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**RIGHTS**  
Active citizenship and the seniors' role in the society  
2019-1-IT02-KA204-063346



# Active citizenship and seniors' role in the society

## RIGHTS

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# How to build theatres in suitcases



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## Introduction

The Erasmus+ KA204 RIGHTS Project (2019-1-IT02-KA204-063346) promotes the active citizenship of senior people by creating a bridge between them and children aged 8 to 12. This connection between generations is based on raising awareness on rights, on their importance in society and on the sacrifice of people for ensuring these rights to everyone. Senior people have been witnesses of the great changes that occurred in the last century's history, from the loss of rights to the raising of a fairer society. That is why they are particularly apt to pass on to the younger generations the moral and civic values at the base of the recognition of rights, together with the tales of the heroes who fought to grant everyone a better future. The project RIGHTS starts from the need of empowering senior people and giving them back the important social role of keepers of the community memory, in order to reach a long-lasting effect on the children's perception of society and help them become active citizens.

The topic of rights is not easy to be addressed with children, and that is why the seniors involved in the Rights project make use of some tales told through the puppets' theatre in a suitcase to engage children and facilitate discussions and reflections about rights. The puppets' theatre in a suitcase is an original technique that permits the creation of boxes in which all the necessary to perform a play with puppets.

This document provides simple instructions on how to build the theatres and the puppets for the plays of the tales of rights. It has been created to support the video tutorial available on the project's online platform ([www.rights-project.eu/output-02/](http://www.rights-project.eu/output-02/)).

## How to build theatres in suitcases

A large wooden box, which will later become the suitcase to carry it, will be needed as a starting point for our puppet theatre.

The box/case will contain all the elements to assemble the puppet theatre, namely, two side uprights, a gable or frame that acts as a connection between the two side uprights, a linear wooden structure that will have to hold the backdrop.

When the little theatre is assembled for the performance, it will be necessary to hook it with two carpenter clamps to what will be the support surface.

## Materials needed to build a theatre

- 2 Clamps;
- 9 Multilayer wooden panels about 1 cm thick with the following sizes:
  - 2 panels 40 x 70 cm, for the bottom and lid of the suitcase/box
  - 2 panels 18x38 cm for the short sides of the suitcase, sides on which holes will be made to insert the side uprights.
  - 2 panels 18x70 cm for the long sides of the suitcase.

- 2 panels 17x 68 cm for the side uprights.
- 1 23x56cm panel to be shaped to make the two parts of the gable.
- 11 solid wood boards with a cross section of about 2.5 cm that must have different sizes:
  - 1 board 55x2.5 cm for the background support,
  - 2 boards of 42x2.5 cm for the background support,
  - 6 boards for the side uprights of about 15x2.5 cm,
  - 2 boards for the background backing 45x2.5 cm,
- 2 smaller solid wood boards with sections about 1 cm long 15 cm for the gable.
- Vinyl-type glue
- Brush for the glue.
- Nails for the wood.
- 9 metal hinges with respective screws: 4 for the background support, 2 for the gable, 1 for the back of the background, 2 for the box closure.
- 2 hooks for hanging the curtain.
- 1 hacksaw for the wood.
- Cloth for the curtain.
- Colors and brushes to decorate the side uprights, the gable of the little theatre and the backdrops.
- Large drawing sheets for drawing and painting the backgrounds.
- A rope to create the suitcase handle.
- Two metal fasteners to create the case closure.

## 1 Build the suitcase

The video demonstrating the building of the suitcase theatre can be found at this link: <https://youtu.be/OIUgSLQ4fdU>

The suitcase that will contain the puppet theatre is a wooden box, which will be assembled using the two large rectangular panels (40x70 cm) for the bottom and lid, and the four smaller panels for the box sides (two 18x70 cm and two 18x38 cm). On the two shorter sides of the box (18x38 cm), grooves will have to be made to insert the side uprights of the theatre.

The grooves on the two shorter sidebars must be the right size to fit the solid wood board on the upright; therefore, it is important to glue the solid wood board on the upright first and then make the grooves on the two parapets.

The backing and the box sides are assembled using Vinyl-type glue, which is brushed onto the surfaces that will come into contact and then fastened with wood nails.

The four sides of the rectangle are assembled first, and then the bottom of the suitcase is joined.

The bottom of the case should be attached from the side where there are grooves into which the side uprights will be placed.

### **1.1 Build the side uprights of the theatre**

Each side upright is made of a wooden board measuring 68x17 cm; in fact they must be smaller than the box in order to fit into it when disassembling and transporting the theatre.

On one of the shorter sides, sideward of the upright, two solid wood boards (measuring 2.5x15 cm) are attached, one vertically, which will be used as a measure to create the groove on the shorter sides of the box, the other will have to be placed horizontally, for the wooden peg to be inserted into.

It is important that the upright wooden board is used as a model for the groove to be made in the case; therefore, this piece on the side upright should be assembled before making the grooves in the short side of the case parapets.

