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Presents

TUNED IN  
Performance guide



# CHILDREN'S GUIDE TO WAYANG KULIT



# 5 Things You Should Know

- 1 *Wayang kulit* is a form of shadow puppetry commonly practised on the Indonesian islands of Java and Bali.
- 2 In Javanese, *wayang* means 'puppet', and *kulit* means 'skin'.
- 3 Scholars believe that *wayang kulit* came from India more than 800 years ago.
- 4 A traditional *wayang kulit* performance can last up to nine hours!
- 5 The Javanese and Balinese believe that shadows created by *wayang kulit* puppets are the souls of their ancestors brought back to life, and that these shadows can offer protection from evil influences when a performance is taking place.



**Totally Epic!**

Most *wayang kulit* stories are taken from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, Indian epics about Hindu gods and men.



## The Man Behind the Shadows

- In *wayang kulit*, a puppet master is known as a *dalang*.
- A *dalang* has a tough job. Not only does he have to narrate, but he also manipulates the puppets, gives voices to the characters, and makes sound effects.
- Traditionally, you have to be born into a family of *dalangs* to be one as knowledge is passed down from father to child.



## Singapore's Last Dalang

Singapore's last known *dalang* was a man called Wak Taslim Harjosanajo. He passed away in 1985.



# Puppet Parts

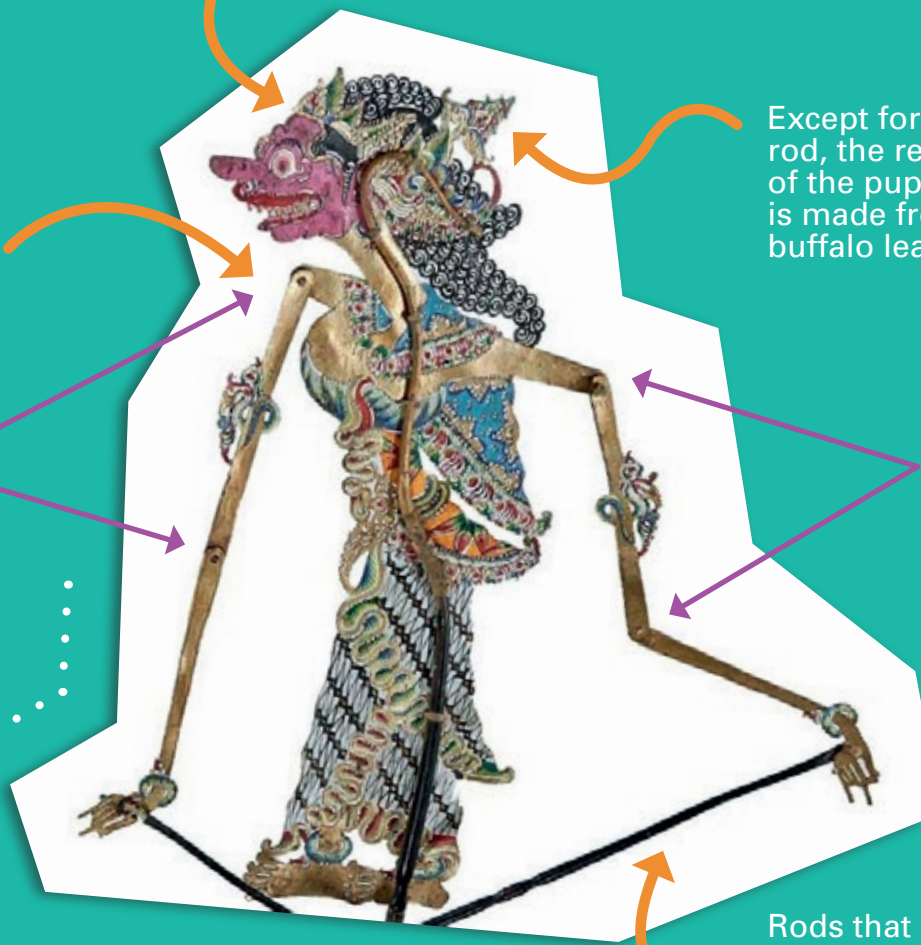
The only movable parts of the puppet are the arms.

Intricate designs carved with the help of very sharp tools.

Except for the rod, the rest of the puppet is made from buffalo leather.

Movable joints

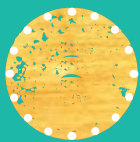
Movable joints



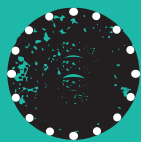
Rods that are used to move the puppets are made from buffalo horns.

