



Feed Your
Imagination

esplanade

Pre-show Educator's Slide

Recommended Level: Primary

An Esplanade Co-production

SAMSUI WOMEN

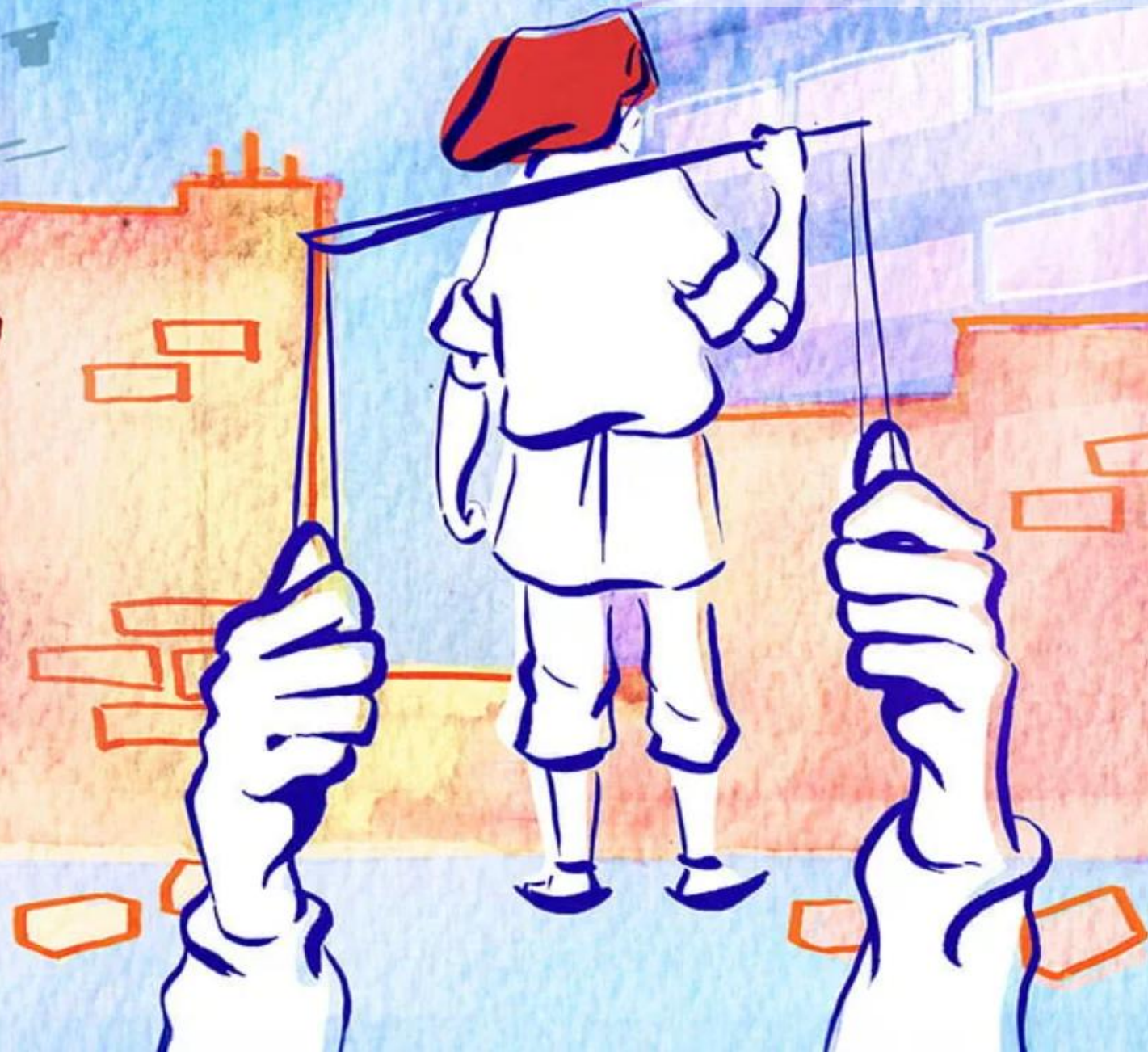
ONE BRICK AT A TIME

By The Finger Players

23 – 25 Jul &

28 Jul – 1 Aug 2025

Esplanade Annexe Studio



What are we learning today?

