

The Model



The Toy Theatre



Teacher's Resource

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Introduction

This resource has been written to assist teachers who are planning to work with The Toy Theatre project as a tool for creative learning. It has been inspired by the watercolour painting The Toy Theatre (1910), one of Jack B. Yeats many works in The Niland Collection, and one which captures the spirit of creativity and imagination that is at the heart of our programme for primary schools.

Toy Theatres were a popular form of domestic entertainment for children in the 1900s and on these tiny stages, large dramas were enacted. Over 100 years on, this painting ignites new ideas for visual

art, drama and cross-curricular learning in the classroom.

The project has a suggested timeline of eight weeks, which can be extended and adapted to your classroom timetable. Please feel free to work within your own schedule and spread out the work in a way that is most suitable for your students. This project is brought to you by The Model, home of The Niland Collection and the workshops are presented by Marc and Sorcha from Branar Téatar do Pháistí.

We hope that you will enjoy the magic of The Toy Theatre!

Overview of Project

Workshop 1: The Story of Jack B. Yeats (9min 49sec)

This workshop is a short film about the life of Jack B. Yeats, told through the medium of Toy Theatre. The children will learn interesting facts about the artist and see how a story can be told through this medium. A transcript of this workshop is available on The Model website.

Workshop 2: Make Your Own Toy Theatre (31min 19sec)

In this workshop Marc will show the class how to build their own Toy Theatre step by step. The class can work alongside the video, pausing whenever they need to.

Workshop 3: Decorating Your Toy Theatre (10min 49sec)

In this workshop Sorcha will show the class a few different ways to create a façade for their theatre. It is suggested that the class watch the whole workshop first, before deciding how they want to approach this.

Workshop 4: Backgrounds, Set Pieces, Characters and Props (27min 35sec)

In this workshop Sorcha will show the class how to make their backgrounds, set pieces, characters and props, using paper and card. The class can work alongside the video, pausing when they need to. There is an index of each different section of the workshop on page 12.

Workshop 5: How To Build A Story (9min 55sec)

In this workshop Marc tells the class about the special project he wants them to do. He tells them about Jack B. Yeats' painting 'The Toy Theatre' and suggests how to build a story around the scene in the painting using storyboards. He also reveals a surprise challenge! More about this and storyboards on pages 15 to 16.

Workshop 6: How To Perform and Film Your Toy Theatre Play (16min 21sec)

Marc and Sorcha give some tips on how to perform your Toy Theatre shows for your class. For a written list of the tips please see pages 17 and 18. We would love if you could film your show and share it with The Model. For information on how to do this please see page 17.

