



Puppeting Purim (and Other Holiday Stories)

An Educational Program Guide by Dr. Penny Joel



**THE JEWISH
EDUCATION PROJECT**

Developed in partnership with The Jewish Education Project

Overview

In this 100-minute intergenerational program, families with children ages 5–9 will bring the story of Purim to life by creating and using puppet characters. This program can be adapted for Passover, Hanukkah, and other holiday stories with dramatic characters.

Enduring Understanding

Creating puppets and using them to tell stories can be a powerful and personal way to engage children in the storytelling experience. Sharing holiday stories links us to our heritage, to the generations that came before us, and to our collective Jewish narrative.

Goals

- Engage in a creative and fun Jewish learning experience as a family (children, parents, grandparents, other family members).
- Become familiar with the Purim story and the names of the characters.
- Use puppets for a participatory storytelling experience that can build the storyteller's confidence as they bring the story to life.

Materials

O: Organization provides

F: Families bring

O	Copies of a summary of the Purim story
O	Brown or white paper lunch bags
O	Examples of some completed puppets (Mordechai, Esther, Haman, Achashverosh)
O	Markers
O	Scissors
O	Glue guns or glue bottles
O	Large quantity of craft supplies (colored construction paper, buttons, googly eyes, pom-poms, yarn, stickers, feathers, etc.)
O	Printed copy of puppet-making instructions for each family/table (see last page)
O	Name tags for participants, pens/markers

O	Screen and projector, speakers, computer to show parts of the following videos (or send them in advance): Paper Bag Puppets (option 1) , How to Make a Paper Bag Puppet of Yourself (option 2) ; or share this article: https://kidsactivitiesblog.com/62724/classic-craft-making-paper-bag-puppets
F	Charged devices to connect with extended family members (cell phone, iPad, laptop, etc.)

Suggested Room Setup

- Large room with good cell reception and strong Wi-Fi
- Clear directions to connect to Wi-Fi
- Tables with 4–6 chairs per family — enough space to spread out materials and set up devices to connect with long-distance family members
- Table coverings, if desired
- Place card or sheet with directions on each table
- Microphone, if needed

Timing (100-minute program)

O: Organization does

F: Families do

O	Welcome, outline of agenda, and demonstration of puppets	10 minutes
O	Brief outline of Purim story and discussion, using a video (The Purim Story in 4 Minutes: Go Esther! or Shalom Sesame: Purim Story) or your own version of the story, perhaps adapted from ReformJudaism.org	20 minutes
F	Puppet creation	30 minutes
F	Purim puppet show	30 minutes
O	Wrap-up	10 minutes

Program

0:00–0:10 Welcome, outline of agenda, and demonstration of puppets

Rabbi/educator/facilitator welcomes participants and introduces the program using a hand puppet like the ones participants are going to make. Present the plans for the activity and show some other Purim-themed examples of puppets you had created earlier.

00:10–0:30 Brief outline of the Purim story and discussion

Introduce the Purim story using one of the following videos or by reading, with your puppet, a summary of the story. Adapt the details according to the ages of the children present.

[The Purim Story in 4 Minutes: Go Esther!](#)

[Shalom Sesame: Purim Story](#)

Your own version of the story, perhaps adapted from ReformJudaism.org

Consider putting a summary of the Purim story on each table.

Discuss:

- What are your reactions to the story?
- Have you ever experienced something that reminds you of events in the story, perhaps someone who didn't like you because you are Jewish?
- Why do you think we retell this story every year?
- What are your main takeaways from the story? (*Esther's risk-taking and bravery; the power each of us has to be heroic and to speak truth to effect change; the important role of women in our tradition; how each of us can play a role in supporting our family and community*)
- What do we do to remember this story? (*celebrate Purim each year on the fourteenth of Adar; read Megillat Esther; observe Purim customs and traditions — give gifts of food (mishloach manot); eat a festive meal; give gifts to those in need; dress up in costumes*)

00:30–1:00 Puppet creation

Invite families to create puppets of the main characters of the story: Achashverosh, Esther, Haman, Mordechai, and Vashti.

Families can do this any way they choose: each person can make one puppet, or they can pick characters to work on together. For example, Bubbe might be responsible for adding the eyes of each puppet, and Uncle Mark for drawing or creating clothes or gluing on the hair.

Have participants think about how they will differentiate their puppets. For example, what could they add to:

- Achashverosh so he looks like a king?
- Esther so she looks like a queen?
- Mordechai to identify him as Jewish?
- Haman so he looks angry or mean?

Point out the materials and resources (as listed in “Materials”). Answer participants’ questions — for example, if they need clarification about points in the story.

Remind participants that after they have made their puppets, in their small groups they will use them to retell the story of Purim.

Lay out instruction sheets on the tables.

