

Punch and Judy

This session is adapted from the Museum Of Childhood's 'Exploring Punch & Judy' session which was created as part of The Big Grin project assisted by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Session outline:

- History of Mr. Punch (5 minutes)
- Meet the cast - object handling or looking at online images. (10 minutes)
- Punch and Judy online video (4 mins) *NB: If budget permits you will find many Punch & Judy performers familiar with working in schools and able to deliver an age-appropriate live performance. A good performer should be able to perform to an entire KS in the school hall should you wish to expand the experience beyond just one class. If not, the video on the V&A puppet page will suffice as an introduction.*
- Playing with puppets (if no Punch & Judy puppets are to hand, then any glove puppets can be used to demonstrate the genre. A marionette would also be useful to show the other type of puppet relevant to Mr. Punch's history) (Optional duration)

Equipment and materials

- Box of handling puppets if available OR online images of Punch (& a slapstick) Judy, Baby, Policeman, Crocodile, Toby the Dog, Ghost
- Online video or equivalent from DVD or live performer.

Learning Outcomes

- This session is targeted at KS1 but can be geared upwards to KS2 and any topic in which puppetry, popular entertainment, drama, art and craft are relevant.
- Outcome: Learn about traditional English street entertainment. Discuss history (English Restoration period; birth of railways; seaside holidays).
- Outcome: Touch and explore different materials
- Outcome: Creative play. Playing with toy puppets.

History of Mr. Punch (5 minutes)

This script assumes you have actual puppets to show. It is easily altered to use photos from the online collection instead.

Has anyone seen a Punch & Judy show before? (FOLLOW UP AS NEEDED)

I'll show you a Mr. Punch puppet (GET OUT PUNCH HANDLING PUPPET OR SHOW IMAGE)

He's the kind of puppet that goes on your hand (PUT ON HAND).

Do you know what we call the kind of puppet that goes on your hand? (ESTABLISH IT'S A HAND PUPPET ALSO CALLED **GLOVE PUPPET**)

You can see that Mr. Punch has a big red nose, he wears a funny costume – and he does things to make us laugh. What type of person has a red nose and makes us laugh? (ESTABLISH 'CLOWN').

So we now know that Mr. Punch is a kind of clown. In fact, he's a really, really old clown. Can anyone guess how old Mr. Punch is? (ESTABLISH EXACT AGE. HE WAS 350 YEARS OLD in 2012)

We know he's that old because of a famous man called Samuel Pepys. Have you heard of him? (NAME IS PRONOUNCED 'PEEPS'. MANY CHILDREN KNOW OF PEPYS IN YEARS 1 & 2 VIA THE GREAT FIRE).

Samuel Pepys kept a diary for almost 10 years (from 1660 to 1669) chronicling daily life in London. He tells us about the Great Fire of London, different wars and the Great Plague that swept the city. In fact, his diary is one of the most important accounts we have in understanding English history from this period!

On 9 May 1662, he wrote that he was out for a walk in Covent Garden in London when he saw a puppet show from Italy. The star puppet had a big nose and a squeaky voice. His Italian name was 'Pulcinella' (PRONOUNCED 'PULCHINELLA'), which means 'Little Chicken'. But English people found that hard to say. They said 'Punchinello' instead, and then shortened it to 'Punch'. That's how he got his name.

Punch wasn't a hand puppet at first. He was a puppet on strings. (ESTABLISH THE WORD 'MARIONETTE'). He was originally dressed all in white, but soon changed to the colours of a Jester.

After he was spotted by Pepys in 1662, Punch puppet shows became a favourite entertainment at fairgrounds and Mr. Punch became the most famous puppet in England.

This went on for about 100 years. Britain changed a lot during this time until more people were living in towns and cities than were living in the countryside. So Mr. Punch changed too. He became a glove puppet in a little

puppet stage like the ones we still see today and he entertained the public in the streets. (THIS HAPPENED around 1800)

When railways were invented by the Victorians, people started going on holiday to the seaside. Punch and Judy went too. It was a great tradition to go watch a Punch and Judy show by the seaside. People still think of Punch and Judy as being at the seaside even though nowadays they are more often at carnivals, fetes, fun days and parties. That's because not so many people take their summer holidays at the seaside any more. They have more options to vacation abroad using trains, ferries or maybe planes.

So we know Punch is a 350 year old clown and that it is a clown's job to make us laugh. The type of comedy Mr. Punch performed was 'physical comedy' which involves lots of falling down, throwing things, tripping up and whacking.

Mr. Punch makes us laugh by whacking people with a special stick. (SHOW IMAGE OF SLAPSTICK). We call this stick a 'slap-stick'. It is made of two pieces of wood that smack together and make a big noise. Human clowns used to use a big slap-stick in their acts, but Mr. Punch uses a small, puppet-sized one. When a clown hits someone with it, it makes a noise but doesn't hurt. The sound is made by the pieces of wood clapping together.

Has anyone heard of the term 'slap-stick comedy'? It's the type of comedy that involves a lot of hitting and throwing and falling over. You see this kind of comedy in cartoons and in old silent movies (e.g. Three Stooges, Laurel and Hardy, Keystone Cops, and more recently in Jim Carey movies and The Simpsons).