- What is **theatre** performance?
- The different forms of **puppetry** (mouth puppet, shadow puppet, rod puppet)
- The life of the ***Samsui Women*** and how they contributed to Singapore's **nation-building**
- Brief introduction to the show “***Samsui Women: One Brick at a Time***”
- The **creator** of the show – The Finger Players

What is THEATRE?

Describe what you know about theatre using ONE word.

THEATRE is...

A form of art that uses live performers to present the experience of a real or imagined event before a live audience in a specific place, often a stage.



What is PUPPETRY?

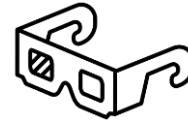
Describe what you know about puppetry using ONE word.

PUPPETRY is...

- Puppetry is a form of theatre or performance that involves the **manipulation of puppets**.
- It is an **ancient art form**. It is believed to have originated 3,000 years BC. That is more than 5,000 years ago!
- The person who brings a puppet to life is called a **puppeteer**.
- Puppetry can take many forms, but they all share the process of **animating** (to move) **inanimate** (lifeless) performing **objects**.



Let's Watch!



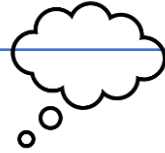
<https://youtu.be/shbgRyColvE>

Observe the appearance and movement of the puppets.



SEE

- What do you see when you look at the puppets?
- What features of the puppet catch your attention? (eyes, mouth, hands, etc.)



THINK

- What do you think the puppets are made of?
- How do you think they move?



WONDER

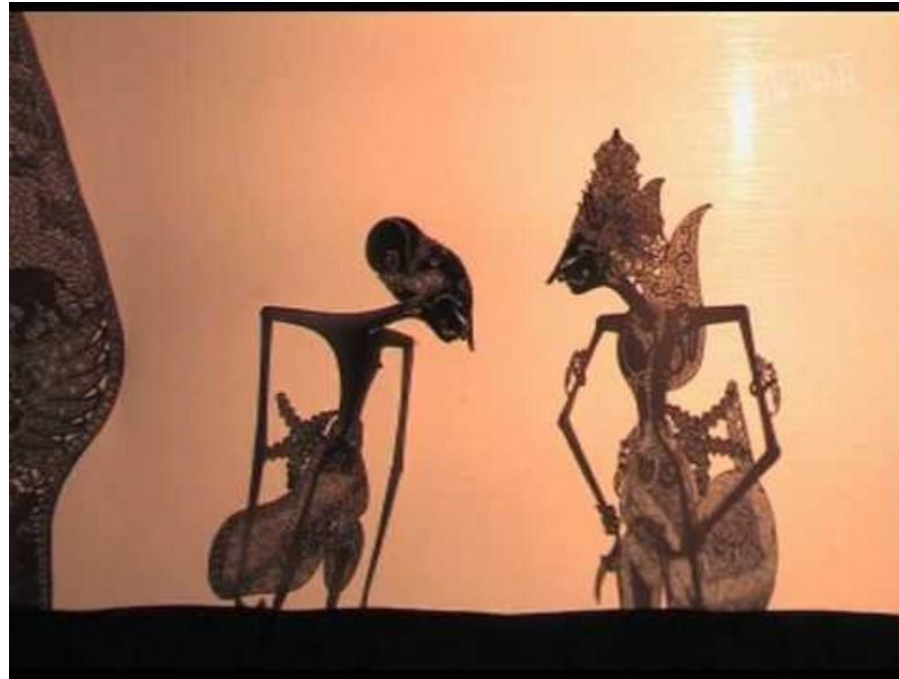
- What do you wonder about the puppets?



