

DANCE STYLE LOCATOR

## Shadow Play!

There are two main ways to perform Shadow Theater:

- 1) **The traditional way**- puppets are held right up against the performance screen, with the audience on the other side of the screen.
- 2) **The modern projected way** – shadows are cast utilizing the space between the light source and the screen.

The main difference between these two methods is the type of light source used, and the size of shadows produced. Each approach has its own possibilities and limitations.

What the audience sees in most shadow theater performances around the world is a traditional approach. The audience sees the silhouettes of puppets that are pressed up against a screen, with a light not more than 1 foot away. For projected shadow theater, a light source is placed farther (3 to 20 feet away) from the screen, and puppets or actors play between the screen and the light. (ShadowLight Productions, appearing in *People Like Me 2005: It's All Relative!*) uses both methods and sometimes combines the two to create a new way to perform in shadow.



### **Shadow Acting – Use your own body to make shadow plays!**

This exercise involves at least 3 people. 2 Actors & 1 Director. In this activity you will experiment with casting shadows using your own body!

#### **Material Needed To Create Projection Screen**

- Light source: any type of **clear** bulb can work. (The cheapest and easiest lights to use are nightlights with the protective shields removed.)
- Performance screen: a roll of butcher paper works well and is easy to work with.
- Scissors and clear packing tape

**Setting Up The Screen:** Tape large portions of butcher paper together with clear packing tape to create the size screen you want and hang in a space that offers access on both sides.

The **Actors** stand on one side of the screen (the side with the light source) and the **Director** (and any audience) stand or sit on the other side of the screen.

One of the main things you'll discover in playing around with shadows is that the closer you get to the light, the larger your shadow becomes. And, as you step further away from the light, your shadow gets smaller. In playing with this difference in scale (size), you'll discover a whole world of possibilities.

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**Instructions to the Director and the Actors:**

- 1) Have an Actor stay large (close to the light) on the left side of the screen.
- 2) Place the other Actor to the right of the first Actor but have him or her stay small (far back from the light.)
- 3) Direct the Actor making the larger shadow to make clear simple gestures to the smaller shadow. Some examples are: scolding gestures, greeting gestures (shaking hands or hugging), or casting a magic spell. The other Actor (the smaller shadow) should respond or react with movements really big and exaggerated so that they can be seen on the screen. The Actors can watch the screen to see how the shadows look like they are touching, even though they should not physically touch each other at all. The Director should tell the actors what shapes and movements make the coolest shadows.
- 4) Have them explore different relationships such as owner/pet, parent/child, competitors, etc. and find the clear gestures and movements that physically communicate these relationships.
- 5) After a couple of minutes, instruct your Actors to move as slowly as possible and switch how close they are to the screen – the one that was close to the light moves toward the screen and the one who was close to the screen moves towards the light – still without physically touching each other.
- 6) The Actors can then explore how the size reversal has affected their relationship.
- 7) Using what you've discovered in the experimentation, make a story about these characters and their changing relationship and practice it so that you can repeat it and show it to an audience.
- 8) You can use music, sound effects, and/or verbal narration for your performance!
- 9) Don't forget to switch roles so that everyone gets a chance to act and direct.

**Observations and Discussion**

An exciting aspect of this demonstration is that a physical connection and a dramatic tension between two characters are made without the Actors actually touching each other. How does that work, and what techniques can you draw on to help sustain the illusions for your story?

For example, slowing down the speed of the movements, and exaggerating the size of the movements helps the audience read the action better, while rapid movements tend to appear blurred on the screen. What else can you observe which helps create the illusions in your story?