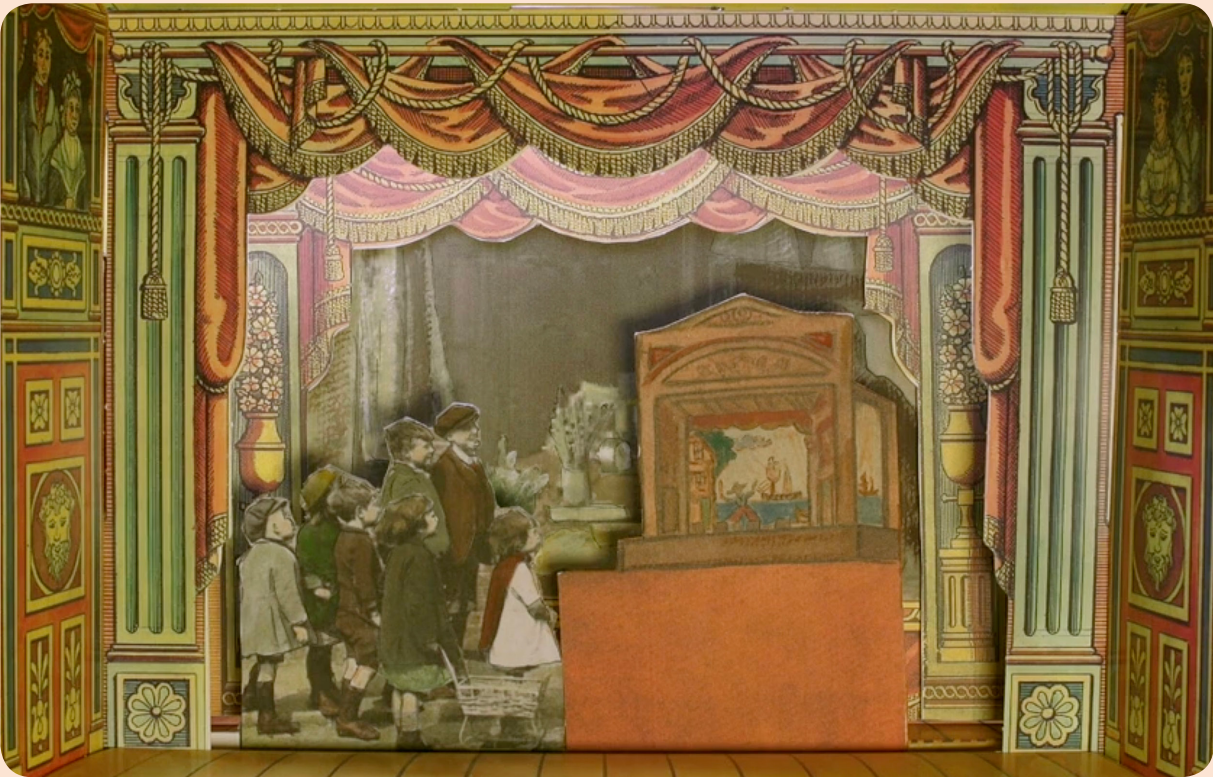
What is Toy Theatre?

In the 19th century, Toy Theatre, also known as paper theatre, flourished throughout Europe, as each country had their own Toy Theatre tradition and culture.

Influenced by this tradition, theatres in London began to advertise their shows with printed postcards featuring illustrations of characters from the shows. These were called ‘tuppenny coloured’ if they were printed in colour, or ‘paper plain’ if they were printed in black and white. Scripts of popular theatre plays were available in print everywhere, and theatres began to print the set designs from the

shows onto larger formats, such as posters, which further inspired the genre. This art form involved the manipulation of paper characters on small sets and became very popular in children’s theatre right up to the 1920s.

It was undoubtably a very popular pastime in Jack B Yeats’ grandfather’s time, and maybe it was in Sligo at his grandfather’s house where Jack B. Yeats first encountered his first Toy Theatre. From the 1940s onwards, the technique became popular with an increasing number of puppeteers and other artists.



Class Activity Suggestions:

- Research Toy Theatres, you can use books or the internet – other search words to use are ‘paper theatre’ or ‘miniature theatre’.

- Create a wall montage of the information you gather.

- Brainstorm with the children, what kind of shows they’d like to turn into a Toy Theatre play.

Workshop 1: The Story of Jack B. Yeats

Watch **Workshop 1: The Story of Jack B. Yeats** together as a class. After watching, research Jack B. Yeats and his paintings using books and The Model website.

