Creating with recycled materials found in your home is always a great way for children to learn not just creativity but about recycling, re-using and taking care of our planet. Let’s see what your child can do with common household items!

In this Lesson Plan children will not only be learning about Theatre Arts and Shadow Puppetry but will also be: Cutting with regular scissors; gluing; painting; learning about and applying Collage; drawing and coloring their own cast of characters.

Materials:

Empty Cereal Box
Black marker or crayon
Paint - Any color (for decorating box at end)
Brush for painting
Elmer’s glue (can use glue sticks as well)
Parchment paper or white tissue paper
Paper for drawing/coloring and markers, colored pencils or crayons
Lightweight cardboard stock paper (old manila files work perfectly)
Popsicle or craft sticks (or any piece of dried branch to be found outside works well too)
Regular scissors
Old magazines
Desk Lamp or flashlight
Instructions:

Shadow Box Theatre front:

First be sure to tape or glue the top of the open cereal box. Then, on one side of cereal box, with black marker draw the frame for the front of the shadow box as shown on this photo: (I used a dog’s cookie treat box, which is smaller, only because I didn’t have a cereal box handy, but it’s a bit harder to cut if it’s this size). This will be the front of the Shadow Box Theatre.

With regular scissors, cut the inside of the box, following the line drawn.

Shadow Box Theatre back:

On the other side of the box, draw with a marker the back flaps or doors as shown in the photo on the right. This will be the back of Shadow Box Theatre.

Proceed to cut these flaps with a regular scissors along the lines marked and swing open so they open all the way to each side of the cereal box.
Shadow Box Theatre front screen:

Using the leftover cutaway from the front of the box as a template, place it on top of the parchment paper (or tissue paper) and draw an outline that extends beyond the size of the template, as shown on the photo to the right. Cut the parchment paper following the lines drawn.

Apply glue all along inside edge of front of the box.

With the cereal box front laying flat on the table, place the cut off parchment section over the glued area. This becomes the shadow box screen. The shadow box front from the inside will look like the photo shown on the right. Wait for glue to dry.

The shadow box front from the outside will look like the photo on the right. The box can be painted before or after gluing the parchment paper. If gluing afterwards, please be very careful not to paint the parchment screen.
**Cast of Characters:**

While waiting for the glue on the shadow box to dry, the children can now start creating their characters. They can draw and color on regular paper (drawing paper or whatever white paper is on hand). They have to remember not to make their characters too small since they will have to cut them out later. I suggest that the characters be around 3” to 4” or so tall or wide.

Once their characters are drawn, they can be glued onto the lightweight cardboard stock paper (old manila files if you have them). When these are dry, carefully cut out each character.

Now we have to do some little folded tabs using the same lightweight cardboard. About 2 inches x 1/2 in. or less wide and folded in half. See photo on right.

Glue one section of a tab on the back of each puppet as shown on the photo at right.

Then glue the craft stick to the other section of the tab. See photo at right. Leave to dry. I left them standing up against the shadow box. They have to be left without moving until they are totally dry. If it’s too hard to glue both sections at the same time, just wait until one side of the tab is totally dry and then glue the other side to the stick.

Meanwhile...Let’s decorate the Shadow Box Theatre exterior!
Outside of Theatre - Collage: While waiting for the glue on the puppets to dry, children can look through old magazines and cut out anything that they like that could be used to decorate the front as well as all around the box. They can decide to leave the box just painted, or they can have more fun and learn about collage. I cut a few that I liked and I may or may not use all of these.

Puppet Shadow Theatre decorated as shown on left and in a dark room with the puppets with light behind as shown on right.