

Dancing Shadow Puppets

Merrymaking in a Tavern, by Jan Steen



Paintings like this, showing people coming together inside taverns (what we might call a pub today), people at work and other scenes of everyday life were popular in the 1600s. Today, we call paintings of this type 'genre' paintings. They often depict familiar places and don't include any fantastical things, such as the ancient gods that you might see in many other paintings in the Wallace Collection.

Genre paintings were particularly popular in the Netherlands, where large paintings of religious or mythological subject matter weren't popular because of the Christian beliefs of the country at the time. Other more popular subjects included still life paintings, and you can see lots of those in the Wallace Collection too. Jan Steen, the painter of this scene, is famous for making lots of pictures of tavern scenes early on in his career. This might have something to do with the fact that his father was a brewer, so scenes like this one would be familiar to him, or perhaps it's because his teachers painted pictures of everyday life too.

Whatever the reason, this tavern scene is completely Jan-packed with interesting characters. There are two that really stand out from the crowd: the man and woman dancing in the middle of the room. The painting has caught these dancers in a freeze frame and it's easy to see they've got some serious moves!

Follow the instructions below to create your own shadow puppet dancers, before bringing them together in a monochromatic Dutch Dance-off.



Merrymaking in a Tavern was probably painted in 1674.



Why not make your own shadow puppet theatre to really show off your puppets' moves?

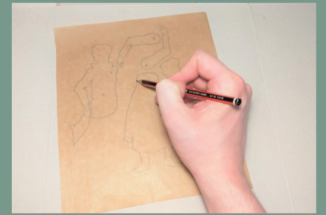
Activity

You Will Need:

- Card
- Scissors
- A pen or pencil
- Metal wire, canes or wooden skewers
- Split pins
- Tape
- Shadow Puppet template
- A torch, lamp or light from your phone

Step 1.

Using the templates provided, begin by drawing out the shadow puppet parts on your card or cereal box. You can trace the template on to your card or cereal box using tracing paper or baking parchment.



Step 2.

Cut out each part of the shadow puppet.



Step 3.

Make a hole in each point marked with a circle on the template. These are the articulation points –where the different pieces of card will join together. Make a smaller hole in the points marked with an x, for attaching the controlling wires.



Step 4.

Join your puppet together at the articulation points, using split pins. You can also now attach the controlling wires through the smaller holes.



Step 5.

Finally, attach a rod or stick to hold up your puppet and you're ready to dance!



Performance

You can use any torch or lamp and flat surface to make a shadow with your puppet. Hold your puppet using the skewer or cane in front of your light source and use the wires to make them dance.

For the best results, make your own shadow puppet theatre. See instructions below.



Make a Shadow Puppet Theatre

You Will Need:

- A large box
- Tracing paper or baking parchment
- Tape
- A torch, lamp or light from your phone

Step 1.

Cut a large square hole in the front of your box, big enough to fit your puppets but leaving some card around the edge to attach your tracing paper or baking parchment to.



Step 2.

Cut another hole in the back of your box. This is where your torch or lamp will enter the box. Cut another two small rectangle holes in either side of the box.



Step 3.

Cut a sheet of tracing paper or grease proof paper and stick it over the large square hole in the front of your box. This will be your stage. Finally seal the top of your box with tape.



Step 4.

To use your theatre, switch on the light at the back and switch off any other lights in the room, move your puppets into position through the holes in the side of your box and get them dancing!

