

Sicilian Marionettes

Background:

Are you a fan of knights and action? If so, you will enjoy making a Sicilian marionette!

The word "puppet" comes from the Latin word "pupus" or "pupi," which means "little child." Sicilian marionettes are among the simplest forms of marionettes to operate. The body is usually carved out of wood and has a sturdy rod that extends through it into the head. This rod has two strings attached (one for each of the puppet's hands) that are used to manipulate the puppet. Thus, the Sicilian puppet is often called a rod or string marionette. Each marionette is hand-crafted with different facial expressions and costumes made of brass, copper, velvet and wood. In modern times, some of the Sicilian marionettes used in the theater are quite large (nearly the size of a twelve-year-old human child). Smaller models are sold to tourists and collectors.

The puppet theater in Sicily reached its full development in the first half of the 1800s. It became known as the *Òpira rî pupi* (Opera of the Puppets). In 2001 UNESCO declared the Sicilian Puppet Theater a "Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity."

There are many characters in the Sicilian puppet theater. Theaters present plays based on old tales. Plays were often based on Frankish romantic poems centering on the Medieval epic poem "The Song of Roland" ("Orlando Furioso"). The recounting of these stories was interpreted in the Sicilian troubadour tradition of *cantastorî* (sung stories).

The stories are based on historical and literary characters and only loosely on actual historical events of the Middle Ages. Charlemagne (crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 800 AD) is a star. Two others usually found are Orlando (better known as Roland, a great fighter and friend of Charlemagne), Rinaldo (a knight who is a more romantic Robin Hood sort of character), Angelica (the woman they both love), and Bradamante (Rinaldo's warrior sister). Fast-paced marionette battles have entertained audiences in puppet theaters for over two centuries.

Why not try your hand at making a marionette out of card stock? We have provided a template for you. Just print it out on a piece of card stock and let the fun begin!



Supplies:

Template for marionette (attached)
Card stock
Scissors
Pencils, thin Sharpies, and/or markers
Hole punchers* (or thumbtacks or thin nails)
Small brad fasteners
Pipe cleaner
Tape
Embroidery thread or thin yarn

Optional items:
Shiny or decorative paper
Glue stick
Velcro or glue dots

*Hole punchers that make smaller than average holes and small brad fasteners work better

Procedure:

Print out template on card stock. Use a pencil or thin Sharpie to create features and hair. Your marionette can be a man or a woman.

Color in your marionette's body, sword and shield. Hint: It's easier to color if you outline the area to be colored in first and then fill it in. You may wish to color *around* the small white circles where you will be punching the holes so you can see them better.

Cut out your marionette carefully. Use the hole puncher to make holes on each white circle. Note that small brad fasteners tend to work better for this project. If you don't have a hole puncher that makes small holes, you can use a thumb tack multiple times to create and enlarge a hole or push through the card stock with a nail, keeping a few layers of corrugated cardboard underneath to protect your work surface.

Use brad fasteners to put your marionette together. Note that the tops of the arms go *behind* the shoulders. The bottoms of the arms go *over* the tops and the legs go *behind* the torso. Careful: Do NOT put brad fasteners on the hands.

Optional: You can use small pieces of shiny or decorated paper to make your marionette extra special and attach with the glue stick.

Create a loop at one end of the pipe cleaner. Turn marionette over. Attach the pipe cleaner to the back with tape, making sure that the loop is at the top.

Cut enough embroidery thread or thin yarn to loop through the hands and run through the loop at the top of the pipe cleaner. Fix thread to the back of the hands with tape. You can attach the sword and shield to the hands with glue dots or small bits of velcro.