

PAPER PUPPET BUNRAKU

Supplies:

- Two sheets of 7' long butcher block paper
- Roll of masking tape.

Instructions:

Head, Neck, Shoulders, Arms, Waist, Legs

- Take one piece of your butcher block paper and scrunch it up – almost like an accordion.
- Take that piece of paper and fold it in half to find its center.
- Once you've found your center, move about a quarter of the way down from the center of the paper and scrunch it, and use plenty of masking tape – this will establish the head and create the neck of your puppet. Puff out the paper to create the face.
- Now, take your second piece of paper and scrunch it up – the same as the first one – and find the center of it by folding it in half.
- Now, place the center of the second piece of paper directing into the center of your other piece of paper, and tape on both sides of the neck creating the shoulders.
- Now, 1/3 or 1/2 the way down from the shoulder scrunch the paper together to create the waist and wrap tape around there, too.

Elbows, Wrists, Knees, Ankles

- Lay your paper puppet on its back
- Take the arms and fold each one in half to create the elbows. Take some tape and wrap it around the top and the bottom of each elbow joint.
- Now, go a short length up from each end of the arm and work the paper around to create the wrist. You may wish to wrap some tape around the wrist, too, to clearly indicate the beginning of the hand.
- Work the area around the shoulders, as well, just to loosen your puppet up.
- Now, flip your puppet over, so it's facing down.
- With the legs, bend each one back creating a midway point for your knees – work the area to loosen it up – then wrap tape around the area just above and below each knee.
- Now, a short length up from the bottom, you will create the feet by working the area – loosening it up – to create the ankle. You may wish to wrap some tape around the ankle, too, to clearly indicate the beginning of each foot.
- Same thing you did with the shoulders – work the area to around the hips to loosen them up, too.
- Now, you have your Bunraku Paper Puppet!

Three Puppeteers:

*In *actual* Bunraku puppetry with ornate and complicated dolls, the parts of the puppet manipulated are different

1. Manipulates the head and the left arm – the omo-zukai (in actual bunraku they control the head and the right arm)
2. Manipulates the right arm and the waist – hidari-zukai (in actual bunraku they control the left arm)
3. Manipulates the feet – ashi-zukai (controls the feet or the bottom of the kimono for female characters)

First three principles of bringing something inanimate to life...

1. Breath
2. Focus
3. Weight

Breath:

- To breathe the omo-zukai will lightly push the neck down while the hidari-zukai resists – lightly compressing the ribs. Breath is what gives us life, so it's quite important that the head puppeteer vocalize the breath itself on the inhalation/exhalation. The audience now knows the puppet is alive – they can see the breath, they can hear the breath – it's alive, but breath can also tell us about the emotion of the puppet. By changing the rhythm of the breath, we can tell if the puppet is relaxed, distressed, alarmed – all sorts of storytelling just by the breath of the puppet.
- The head puppeteer -the omo-zukai – is responsible for maintaining and vocalizing the breath, and by extension of that breath, unifies all three puppeteers and their actions. A tiny shift in the rhythm or a break in the breath can serve as a suggestion for the other puppeteers an action that might happen.

Focus – where the puppet is looking or what it's interested in.

- You can allow the puppet to hold a gaze as long as you want – while it is interested in it, it might express different levels of interest, but when it's focus changes, then its interest goes somewhere else.
- As the puppeteer, it's so important to keep your focus on the puppet. The moment you break from the puppet, it becomes to beings competing for attention. When you stay with the puppet, the puppet gets all the attention, and the puppeteer starts to disappear.

Weight

- Weight is in every part of movement in the puppet, but is possibly most evident in walking. We want to see weight go through those legs and the feet touch the floor, so that it feels like the puppet has muscle and is opposing gravity. Another way you might show it is by jumping

Exercise: Copying from Life

- Groups of 3-4.
- Take a moment from someone in your groups life that is very specific – take all that detail – put it into your puppet.
- In the groups of 3-4, while one participant demonstrate the activity the other puppeteers are observing and looking for the evidence of the three principles – breath, focus, weight – so they can apply those to the puppet and make the gesture of the puppet even more realistic.

Exercise: Storytelling - Create a scene with a human

- Groups of 3-4
- Create a scene with a very clear beginning, middle, and end.
 - Beginning: What are the given circumstances between the human and the puppet at the start of the scene?
 - Middle: What changes or shifts between the human and the puppet?
 - End: How is that change or shift between the human and that puppet resolved?
- Challenge: Make the puppet the central character and the one with the most physical activity while avoiding signifying gestures – consider subtlety and truthfulness to be the goal of the puppeteer for the puppet.