

Pop-up Bunraku Japanese Puppet Theater

The Japanese Bunraku puppet tradition goes back hundreds of years. It's not a puppet show for kids, as most puppet shows are in America. These puppets perform famous plays often based on stories from the era of the Samurai.

Bunraku puppets can be either life-size or half-size. The puppets in this scene are closer to life-size. The puppeteers wear black robes and hoods to encourage the audience to forget that the puppets are being manipulated by people. Thus, the puppets seem to take on a real life of their own. It takes two or three puppeteers to manipulate each puppet. A typical arrangement is that one person does the head and right hand, a second is in charge of the left hand and a third moves the feet.

If you would like to see some scenes from famous Bunraku puppet shows, try these links, or use an Internet video search with key words "Bunraku puppets of Japan."

<http://youtube.com/watch?v=Zef4KsgqhAE>

<http://youtube.com/watch?v=Sbjr5ubBR04>

<http://youtube.com/watch?v=IJ15jVfZlk&feature=related> (This one is narrated in Portuguese but is nice because it shows more than just a performance. It shows backstage preparation.)

You will need:

colored pencils

scissors

white glue

X-acto knife or razor blade (in a pinch you can make do with the edge of a scissor)

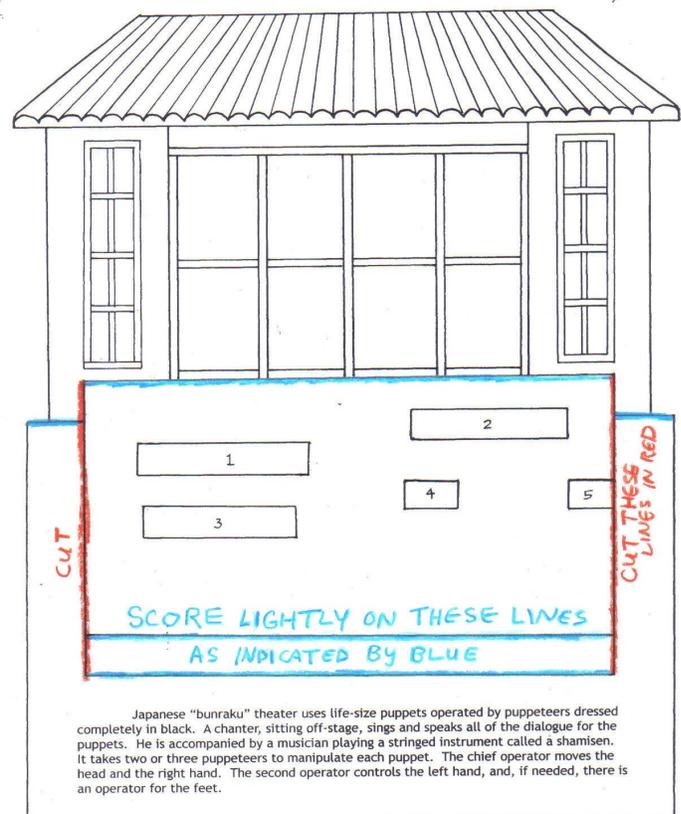
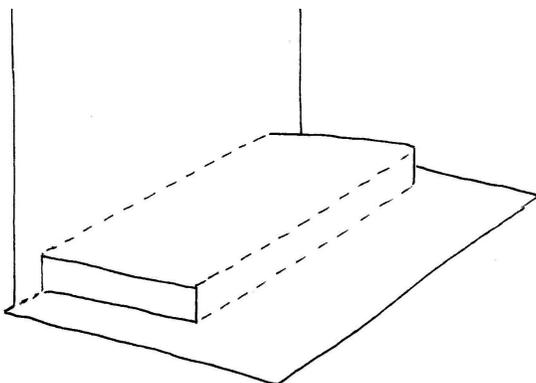
Assembly instructions:

1) Color your figures using colored pencils. (Substitute crayons if you must.) You can color the stage or you can leave it plain.

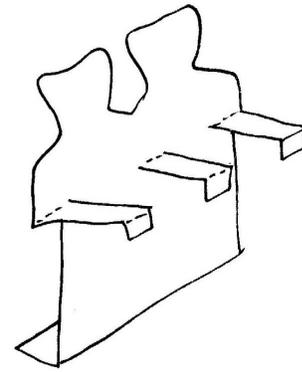
2) Cut out the theater.

3) Use an X-acto knife to cut along lines on the theater as indicated by the red and blue lines. Also, score VERY LIGHTLY along the lines indicated. To score lines, use a ruler and something sharp enough to score but not sharp enough to cut. You could possibly use the back side of the X-acto or the scissors. Just press very, very lightly.

4) Fold the theater as shown below.



