

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

PENNY RUSSELL

Outside Your Door: Exploring Nature through Puppetry, Drama and Music

Step outside and spark curiosity! In this lively, hands-on workshop, educators will discover how the performing arts—especially puppetry—can bring science concepts to life. Explore earth, life, and physical sciences through imaginative play, storytelling, and song. Learn how to support children’s understanding of seasonal changes, basic life needs, and the wonders of the natural world right outside your door. Walk away with practical strategies, playful activities, and puppet-making ideas you can immediately use to deepen nature-based learning in your classroom.



Penny Russell is a Puppeteer, Musician, and Teaching Artist based in Prince George’s County, MD. She is a MD Wolf Trap Teaching Artist, Master Teaching Artist with Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts; and teaches Music, Drama, Puppetry, and Self-Advocacy through the Arts to children and adults on the autism spectrum for ArtStream. She performs as Penny’s Puppets for The Puppet Company’s Tiny Tots first-exposure theater. She studied Folklore and Mythology at the University of Maryland, College Park where she received degrees in Sociology and English. She has presented workshops for the National Science Teachers Convention, Wolf Trap, The Kennedy Center, The Actor’s Center, and schools across the country. Penny loves connecting and communicating through the arts; and believes that the arts are for everyone.

Strategies



Collaboration



Puppetry

Elements of Puppetry:
Eyes and Eyeline



Imagination

Featured Strategies



Outdoor Puppet Ambassador

We will learn the basics of moving mouth manipulation, and use them to create classroom character

Talk Show

We will interview our puppets in a talk show format

Tabletop Puppetry

Puppetry using toys and simple props, acted out on the floor or a table

Props and Costumes

Anthropomorphizing parts of a plant, using props and costumes to explore form and function

Mirror Game

Adaptation of the Mirror Exercise relating to shadows

What's in the Box?

A sensory experience using a chant

Maryland Early Learning Standards

- W.PK.8 With modeling and support from adults, recall information from experiences or information from provided sources to answer a question.
- SL.PK.3 Ask and answer questions in order to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood.
- SL.PK.4 Describe familiar people, places, things, and events with modeling and support.



Maryland Fine Arts Standards

- Art Form: Theater
 - Anchor Standard: 5 Develop and artistic work for presentation
 - Artistic Process: Presenting {Strategies: Tabletop Puppetry (Bear Experience), Props and Costumes (Tree Experience)}
 - T5 E:P-2:2: Think creatively and collaboratively to create technical solutions in props and costumes that enhance a guided drama/theatrical experience based on a known story
- Art Form: Theater
 - Anchor Standard: 6 Convey meaning through the presentation of an artistic work
 - Artistic Process: Presenting {Strategies: Rod Puppetry, Table Top Puppetry, Movement Experience}
 - I:P-2:1: Share an informal, guided drama/theatrical work based on known story.
- Art Form: Theater
 - Anchor Standard: 10 Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experience to make art
 - Artistic Process: Connecting {Strategies: Hand Puppetry, Talk Show, Outside Your Door Poem}
 - T10 E:P-2:2: Interact effectively with others and share how personal and character experiences relate.

Elements of Puppetry

Eyes and Eyeline:

So important! We are attuned from our earliest moments to pay attention to the gaze of others. So we need to pay extra attention to ensure that the eyeline between characters is always correct, especially in games where the eyeline may need to hold up from many angles.

Breath:

Even when the character is in the background and not the focus of the scene, it is important that they are always breathing, and their breathing should communicate the emotional state of the character. It signals.

Puppet versus Puppeteer:

Never upstage the puppet with your facial expressions, voice, or body movement.

Stillness:

Characters should remain still when they are not the focus of the moment (but always still breathing) – avoid the urge to “earn your keep” by overselling the motion. The puppeteer should maintain stillness

Micromovement:

All puppetry movements can be easily seen. Don’t exaggerate.

Passing the Ball:

Make it clear when the focus of the scene passes from one character to another by minimizing distracting motion that might pull focus.

Gesture:

Use gestures to tell the story.

Rhythm:

If music is used, stay in rhythm.

Speed:

Puppets should move slightly slower than in real life to communicate the gesture clearly.