The type of comedy you see in a Punch and Judy show is 'slap stick' comedy. You might think of it as a live action cartoon.

Meet the Cast (using puppets or images) (10 minutes)

There is no 'official' script for a Punch and Judy show. That means no two shows are exactly alike. However, there are routines that often appear in a Punch and Judy show (e.g. Punch and Judy having a dispute about the Baby; Punch getting in trouble with a Policeman; a Crocodile eats Mr Punch's sausages, etc).

PUNCH (already discussed under History of Punch and Judy.)

- 350 years old. Originally a clown-like character 'Pulcinella' from Italian tradition of Commedia dell' arte (means 'Little Chicken')
- Originally dressed in white, but changed to Court Jester type costume.
- Originally a marionette (string puppet) but changed to glove puppet for street theatre in 1800s.
- His famous catchphrase is "That's the way to do it".

JUDY

- Married to Mr. Punch. Essentially a female clown. She looks a lot like her husband. She too has a clown's red nose.
- Argues and fights with Mr. Punch a lot.

NB: The term "Punch and Judy politics" relates to silly, petty point scoring and tit-for-tat squabbling. Children do this too.

Basic slapstick humour was (and still is) extremely popular. It is a popular type of 'physical comedy'. Think of the cartoon, The Simpsons. In it, we see Homer strangling Bart and Bart's eye's popping out. We know this isn't real – it is extreme behaviour that is meant to make us laugh. Other puppets (like Miss Piggy) often whack others for comic effect. Cartoons like Tom and Jerry and Bugs Bunny also used this kind of humour. It might be easier to think of Punch and Judy as a live action cartoon.

BABY

- Child of Punch and Judy
- Punch is famous at being useless at looking after the baby. Of course it's not a real baby . It's just a piece of wood painted to look like a baby. It is Punch's failure to look after the baby properly which starts an argument making Judy fetch a stick to teach Punch a lesson.

NB: During Victorian times, people had different attitudes to children than we do today. In the old Punch and Judy shows, this scene was played with a darker form of humour. Punch threw the crying baby out of the window and blamed Judy for not having been there to catch it. Today a common approach to the performance is to have Punch sit on the baby when Judy asks him to do the baby sitting. This type of humour is similar to what you see in pantomimes. The tradition keeps in tune with public attitudes. In this respect it is similar to a traditional tale like Cinderella. Any harsh abuse and violent acts in the original tale has been adapted to the tastes of later generations. For instance, in the old tale of Cinderella, the Ugly Stepsisters cut off bits of their toes and feet to try to squeeze their foot into the glass slipper – you don't see that in the Disney version.

POLICEMAN

- The Policeman represents law and order – two things Mr. Punch is not very good at.
- He comes to arrest Mr. Punch after he has mistreated Judy and the Baby, but Punch always manages to escape (usually by hitting the Policeman with the slapstick).

JOEY THE CLOWN

- He is Mr. Punch's friend – who also plays tricks on him.
- Joey is named after the famous English pantomime clown superstar Joey Grimaldi. (circa 1800). One of Grimaldi's famous acts involved him stealing sausages. That seems to be how sausages made their way into the Punch & Judy show.
- Joey is the only character who can play tricks and outwit Mr. Punch.

CROCODILE

- No-one is quite sure how this puppet entered the cast. It arrived somewhere around 1860. It is possibly linked to the Victorian interest in exotic animals and zoos. The crocodile eating Mr. Punch's sausages is now a very famous scene in the show.

GHOST

- The Ghost comes on to give Punch a fright and teach him a lesson. In some versions of the play instead of a Ghost, a DEVIL appears to take Punch away. In some shows Punch wins the fight, and in others the Devil or Ghost wins. Usually, Mr. Punch wins the fight – thanks to his slapstick.

TOBY the DOG

- Just as pantomimes have musical numbers and guest acts that have little to do with the plot, so too with a Punch and Judy show. Dog Toby - a live performing dog - was once so popular that the show was briefly known as 'Punch and Toby'. (You can see this is the title on the booth in the first known photograph of Punch which is in the V&A George Speaight Collection). Toby would be put on the stage to bite Punch's nose or shake his hand, or do simple tricks. Today if Toby is seen in a show he will be a puppet dog and not a live one. There is a film of a 1901 performance using a live dog on the V&A puppet page. There are also many images showing a Dog Toby.

PERFORMERS

- Punch and Judy shows used to have two performers (a) a Punch Professor who voiced and manipulated the puppets inside the stage, and (b) a 'partner' outside the stage who spoke to the crowd, interacted with the puppets (and collected money from the audience).

The Plot

There is no set script for a Punch and Judy show. This means no two Punch and Judy shows are exactly alike. However, there are traditional routines that consistently find their way into shows.

For instance a show might include:

1. Punch and Judy squabble.
2. Punch mistreats the Baby and comes to the attention of the law (Policeman). Punch and Policeman squabble.
3. Punch encounters Joey the Clown. Joey calls Punch silly names and outwits him.
4. Punch meets a Crocodile who steals Punch's sausages.
5. A Ghost comes to give Punch a fright.
6. A Devil comes to give Punch a fright and to take him away. Punch and Devil fight. Punch defeats the devil. Judy thanks him and the cast take a bow.