5) Cut out the figures. On the hooded puppeteers, you will need to cut the arms up to the armpits, so that the arms can be folded forward, in “zombie” fashion. The hand tabs can be folded downward. Bend the foot tabs on the bottom of the figures so they go back under the figures.



6) Glue figures to the stage where indicated by the numbers.

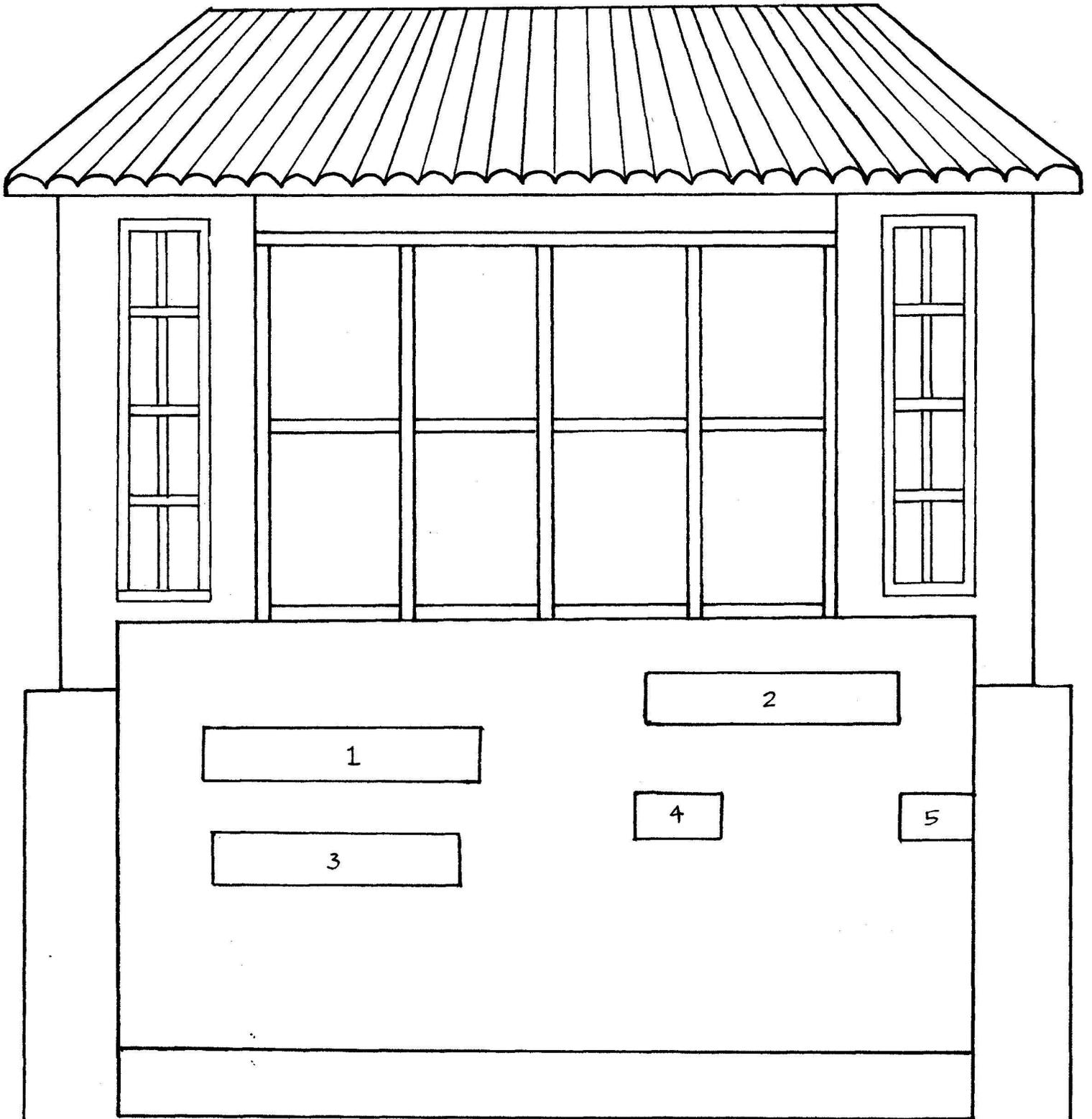
7) Glue the hands of the puppeteers to the backs of the puppets so that the arms are straight out, parallel to the stage floor.

8) Cut out the stabilizer tabs and bend on dotted lines. Glue them to the backs of the puppeteers (exact place is not crucial), then to the back of the stage. Make sure that the stabilizers are nice and straight, parallel to the stage floor.

