

Audio-visual aids take time to prepare. Having made an aid, a teacher often uses it for a particular lesson and then it is put away until the teacher uses it to teach a similar lesson later on. Because of this, many teachers, especially those in secondary schools are reluctant to make aids as they feel they have to make a large number of aids to teach the various aspects of the syllabus. This should not be the case; aids should be versatile. Having made an aid, a teacher should be able to use it in different teaching situations. I have taken just one set of audio-visual aids to show that all the areas in the Communication Syllabus can be taught with this aid. This, of course, is to prove my point, but to use the same aid over and over may defeat the purpose for which it was intended in the first place. A number of such aids should be developed by the teacher and their potential for use also listed down so that these can be used to cover the syllabus as a whole.

Puppets are excellent audio-visual aids in the English class. They cost little or nothing to make and their curricular applications are numerous. The puppeteer can create entire worlds — oceans, deserts, jungles, palaces and outerspaces. All that is required are a few mini-backdrops and a few puppets.

Puppets can be used to explain or to describe something, to give directions, to say funny things, to tell stories and to create dramatic situations to which students respond. They provide students with many opportunities to enrich and expand their language skills as well as to challenge their imaginations. Students often feel more confident talking through the characters of puppets. The smallest student can play the giant and even shy students can step forth to play bold heroes because they will be exposing only their voices, not their bodies.

The challenge of puppetry is in giving life to the inanimate. If the student relaxes for a moment, the puppet dies. To keep the puppet animated, the student must always feel himself on stage. This is relatively easy when the puppet is talking or performing. But even when the puppet is standing motionless, maybe listening to another character,

the student's fingers must stay tense to keep the creature from going flacid.

Although the students do not actually appear on stage, they must do much preliminary work with the language. They have to read fluently and be able to paraphrase and summarize, to ensure a coherent presentation.

Students can write additional scenes or new conclusions. They can write simple descriptions and statements of mood and personal reactions; they can express ideas and moods. Hypothetical letters can be written between characters. Students can be involved in the making of the puppets, designing the costumes and sets, writing the stories, building sound effects, putting music on tape, giving commentaries and dialogue. All these are learning activities which are meaningful and interesting.

Working with puppets is a group experience in which the students are taught to listen to others, to observe, to react and to relax in a non-threatening environment. It also gives them the opportunity to practise using the language they have learnt. They learn more about themselves as individuals and about the others in the group.

#### **The areas of the Communication Syllabus and the use of puppets to teach them.**

##### **Area 1: Relaying of information to others**

1. Students who made the puppets, costumes, sets, etc. can explain to the rest of the class how they went about choosing the costumes, or deciding on the characters of their puppets.
2. Students can talk about the production of the play.

##### **Area 2: Description of visually perceived information**

1. Students can be asked to write a description of one of the puppets.
2. They can also describe a character in the play.
3. They can compare two puppets.

##### **Area 3: Translation of oral or written information into non-language forms**

1. The making of the puppets, the sets, the music will all come under this area.

**Area 4:** Making and receiving telephone calls

1. Students can ring their friends and talk to them about the play, the puppets, etc. They can also ask for advice and help in solving some of the problems related to production.
2. The puppets can be made to talk to each other about some issue related to the storyline.

**Area 5:** Gathering of the information, comments and ideas

1. Students will have to read up background information on the design of costumes and sets.
2. Discussion with the class after the play has been seen; for example, on improvements that could have been made.

**Area 6:** Social and friendly correspondence

1. Students write letters to their friends telling them about the play.
2. Hypothetical letters can be written between characters in the play.

**Area 7:** Business and formal correspondence

1. Students can write to Embassies and information departments for information about costumes, etc.
2. They can also write invitations for a viewing of their play.

**Area 8:** Description and explanation of processes and procedures

1. Students can explain to the class how to make the different types of puppets.
2. They can be given pictures and notes on how to make different types of puppets and they can then write out the procedures.

**Area 9:** Short notes to record salient information

1. They can write short notes when they are working out the dialogues and when they are producing the play.

**Area 10:** Comments or questions for gleaning further information

1. Students can ask questions about the play, how the puppets were made, etc.
2. Class discussion can be held about the play as a whole.

