



## Can Puppets Compete in Our Tech Savvy Culture?

By Tim Brown

Churches, Schools, children's programs, and many other groups have used puppet programs to educate for years, but with the growth of modern technology, are they still effective?

Modern technology has brought great teaching and learning enhancements that are appealing and attention grabbing. Compare the special effects in movies and TV programs today with the ones from ten or twenty years ago. The advances are amazing. The effects are often so realistic; they blur the line between reality and entertainment. The same is true for today's video games. In most role playing games, you don't just play a part in the game—you become the character and experience the game.

Children and teens are used to this realism in the media they're exposed to. So, again, the question arises: Are puppets still a viable teaching tool in our society?

The answer is yes. Puppets have a universal appeal to all ages. A recent "America's Got Talent" season supports this statement. The winner was a ventriloquist using a variety of hand puppets to entertain millions of people each week during the competition. I did a You-Tube search on "Terry Fator" and came up with 147 video selections. The first one had almost four million views in a five month period!

Another search on You-Tube using the word "puppet" yielded 61,600 video possibilities. One of the videos, added eight months ago had over 26,000,000 views—that's over 100,000 views every day. Seven out of the initial twenty had over 1,000,000 views each.

When you see the above results and factor in how often TV programs and movies use puppets, it's obvious that puppetry is still effective. Let's examine why puppets have such appeal and teaching ability.

First, as stated above, puppets have a universal appeal. You'll find them in most cultures and societies around the world. When I was part of a traveling puppet ministry, it was fun to watch the expressions of the people when they entered the church or auditorium. Just seeing the puppet stage often brought a smile to their faces and I could sense the anticipation building as they waited for the program to start. More often than not, it was adults who came to us after the program to ask when we were coming back again.

Second, people enjoy stories. Most movies and TV programs are stories that are acted out for people to watch. It's becoming common place for newly released movies to make millions of dollars the first weekend they run. Why? Marketing efforts portray them as stories that you need to see and experience. Marketers take advantage of people's enjoyment of stories.

Puppets also benefit from that trait. Puppet plays are simply the process of one or more puppets acting out a story for the audience to enjoy. You can have the puppets act out the play for entertainment purposes or to teach important truths.

This leads to the next reason...Puppet shows allow for audience interaction. If you want to teach a specific truth through the puppets, before the play ask some key questions that the story will answer. In other words, give them something to look for while watching the play. Then, after the story is finished, discuss the answers with the audience. By doing this, the audience isn't simply watching for entertainment purposes. They are actively watching—looking for the answer to your questions. As they watch and begin to relate to the puppets through the story, the truth has a greater chance of impacting them.

Here are four more reasons. Puppets are great visual aids, they add variety to your teaching, they add enjoyment to learning, and are fun to watch.

Puppets are and always will be an effective teaching and entertainment tool. They are already incorporated into our tech savvy culture and will continue to entertain and teach. But, we can learn a lesson from technology. The shows and movies that are the highest quality tend to acquire greater numbers of viewers. Puppeteers and puppet teams that maintain high-quality puppetry standards will also draw audiences and have opportunities to share their message. As you use puppets to entertain or instruct, you will help your audience to understand what it means to experience puppets.