

Wayang-Kulit: Indonesian Shadow Puppets

The History of Wayang-Kulit:

In Indonesia, primarily Java and Bali, shadow puppet plays are known as *Wayang-Kulit*. **Wayang** is the Indonesian word for “theater” and **Kulit** means “skin”, referring to the buffalo leather used to make traditional puppets. Puppet Theater emerged with the introduction of Hinduism to Indonesia in the 1st Century A.D., and was used to spread the Hindu religion.



Photo by Flickr User flydime

When Islam started to spread throughout Indonesia, the display of God or Gods in human form was prohibited, so the Wayang style of puppetry was suppressed. Despite this, puppetry had become very important to Indonesian culture, so Indonesian’s changed how they displayed their puppets. Instead of showing the forbidden figures, the puppeteer only displayed the puppet’s shadows projected onto a screen lit by oil lamp.



Photo by Masgatotkaca, via Wikimedia Commons

The stories present tales of mystery, symbolism, morality, and myth. Even though they are hidden behind a sheer screen, the puppets are highly decorated, often with brightly colored paints and shiny accents.

Where in the world is Java and Bali?

Indonesia is made up of over 17,500 islands!



Make Your Own *Wayang-Kulit* Puppet:

You can make this puppet in: **1 hour**

What you will need:

- Cardstock or cardboard from a cereal box
- Scissors
- Pencil
- Paper fasteners (brads)
- Tape
- Hole punch
- Dowels, chopsticks, popsicle sticks, or plastic straws
- Decorative elements, such as crayons, markers, fabric, sequins, yarn, paint, glitter, tissue paper, etc.
- Light-colored sheet and a flashlight or a bright lamp (for performance)

How- To:

1. Draw a character on a piece of cardstock, and then cut it out. If you want the arms and legs to move, cut them separately from the puppet's body. If you prefer, you may use the attached template and cut out the puppet from there.



2. Draw your own design on the puppet's body for detail, and color the puppet as you wish.



3. Punch holes in the areas where you want to attach the puppet's arms and legs.



4. Attach the body parts together using the paper fasteners.



5. Add decoration to your puppet by attaching feathers, yarn, fabric, sequins, glitter, etc. with glue and tape and then let it dry.



6. If you want, you can punch small holes in your puppet for light to shine through.

7. Attach your popsicle sticks to the puppet by taping the sticks to the moving body parts. Place another popsicle stick to the body of the puppet for support.



8. And now, your puppet is finished!



When you're done with your puppet... Put on a Show!

1. Hang up a large sheet in a doorway, and secure with tape.
2. Shine a strong light source, such as a flashlight, or a bright lamp towards the screen.
3. Sitting behind the light, place your puppets close to the screen, so the audience can see the silhouette.
4. Use your puppet to tell a story, and maybe even perform a show with a friend!

Think about this:

1. What character did you choose to create? Why?
2. What story did you decide to tell? Why?
3. What stories do you think the Indonesian puppeteers would tell?
4. Why do you think they chose to use puppets to tell a story?

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