**Area 11:** Expansion of notes

1. To write the dialogue they will have to write in note form and then expand it.
2. Descriptions of costumes, sets, etc. If they are getting the information from a book they will need to write in note form and then expand these for the project work ( Area 16).

**Area 12:** Summary of extended pieces of information

1. To write the dialogue they will have had to summarize the story first.
2. Students can be asked to write a summary of the story after having watched the performance.

**Area 13:** Reply to an argument against a viewpoint; presentation of reasoned opinion

1. During class discussions about the play this area can be covered.

**Area 14:** Accurate translation of information from Bahasa Malaysia

1. Students can be given a story in Bahasa Malaysia and told to translate it into English before working on the dialogues.

**Area 15:** Speeches and responses appropriate for social occasions

1. A speech to welcome and thank the class – or others – for attending the play.
2. To introduce the story and the characters.

**Area 16:** Gleaning of information from various sources and presentation of the information gathered in an organized way

1. Students can work around the story as a project. They can have (a) a short description of the country, its people, culture, etc.; (b) a short history; (c) the puppets can be exhibited with a short description of each character and its costume.
2. Students can also work on different types of puppets, for example, glove puppets, string puppets, puppets used for shadow play, etc. with their origins and history written out.

**Functions**

Puppets can also be used to teach the different functions in realistic situations. They can be made to instruct, describe, report, etc. The teacher can pick out the functions from the play and deal with them; for example, in class, the wolf in 'Red Riding Hood' asks directions to Red Riding Hood's grandmother's house and she gives him the directions. The following are sample lessons that show how this integrated approach can be carried out.

**Lesson 1** (Double period)

1. The teacher divides the class into groups. Each group is given a story to be adapted for a puppet show.

2. If the teacher wishes, she can give the stories in Bahasa Malaysia and ask the students to write the dialogue in English.
3. The students should be allowed to make some changes to the story if they think it is necessary.
4. The teacher should have pinned on the notice-board instructions on how to make various types of puppets or she could give each group a set of these instructions. The students will have to decide which type of puppet they want to make.

**Lesson 2** (This lesson will cover all aspects of production.)

1. The teacher can ask each group to choose a secretary and a director. The secretary will keep a diary of all the things that the group does. She will also be responsible for the writing of a report of what the group has done. This she does after consultation with the other members of the group.
2. Discussion will be centred on:
  - (a) Who is going to make the puppets? One student can make the face and another the costume or one student can concentrate on one puppet.
  - (b) Costumes: A little research is needed to find out the type of costumes needed. The group can choose one or two students to do this.
  - (c) Sets: How many will be needed and who is going to make them?
  - (d) Sound effects/music: What types of sounds, music, etc.? When in the play will these be used?
  - (e) Who is going to manipulate the puppets and play the different characters?
  - (f) If a narrator is needed they will have to choose one.

- (g) If they need any help or information, who do they write to?

Once all these have been settled, the group leader can submit a report of what has taken place and what the group has decided to do. The groups are on their own now and the teacher can give them two or three weeks to get the show ready. The stage should be left in the class and a timetable drawn up so that all the groups get a chance to practise after school or during their free periods. During these two weeks, the teacher can get students to talk about how they make their puppets, the problems they faced. They can write descriptions of puppets, compare puppets, etc.

At the end of two or three weeks, the first group will present its play, after which there will be a general discussion. Students should be allowed to ask the group questions about the production. At this stage, the teacher should discourage too strong a criticism of the production. After each group has presented its play, students could compare puppets and plays. They could write a summary of the story, write hypothetical letters between characters, talk about the various functions, answer comprehension questions on the play, etc. The teacher could do a whole lot of things with the class. Finally, each group could put up on the notice-board the play, designs of the costumes, background information, the diary or progress reports, etc.

This sort of approach would be most suitable for a Form Five class where the areas covered in Form Four are repeated. Here the areas are integrated. The students get a lot of opportunity to discuss and use the language. They are actively involved and everyone gets a chance to do something.