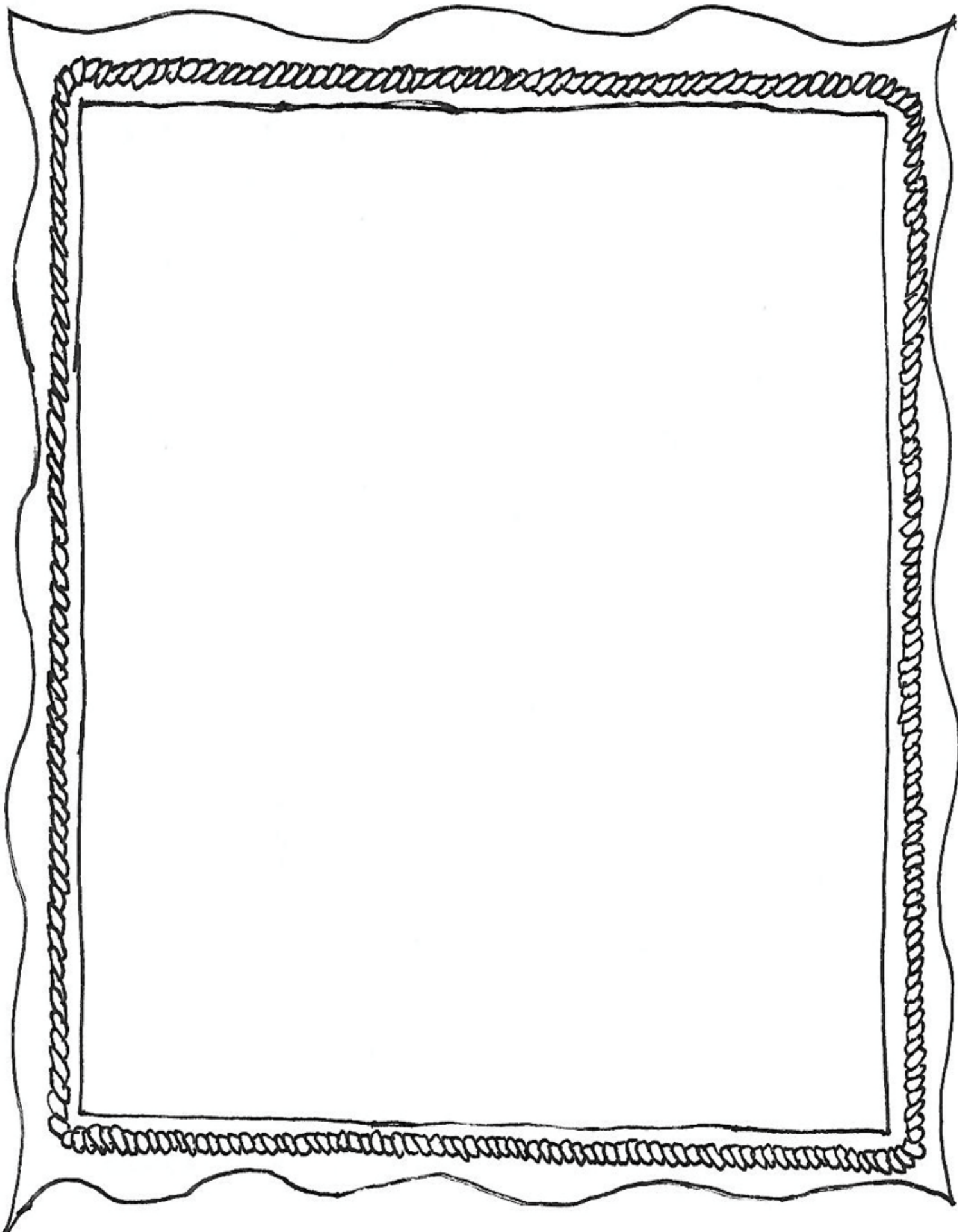
Class Activity: Create a Gallery

- Each child chooses their favourite Jack B Yeats painting. Using the frame template on the next page, each child draws/paints their own version of their favourite painting. Cut all the frames out and create a gallery wall of the children's paintings. (This will look especially lovely if the frames are painted gold).

Class Activity: The Toy Theatre

- Divide the class up into the groups that they will be working in to create their own Toy Theatre show (**suggested 5 children per group**).
- Ask each group to look at and discuss The Toy Theatre painting together as a class, using the suggested questions below. We will be using these questions again in workshop 5.
 - What do you SEE?
 - What do you HEAR?
 - What do you THINK? (what do you think is happening in the scene?)
 - What do you FEEL? (when you look at the scene)
 - How do you think the CHARACTER is feeling in the scene?

Look ahead to **Workshop 2 - Make Your Own Toy Theatre** and plan what materials are needed for the next week. You might have to ask the children to bring in extra materials if needed.



