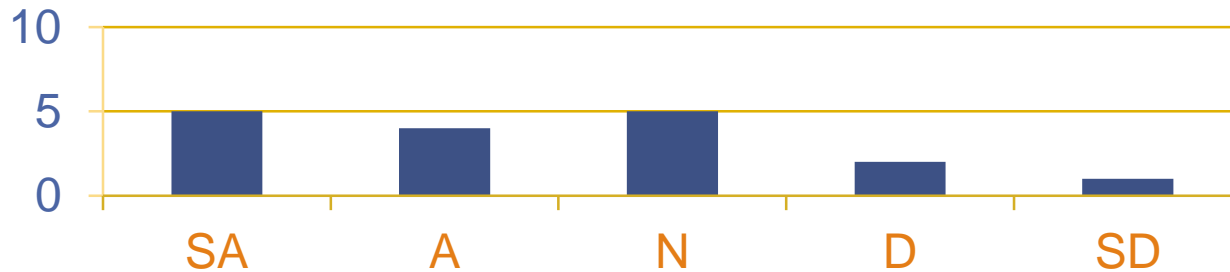
STUDENT SURVEYS: QUESTION 1 AND 2

This class taught me (circle one):

1. The history of puppetry.

1 2 3 4 5
5 4 5 2 1

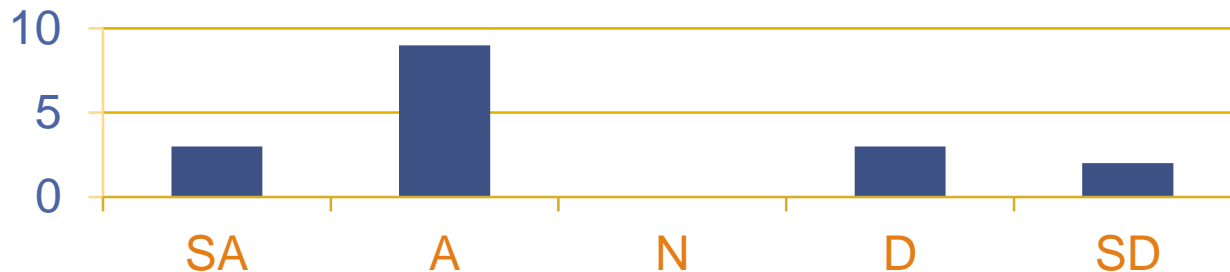
History



2. The connection between society and puppetry.

1 2 3 4 5
3 9 0 3 2

Society Connection



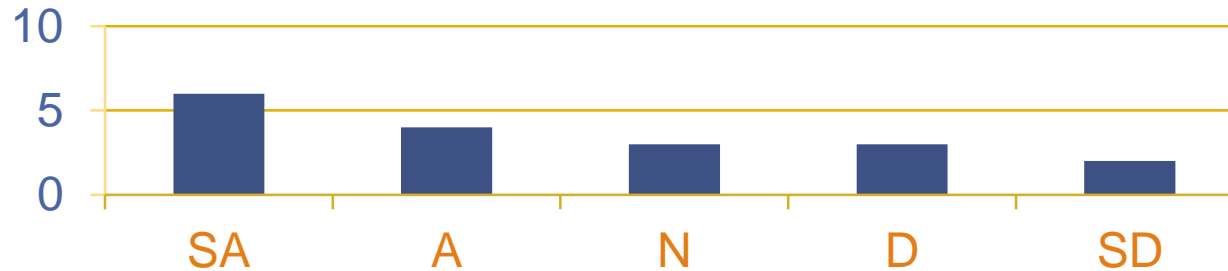
STUDENT SURVEYS: QUESTION 3 AND 4

This class taught me (circle one):

3. Basic puppetry construction techniques.

1 2 3 4 5
6 4 3 3 1

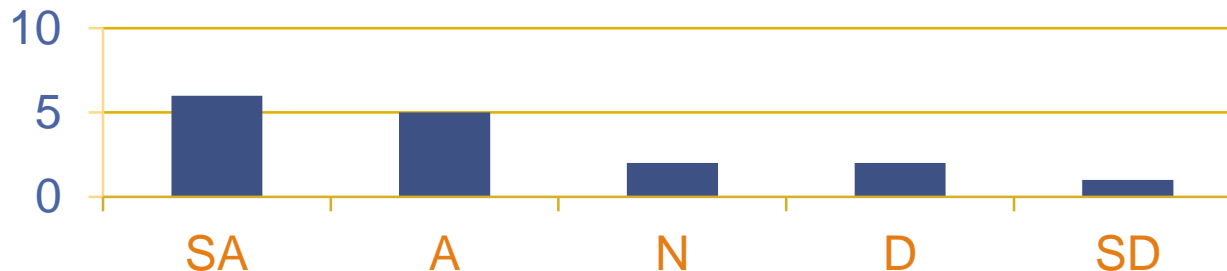
Construction



4. Basic puppeteering techniques.

1 2 3 4 5
7 5 2 2 1

Puppeteering



STUDENT SURVEYS: QUESTION 5, 6, AND 7

This class (circle one):

