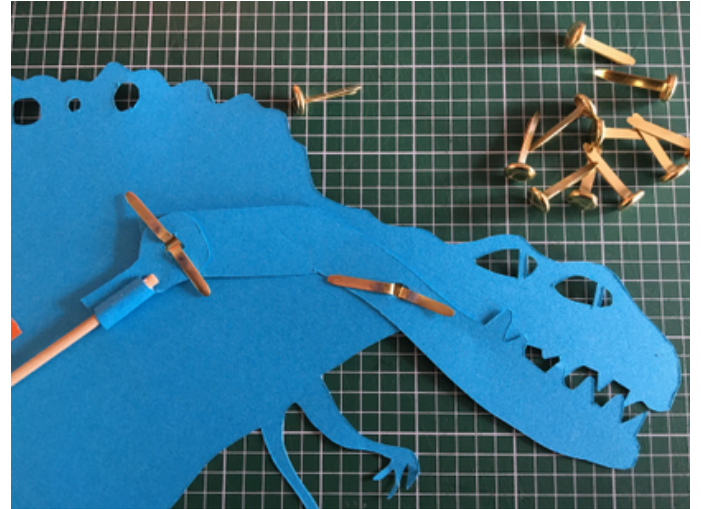


# How to make... a shadow puppet

By Matthew Robins  
Suitable for ages 5 - adult

## You will need:

- Paper and pencil for initial sketching (optional)
- Thin cardboard (not paper - you will want a piece of cardboard that is thick enough to not flop around when you're trying to hold it upright but not too thick that you can't cut it easily. An empty cereal box would be ideal if you don't have any other cardboard in the house)
- Glue
- Tape
- Scissors/craft knife/scalpel depending on age and confidence levels (plus a cutting mat if you're using a knife)
- Sticks - i.e. barbecue skewers or any thin wooden sticks
- Optional - coloured plastic, i.e. sweet wrappers, miscellaneous bits of interesting stuff that would make interesting shadows

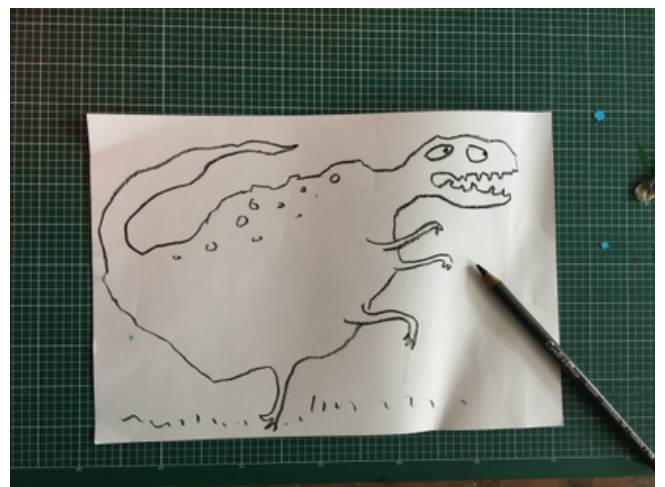


## Instructions

### Step 1:

**Think of an idea for a character.** It can be someone you've invented, a character from a book you like, someone interesting from history, a monster, an animal, an alien... if you can imagine it then you can make a shadow puppet of it.

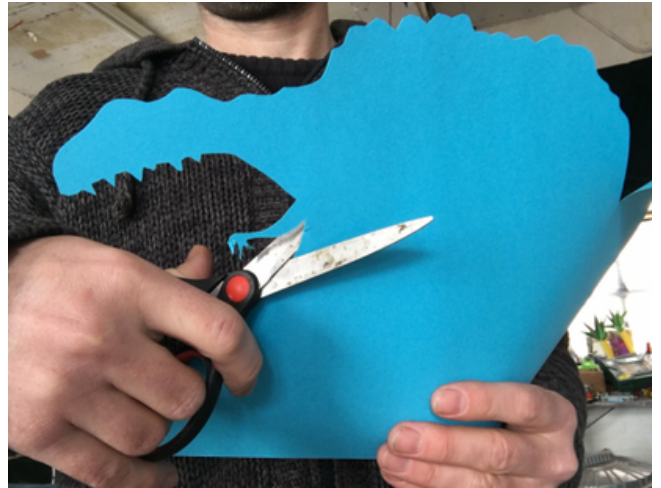
I really like dinosaurs so for this example I'm going to make a dinosaur. It isn't any specific dinosaur, I'm just thinking of what I like to draw most - lots of teeth, a big tail, tiny dinosaur fingers and toes.



