

## A Ticket to the Shadow Theatre

Ideas for sensory games and creative activities using light and shadow.

Based on the book *Afraid of the Dark* by Lucy Farfort and Isobel Otter.

Resource created by Kate Leiper



**Level:**

Suitable for all ages with some adult help!

**Explore themes of:**

√ Shadow and light √ Storytelling √ Imagination √ Exploring senses

**Subject Checklist:**

√ Creative Arts √ Health and Wellbeing

### Summary:

*After moving house with her dad, Amy, the little girl in 'Afraid of the Dark', begins to feel more at home when two local children, Sofia and Bilal, invite her into their secret den. Illustrator, Lucy Farfort, shows us how to recreate this magical den, complete with sparkly stars and little rocket decorations, in her event Lucy Farfort: Build Your Own Magical Den at Edinburgh International Book Festival. This resource follows on from the theme of den building by creating a space, or a 'theatre', in which to discover and play with the magic of shadow.*

*Shadow theatre or play is an ancient form of entertainment which has existed for centuries in many parts of the world. Some forms are very skilled and specialised, however the main elements of light and shadow can be simply recreated in the classroom or at home, thereby offering participants an enchanting sensory experience.*

### This resource is great for:

- **Bonding with a community** through sharing the same sensory experiences together
- **Developing social skills** through learning to share, take turns and working as a team
- **Building on communication skills**
- **Encouraging imaginative play**
- **Developing manual dexterity skills** by using scissors to cut out and make card puppets

### Introduction

The first stage of this project is to build our 'Shadow Theatre'. For this you will need -

- **2 chairs**
- **A pale coloured bedsheet or large table cloth**
- **Clothes pegs**
- **A lamp - a small bedside lamp or torch would be ideal**
- **A small table or box or stack of books - something to place the lamp on**

It would be best to build the theatre in a space in which the light can be controlled or blocked out. There doesn't have to be complete darkness but if blinds or curtains could be closed, even if only partially, that would be ideal for creating a bit of magical theatrical atmosphere.

To build the theatre, simply place the 2 chairs back to back with a space in-between. Drape your sheet or table cloth over the chairs to create a flat 'screen' on the side that will be facing your audience. Use the pegs to secure it in place. Behind the screen, place your lamp or torch at a height that will allow the beam to roughly hit the centre of your draped sheet. You can use the table or box and/or books to find the best position.

You could build your theatre at floor level. This gives the theatre that cosy den-like quality and creates intimacy, especially if your audience is also gathered around sitting on the floor. However, if you want to make it more accessible, especially for those using wheelchairs, you may wish to build the screen on a table.

- If your class is well supported with assistants, you could simply have two people holding up the tablecloth or bedsheet while a third person wearing a **head torch** creates the shadows behind the cloth. This makes the activity very transportable and spontaneous which may be more appropriate for some classes, depending on abilities and needs.
- If your school has a sensory room, you may want to consider building your theatre in this space.
- Make the theatre as big or as small as you like. If a number of participants are going to be involved in creating shadow shows, use an extra large sheet or table cloth so that there is enough space to accommodate them all behind the screen.
- If you want to really go to town with your theatre, you could surround it with **drapes made from scarves and shawls, fairy lights, tinsel or fancy ostrich feathers**. At Christmas time you could give it a festive twist with **baubles** and a sprig or two of **holly**. At Halloween a **neep or pumpkin lantern** lit up with a **battery operated candle** is a must!



The above photos show the theatre built at floor level, which very much has a den like feel to it.



The above set up shows the theatre built on a table, making it more accessible for wheel chair users.

### Activity 1

This activity is really a game in which real-life every day objects are held behind the sheet/screen and in front of the lamp. The aim of the game is for the audience to identify the object from their silhouette.

- You could have a bit of fun by moving the object closer and further away from the lamp, blurring the image and twirling them around, thereby creating a bit of drama and suspense.
- This could be developed further to include actions. For example, as shown in the video clip below, after identifying a teacup and a teapot, the motion of pouring could be demonstrated and then the person behind the screen could pretend to also drink the tea.
- These objects and actions could be developed into themes. If a class is learning about daily morning routines, perhaps you could show a toothbrush and a tube of tooth paste and demonstrate squeezing toothpaste onto the toothbrush. Or show a hairbrush and demonstrate brushing hair.
- Depending on the ability of the class, the children may want to get involved and show some of their own daily routines for the rest of the class to try and guess.



Video: Playing the object identifying game.

## Activity 2



This activity involves making simple puppets for the shadow theatre. Characters can be drawn onto cardboard and then cut out and stuck onto a wooden spoon,

old paint brush or bamboo stick which will make the puppet easier to handle behind the screen.

These card puppets are stuck onto the end of an old paint brush handle, a wooden spoon handle and a bamboo stick with a large lump of blue tack. It may be an idea to also wrap around some masking tape on top of the blue tack. Some participants might be tempted to dismantle the puppet from its stick and the tape would at least slow them down. You'll see that the star has been stuck onto the side of the bamboo stick rather than onto the end, as with the other two examples. This will allow a puppet to be operated from the side of the theatre. In some situations, this may be easier than operating a puppet from behind the screen.