The solid wood boards are applied with glue and held in place with clamps until the glue has dried.

On the other short side of the upright, another solid wood board is applied with a groove that will serve as a lodging for the two small solid wood boards, which serve as a connection between the two side uprights.

The side uprights are then to be decorated as desired, with the paint on the side facing the audience.

### **1.2 Build the backdrop support**

The backdrop support consists of three solid wood boards that will be joined with four metal hinges, screwed into the wood, to allow the structure to bend and fit into the suitcase.

The measurements of the three pieces of wood must be very precise, otherwise the hinges will fail to perform their function. The longer board will be 55x2.5 cm; while the two shorter ones will be 42x2.5 cm.

### **1.3 Build the gable**

To build the gable it is necessary to get two shaped forms from a rectangular wooden panel (23x65 cm), the two pieces then will be held together by two hinges so that they can be folded and inserted into the case. It is important that the two pieces, the two sides, of the gable be cut from a single rectangle of shaped wood so that they can fit together perfectly when the hinges are applied.

The gable, like the uprights, will then have to be decorated with paint on the front side facing the audience.

Two small solid wood boards (15x1 cm) must be applied to the gable, which will fit into the grooves of the two uprights; two hooks will also be applied to the back side of the gable to slide the curtain.

### **1.4 Build the back of the backdrop**

The back of the backdrop is made of two solid wood boards joined by a hinge so that it can be folded and put into the box. On each side of the back of the backdrop there is a peg that must be inserted into the upright. The back of the backdrop consists of two solid wood boards of 45 cm.

## How to create the puppets

In the creation of the puppets, there are two different procedures, one relating to the clothes, the other to the head and face.

### Materials needed to build the puppets' clothes

- Fabric scraps of different colors for the clothes; for the measure of the scraps, please keep in mind that they will have to be large enough to create some kind of sleeves into which the puppeteer's arm will be inserted.
- Needles and threads for sewing the clothes.
- Scissors.
- Cardboard for paper patterns for the clothes.
- Marker for drawing the outline of the paper pattern.
- Wool balls of different colors for hair.
- Pairs of light wood hands (can be found ready-made or can be cut into plywood).
  
- Plastic bowls of different sizes:
  - 1 for mixing plaster,
  - 1 large enough to hold the plasticine shapes to make the mould,
  - 1 small like an ice cream tub, for mixing glue powder,
  - 1 similar to the latter, to fill with water to wet the roller.
- Plasticine.
- Wire for cutting plasticine.
- Quick-setting plaster.
- Two wooden sticks for mixing the plaster and glue.
- Several sheets of butcher or frying paper.
- Powdered tapestry glue.
- Glue brush.
- Paper cutter.
- Hot glue gun and associated glue cartridges.
- Paper tape.
- Mastic-type glue.
- Large plastic tray, must hold the sheets of paper as they will be glued.
- Small roller to wet the paper the puppet's head will be created with.
- White water paint to spread the base coat on the puppet's head.
- Colors and brushes to paint the puppets' faces.

## 1 Making clothes for the puppets

The video showing how to prepare the puppets' clothes can be found at this link: <https://youtu.be/LLW2ZboTlvY>

The puppets' clothes can be made from different scraps of fabric, to match your own taste and imagination. Two moulds (or paper patterns) are needed to make the clothes: one for the front, one for the back.

When making the clothes, keep in mind that they should be large enough to fit the hand and arm, not only of a child but also of an adult. In case the dress turns out to be too long or too wide in relation to the puppeteer's arm, a few seams can be made in the back of the dress, or a lapel in the hem.

Once the two models have been drawn and cut out, take a fabric of your favourite colour and, resting the model on it, draw the perimeter with a marker. Then cut the fabric around the perimeter.

When the two parts have been cut out, they will be sewn together from the reverse side, leaving an opening at the base to allow the puppeteer's hand to enter; the parts of the dress corresponding to the puppet's arms and neck will not be closed because the puppet's hands and head will be inserted here. This will result in a kind of pouch with sleeves and neck, which will then be turned right side out to hide the seams. If desired, a hem can be made at the bottom edge where the puppeteer's hand will fit.

The puppet hands can be found ready-made; they are made of wood and they will have to be inserted into the sleeves and glued (with hot glue) but the unsewn fabric will first have to be turned inside out. It is essential that the hands be made of wood because they should produce the typical beat when the puppet is animated.

The head will also need to be glued on with strong-grip glue (such as Bostik), and the fabric that makes up the neck will need to be turned inside out so the puppeteer can easily reach the base of the puppet's head to move it.

## 2 Build the puppet's head

The video showing how to make the puppet's head can be found at this link: <https://youtu.be/msgNLrHoMEo>

Making the head of the puppets is the most complex part. In fact, it starts with a plasticine model that will have to form the shape for the plaster mould.