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## Step 1 (continued):

You can start by sketching it out somewhere first or if you're feeling brave working straightaway with your cardboard. Sometimes I just quickly sketch out what's in my head before I forget, and to work out if I'll need any moving parts but always keep in mind: *a shadow puppet is a way to create drawings out of light*. Therefore the finished puppet can sometimes end up being a bit dull if you put too much of your energy into drawing designs at the beginning rather than the puppet itself.



As a guide I might draw a few rough blobs onto my card - something for the body, sausage shapes for the legs etc. but it's best to think of your scissors or craft knife as your main drawing tool, use it like you would a pencil. Imagine you're a sculptor carving something out of a giant piece of marble rather than simply cutting around the edges of an existing drawing.

## Step 2:

**Cut it out.** You want a piece of cardboard that is thick enough to not flop around when you're trying to hold it upright but not too thick that you can't cut it easily. An empty cereal box would be ideal if you don't have any other cardboard in the house. I use a scalpel to cut out my puppets but if you're not old enough or confident enough to use a scalpel yet (as they're mainly used by surgeons) you can use a craft knife or scissors. Take your time but cut with confidence and let your instinct guide you. Trusting your instinct will allow you to cut out a brilliant puppet.



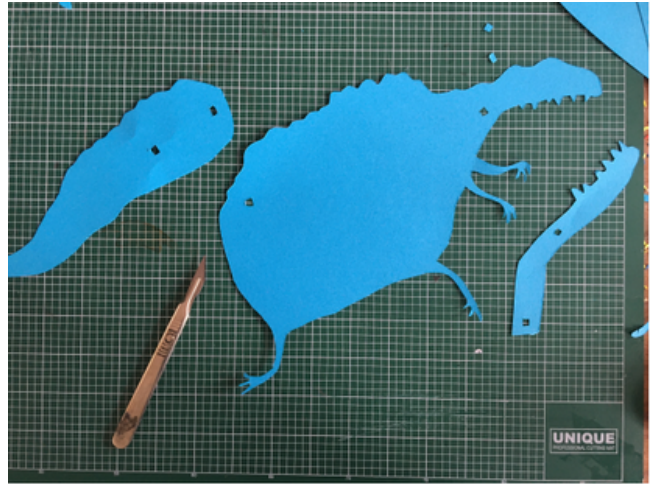
And if it looks a bit rubbish keep chopping bits off or glueing bits on until it looks good or chuck the whole thing into the recycling bin and start again. Think about the outline of the character - you're making something that will cast a shadow so this is where most of the detail will be. Imagine your own shadow on a sunny day - or a bedside lamp casting the shadow of your hand on the ceiling at night. You can't see details in the shadow like your eyes or your freckles.

If your character has a distinctive nose it would be most effective to make the puppet as a side-on/profile view - like the queen on a stamp - and then their lovely big nose will be a great feature in the shadow (sorry ma'am). You can add some details later, cutting out extra holes for the light to shine through - it will appear as a white space in the shadow and can be the eyes or nostrils or feathers or hair... but we'll come to that.

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## Step 3:

**Do you want anything to move?** If so it needs to be cut out separately and have some sort of overlapping area of cardboard that you can add the swivel points to. I want my dinosaur to be able to snap its jaws and shake its tail about a bit so these parts will be separate to the main body of the dinosaur puppet.