Workshop 2: Make Your Own Toy Theatre

It is suggested that you watch **Workshop 2: Make Your Own Toy Theatre** first before working through it with the class, so as to be aware of the materials needed. You can then make an informed decision about whether they want to make their Toy Theatre in one day, or to break it up over the whole week.

The estimated time it should take to make a Toy Theatre, is 2 hours, stopping the video as needed.

What you will need for each group:

- A cardboard box
- A4 piece of card (not paper)
- Ruler
- Pencil
- Scissors

Workshop Index:

1. What You Need – 00:43
2. Marking Out the Box – 01:33
3. Cutting Out the Openings – 07:27
4. Cutting the Slots for the Scene Hangers – 12:22
5. Making the Legs or Scene Hangers – 18:37



Workshop 3: Decorating Your Toy Theatre

Watch **Workshop 3: Decorating Your Toy Theatre** together as a class, and then each group can decide how they want to decorate their theatre. In the picture below you can see two of the possible options for decorating the facade of the theatre.

1. Painting the cardboard box.



2. Covering the cardboard box with coloured paper.



Workshop 4: Backgrounds, Set Pieces, Characters and Props

It is suggested that you watch **Workshop 4: Backgrounds, Set Pieces, Characters and Props** first before working through it with the class, so as to be aware of the materials needed. You can then make an informed decision about whether to make all the elements in one day, or to break it up over a whole week or more.

- Possible timeline suggestion:
 - Monday: Backgrounds
 - Tuesday: Set Pieces
 - Wednesday: Characters
 - Thursday: Props
 - Friday: Playtime with all the elements they made over the week

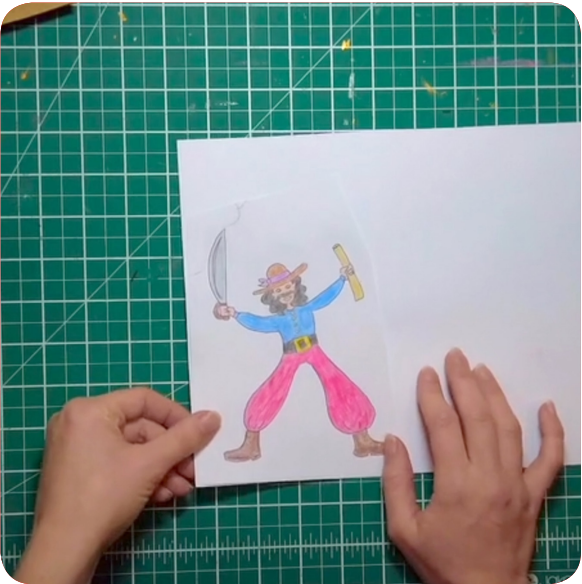
Watch **Workshop 4** with the class, making each element along with the video, pausing as needed.

What you need (per group):

- The Scene Hangers you made along with Marc in **Workshop 2**
- The A4 piece of card you used as a template for the front opening of the paper theatre
- The print out of The Toy Theatre painting
- The print out of the close up of The Toy Theatre in the painting
- Sheets of A3 paper (for the backgrounds and set pieces)
- Sheets of A4 paper (for the characters and props)
- Scissors
- Ruler
- Glue stick (Pritt Stick or something similar)
- Pencils
- Black pen or marker
- Rubber
- Tape (masking tape is good, as you'll be swapping backdrops so you want it to be easy to remove them from the hangers)
- Leftover cardboard from making the box, or any spare cardboard you have lying around (cereal box cardboard is good)
- Lollipop sticks or long wooden skewers (cutting off the sharp points)
- Any kind of colouring materials you want to use (colouring pencils, crayons, markers, etc. Note that if you use paint you'll need to leave time for it to dry)

Workshop Index:

1. What You Need – 00:58
2. Making A Backdrop – 01:45
(If you used paint to colour your backdrops wait until they're dry while making the rest of the elements, or you can skip to step 6 to learn how to attach them to the frames)
3. Making A Character – 09:45
4. Making A Set Piece – 15:50
5. Making A Prop – 19:00
6. Attaching the Backdrop to the Frame – 24:05



Surprise Challenge!