Mouth Puppets

- **Operated primarily with one hand inside the puppet's head** – The puppeteer uses their hand to move the puppet's mouth, syncing with speech to give the illusion of talking.
- **Mouth puppets rely heavily on lip sync and body language** – Since their faces usually don't have movable eyes or eyebrows, personality and emotion are conveyed through timing, mouth movement, and exaggerated gestures.

Let's Watch!



0:12-0:32

<https://youtu.be/n8xbIOkp2sY>

Observe the appearance and movement of the puppets.



SEE

- What do you see when you look at the puppets?
- What features of the puppet catch your attention? (eyes, mouth, hands, etc.)



THINK

- What do you think the puppets are made of?
- What do you think controls their movements?



WONDER

- What do you wonder about the puppets?



Image Credit: The Finger Players

Shadow Puppets

- **Shadow puppetry is one of the oldest forms of storytelling** – dates back over 2,000 years, with origins in places like **China, India, and Indonesia**, where it was used to tell myths, legends, and religious stories.
- **The puppets are flat figures held between a light source and a screen** – The puppets cast shadows on the screen, and their articulated parts (like arms or legs) can be moved with rods to create lifelike motion.

Let's Watch!

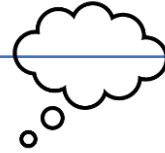


<https://youtu.be/plr5E3ZPtwM>

Observe the appearance and movement of the puppets.



- What do you see when you look at the puppets?
- What features of the puppet catch your attention? (eyes, mouth, hands, etc.)



THINK

- What do you think the puppets are made of?
- How do you think they move?



WONDER

- What do you wonder about the puppets?



Image Credit: The Finger Players

Rod Puppets

- **Rod puppetry has a rich history in various cultures**, some of which include Japanese *Bunraku*, and Indonesian *Wayang Golek*.
- **Operated using rods** – contemporary rod puppets can be manipulated by up to three puppeteers manipulating the head, the elbows, and the legs by holding on to the back of the puppet's heels. This will allow the puppet to achieve more complex movements.

About the Artist



The Finger Players is a theatre company in Singapore that focuses on puppetry.

They specialise in Traditional Chinese Hand Puppets, Rod Puppets, String Puppets, Shadow Puppets, and Mask Puppets and Object Puppets.



Pay attention to the forms of puppetry that are used by
The Finger Players in the show!

The Samsui Women



Image taken from NHB website
<https://www.roots.gov.sg/Collection-Landing/listing/1141264>



SEE

- What do you see in this picture?
- What is one interesting thing that you see about this person?



THINK

- Where do you think this person originates from?
- What do you think she is doing?



WONDER

- What do you wonder about her life?

Let's Watch!