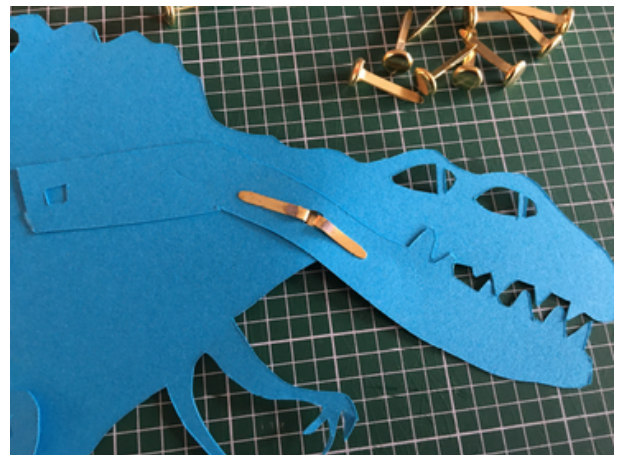


I'm not going to add any movement to the feet and the arms here, often just moving the puppet around with the right kind of energy gives it enough of a sense of life for me. If your story requires the puppet to do something specific, maybe pick up a prehistoric sandwich for its lunch or kick a jurassic football (basically a rock) then you can adapt the movements I'm showing here and add them to the arms or legs instead. If you have too many things moving it can get complicated for one person to operate so you might need to get an assistant to help you wrangle those bits during the performance.

## Step 4:

**Work out where the pivot point is going to go.** I

want the jaw to move so I've cut out a separate piece (with enough overhang for the pivot hole) and line it up in the right position on the main body of the puppet. I then make a hole through the jaw piece and a corresponding hole in the main body of the puppet. A split pin/paper fastener will go through this both these holes and join the two pieces together.



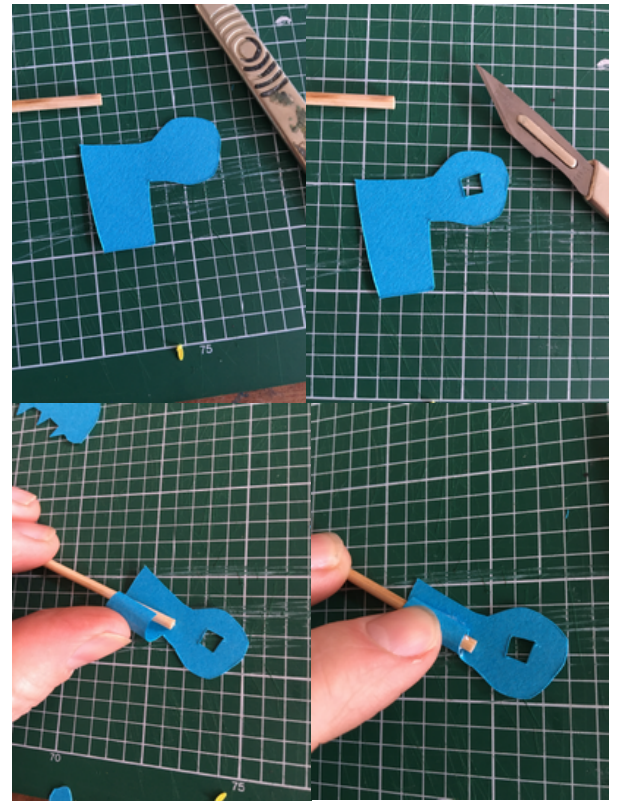


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## Step 4 (continued):

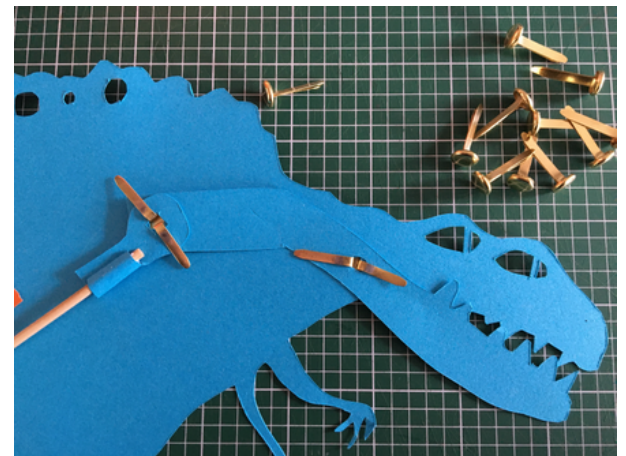
I also need to add a second hole to the jaw piece on its little overlapping area of cardboard and this is where I add the stick that will control the movement.