Touch:

Emotion prosthesis through which the audience experiences the contact between the puppet and the scene, and it is essential to good animation as well. It’s through contact with the ground that we feel the weight of the character and when one character punches another or gently touches another character’s hand, if it’s done right, you can feel it in your own body.



Featured Songs



If You're Happy and You Know It (traditional):

I
f you're happy and you know it, nod your head
If you're happy and you know it, nod your head
If you're happy and you know it, then you really want to show it
If you're happy and you know it, nod your head...
If you're happy and you know it, wave to a friend...
If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands...
If you're happy and you know it, dance around....

My Shadow Moves (tune of Skip to my Lou):

My shadow moves just like me
My shadow moves just like me
My shadow moves just like me
Just like me it's moving

What's in the Box? (Fijian folk melody):

What's in the box? What's in the box? Do you think you know?
What's in the box? What's in the box? Do you think you know?

Roots Grow Down (Penny Russell):

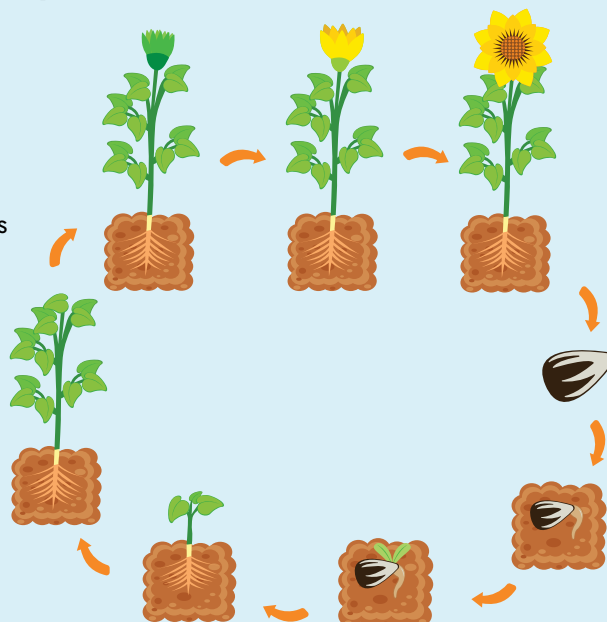
The roots grow down
The roots grow down
The roots grow down

The next thing that happens is

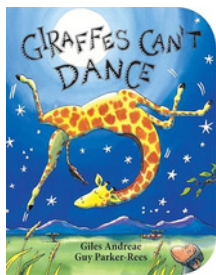
The stem shoots up...

The leaves grow out...

And the flower blooms



Featured Books



Giraffes Can't Dance by Giles Andreae

Giraffes Can't Dance is a touching tale of Gerald the giraffe, who wants nothing more than to dance. With crooked knees and thin legs, it's harder for a giraffe than you would think. But with some words of encouragement from an unlikely friend, he might just find the courage to be himself on the dance floor. With light-footed rhymes and high-stepping illustrations, this tale is gentle inspiration for every child with dreams of greatness.

Imagination:

Go outdoors, invite the children to sit down or quietly move and listen. Alternatively, sit or lie down in the classroom and play a nature soundscape. Ask the children what they heard. If using a soundscape, ask the children where they imagined they were. After everyone has had an opportunity to report their observations, listen or play the soundscape again and listen for all the sounds reported by the class. Try adding five minutes (outdoors) or 5 seconds (indoors) to your listening time on each outing.

Collaboration:

Recreate your nature sounds. Find a toy giraffe and re-enact Gerald's dancing scene from the book. Pass the giraffe around the circle, giving each child a turn to make Gerald dance.

Divide the class into three groups. Give each group 1-3 letter sounds [ex: s, w, sh, ee, i, ah, ch]. Have a leader "direct" each section of the choir by holding up the letter sounds. The choir will make the sound it sees. The director can make it even more interesting by directing dynamics (changing the volume) with hand motions. One group could be dancing giraffes.