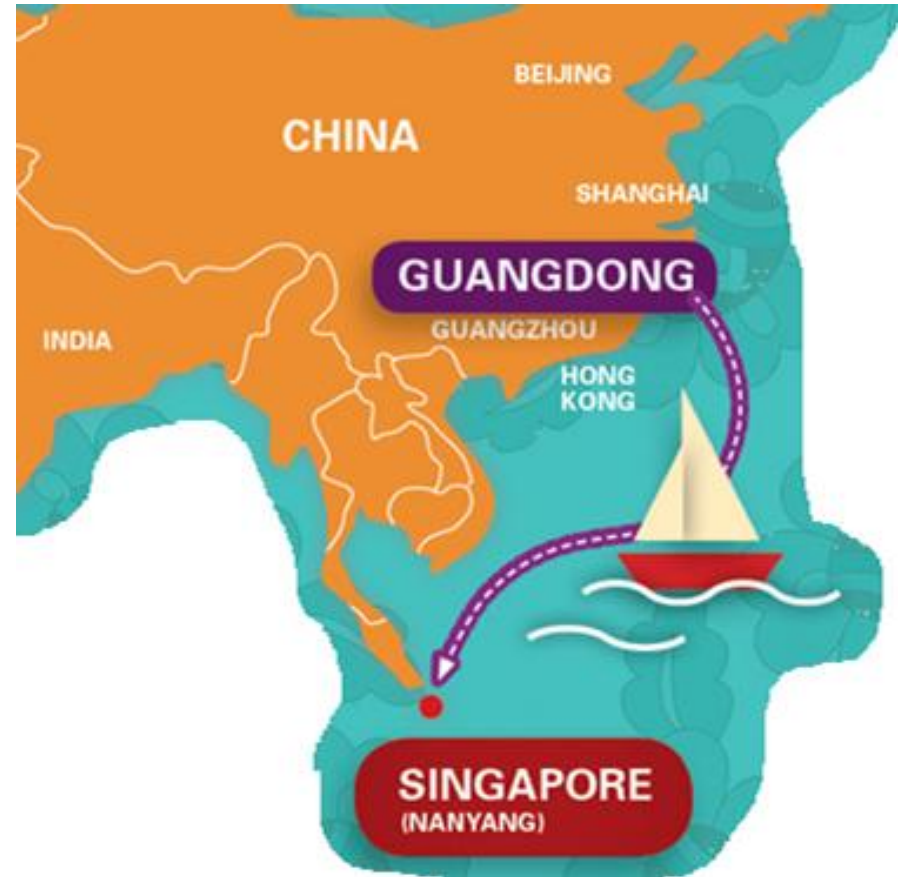


<https://youtu.be/2yx80IUMoZA>

1. Who are the Samsui women?
2. Why did they come to Singapore?
3. What did they do in Singapore?
4. Why did they wrap a head cloth around their heads?
5. From the video, how do you think life was like for the Samsui women?

Who are they?

- They were **female** immigrants from **China**.
- They started arriving in Singapore from the **1920s**.
- Most of them came in the 1930s. Samsui women stopped coming into Singapore in the **late 1940s**.



Why did they leave their homes?

- Many come from the **Sanshui district** (Samsui in Cantonese). Sanshui can be found in **present-day Guangdong**.
- They left their villages to set sail for **Nanyang to earn a living**.
- Nanyang refers to present-day Southeast Asia which includes Singapore.



Life in Nanyang (Singapore)

- Many **borrowed money** to come to Singapore.
- When they reached Singapore, they had to **pay off their debts** from the ship journey.
- They worked as **laborers** in Singapore.
- When the Samsui women came to Singapore, they stayed in **cubicles** that were crowded and small.

How are they dressed?

Dark-coloured *samfu*

(trousers & blouse)

The *samfu* was always dark-coloured (black or blue) so that the dirt and dust that got on their clothes would be less noticeable.



Image taken from <https://alchetron.com/Samsui-women>

Red headdress

The headdress was meant to protect their heads. The colour red was also chosen so that other workers could see them while they work at the construction sites. This helped to prevent accidents.

To see more pictures of Samsui women at work and what their daily life was like, go to:
<https://www.nlb.gov.sg/main/article-detail?cmsuuid=22e8b6c7-7f0e-453a-a3dd-9e2f6a028bf3>

About the Show

Samsui Women: One Brick at a Time



Building Site / Samsui Women by Liu Kang, 1951

To escape her fate in China, Swee Leng and her friends, sail across oceans to find hope and a better life in Nanyang. Upon their arrival, the women earn their keep as helpers to the men at construction sites, making a name for themselves as the resilient Samsui women.

However, repeated taunts from people around them as well as conflicts between Swee Leng and her friends threaten their friendship.

Friends become foes and family turns into enemies, until a fire at Bukit Ho Swee brings them together again. Working as one, they race against the clock to build new homes for thousands without shelter over their heads.

Let's Watch!

Watch the video to find out more about the Bukit Ho Swee fire.



If this event happen in present day,
how can **you** rise to the occasion
and **help the victims**?

What **values** will be helpful in this
challenging situation?

Share with a partner!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGVD0MrTP2g>

During the Performance

Learning Points:

1. Look out for the **types of puppets** used in the show.
 Observe how the puppets are **held and moved** to tell a story.