These sticks need to be able to move freely so I make a little mechanism out of cardboard to glue onto the end - it's easier to explain in photos so have a look at this:



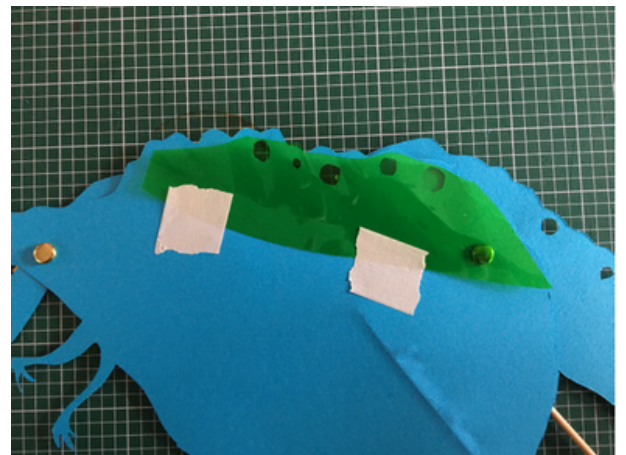
And then I use a paper fastener to fix this to the other hole.

Getting this right is one of the hardest bits so if it doesn't quite work or isn't moving in the way you had hoped then just glue a scrap of cardboard over the holes and try again.



## Step 5:

**Details.** I want my puppet to have eyes so (as you can see here) I cut these out as extra holes so they will appear as areas of white when the shadow is projected. This is easier with a knife but not too difficult with scissors, just take your time. You could also use a hole-punch for this instead. I also like to cut out little details, again you can use a hole-punch for this. I also cut out some little blobs that will look like some kind of pattern on the dinosaur's back.



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## Step 5 (continued):

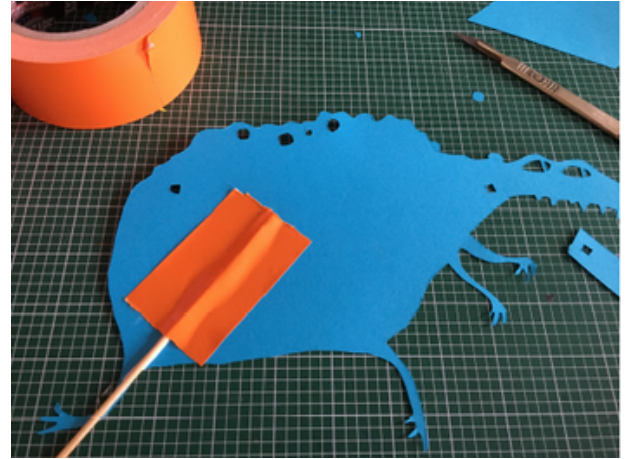
No one needs to look at the puppet, so it doesn't matter if it's got messy blobs of glue on or torn off strips of sellotape - the audience will all be watching the shadows you project onto the wall.

If you do want to add colour you need to be creative and find see-through coloured pieces of plastic - maybe from some sweet wrappers or ask a friend if they have anything like that.

## Step 6:

**A stick to hold the puppet.** A wooden barbecue skewer is ideal for this, and they're easy to find in the supermarket. If you don't have one you could use a lolly stick or a twig from the garden or the park.

Glue it on with PVA glue or strong tape (for example gaffer tape). I'm using the dinosaur's leg to disguise where the stick joins the body but this is up to you, there is really no need to try and make the sticks look invisible.



(You can always tweak it if it's not quite what you thought - maybe the tail is too big, trim a bit off, or the eyes are too small to have enough impact, so you might want to make those holes a bit bigger.)

Once you're happy you can think about cutting out some friends for it, or cutting out some shadow puppet scenery to go with it.

## Step 7:

**Let the glue dry** and then you're ready to project your shadows. A nice empty bit of wall is good or you can project it onto the ceiling. You need a small but strong light source. The torch app on a phone works quite well, or a good torch like a mag-light. You can use a desk lamp if you don't have anything else, but you might find that you have slightly less control over the size and crispness of your shadow.

Turn out the lights or pull the curtains and make your puppet come to life as a shadow on the wall. You can pick some suitable dramatic music to go with it, sing a song, or narrate the action like a football commentator.