

# Foam Mouth Puppets

## Materials

**Head** foam blocks, vinyl hinge strip, mouth lining material

**Material covering:** stretchy fabric

**Mâché covering:** paper or plaster mâché pulp, paint

**Eyes** tinfoil, polymer clay various colours

**Hair** wool, fake fur or other suitable material

**Body** small clothes, gloves, socks and shoes

**Hand Controller** coat hanger wire

## Tools

Hot-glue gun, sharp pointed scissors, permanent marker, pliers, hacksaw blade or sharp craft knife, paint brushes, oven/tray, needle and thread



## Instructions

### Make the Head

**1** Choose a suitable sized foam block, draw the basic profile and front view outline with permanent marker.

**2** Using sharp scissors, sculpt the foam by pinching and cutting. To round off a corner or edge, make a big cut first then smaller cuts on each side until the shape you want is achieved. Foam can also be sculpted by pinching and tearing.

**3** Foam features can now be added on with hot-glue. Think about Eyebrow ridges, cheekbones, lips, nose, ears and chin. Look at the head from different directions.

**Notes** If covering with material it is sometimes easier to cover and glue on the nose separately. When joining foam with hot-glue, do not squeeze foam together too tightly. The hot-glue needs to stay on the surface of the foam to make a bond. Because the foam acts as an insulator, hot-glue takes longer to cool between foam blocks.

**4** Draw the position of the mouth with permanent marker. The mouth can be drawn in a curve to give more of a smile. Using the hacksaw blade or craft knife, cut the lower jaw from the head so it is now in two pieces.

**5** Using hot-glue, join the jaw back to the head with the vinyl hinge. The fold in the vinyl should protrude slightly from the back of the head to give the puppets mouth freedom of movement.

**6** Mark the position of your fingers in the back of the head, just above the vinyl hinge. Using the pointy ends of the scissors cut a finger length slot into the foam. Make it wide enough for all your fingers. Now do the same for your thumb in the back of the jaw, just below the hinge. Your puppet head is now ready to try out! The mouth should be easy to open and close. If it is difficult, check that the finger



holes are not too far from the hinge or that the bend in the hinge is not too far into the mouth.

### **Cover the Head with Material**

**7** This can be tricky, especially if your puppets face has lots of contours. I like to start by hot-gluing the material down the middle of the puppets face, then gluing each side down symmetrically. Save the stretch in your material for the lumps and hollows. You may need to make a dart if stretch is not sufficient.

**8** glue the material so it just reaches into the mouth, then cover over the top with the separate mouth lining.

### **Or Cover the Head with Mâché**

**9** Using the mâché recipe below, paint a thin layer of mâché pulp using a wet paint brush or your wet fingers. Leave to dry and then cover with a second layer, filling any gaps or depressions. This technique can be used to make a very smooth or roughly textured surface. Paint when final mâché layer is dry.

### **Make the Eyes**

**Notes** Eyes are REALLY REALLY important on puppets. Spend some time thinking about how you want them to look. What size, shape and colour. Do you want them to sit in the face with eyelids or bulge out. If you want a real look, pick a hollow eye socket in the foam and after they are glued in, cover the top and bottom with lids. I like using polymer clay to make the eyes, however any curved surface will be effective. Jim Henson's advice is to make the iris' slightly cross eyed to give the puppet a focused stare.

**10** To reduce the amount of polymer clay, first shape the eyes from tinfoil so they are the same size and shape. Then cover with a thin layer of polymer clay. Make the iris by cutting a small ball of clay into halves and squashing them into circles. The colour can be two colours marbled together to give a more realistic look. Position them carefully onto the eyes and roll eye on a smooth surface until the iris blends in. Add pupils in the same way. Bake in the oven to the clays instructions and hot-glue into place.

### **Make the Body**

**11** Your puppet body can be as simple as a sleeve! Made by sewing or hot gluing a rectangle of cloth. This is then attached to the back of your puppets head, around where your fingers go into the holes. make sure the sleeve is big enough so the mouth is free to open and close. Or, if making a person, use ready made recycled cloths. Make foam hands or stuff a pair of gloves. Glue them together then fix to the puppets neck or head. Make a slit in the back of the shirt with scissors for your hand to work the puppets' mouth.

**Notes** The clothes can be stuffed with available materials. I like to use a foam rectangle inside the shirt to give the shoulders some shape at least.



## Make the Controller

**12** A stick or wire coat hanger can be made into a controller for hand movements. Being able to move the arms as well as the mouth will make your puppet much more expressive. Straighten the wire with pliers and curl one end into a small loop. Hand sew the wire loop to the inside of the puppets hand. If you have made a foam hand, a button on both sides stops the thread from pulling through the foam.



## Notes

- The final result is a unique artwork, but thought should also be given to the puppets functionality. If the head is too heavy the amount of time you can use the puppet will be limited. The way muppets are generally made is using a sheet of foam cut into a pattern and glued to make the head shape. **Antron fleece** is then sewn from the pattern and glued to the foam. The pile of the fleece is thick enough to hide any seams. This leaves the head hollow and light.
- Especially with a long jawed puppet like a crocodile, the jaw should be as light as possible. In this case simply colouring the foam with **spray paint** might be the best option.