

Puppetry Residency and Writing Skills

Susana Abell, Silver Trout Arts

The art of puppetry communicates via a combination of visual imagery and playwriting. Students will construct simple puppets during one of our sessions together during the residency week. However, the focus of the residency will be on learning to create multidimensional characters and effective stories and plays. The use of puppets as a fun and inspirational tool to stimulate an understanding of well-crafted and meaningful stories is at the heart of the students' work. Some of the exercises we will use to that end are as follows:

Modeling and Analysis:

Our week begins with an analysis of non-verbal puppet play. Students demonstrate comprehension in the retelling of the piece and brainstorm to discover the moral of the story.

Character Development:

After constructing their puppets, students will work on developing the puppets character, in essence, creating a life for it. We will use an interactive interview process to tease out the components of a character including habits and habitats, hopes and dreams, and very big problems. These components can then be written into puppet biographies and offer a jumping off point for a discussion of story form.

Story Form (mapping)

Students will learn the four basic ingredients of a story (*situation or setting, conflict, transformation, and resolution*) by developing a group story together as a class. This model will then be taken into small groups where students will begin the work of developing and writing a play for their puppets.

Dialogue

Once a story has been invented, students will work on the telling of it through dialogue and movement. Although it can be a challenging transition to move from narrative to dialogue, by this time the puppets are dying to talk, which makes the journey easier and fun.

Retention (line please!)

During performance, students are asked to remember what they wrote, how the story goes, and improvise the dialogue (it is impossible to effectively manipulate a puppet while reading from a script). Although we don't ask students to memorize their scripts, and lots of good new ideas come out of improvisation, it is helpful to be able to remember what you said.

Editing

The concept of editing and rewriting is vital to all writers. Students will learn techniques of effective and constructive critique and have an opportunity to reconstruct their puppet plays accordingly.

INSPIRATION!

Perhaps the most powerful result of puppetry workshops on students writing skills is the excitement and drive generated by these simple creatures that inspires students to create! Puppets have a way of alleviating some of the personal responsibility associated with the creative process and students seem to feel freer to play and invent. Writing from that creative impulse can be integrated at every phase of the workshop.