Extensions:

Find instruments to recreate the nature sounds. Use a soundscape to encourage Gerald to dance. Use a body part to represent Gerald's graceful dancing: a hand, an arm, a leg, etc. Recreate the movements of nature with body parts to accompany Gerald.



hello! hello! by Matthew Cordell

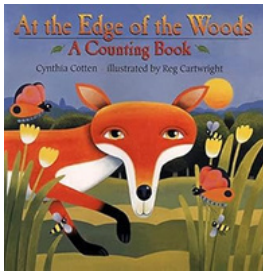
Outside the world is bright and colorful, but Lydia's family is too busy with their gadgets to notice. She says Hello to everyone. Hello? Hello! Her father says hello while texting, her mother says hello while working on her laptop and her brother doesn't say hello at all. The T.V shouts Hello! But she doesn't want to watch any shows. Lydia, now restless, ventures outside. There are so many things to say hello to! Hello rocks! Hello leaves! Hello flowers! When Lydia comes back home she decides to show her family what she has found, and it's hello world and goodbye gadgets!

Imagination and Collaboration:

Read together. Invite the children to voice the animal characters saying, "Hello" in the story.

Extensions:

K/1st Grade-is this story fiction or nonfiction? How do you know?



At the Edge of the Woods: A Counting Book by Cynthia Cotton & Reg Cartwright

With lilting, alliterative rhymes and the title acting as a refrain, Cotton (Snow Ponies) invites readers to spend sunrise to sunset at the perimeter of a forest, a landscape that Cartwright (Mister Potter's Pigeon) fills with ever-increasing groups of industrious and convivial inhabitants.

Imagination:

Go outdoors. Make observations. Share your observations. What did you see? Describe its appearance. Describe its behavior. Where were you? Put it together in a poem. Ex: a large, brown bird sitting in a tree outside my door. Add more observations to your poem.

Collaboration:

After creating your poem, create simple stick figures representations of what you saw. Draw or color your object on card stock or a recycled file folder. Cut out the picture. Tape it to a craft stick. Read your poem while manipulating your rod puppet.

Extensions:

Retell your poem with your bodies as a choreopoem. Create a poem, rod puppets and/or a choreopoem based on a nature video or research on alternate locations. Create rod puppets directly connected to the book.



Hank Finds an Egg by Rebecca Dudley

While walking through the woods, Hank finds an egg all alone on the forest floor. Spotting its home high up in a tree, Hank diligently tries to return the egg to its nest, but is met with failure each time. After keeping the egg warm overnight, he returns to the scene the next morning. To his surprise, he is met by another forest creature. Will they find a way together to see the egg safely home? Artist Rebecca Dudley crafts each tiny leaf, flower, and creature that appears in Hank's forest in breathtaking detail, bringing the sunlit woods to life. From delicate ferns to the glow of Hank's little campfire, Hank Finds an Egg immerses you in its vivid miniature world. In this charming tale, told without words, Hank's endearing and genuine kindness will inspire readers young and old alike to believe in themselves and the goodness of others.

Imagination:

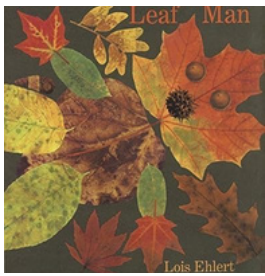
"Read" the story, which has no text. Tell us what is happening in the pictures. Have children tell you what is happening? Have children predict what might happen next?

Collaboration:

Go outdoors. Work together to tell a simple story with a beginning, middle and end. Use leaves, grasses, sticks and seeds found on the ground to create the setting for your story. You may choose to use a plastic animal from the classroom as the main character. Share your story with another small group.

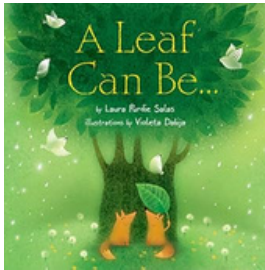
Extensions:

Retell a familiar story. Work as a whole group.



Leaf Man by Lois Ehlert

Fall has come, the wind is gusting, and Leaf Man is on the move. Is he drifting east, over the marsh and ducks and geese? Or is he heading west, above the orchards, prairie meadows, and spotted cows? No one's quite sure, but this much is certain: A Leaf Man's got to go where the wind blows. Ehlert crafts each illustration out of actual fall leaves on every spread to reveal gorgeous landscapes. This playful and whimsical book celebrates the natural world and the rich imaginative life of children.