In 2018, some model boats once owned by Jack Butler Yeats were given to The Model as a gift. When the boats were being cleaned a tiny paper character was discovered hidden in the hull of a boat called The Irish Girl. The little figure turned out to be a famous character invented by Yeats called Theodore the Pirate. Theodore features in some of Yeats's early drawings and also in *A Broadside*, a pamphlet edited by Jack and published by their sister, Elizabeth in Cuala Press. The paper figure of Theodore discovered in The Irish Girl was an actor made especially for use in a Toy Theatre.

Questions to Ask About the Small Pirate:

- Who is he?
- What's his name?
- Where did he come from?
- Where is he going?
- Is he a pirate, or is he something else?
- What could the book that he is reading be about?

The Challenge!

- In each pack are several small paper cut-outs of the small pirate to share between the class.
- It is the group's task to figure out how the small pirate fits into their story.
- He can be a main character, or he can just feature in the background, whatever suits the story. But try and include him somehow!



Workshop 5:

How to Build a Story

Watch **Workshop 5: How To Build A Story** with the class. Discuss afterwards using the suggested questions and classroom activities. We advise that you take two weeks to complete this section, so as to allow for the development of the story.

- Possible timeline suggestion:

Week 1

Monday: Watch **Workshop 5: How To Build A Story** Discuss the questions Marc asks in the video.

Tuesday: Drawing Storyboards.

Wednesday: Drawing Storyboards.

Thursday: Work in groups, create a story together, using their ideas from their storyboard.

Friday: Write the story (narrator's text).

Week 2

Monday–Friday: Making backgrounds, characters, set pieces and props. Estimated time 3–4 hours.

Class Activity: Open Discussion

Watch the video and discuss the following questions with the class, pausing the video after each question to give the class time to discuss before Marc moves along to another question. Encourage the class to use their imaginations, there are no wrong answers to these questions!

1. What do you SEE?
2. What do you HEAR?
3. What do you THINK? (what do you think is happening in the scene?)
4. What do you FEEL? (when you look at the scene)
5. How do you think the CHARACTER is feeling in the scene?

Creating Your Story using Storyboards

For this exercise you can either use one big sheet of paper and draw 3 squares on it for the 3 storyboard panels, or you can use 3 separate pieces of A4 paper.

- Put the children back into their groups.
- Give each group 3 sheets of A4 paper or one large sheet with three squares drawn on it.
- Ask them to number the sheets 1, 2 and 3 with pencil on the back (or

write the numbers above each box if using one big sheet).

- On Sheet Number 2 ask the children to draw the scene they see in the Toy Theatre. This is the MIDDLE of the story.
- Give them time to have a think and discuss in their group what the BEGINNING of the story could be. What happened BEFORE this scene? More characters/props/settings are very welcome!
- On Sheet Number 1 ask the children to draw what they think the BEGINNING of the story is.
- Give them time to have a think and discuss in their group about what the ENDING of the story could be. What happened AFTER the scene in the Toy Theatre? Again, the more characters/props/settings the merrier!
- On Sheet Number 3 ask the children to draw what they think the ENDING of the story is.
- Now each group should have created a story with a Beginning, Middle and End!
- You could do a Show & Tell where each group shows the class their storyboards.

Tips for Drawing Your Beginning and Endings :

- If somebody is stuck trying to come up with something for their story, ask the question 'What COULD happen?'
- The answer is anything could happen! The sky's the limit!

