

learn

Elements of performance art can come together to develop language, says Mr Benjamin Ho, artistic director of Paper Monkey Theatre.

# Puppet POWER

Performance art forms such as puppetry and storytelling might be the key to getting little ones not only enthusiastic about, but also proficient in their mother tongue.

So says Mr Benjamin Ho, the artistic director of local theatre company Paper Monkey Theatre, who has seen for himself the dramatic impact that performance art can have on the young.

"There was a child who was dragged in by his mother to watch one of our earlier shows. He was not comfortable with speaking Mandarin, so he had no interest in watching a Mandarin play," he recalls. "But by the end of the performance, something changed. He became a fan and persuaded his mother to get the Mandarin storybook that the play was based on."

Mr Ho, 46, hopes that Paper Monkey Theatre's next outing, a tale taken from the Mandarin classic *Journey to the West*, will cultivate a love for the Mandarin language



Puppets make valuable learning tools as children are more inclined to respond to them.

and Chinese culture in younger audiences. Titled *Journey West: Web of Deceit*, the hour-long show is commissioned by the Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, and will be staged at this year's Moonfest – A Mid-Autumn Celebration.

## A WEB OF LEARNING

*Web of Deceit* follows the adventures of the Monkey King and his master while on a quest to the west, and their encounter with the Spider Demon.

Engaging young audiences will not be a problem thanks to extensive use of puppetry in the show. Two puppetry forms will be showcased: metal rod puppetry, a style rarely seen in Singapore since the 1970s, and shadow puppetry.

Nearly 20 puppets will be handmade for the show, but Mr Ho is quick to add that

parents keen to bring the magic of puppetry into their own homes need not purchase expensive puppets to do so.

"Ultimately, what are puppets? Any inanimate object, such as a bottle or a broom, can be a puppet. That's the beauty of puppetry; it's a theatre of fantasy," he explains. "Children are not scared of puppets — when you talk to them with a puppet, they ignore you and respond to the puppet!"

Mr Ho believes that puppets make valuable learning tools, especially for new languages. Puppets also allow children to make mistakes without feeling discouraged, which is useful when they are learning their mother tongue.

"Children can be shy to speak in their mother tongue. However, with a puppet in their hands, it's the puppet that's talking, not them. It's like a security blanket," he says.

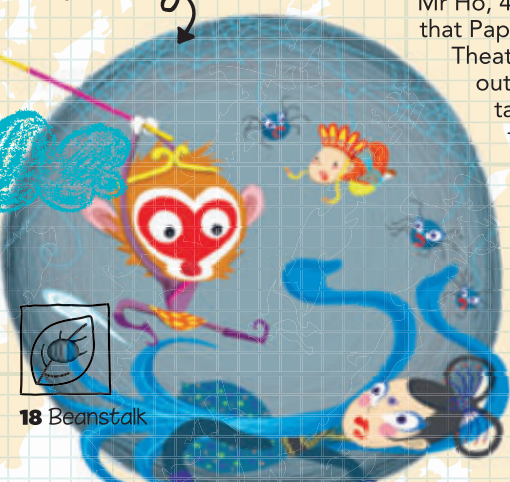
Puppets add another dimension to stories read aloud in a child's mother tongue. They can improve vocabulary while teaching the basics of sentence structure and grammar. They also help to transmit values, morals and cultural norms. Choosing the right stories can make all the difference.

"Nowadays, many turn to stories from the western world when there are stories just as exciting from Asia! Sharing Asian stories with children is one way to ensure that they remain connected to their culture," says Mr Ho. ♥

*Journey West: Web of Deceit* will be performed at the Esplanade Theatre Studio from 25 – 27 Sep 2015 (Fri, 10.30am & 2pm; Sat & Sun, 2pm & 6pm). **A tale that teaches children about loyalty and honesty, and to have courage to admit one's wrongdoing and learn from mistakes, it is recommended for children five to eight years old. Approximately 1 hour, performed in Mandarin with English subtitles.** Tickets, \$22 each, available at Sistic.

Metal rod puppetry has been rarely seen in Singapore since the 70s!

Asian stories like the Monkey King legend help connect children to their culture.



## CELEBRATING ARTS & CULTURE AT THE ESPLANADE

### ➤ Pesta Raya – Malay Festival of Arts

Date: 13 – 16 Aug 2015

This annual festival features a vibrant array of dance, music and theatre performances. In this 14<sup>th</sup> edition, Pesta Raya pays tribute to the Malay community by celebrating its icons and cultural treasures. There are a host of activities for children to enjoy. For more information, visit [www.pestaraya.com](http://www.pestaraya.com).

### ➤ Moonfest – A Mid-Autumn Celebration

Date: 25 – 27 Sep 2015

Moonfest, an annual Chinese arts festival held since 2005, focuses on traditional Chinese art forms. Highlights include Chinese opera, puppetry, lantern riddles, and Chinese chess as well as parent-child workshops. Visit [www.moonfest.com.sg](http://www.moonfest.com.sg) for details.

### ➤ Kalaa Utsavam

Date: 20 – 29 Nov 2015

From a three-day festival in 2002, Kalaa Utsavam has grown into a 10-day festival celebrating Indian arts during the Deepavali period. Since 2012, the festival has presented a children's production each year, aimed at introducing Indian culture and folk stories to young audiences. Visit [www.kalaaatsavam.com](http://www.kalaaatsavam.com) for details.

Win! TICKETS TO *Journey West: Web of Deceit*

**TOP PRIZE**  
1 x 4 tickets to Journey West: Web of Deceit (27 Sep 2015, 6pm, at the Esplanade Theatre Studio), worth a total of \$88.

**CONSOLATION PRIZES**  
3 x PIP (Esplanade's new mascot) limited edition soft toy, worth \$19.90 each.

NAME ONE FORM OF PUPPETRY THAT WILL BE USED IN JOURNEY WEST: WEB OF DECEIT TO STAND A CHANCE TO WIN.

Please visit [www.ecda.gov.sg/growatbeanstalk/Pages/Survey.aspx?itemId=13](http://www.ecda.gov.sg/growatbeanstalk/Pages/Survey.aspx?itemId=13)

to submit your answer and enter the contest by 31 July 2015.

All contestants' entry information inclusive of any personal data will be privy to ECDA only and will be used solely for purpose of this contest such as communication on prize collection or redemption.