2. Find out more about **Samsui women**.



-  Identify the **values** that the Samsui women possess.



-  Appreciate the **contributions** of Samsui women to nation-building.

Remember to observe *Audience Etiquette* – the **Do's** and **Don'ts** while watching the show!

What have we learned?

- ☑ **THEATRE**, an art form that uses **live performers** to present the experience of a **real or imagined event on stage**.
- ☑ **PUPPETRY**, an ancient art form that involves the **manipulation of puppets** by **puppeteer**. **Inanimate** (lifeless) performing objects are **animated** (moving) to tell a story.
- ☑ **FORMS OF PUPPETRY**- Mouth Puppets, Shadow Puppets, Rod Puppets. The puppets are **manipulated differently**.
- ☑ **SAMSUI WOMEN**, **female immigrants from China** who started coming to **Nanyang** (Singapore) in **1920s** to **earn a living**. They are usually dressed in **dark-coloured samfu** and **red headdress**.
- ☑ **SAMSUI WOMEN: ONE BRICK AT A TIME** tells the story of the Samsui women, **Swee Leng and her friends** who were involved in **building homes** for those involved in the **Bukit Ho Swee fire**.
- ☑ **AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE**, the **6 golden rules** to enjoy the show.



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SAMSUI WOMEN

ONE BRICK AT A TIME

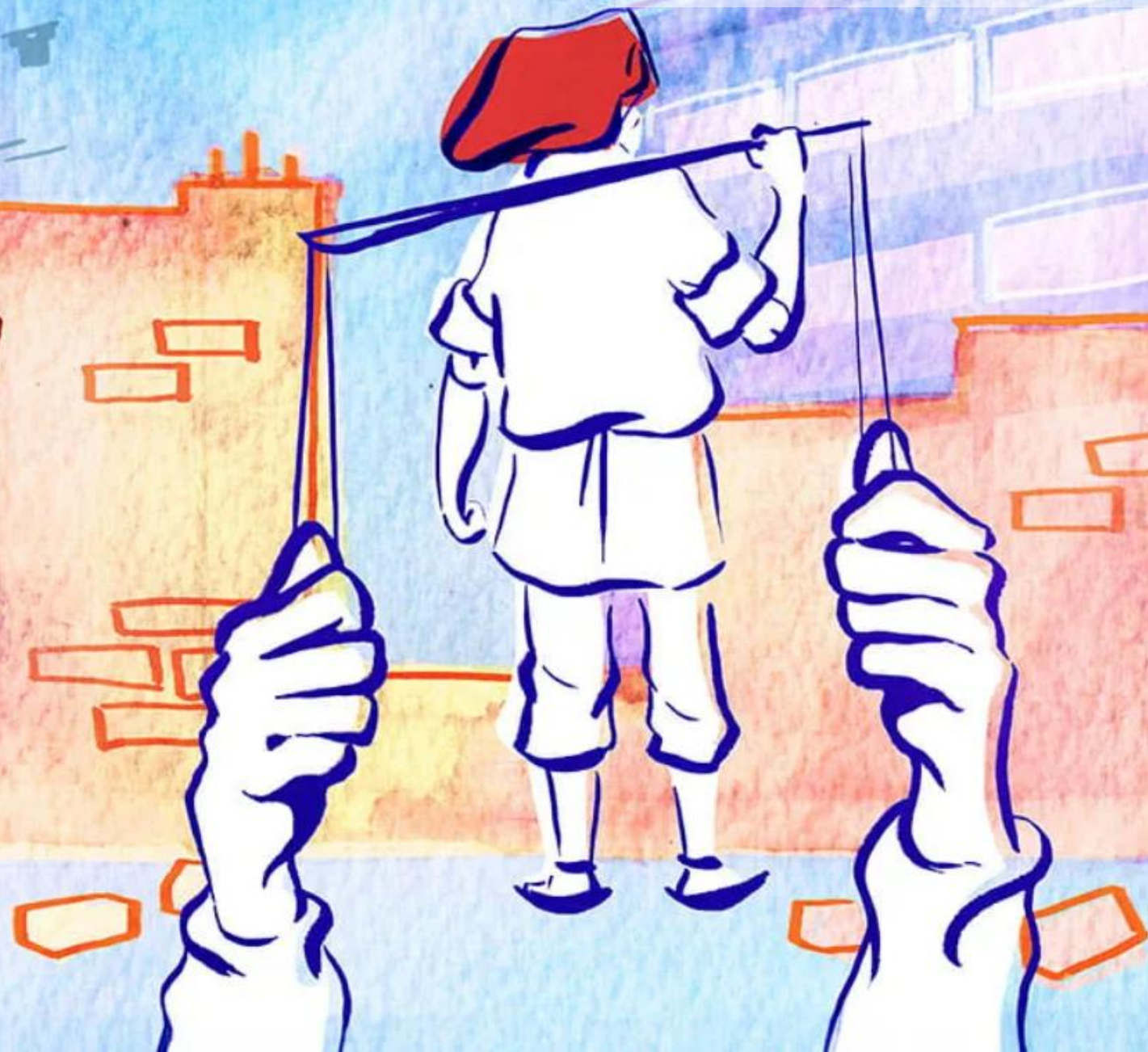
By The Finger Players

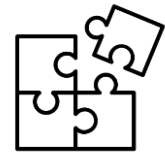
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Esplanade Annexe Studio

Post-show Educator's Slide

Recommended Level: Primary



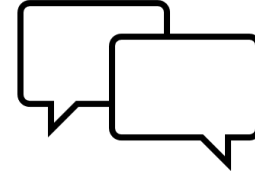


Story Puzzle

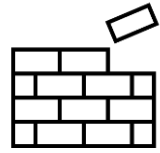
