

Traditional Puppet Plays



Where did shadow puppetry begin?

Shadow puppetry is believed to have originated in China and India thousands of years ago. It spread from China to the Middle East and parts of Europe. It spread from India to South East Asia.

Traditional shadow puppet plays are still performed in many parts of the world today; including China, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Turkey and Greece.





Shadow puppets are traditionally made of thin animal hide. Some are highly decorated with perforations (holes) to let light shine through for detail.

Some puppets are made from parchment which is animal hide that has been stretched as thin as paper.



Shadow puppets are often made of moveable pieces which are operated by sticks.

The puppets are placed against a white screen. When the light shines from behind the screen the audience will see the puppets but not the puppeteers.





Shadow puppetry can also include intricate sets to help tell stories. This is a Chinese shadow puppet play.



Thai shadow puppet plays include intricate traditional costumes and music. Sometimes the puppets are life size.

For hundreds of years traditional stories have been brought to life for audiences through puppetry. The same stories with the same characters are still being told today through traditional shadow puppetry theatre.

The characters Karagoz and Hacivat (right) often appear in traditional Turkish shadow puppet plays.



Can you guess what traditional story these puppets might tell?



Try making your own set of shadow puppets. Write a story to perform in a shadow puppet play.