Have a facilitator on hand to answer questions and help get supplies, brainstorm puppet ideas, and answer questions about timing.

This is a good opportunity for grandparents and grandchildren to create together. They might plan the puppet together, share in the choices of materials, and discuss how their puppet reflects the Purim story. Grandparents and grandchildren might assign tasks to the parents — for example, to plan the dialogue or the sound effects.

1:00–1:30 Purim puppet show

When puppets are complete, invite the families in their small groups to retell the story of Purim using their puppets. Families can make this as dramatic as they like — for example, by using different voices, including props (using leftover supplies), and adding singing and sound effects or music from their phones. Make it participatory by inviting listeners to boo, bang on the table, or stomp their feet (for Haman) and cheer or whoop it up (for Esther and Mordechai).

If families choose, they can record their show on one of their phones.

Here are some other ways to tell the story:

- Have families choose a member to be the narrator, and the others use the puppets to act it out. If families want to include loved ones at a distance, they can video call them and have those family members be the audience, add sound effects, and cheer and applaud the children.
- Tell the story using a microphone at the front of the room, and families act it out using their puppets.
- Invite grandparents to perform the story for the children.
- Invite the children to perform the story for the adults.
- Group 2–3 families together to perform different parts of the story for each other.

1:30–1:40 Wrap-up

Consider having a simple graphical survey on the table for families or individuals to complete. It might be a piece of paper with either a full body or pictures of a head, heart, and feet (or hands).

Participants fill out:

Head: What did you learn?

Heart: How did you feel about the experience?

Feet (or hands): What will you take away and do differently as a result of this experience?

If you have time, invite participants to share a few responses. Ask if they would like to do more of these types of programs and what they might like to do differently.

For younger children, you may have a paper with smiley faces — happy, neutral, and sad — so they too can evaluate the experience.

Creating Puppets for Other Holidays

Passover

Choose parts of the Passover story (for example: baby Moses in a basket on the Nile, Moses at the Burning Bush, Pharaoh refusing to let the Israelites go, Miriam leading the Israelites in song after they crossed the Sea of Reeds), and have families make puppets. As a bonus, they can use the puppets at their Passover seder. *Examples of characters:*

Pharaoh's daughter; Yocheved, Moses's mother; baby Moses; big Moses; Aaron; Pharaoh; Miriam.

Hanukkah

Use the story of the Assyrian-Greeks under King Antiochus, who desecrated the Temple, and how the Maccabees resisted and, against overwhelming odds, were victorious. Include the story of the miracle of the oil and how the Maccabees rededicated the Temple.

Examples of characters: King Antiochus; Mattathias; Judah Maccabee and a few other Maccabees; some Assyrian Greeks; priest of the Temple

Sample preparation email

Dear Families,

On [day and date] at [time] [name of synagogue/organization] will hold a Purim puppet production and performance for __ grade families.

Puppeting Purim is an intergenerational program for children, parents, grandparents, and other extended family members.

Together we will use our imagination and creativity to create Purim puppets and perform the Purim story.

We invite family members who are not local to [name of synagogue/organization] to join the program remotely. We encourage you to bring whatever device works best for your family. We'll make sure there's good cell reception and strong Wi-Fi. If you have questions about how best to make this work for your family, please contact [name of contact].

We will provide all the crafts materials you will need.

If you have any questions, please reach out to [contact name].

We look forward to creating together!

Sample follow-up email

Dear Families,

We are so pleased that you joined us on [date] for our workshop Puppeting Purim. We hope you enjoyed it as much as we did.

You may like to learn about the [benefits of puppet play](#). And if you want to have more fun with puppets, see [Puppet It Up](#) in the Jewish Grandparents Network [Family Room](#).

We encourage you to explore the Family Room to find more experiences and activities your family can do together, especially grandparents and grandchildren.

As always, do not hesitate to be in touch if you have questions.

Puppet-Making Instructions

Main Characters

Choose your puppet from among the following Purim characters:

- King Achashverosh
- Esther/Queen Esther
- Haman, the king's chief advisor
- Mordechai, Esther's uncle
- Queen Vashti, the king's first wife

Directions

Step 1: Turn the paper bag so the folded part is at the top. Make the paper bag puppet's face, using the folded part as the place for the mouth.

Step 2: Add hair, hats, crowns, clothes, and any other accessories, using construction paper, markers, and other arts and crafts supplies.

Step 4: Perhaps add arms and legs by gluing them to the sides and bottom (actual top) of the bag

Step 5: Create any background scenery or props you want for your puppet show — for example, a drawing of a palace, a scepter for the king, a wine goblet, or other banquet items.

Distinguishing Your Puppet

What could you add to:

- Achashverosh to look like a king?
- Esther to look like a queen?
- Mordechai to identify him as Jewish?
- Haman to look angry or mean?



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