5. Will be valuable in my studies/career as a thespian

1 2 3 4 5
8 4 2 1 2

Valuable



6. Was more rigorous than my other theatre classes.

1 2 3 4 5
6 5 3 2 1

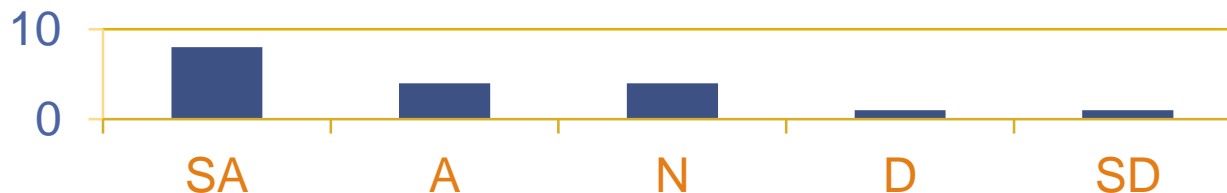
Rigor



7. Revealed abilities in myself that I had not previously known.

1 2 3 4 5
7 4 4 1 1

Revealed Abilities



STUDENT SURVEYS: RANKING QUESTION

Please rank the following assignments from least effective (4), in your opinion, to most effective (1).

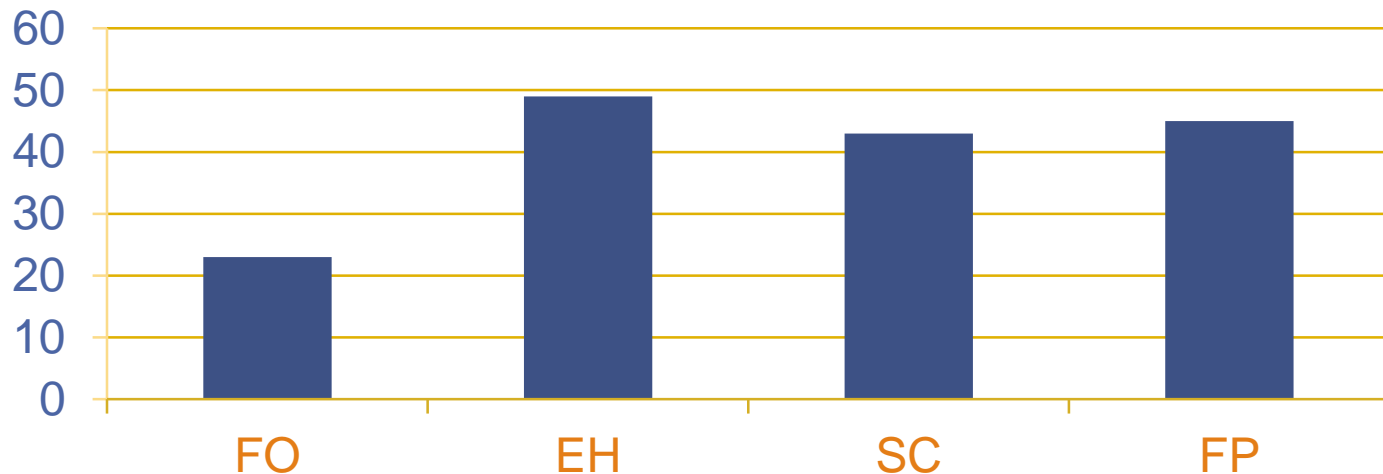
__23__ Found Object Puppet

__49__ Expressive Head Puppet

__43__ Social Commentary Puppet

__45__ Filmed Piece

Efficacy of Projects Inverse relationship



STUDENT SURVEYS: SHORT ANSWER

Ways this course was effective:

- “It has helped me in preparing me in my RTV classes with film and editing.”
- “I can’t brag enough about this class! Going into this I didn’t know what to expect, but within a couple of classes I knew I was going to love it. This puppetry class has exposed me to a different side of theatre and the techniques and assignments and the demand of what this class calls for has given me tools in order to further my theatrical career.”
- “I didn’t realize I had the skills to actually create a puppet. This class uncovered hidden talent that I don’t know I possessed.”
- “It helped me uncover talents that I did not know that I possessed.”
- “This course was very effective. I’ve been a ventriloquist and puppeteer for four years so this class was very beneficial to me.”
- “Love this course. Nothing to change.”
- “Opening new experiences for students to learn a new art.”
- “On learning how to construct fast and easily.”
- “Learning the history, construction, and performing aspects of puppetry rather than just one aspect of puppetry.”

Ways this course could be improved:

- “For the expressive face/social commentary puppets, use Sculpey! ☺”
- “I’m not sure how I would improve this course. My only complaint was the group project we had over spring break when everyone went their separate way, but we still made it work.”
- “I only have one complaint about the group project that we did during spring break when everyone split up but we still made it work!”
- “The only suggestion I would recommend would be perhaps use different types of clay to make puppets; a kind that doesn’t crack. Also maybe allow students to do more solo puppetry performances.”
- “More history on puppetry during class.”
- “Since this class is a lot of work on projects that some know more than others, I wish we had more time to work.”
- “More intensive study of construction and techniques.”
- “Could do with more time and history in the beginning and at least 1 workshop/class day to learn techniques.”
- “I would have loved to learn more about the history of puppetry.”

CONCLUSION

At this stage of the course, the students feel they are receiving training of value. Changes will be made to accommodate their wants (history, more construction demos) but these must be balanced with their needs, such as a need to learn to collaborate within a disparate group.

My webpage: <http://faculty.tamuc.edu/kswitzer/>

Their filmed pieces:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLmfDOhRHh-bCM4L5kftdWYLezxZv5_s5-

Flickr photos of their Shadow Puppet productions:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/tamuc/sets/72157641280412584/>

Kelly D. Switzer, MFA

Mass Media, Communication, and Theatre

Texas A&M University-Commerce

**Member, Puppeteers of America
and the US Institute of Theatre Technology**