(refer to student guide page 3)

The events in *Samsui Women: One Brick at a Time* are all mixed up in different building blocks! Draw a line to match each event description to the correct part of the story.

Think, Pair, Share!



- What was your favourite part of the story?
Why?
- What values did the characters show?
- Can you share a time when you showed one of these values?



Heroines of Hard Work

(refer to student guide page 4)

What are some types of buildings that the Samsui women helped to build in Singapore back then? Do the matching activity to identify these buildings.

Discuss: Where can you find examples of these buildings now?

Let's Watch!



https://youtu.be/mjDSgsthWBU?si=EJ-Z7fBlvwrWT_u

Look at the **type of work** Samsui women had to carry out.
Imagine you are one of them.

What do you think are some **difficulties** that you would face in these situations?

Share with a partner!



Walk In Her Shoes

(refer to student guide page 4)

Think about the **challenges** that the Samsui Women faced in Nanyang and the **values** that they showed when rebuilding Bukit Ho Swee after the fire.

Share your thoughts by answering the questions in your booklet.



Reimagining the Samsui Women's Attire

(refer to student guide page 5)

Imagine you are a fashion designer today.

Let's design new attire for the Samsui Women.

Think about:

- Comfort: Is the material breathable?
- Safety: Does it protect them from the sun, falling objects, or heat?
- Symbolism: Can you keep the red headscarf or add a modern twist?

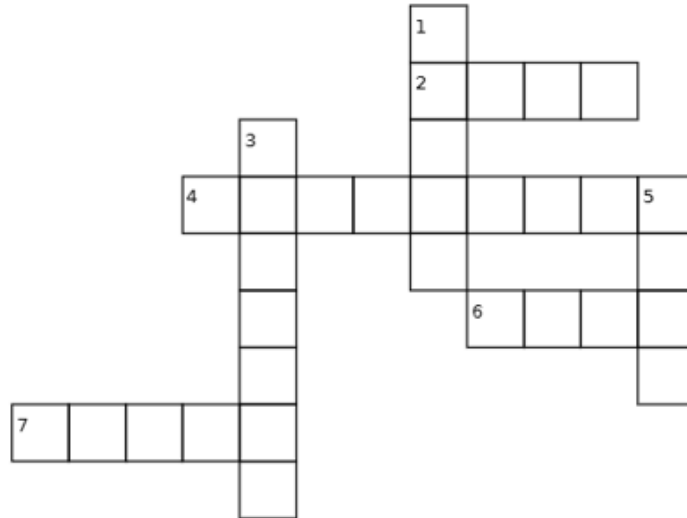


Image taken from <https://alchetron.com/Samsui-women>

Puppetry Crossword Puzzle!