A Leaf Can Be... by Laura Purdie Salas

A leaf can be a...shade spiller, mouth filler, tree topper, rain stopper. Find out about the many roles leaves play in this poetic exploration of leaves throughout the year.

Laura Purdie Salas's lyrical, rhyming text and Violeta Dabija's glowing illustrations make simple yet profound observations about seemingly ordinary objects and encourage readers to suggest "what else it can be!" Using metaphors for a leaf (tree topper / rain stopper), a rock (hopscotch marker / fire sparker), and water (thirst quencher / kid drencher), these insightful picture books creatively highlight a variety of roles and relationships in nature.

Imagination:

After reading the book, create your own Leaf Character outdoors using natural materials you find on the ground (sticks, leaves, stones, seeds). Share your finished Leaf Character with another student. Teachers can take photos of the Leaf Characters. What is your character's name? How old are they? What do they do for fun?

Collaboration:

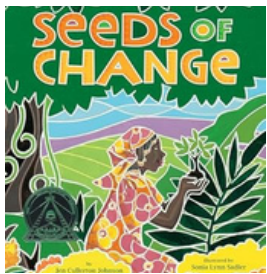
Introduce your Leaf Character to another Leaf Character. What will they say to each other? Write a story about an adventure involving the two characters.

Extensions:

Use the end papers in *Leaf Man* to identify the leaves and seeds in your Leaf Character. Use the names of these leaves and/or seeds in your Character's name.

Modifications:

For young children, work together to create a Leaf Face using numerals and positional words.



Seeds of Change: Planting a Path to Peace by Jen Cullerton

As a young girl in Kenya, Wangari was taught to respect nature. She grew up loving the land, plants, and animals that surrounded her—from the giant mugumo trees her people, the Kikuyu, revered to the tiny tadpoles that swam in the river.

Although most Kenyan girls were not educated, Wangari, curious and hardworking, was allowed to go to school. There, her mind sprouted like a seed. She excelled at science and went on to study in the United States. After returning home, Wangari blazed a trail across Kenya, using her knowledge and compassion to promote the rights of her countrywomen and to help save the land, one tree at a time.

Imagination:

How can you help keep the natural world outside your door safe, clean and healthy?

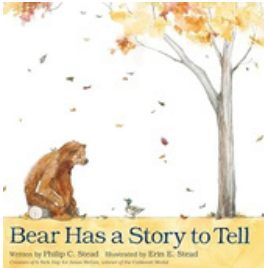
Collaboration:

Work together to portray short scenarios (using the elements of puppetry) that represent the answers to the question.



Goodbye Autumn, Hello Winter by Kenard Pak

Join a brother and sister as they explore nature and take a stroll through their twinkling town, greeting all the signs of the coming season. In a series of conversations with everything from the setting sun to curious deer, they say goodbye to autumn and welcome the glorious first snow of winter in Kenard Pak's *Goodbye Autumn, Hello Winter*.



Bear Has a Story to Tell by Philip C. Stead

It was almost winter and Bear was getting sleepy.

But first, Bear had a story to tell...

Bear found his friend Mouse, but Mouse was busy gathering seeds and didn't have time to listen to a story. Then Bear saw his friend Duck, but Duck was getting ready to fly south. What about his friend Toad? He was busy looking for a warm place to sleep. By the time Bear was through helping his friends get ready for winter, would anyone still be awake to hear his story.

Imagination:

We will use table top puppetry to tell the story of the Bear. **Materials needed:** plastic bear toy, box den, paper sun, paper moon, fabric river, toy tree.

In the summer, Bear gets up every morning. [Put up the sun.] He scratches his back against a tree. [Bear scratches his back against the tree.] He goes to the river to catch a fish. [Bear catches fish in the river.] It's very hot, and he cools off in the river.

At night [put up the moon], he goes to sleep in his den. [Bear goes to his den.] The next morning [put up the sun], he does it again.

Repeat this sequence several times. Invite the children to come up and follow the sequence while you narrate. (Bear gets up; Bear scratches his back; Bear catches fish; Bear goes to sleep.

Fall: Change the leaves on the tree. Shorten the day.

Winter: Bear doesn't get up. Remove the leaves from the tree. Put heavy fabric over the river. Add cotton ball snow.