- Characters don't need to be complicated. You can use basic shapes (square, circle, triangle) with arms, legs, hands and feet added on.
- If there is a lack of confidence in drawing, use images from old magazines and catalogues. Tear the page out and stick it onto cardboard before cutting out. This will make the shape more robust and prevent you having to cut it out twice. If the magazine or catalogue image is too small and intricate to cut out, enlarge it on the photocopier.
- If participants have profound complex additional needs, get them involved by drawing around their hand or foot and creating a character from those shapes.
- In a similar way to Activity 1, you could use the silhouettes to work on a theme and develop a game. For example, you could show silhouettes of animals you may find in a zoo for the audience to guess, or silhouettes of favourite book characters, eg, The Gruffulo, Elmer the Patchwork Elephant, etc.



### Video: Creating shadow characters

- You may want to get quite fancy and use coloured lights, maybe bike lights covered in coloured transparent sweet wrappers, to conjure up special lighting effects. Coloured transparent fabric could be used, perhaps waving and flapping it to create more dramatic movement.
- You could take a favourite book illustration or book spread and recreate it in shadow form. Start to animate it and use it as a starting point to develop your own narrative. I took Lucy Farfort's idea of decorating her den with stars and rockets and developed it into the very simple little scene which you can see in the video below.



**Video: Space rocket and space man**

### **Activity 3**

Remember that you can use your hands to create characters and shapes. This is obviously a very simple and direct way of creating shadow characters. A quick search on the internet will give you lots of ideas.



**Photos: Using hands to make the shadow of a deer.**

### **Further information**

- The 3 different activities described above could be combined and further developed to tell a simple narrative or even to illustrate a favourite nursery rhyme or song.
- Illustrating stories with shadow could be good for participants who are visually impaired. Simplifying shapes and working with the strong contrast of light and shadow may allow them to see the imagery with more ease.
- It's very possible that due to continuing Covid restrictions, schools will be unable to put on any shows this year, especially at Christmas time. Perhaps your class could create and record their own shadow show which could be emailed to parents and carers as a Christmas surprise. You could do a traditional nativity story, or make up your own festive tale or illustrate a favourite Christmas song, such as 'Jingle Bells' or 'Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer'.

I feel that it's important to emphasise that the videos I have made for this resource are very simple as I only had my own set of hands to work with. With extra hands to help, you could start to combine all sorts of characters and effects into the shadow scene, thereby creating plenty of opportunity for children of all abilities to

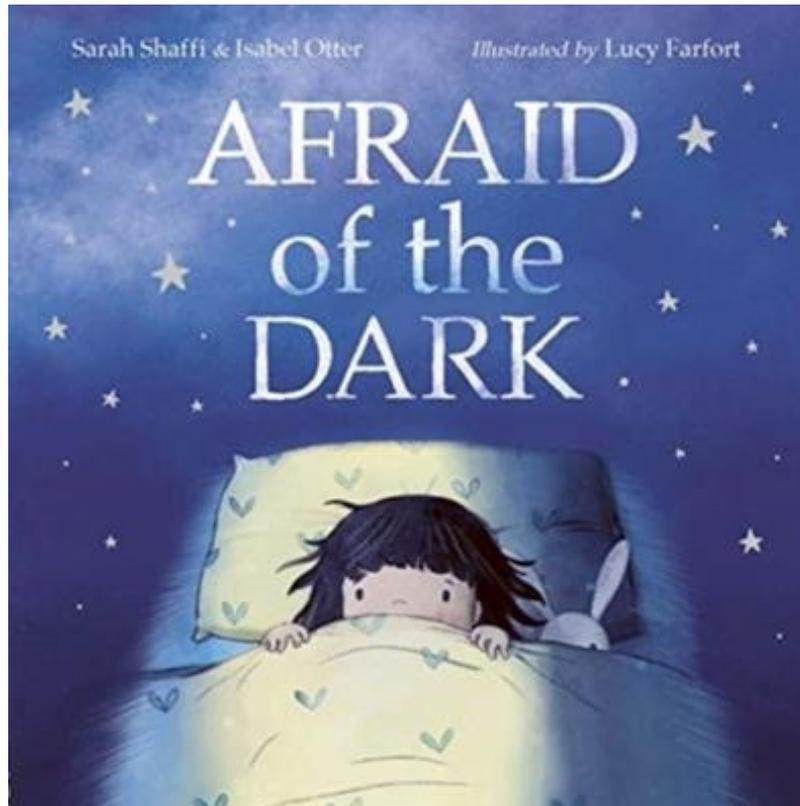


get involved in conjuring up some shadow theatre magic.

**Photo: Gustav the Whippet, who has paws but no helping hands!**

## Further information

Keep your eye out for more books by Sarah Shaffi, Isabel Otter and Lucy Farfort as well as the other authors from the Edinburgh International Book Festival!



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