Storybook Shadow Puppets
by Branan Freeman, SDMA Educator

Literature Inspiration

Title: *Kitten's First Full Moon*

Author and Illustrator: Kevin Henkes
Publisher: Greenwillow Books, an
Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers 2004
Caldecott Award: 2005

Grade Level: Lower Elementary (K–2 grades)

General Description

Kitten's First Full Moon is a charming tale of a kitten's adventures on a bright, full moon night. The illustrations are simple and yet evocative, lending themselves well to the medium of shadow-puppetry. In this art project, students will explore shape and contour as they trace, cut, and assemble their own puppets to use in a shadow puppet show, an ancient form of storytelling and entertainment that can be traced as far back as first century China and is still popular today worldwide. Using a work of literature as inspiration for the characters they will create and story they will tell, students will have the opportunity to enhance their comprehension of what they read while exploring and learning about a centuries old artistic medium.

Shadow puppets are seen behind a screen, backlit to reveal their silhouettes. Traditional shadow puppets typically depict characters that are animals, heroes, or clowns, and the settings for a shadow puppet show can be detailed or tell the story with only one or two props. Today, this art form can be found throughout the world, most predominantly in Asia, Indonesia, and the Middle East and can incorporate both traditional hands-on methods of production as well as various forms of computer technology.

Objective

Students will. . .
- create a series of shadow puppets to reflect the different characters and background pieces of a story they have read.
- trace basic shapes and cut them out to make puppets that they can manipulate behind a screen.
- experience the process of assembling a puppet from start to finish.
- learn about the different ways of sharing a story. Some cultures share stories through books while others, throughout time, have used puppetry and performance to entertain, tell stories and teach lessons through characters acting on a stage.
- identify the elements of a story (plot, setting, and characters) and the sequence of a story (beginning, middle, end)
- identify the title, author, and illustrator of a story
- put on a short play to reenact the story.

Project Time: Allow approximately one hour from start to completion.

Note: This project will take about an hour, from introduction to completion, depending on how many puppets each child makes. Students can work individually or in pairs, sharing the responsibilities of cutting and assembling the puppets. Students can also work together to put on a final puppet show, taking turns so that everyone has the opportunity to perform.

Vocabulary (Visual and Performing Arts Vocabulary: **line**, **shape**, **contour drawings**, **function**, **positive shapes**, **negative shapes**, **structure**, and **performance art**; English-Language Arts Vocabulary: **author**, **character**, **illustrator**, **plot**, and **setting**). *Please see appendix for glossary.*

Adaptation Suggestions

(for older students, grades 3–12)
This particular lesson is geared towards students in lower elementary school, grades K–2, but the art processes and dramatic arts behind shadow puppetry appeals to students of all ages. Although the literature being used in this lesson and the California State Standards—based art components of tracing and basic puppet assemblage are particular to the K–2 age range, the lesson can be easily adapted to suit older students by adjusting the literature and having the students free-hand draw, rather than trace, the characters and settings for their puppets.

California State Standards
Please see appendix.

Preparation

- Locate the book, *Kitten's First Full Moon* by Kevin Henkes (or select another work of literature suitable to your students'age group and one whose illustrations do not rely on color to be understood, therefore lending themselves well to shadow puppetry). Create several photocopies of the illustrations to be spread among the tables.

- Using heavier-weight paper, cut out a set of templates of story characters and backgrounds taken from the story and from which the students can trace their own shapes. Puppets can be created from single shapes (best for younger students) or with multiple shapes (better for older students) that will be attached together later with metal brads. Depending on the size of your class, you may need three or more sets of templates. Students can share the templates and exchange them as they're working.

Procedure

Motivation

1. Discuss the purpose and history of storytelling in different cultures, particularly the concept that before there was television, people shared stories through a variety of other means, including puppetry and plays. If possible, show images of traditional shadow puppets and discuss the popularity of this art form today. (*See the* **Resources** *section at the end of this lesson for web links and literary sources with more information on the history and the long-standing popularity of shadow puppetry*).

2. Read aloud the story, *Kitten's First Full Moon*. While reading it, have students identify the **title**, **author**, and **illustrator** of the story. After reading it, discuss the elements of a story (**plot**, **setting**, and **character**) found within this book. Create a list of characters found in the story and the objects found within the setting. Also discuss the sequence of the story—**beginning**, **middle**, and **end**, and have students help create a list of events that take place within each section. Students will use these lists to help recall the story and accurately re-enact it in their puppet show. *Please see appendix for vocabulary definitions.*

Project

3. Introduce the project and discuss associated art vocabulary words (Visual and Performing Arts Vocabulary: **line**, **shape**, **contour drawings**, **function**, **positive shapes**, **negative shapes**, **structure**, and **performance art**; English-Language Arts Vocabulary: **author**, **character**, **illustrator**, **plot**, and **setting**). *Please see appendix for vocabulary definitions.*

4. Demonstrate how to trace the templates onto the 8 ½″ x 11″ pieces of card stock (or other material) so that students can see how tracing is done and what they will later be doing to trace each of the characters and background objects.
   Note: To make this lesson more suitable for students beyond grade level 2, encourage older students to free-hand draw their shapes or make their own templates by using observational drawing skills or imagination (if the text is without images) to recreate the characters and setting of the story.

5. Demonstrate how to cut out the traced shapes from the card stock (or other cardboard material) by cutting along the traced lines. Show the students how to cut away excess paper around the shapes for easier handling.

6. Have students trace and cut as you supervise. Some students may need help holding the template steady while tracing around it. Encourage students to help each other with this process.