Tips for Making New Backgrounds, Set Pieces, Characters and Props:

- Set aside time for the groups to make the extra backgrounds, set pieces, characters and props that they need to tell the stories that they have created.
- To ensure all the characters are a similar size, get an A4 page, fold it in half and fold it in half again. Draw all the characters on a quartered A4 page and they should all be a similar size without having to measure each of them.
- Because the characters are made of paper and can't move, encourage the children to draw them IN ACTION so it looks like they're moving.
- Encourage the children to make their scene look action-filled by adding different LAYERS of set pieces and a couple of different props. If they feel like there's too much going on or it looks too busy they can always take some things away!
- Go back over Workshop 4 as a refresher to help in the construction on the extra backgrounds, characters and props.

Workshop 6: How to Perform and Film Your Toy Theatre Play

It is suggested that you watch **Workshop 6: How To Perform and Film Your Paper Theatre Play** first before working through it with the class, so as to be aware of the materials and time needed.

- Possible timeline suggestion:

Week 1

Monday: Watch **Workshop 6: How To Perform and Film Your Paper Theatre Play** with the class. Source lamps for lighting.

Tuesday: Making the elements.

Wednesday: Making elements/rehearsing the plays.

Thursday: Rehearsing.

Friday: Each group performs their show live to the rest of the class.

Week 2

Monday–Friday: Choose one play to film. The whole class comes together to work on making a recording of the performance. The Model will showcase your final video on The Model website. Please send to education@themodel.ie

Tips for Film Set Up

- **PLACEMENT:** Put your Toy Theatre in the centre of a table, make sure that when the audience are looking at it that they are looking straight into the theatre. If the theatre is too low or too high they might not be able to see important bits of the backgrounds or characters.
- **SPACE:** There should be enough space on the RIGHT, LEFT and BEHIND the Toy Theatre for three people to operate the show (you may have to push two tables together.) Each person needs space to place the elements of the show that they will be operating (backgrounds, characters, props etc.)
- It would be handy to have a table behind the person who is stationed behind the paper theatre for them to place their elements on and have somewhere to strike them when they've used them. 'Strike' is a word used in theatre to describe when something is used onstage and then put away because it's not needed again for the rest of the show.

- Tape the box to the table so it doesn't move around when you're trying to slide backgrounds in and out.
- **ROLES/JOB:** There are a couple of different jobs to do when performing the Toy Theatre show. Students need to bring elements onstage and offstage and bring the backgrounds in and out. There can also be a narrator or a couple of students doing voices and sound effects. Try to figure out how best to assign these roles with the student groups. We suggest one student to narrate the piece as this requires a lot of concentration. We recommend students to have a go doing each of the different roles, to see what they like best!
- In the context of Toy Theatre, the best way to tell a story is to keep it simple. **PRACTICE** a few times to figure out what the best way to do it is. You'll then be able to make sure that everyone in your group has a role they are happy with.
- **ORDER/ORGANISATION:** It's very important that the students organise their elements (characters, props, backgrounds, set pieces) in the space so that the prop or character is on hand when needed. Otherwise there will be a lot of scrambling around! They will be able to figure out the order as they practice, and what is the best way to organise the theatre elements.
- When it's ready, the elements should be face-down so the audience doesn't get a glimpse of what they are in advance, therefore not giving the story away! Make sure the students **WRITE ON THE BACK** of the elements exactly what they are to avoid confusion.
- **STORYBOARDING:** It can be really useful to have the storyboard handy when performing it, so as not to lose track. It's also a really good idea to go through each scene and write out next to it who is doing what in that scene so everyone is on the same page.
- **FILMING:** Film the show with a phone or a camera. The students may need help with this especially the younger classes. When filming, make sure the camera focuses right in on the stage, so all you see is what is going on in the theatre and not off stage. This will make it look like a little animation!

Conclusion

After completing the project, students will have developed their skills in literacy, visual art, drama, contemporary media, and many other levels of learning such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating. The legacy of this project is that the Toy

Theatre can be used as a tool for further integrated learning in the classroom, and to explore other curricular subjects through storytelling, such as important moments in history, geography and science through visual storytelling and drama.

The Toy Theatre has been commissioned by The Model, home of The Niland Collection, for use in participating schools, and has been developed and presented by Branar Téatar Do Pháistí.

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