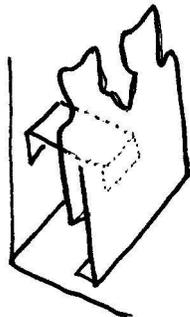
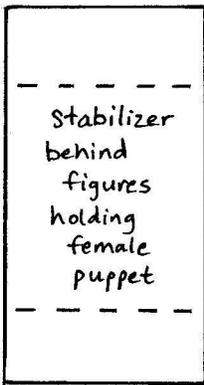
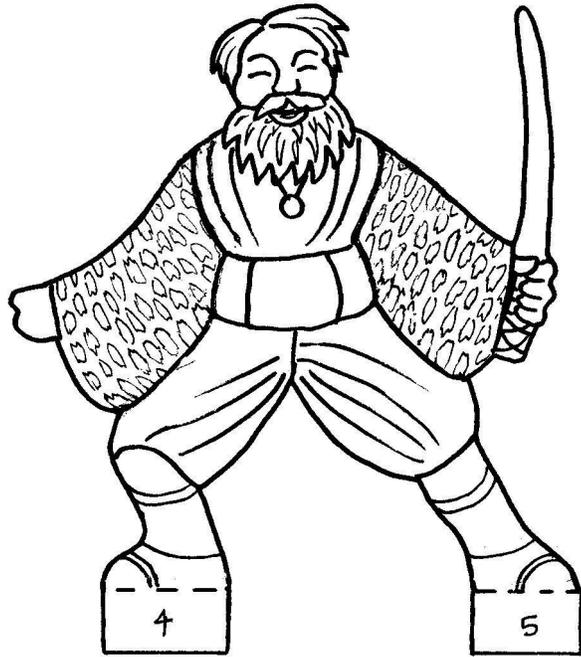
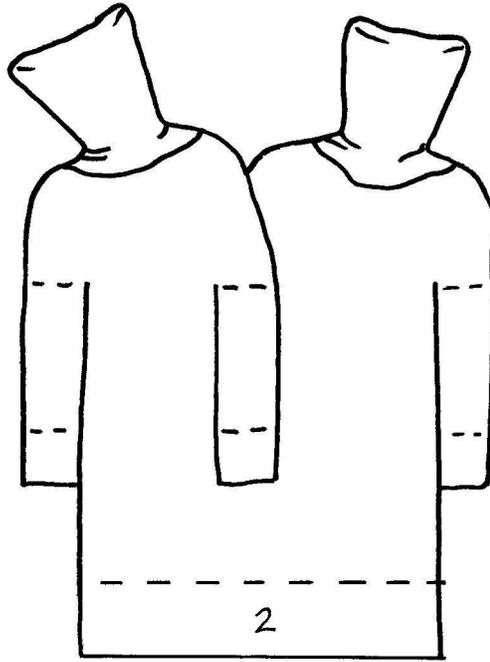
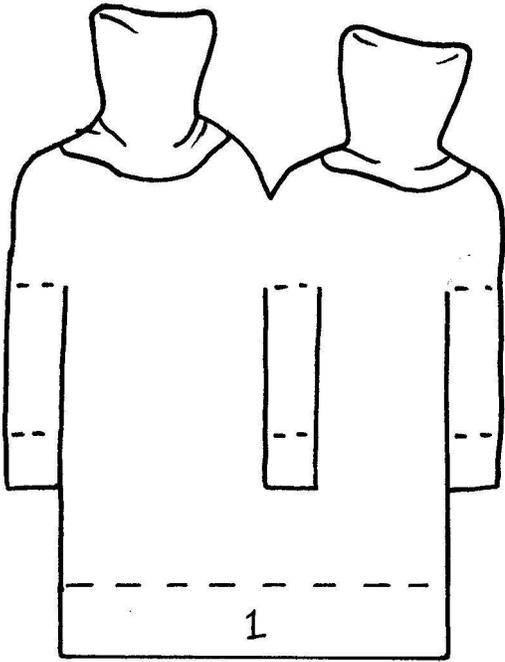
9) Do not try to fold the stage shut until you have let it dry for at about 30 minutes or more. When it is completely dry, fold the stage down and press flat.

GLUING TIP: Apply only a small amount of white glue. Just barely enough to wet the surface. If it seeps out, it's too much glue! Then press tightly, holding the joint, and count to ten. When you let go, the paper should be pretty well stuck.

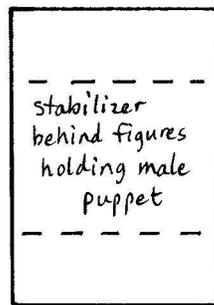




Japanese “bunraku” theater uses life-size puppets operated by puppeteers dressed completely in black. A chanter, sitting off-stage, sings and speaks all of the dialogue for the puppets. He is accompanied by a musician playing a stringed instrument called a shamisen. It takes two or three puppeteers to manipulate each puppet. The chief operator moves the head and the right hand. The second operator controls the left hand, and, if needed, there is an operator for the feet.



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