(refer to student guide page 6)

Use what you've learned about Rod Puppetry to complete the crossword puzzle.



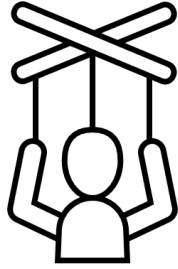
DOWN

1. Rod puppets are best operated by a team of _____ puppeteers.
3. _____ from Japan is an example of rod puppetry.
5. Rod puppets are manipulated using _____.

ACROSS

2. A rod puppet is controlled from behind the _____, each elbow, and each shoe.
4. A _____ is a person who controls puppets.
6. Rod puppets are made of _____, sponge and fabric.
7. An example of rod puppetry from Indonesia is wayang _____.

Answer Key: 1. three ; 2. head; 3. bunraku;
4. puppeteer; 5. rods; 6. wood; 7. golek



My Puppet, My Story!

(refer to student guide page 7)

Create your own puppet and tell its story.

1. **Imagine Your Character**

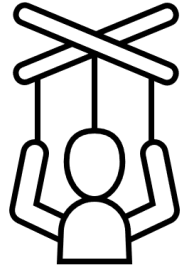
Think of a character you want to create. It could be a hero, or someone who shows kindness, courage, or teamwork – just like the Samsui Women in the show!

2. **Design Your Puppet**

Draw your puppet in the space provided and label its special features such as the material it is made of, the type of puppet it is, any costumes or props it uses.

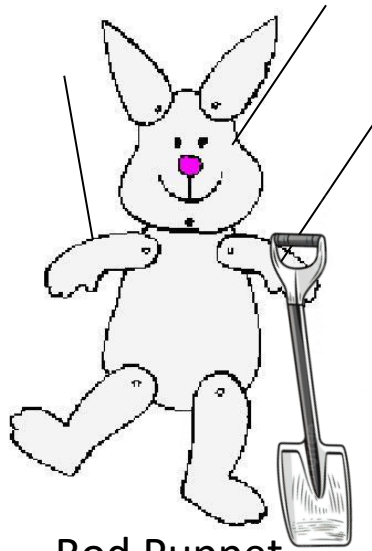
3. **Tell us about your Puppet**

Give your puppet a name, occupation, and what values it shows (e.g. kindness, courage, teamwork). Write 3–5 sentences to tell a short story about your puppet character.



My Puppet, My Story!

(EXAMPLE)



Rod Puppet

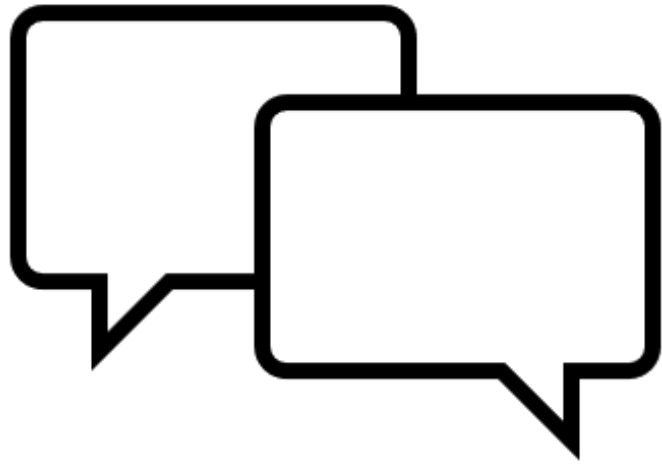
Name: Mr. Bunny

Occupation: Carrot farmer

Character Values: Resilient, Hardworking, Agile

Mr. Bunny is a carrot farmer who loves working on his farm. One day, his carrots were attacked by pests. He did not give up! He found a way to protect his crops using ladybugs. Within days, the pests were gone, and Mr. Bunny's carrots grew even bigger and sweeter than before!