Materials

- Scissors (one per student)
- Pencils or markers (one per student)
- Glue sticks or double-sided foam tape (to be shared)
- Craft sticks, chop sticks, or heavy weight straws (one for each moving part of the puppet)
- Metal brads (5-10 for every student)
- Hole punch (one for every four students)
- One X-ACTO knife (for use by instructor only)
- 8 ½″ x 11″ card stock, manila folders, or poster board (2–4 pieces per student)
- A set of original templates to trace from (one set can be shared by several students—use heavier-weight paper than the students use, i.e. 140 lb. watercolor paper or cereal box cardboard)
- 24″ x 24″ stretched (framed-out) white canvas for the shadow-puppet theater (a suspended light-colored sheet could be used instead or a white, stretched shower curtain)
- One spot-light and extension cord (a large flashlight can also be used)
- 2–4 clamps for securing the canvas to the table (push pins could be used to hang the sheet from the ceiling)
- Photocopied images of the illustrations found in the book
- Examples or photographs of traditional shadow puppets (*see the* **Resources** *section at the end of this lesson for literary and web sources containing traditional shadow puppet images*).

7. If the puppets contain more than one shape, the puppet parts will need to be attached to each other with metal brads. A hole will need to be punched on each of the appendages as well as the place where those parts connect to the larger body. Show students how to create the holes using the hole punch, being careful not to punch the holes too close to the edges.

8. After punching the holes, pass out the metal brads, first demonstrating that loose parts will need to be connected using metal brads (This will allow the part to move.) Show students how to insert the metal brads and close them to make the puppet parts move effectively.

9. Have students write their names or initials on the back of the puppet.

10. Pass out the craft sticks (or other stick material) and have the children either glue or tape the sticks onto the backs of their puppet shapes. Older students may wish to attach additional sticks to the appendages to allow them to be moved as well.

11. While students work on finishing their puppets, create a screen by propping the stretched canvas up on the table using books or clamps being careful not to place your materials inside the screen area. A sheet can be hung in place of the canvas. Be sure to use push pins or large-sized clips to pull it taught. Set up a spot light or large flash light behind the back of the canvas. The puppets will be placed between the light and the canvas, and a shadow should appear.

12. Demonstrate how, depending upon how close or far from the canvas you have the light, the puppet will look smaller and crisper or larger and a bit fuzzier around the edges. Allow students to test out their own puppets behind the screen.

Performance Component (optional)

1. Have students partner-up or work in smaller groups to perform the story using their puppets and following the sequence of the book.

Teaching tips:

- If students wish to show the eyes and mouth of the kitten or character, you may want to have an X-ACTO knife handy to cut out these interior shapes. Place the paper on a piece of matte board (or heavy weight cardboard) before cutting.
- Primary grades may use the templates more for general shapes. Upper grades may wish to create their own templates or free-hand draw their characters onto the cardboard before cutting them out.
- Emphasis should always be on the process, not the product. Despite the fact that this project uses templates for tracing, students' projects will vary.
- If students wish to create additional props according to the story, encourage their creativity.

Extension Activities

- Read a story without illustrations and have students design the characters and setting from their imaginations.
- Have students create their own stories and work in groups to create a set of characters and a storyline.
- Further explore the tradition of shadow puppetry through music, visuals, and performance storytelling.
- For older students, have them create an alternative ending to the story and recreate it using shadow puppet theatre.
- As you read and discuss other books throughout the year, create other shadow puppet collections based on those stories.
- Additional K–2 picture book suggestions suitable for shadow puppetry:

    Seven blind mice (2002) **by Ed Young**
    Head, body, legs: a story from Liberia (2005) **by Won-Ldy Paye, Margaret H. Lippert, and Julie Paschkis**
    La mariquita malhumorada/The grouchy ladybug (1996) **by Eric Carle**
    First the egg (2007) **by Laura Vaccaro Seeger**
    Frederick (2005) **by Leo Lionni (also available in Spanish language)**

Resources

About the book and author of *Kitten's First Full Moon*:
http://www.kevinhenkes.com/
http://www.kevinhenkes.com/kittens_first.asp
http://www.kevinhenkes.com/picture/behind.asp

About shadow puppetry

An Introduction to Shadow Puppetry
http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/shadowpuppets/artsedge.html

Indonesian Shadow Puppetry
http://discover-indo.tierranet.com/wayang.html

Balinese Shadow Puppetry
http://records.viu.ca/www/discover/educate/posters/noname4.htm

About puppetry

http://www.sagecraft.com/puppetry/
http://www.sagecraft.com/puppetry/definitions/shadow.html

Traditional Balinese Shadow Puppet
Photograph taken by James Halfacre

Resources available at the San Diego County Library

Chinese shadow puppet plays (1998)
by Liu Jilian
791.53 LIU [Ages 6–12]
Provides a history of the art of shadow puppet making and performance.

Making shadow puppets (2002)
by Jill Bryant and Catherine Heard; illustrated by Laura Watson
J 791.53 BRY [Ages 6–12]
Directions on how to create shadow puppets using a variety of materials.

Mr Fong's toy shop (1978)
by Leo Politi
JE P [Ages 4–8]
A toymaker and his young friends prepare a shadow puppet play for the Moon Festival in Chinatown in Los Angeles.

Currently on view at SDMA

The Binney Collection at SDMA presents paintings from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Persia often referencing the great classics of literature.

SDMA's Asian collection highlights the diverse tastes of different social groups—the imperial ruling class, scholars, warriors, and common people—and features separate sections dedicated to religious and Persian art.

Young Art 2009: Expressing Literature (April 18–May 31, 2009) will include several works from the Museum's permanent collection that are inspired by literature.