Spring: Put new, bright green leaves on the tree. Add flowers. Remove the ice from the river. Add a berry bush. Add sound effects (frogs, birds). Bear wakes up!

Collaboration:

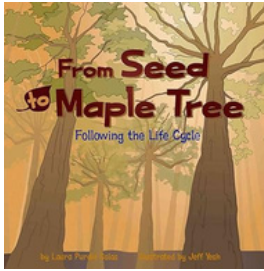
Take turns telling the bear story. A new child moves the bear for each new action. Become bears, using imaginary costume pieces. Choose a place in the classroom to be your den. Choose an object in the classroom to be a tree. Use a large piece of blue fabric to represent the river. Retell the simple story.

Extensions:

Add sound effects to your story (snoring bear, scratching back, eating bear, waking bear). Use your bear set to retell hibernation stories like *Bear Has a Story to Tell*. Use other plastic animals, or simple rod puppets for additional characters.

Modification:

Change the setting from the Woodland Forest to the City. Follow the seasonal changes to people (going to school in the fall, wearing a heavy jacket in the winter, etc.).



From Seed to Maple Tree: Following the Life Cycle by Laura Purdie Salas

What does a seed need to grow? What color flowers does a sugar maple tree have? Let your mind bloom as you learn about the life cycle of a sugar maple tree.

Imagination:

Imagine you are part of a tree (roots, trunk, leaves, flowers). What might you say? How might you move? What sounds might you make?

Collaboration:

Choose volunteers to sit back-to-back in a circle with their legs and arm out as roots. (Costume: tights) The roots suck up the water from the soil, with sound effects.

Choose volunteers to be the trunk of the tree; one seated, one on his/her knees, one standing slightly taller, and one standing. (Costume: brown filler paper) The members of the trunk will carry the water up the trunk of the tree, from the roots to the leaves.

Choose volunteers to be leaves. (Costume: sun glasses) They will take in the sun and make food. (Prop: dishes)

Choose volunteers to be flowers. (Costume: flower hat) Their job is to look handsome/beautiful and attract bees.

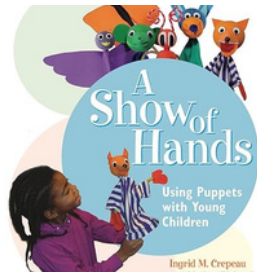
Choose one volunteer to be a bee. (Costume: puppet) The bee flies around the tree and lands on the Flower.

Replace the flowers with apples (Prop: apples, or red foam balls). The "apples" will drop to the ground.

Extensions:

Recreate the tree outdoors. Draw the tree outline on the ground in chalk. Children will sit on the roots, sit on the trunk, and sit on the branches. Pass water from cup to cup up the tree to the leaves.

Support for Using Puppetry in Your Classroom



A Show of Hands by Ingrid M. Crepeau and M. Ann Richards

Puppets are a play-time favorite in countless classrooms. With the ability to capture and nurture a child's imagination, puppets have great untapped potential as creative teaching aids.

An ideal resource for teachers from preschool to early primary, A Show of Hands also includes helpful instructions for designing, constructing, or purchasing your own puppets, as well as how puppets may be used with children diagnosed with autism, ADD/ADHD, or a hearing or vision impairment.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Penny Russell is a Puppeteer, Musician, and Teaching Artist based in Prince George's County, MD. She is a Master Teaching Artist with Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts; and teaches Music, Drama, Puppetry, and Self-Advocacy through the Arts to children and adults on the autism spectrum for ArtStream. She performs as Penny's Puppets for The Puppet Company's Tiny Tots first-exposure theater. She studied Folklore and Mythology at the University of Maryland, College Park where she received degrees in Sociology and English. She has presented workshops for the National Science Teachers Convention, Wolf Trap, The Kennedy Center, The Actor's Center, and schools across the country. Penny loves connecting and communicating through the arts; and believes that the arts are for everyone.



Puppetry



For more about Penny's programs, scan below!



Penny Russell

Pronouns: she/her

"After years as a musician and actor, I found my passion in puppetry. I love the humor, creativity and humanity found in the medium of puppetry. I also love sharing the artform with others. As a teaching artist, I strive for accessibility. I love connecting and communicating through the arts; and I believe the arts are for everyone."

-Penny Russell