Think, Pair, Share



- Which form of puppetry was the most unique or interesting to you? Why?
- Do you think people should carry on practising traditional forms of puppetry? Why and why not?
- What can you do to make sure that traditional forms of puppetry will stay alive?

What have we learned?

-  **PUPPETRY**, is an art form that can be used **for storytelling**. Puppeteers use their voices, hands, and movements to bring characters to life. It is a mix of art, acting, and storytelling found in many cultures around the world.
-  **LOYALTY, RESILIENCE AND A STRONG SENSE OF DUTY** were shown by the **Samsui women** as they contributed to **Singapore's development**. We should **appreciate** the significant **contributions** of the Samsui women to Singapore's nation-building.
-  **ROD PUPPETRY** is a form of puppetry used in the show *Samsui Women: One Brick at a Time*. Puppetry takes many forms, using puppets made from **different materials** and **manipulated in different ways**. They exist in **various cultures** around the world.

Optional

“Puppet Explorer Mission”

(refer to student guide page 8)

Guiding Question: “Why is this form of puppetry unique and special?”

Pick your favourite form of puppetry and research on it.
Complete “The Explorer’s Log” on your student guide.

Glove Puppets from China

1. Chinese **glove puppet theatre** (also known as *bùdàixì*) is a form of puppetry that uses **cloth puppets**.
2. It was believed to have **started during the 17th century** in Fujian province, China.
3. The **head, palms and feet** of the puppet are made from **wood**.
4. The puppet's **body and limbs** (arms and legs) consist entirely of **cloth costumes**.
5. A **hand** is put **inside the cloth** and the **puppeteer's fingers** move the **hands of the puppets**.

Additional links:

1. <https://fingerplayers.com/part-1-the-puppets/>
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXo5aVoAFhQ>
3. <https://youtu.be/7QLUTXU8oEo>



A glove puppet of Sun Wukong

Image credit: Via
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glove_puppetry#/media/File:Taiwan-Puppet-Monkey-god2.jpg CC BY-SA 3.0

Bunraku Puppets from Japan

1. *Bunraku* is the common name for *ningyo-joyuri* which means **puppets and storytelling**.
2. It is a form of **rod puppetry**.
3. Was created in **1684** in **Osaka**, Japan.
4. Usually requires **three puppeteers**:
 - a) The main puppeteer uses his or her **right hand to control the right hand of the puppet and the head**.
 - b) The left puppeteer controls the **left hand using a rod that extends from the elbow of the puppet**.
 - c) A third puppeteer **operates the feet and legs**.

Additional Links:

1. <https://silverkris.singaporeair.com/inspiration/arts-culture/heritage/things-to-know-japanese-puppet-theatre-bunraku/>
2. <https://youtu.be/124HrR-M0iQ?si=u7RWvJ7NKSuY7jbG>,
3. <http://youtu.be/UV938f46Wpg>



A *bunraku* puppet called Osono, from the play *Hade Sugata Onna Maiginu*

Vietnamese Water Puppets

1. First performed a thousand years ago on the surface of ponds and paddy fields in Vietnam's Red River Delta.
2. Performed in chest or waist-deep water.
3. Water surface acts as a stage.
4. Puppeteers stand behind a curtain.
5. Water helps to hide the rod and strings. It also provides exciting water effects like waves and splashes.

Additional Links:

1. <https://asiamystika.com/blog/vietnamese-water-puppets>
2. <https://youtu.be/-bezb1tRCZM?si=7To9Z-88iOcrMwiJ>
3. <http://youtu.be/rxIff980XyM>



Puppets of water fairies dancing

Image credit:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water_puppetry#/media/File:Puppettheatre.JPG
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