

Ten Secrets for Puppeteers and Directors

By Amy Harder

So you know how to select your pieces and move your puppets. But how do you make a performance that really connects with your audience? In this class, Amy will share essential details of acting, staging, and composition that are often neglected in the puppet world. Techniques and creativity are just part of a good performance. Come learn some important secret ingredients so you can give your audience the whole enchilada.

Part I: Acting

1. _____

- Who is the most important person in your scene? _____
- How do you connect with your audience? _____

“Our goal . . . is to make the audience feel the emotions of the characters, rather than appreciate them intellectually. We want our viewers not merely to enjoy the situation with a murmured, “Isn’t he cu-ute?” but really to feel something of what the character is feeling. If we succeed in this, the audience will now care about the character and about what happens to him, and that is audience involvement. Without it, a cartoon feature will never hold the attention of its viewers.” Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston, *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation*

2. _____

- YOU must think.
 - Who is this character? _____
 - What happened just before this line? _____
- YOUR CHARACTER must think. Thoughts are expressed as _____.

3. _____

- When? After _____ or other stimulus
 - Don’t anticipate!!!
 - Let the thoughts happen first, then show a reaction.
- How? _____ lead to _____.
 - Make sure your body language says what you want it to say.
 - Practice some generalities.
 - *Expressions, Attitudes and Actions* by Cliff Taylor
 - *Acting for Animators* by Ed Hooks p 62-63
 - Improv games
 - Let the thoughts happen first, then show a reaction.
- How long? Until _____ to make him change.
 - Remember a bead necklace.
 - Inaction = lifelessness. Lifelessness cannot engage an audience.

4. _____

- What is your character doing? Pursue _____.
 - Reactions dictate the way an action will be played.
 - Objectives give the actions purpose and significance.
- Directors: Why are you doing what you’re doing?
 - If your goal is to get across a particular message, make sure that message, that objective is clear to your audience.
 - “If you turned off the sound, would you still have a story?” David Pannabecker

5. _____

- What is the _____ of the story?
 - Between characters
 - Within self
 - Against surroundings/happenings
- What are the _____ that must be overcome?

Part 2: Composition

“Composition, in a basic sense, means combining forms and space to produce a harmonious whole.” *Famous Artists Course, Lesson 3*

1. _____

- Avoid _____
- Leave _____
 - Frame characters.
 - Limit details. Eliminate confusion.

2. _____

- Clear or _____?
- Stage for _____.
 - Think through staging elements before rehearsal.
 - Train puppeteers what to do and why.

3. _____

- _____
 - Limit your body movements when you are not the center of attention.
 - Look in the direction where you want your audience to focus.
- _____
 - Think about costuming. Play with contrasting colors to help your lead stand out better.
 - Do you have access to spotlights or a lighting system? These can be quite effective in helping bring focus to particular areas.
 - Backgrounds can help or hinder a character’s ability to grab attention.
- _____
 - Can you cast your lead puppet from a different puppet maker than the others?
 - Puppet size variance also can beneficially affect focus direction.

4. _____

- Try quarter turns instead of completely facing each other on stage.
- Just give the idea of character focus.

5. _____

- Make time.
- Use focus, backgrounds, and staging to accentuate or diminish a character’s entrance.

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