The plaster mould will then have to be filled with paper and glue, which, once dried, can be painted and decorated with hair according to one's preference and imagination.

### 2.1 *Plasticine model*

Plasticine is given a spherical shape and then modeled by creating nose, ears, and eye shape.

The face is characterized in a simple way; it is not necessary to use much detail.

The plasticine model is then cut in two, in the direction from the top of the head to the neck, with a wire and the two halves are placed into a bowl with the flat part, where the cut was made, toward the bottom of the bowl.

## **2.2 Plaster mould**

In another bowl, the quick-setting plaster is prepared, which will then be used for casting the mould.

The water is first poured into the basin and then the plaster is sprinkled in; for the dosage it is necessary to understand by oneself the amount of plaster needed by the water. When "islands" of plaster begin to form in the water, it means that the correct proportions are being achieved. In practice, the water will have to be absorbed by the plaster.

The plaster is then gently mixed with a wooden stick and the basin in which it is contained is beaten to remove bubbles.

Once the plaster is ready, it is gently poured into the basin where the two halves of the plasticine head have been placed. Care must be taken to cover all the plasticine well, making sure that no bubbles have been formed in the process.

When the plaster has dried, the bowl will be flipped over, the plasticine removed, and the plaster mould of the two halves of the head will remain, which will then be filled with paper. Two shapes of masks will thus be created.

## **2.3 Create the head with the paper**

A sheet of butcher's or frying paper is placed on a large tray (the sheet must be single in this first step) and wetted with a small roller soaked in water.

Powdered upholsterer's glue is prepared in a bowl by first putting the water and then the powder. The glue should be quite thick.

The glue is brushed onto the sheet, then strips of it are torn off and the two halves of the head are patiently covered inside the plaster mould, taking care to place the side with the glue towards the inside, not in contact with the plaster. Paper flaps are left over because they will later be used to create the bead for removing the head from the plaster.

Then it is also possible to overlap two sheets of paper each time, sprinkle them with water with the roller and then with glue, peel off strips and continue covering the mould. All layers of paper must overlap the mould, because the bead that will be formed must have a certain consistency.

At least five layers of paper should be made.

When the paper has been laid, the flaps are folded over and the bead is formed.

The model is left to dry, which could take a day.

When this sort of papier-mâché is dry, without it being too dry (it should still have a minimum of moisture) the bead is gently pulled to extract the two halves of the head, resulting in two parts of the mask.



Once the two halves of the mask have been extracted, the bead is trimmed with a cutter, so that they fit together and can be glued smoothly.

Before joining the two halves with glue, the hole at the neck will have to be widened with the cutter to allow the puppeteer to insert his fingers and move the puppet's head.

Using hot glue, the two halves of the head are joined together, filling all the gaps.

(If desired, the two halves can also be sealed with paper tape, starting with wrapping the neck tightly).

Once the two halves are assembled, the entire head is covered with more strips of butcher paper, again wet and then glued, to give uniformity to the surface. To make this last layer of paper adhere well, glue must be brushed directly onto the entire head of the puppet.

If desired, tapestry glue can be 'reinforced' by adding a little vinyl-type glue.

To cover the entire head, rather large strips of paper are used, starting with the neck and then adhering the paper tightly around all the protuberances of the head (ears, nose, etc.). Around the neck, the paper should be turned inside the mask and adhere tightly.

(If the masks are more complex, e.g. if you want to create the head of an animal that opens and closes its mouth, there will have to be more moulds, as in example four).

When the head is dry, a first coat of white water paint must be applied to even out the surface, so that all colours can then be used.

If hair is to be applied to the puppet, wool will be used.

Take a yarn, tie one end of the wool thread to the finger of one hand of a 'helper' and wrap it around the finger of the other hand. When the mass of wool is sufficient, this will be tied in one or two places depending on how long the hair, or the mane if it is an animal-shaped puppet, has to be, and then the wool will be cut at some distance from the knot to create tufts.

The tufts of wool thus obtained will be glued onto the puppet's head with hot glue.

The completed and painted head will be glued to the dress with a strong, mastic-like glue.

### 3 Alternative ways of preparing the puppets

The project Rights takes in great consideration the local traditions or the handcraft abilities of the involved seniors. Two other different techniques of preparing the puppets have been collected by the Romanian and the Lithuanian partners and the videos are available on the project platform:

- How to prepare a puppet's head with recycled garments
- How to make puppets using wool felting technique (<https://www.rights-project.eu/how-to-make-puppets-using-wool-felting-technique/>)

The bridge between generations of the project Rights has also been followed the other way round, trying to modernize the tradition of the puppets' theatre. The adult education centre "Mateo

Hernández” located in Béjar, in the province of Salamanca (Spain) has experimented with designing and making the heads of the puppets with a 3D printer (using polymers obtained from renewable and 100% natural resources). The designs are available on the project platform (<https://www.rights-project.eu/creation-of-the-puppet-heads-with-3d-printer/>).