## What do the Colours Mean?

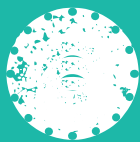
You can tell more about a character by looking at the puppet's face. Most of the time, the 'good guys' have faces which are painted black, gold or white, while the 'bad guys' tend to have red faces, like those often seen on a demon\*.



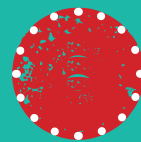
- Full of dignity
- Calm
- Most likely, a royal descendant



- Calm
- Mature
- Physically strong



- Purity
- Serenity
- Knowledgeable



- Physically strong
- Full of anger



- Cowardly



## Brightly Painted and Decorated Puppets

Why would puppets be intricately designed if you can only see shadows on a screen? That's because audience members can sit on either side of the screen where they can see the shadows or the puppets themselves.

# The Good, the Bad and Wayang Kulit

In *wayang kulit*, some characters can be divided into *halus* (gentle and good) characters and others into *kasar* (coarse and evil) characters.

Puppets that are placed on the *dalang's* right side usually possess *halus* personalities, whereas those that are placed to his left have *kasar* personalities. Sometimes, you can guess if a character is *halus* or *kasar* by looking at the details on the puppet.

Here are a few facial features you might want to pay attention to\*.

Kasar (Evil)	Facial Features	Halus (Good)
Bulging	EYES	Narrow or almond-shaped
Bulbous nose	NOSE	Long pointed nose
Bared fangs	TEETH	Teeth not visible
Head angled upwards	HEAD	Head angled downwards



Look at the details on the puppets and guess whether the characters are closer to the good or dark side. Why?

## 1) Dasamuka

a. Good or bad? b. Why?



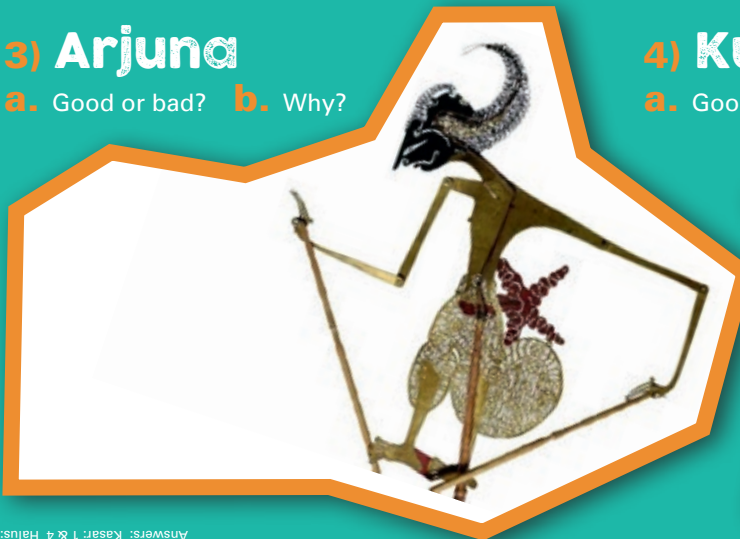
## 2) Dewi Sumbadra

a. Good or bad? b. Why?



## 3) Arjuna

a. Good or bad? b. Why?



## 4) Kumbhakarna

a. Good or bad? b. Why?



Answers: Kasar: 1 & 4 Halus: 2 & 3



Not all characters can be divided neatly into good or evil characters. Some 'good' characters can have negative traits, while some 'bad' characters can have positive traits. How do you think these puppets would look?

# Other Puppets

## The Advisor



Semar is a special character in *wayang kulit* epics. He represents the universe and is an advisor to the warriors in the Mahabharata and Ramayana. His round body symbolises the round earth. The smile on his face symbolises joy but his swollen and puffy eyes symbolise sadness. He also represents both men and women as well as the young and old.

## The Mountain



The *gunungan* (mountain) or *kayon* (tree) will always be present in a traditional *wayang kulit* performance. It is used to mark the beginning and the end of a performance, the change from one scene to another, the entrance of a major character and as a mere prop.

## Animals & Mythical Creatures



Not all character puppets take a human form. Some puppets come in the form of animals or mythical creatures.



# Your Turn

Now that you know a little more about *wayang kulit* puppets, design your own original character.



## Interested to learn more about the arts?

Check out [www.esplanade.com/learn](http://www.esplanade.com/learn) for more resources!

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