

# PAPER \* THEATER

**Topics:** Cut paper, storytelling, foreground/middleground/background

**Supplies:**

- shoebox, cereal box, or similar
- thin cardboard (another cereal box or similar)
- markers, crayons, or paint
- pencils
- tape



Have you ever been to a movie theater? Have you ever loved a movie so much that after it ended you wanted to reenact the whole thing? It's fun to retell stories or make up your own! That's exactly why people bought **toy theaters** in London, England over 200 years ago.



**Toy Theater**

These are artists **Hari & Deepti**- we'll meet them later!



# TOY THEATERS

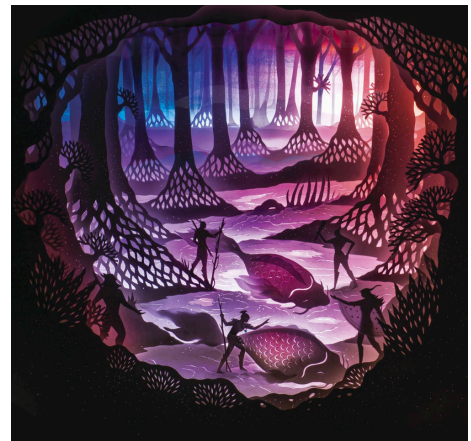
**Toy theaters** have been around for a very long time. They were popular in Europe during the 1800's. At the time, many stage shows in London were recreated as miniature paper versions that could be bought and assembled at home. Toy theaters were about the size of a large shoebox and came with characters, backgrounds, and props to cut out. There would also be scripts to follow so that you could reenact the play and even instructions for special effects like adding water and tiny explosives!



Images courtesy Benjamin Pollock's Toyshop

# HARI & DEEPTI

**Hari & Deepti** are married and live in Mumbai, India. They use paper and light to make shadow box images that tell stories. A shadow box is similar to a toy theater. Hari & Deepti fill their shadow boxes with white paper cut into the shapes of characters, plants, and props. When the cut paper shapes are layered inside the box and lit from behind, Hari & Deepti's images can look magical! What other words would you use to describe Hari & Deepti's art? How does their artwork remind you of a toy theater?



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Hari Panicker & Deepti Nair

When you look at Hari & Deepti's art, you can spot the foreground, middleground, and background. Foreground, middleground, and background are used to create **depth** in an image. The **background** of an image is what appears farthest away. Because of this, items in the background are usually smaller and have less detail. The **foreground** of an image appears closest with larger items and more detail. The **middleground** is the part between the two. In Hari & Deepti's art, the background is often brighter while the foreground is very dark. Why do you think that is?



# Let's make a paper theater!

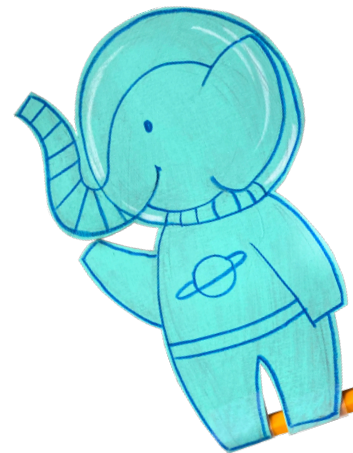
**1** Begin with a box. Cut a large hole in the side of the box that you want to be the front of your stage.



**2** Cut a smaller hole on the left and right sides of your box. This will be how your characters "enter" the stage.

**3** Think about what story you want to tell with your theater. Will it be a fairytale you've read in a book? A story about your day? Or an adventure you've invented like Hari & Deepti? Where will your story's setting be? Who will the characters be?

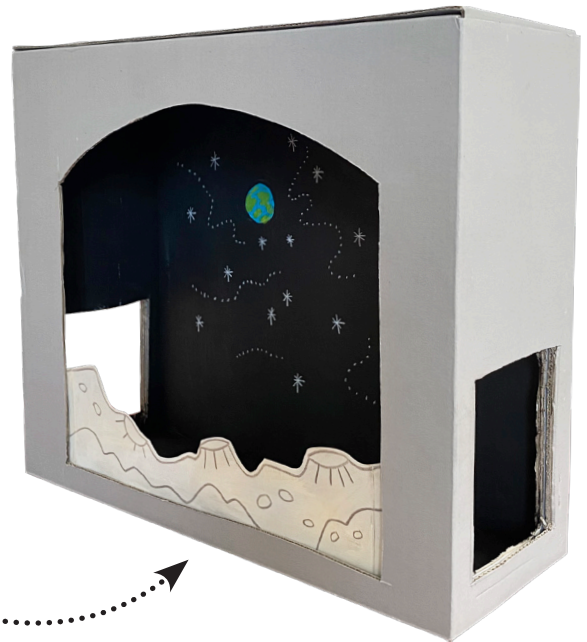
**4** Draw your characters on thin cardboard, such as the back of a cereal box. Cut them out and tape them to the ends of pencils.



**5** Where will your story take place? What would be in the foreground, middleground, and background? Draw a **background** on the wall at the very back of your stage.

# Let's make a paper theater!

- 6** To make a **foreground**, measure a piece of thin cardboard slightly wider than the hole at the front of the stage. Draw your foreground, cut it out, and tape it inside the front of the stage.



- 7** To make a **middleground**, measure a second piece of thin cardboard slightly wider than the hole at the front of the stage. Draw your middleground and cut it out. Fold back the sides of your middleground so that it stands up.

Your middleground will probably be taller than your foreground. What if your foreground was taller, like the trees in a dark forest?

- 8** Decorate the front of your theater! We used painted cardboard, crayons, and bottlecaps. What else could you use as decoration?



# REFLECTION

IT'S SHOWTIME!



It's time to act out your story! Will you write a script? Pass out tickets? Send invitations? Will there be music and special effects?

# RESOURCES & SOURCES

## Resources

Learn more about Hari & Deepti on their [website](#) and [here](#). Check out their [Instagram](#), where they share behind-the-scenes photos and videos. Support your [local bookstore](#) and order a copy of their book!

Learn more about toy theaters from [Benjamin Pollock's Toyshop](#) in London.

Lotte Reiniger was an animator from Germany. She made animations with cut paper and shadows similar to Hari & Deepti! Watch a [video](#) of her animation that tells the story of Sleeping Beauty.

Learn about different kinds of paper engineering, like pop-ups and toy theaters, from the [Smithsonian Museum](#)!

[Mac Barnett](#) is a children's book author and [Shawn Harris](#) is an illustrator. Together, they make up stories with cut-paper characters and sets for their "Live Cartoons". You can watch them on [Instagram](#)!

Watch [videos](#) of puppet shows on stage at [Bob Baker Marionette Theater](#) in Los Angeles.

## Sources

Hall, Kirsten. "Hari & Deepti." *Catbird Agency*, Catbird Agency, [catbirdagency.com/artists/hari-deepti/](http://catbirdagency.com/artists/hari-deepti/).

"Make Your Own Toy Theatre," *V&A*, Victoria & Albert Museum, 31 Jan. 2013, [www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/m/make-your-own-toy-theatre/](http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/m/make-your-own-toy-theatre/).

Panicker, Hari, and Deepti Nair. "Hari & Deepti." *Hari & Deepti*, [www.harianddeepti.com/](http://www.harianddeepti.com/).

"Toy Theatre." *V&A Search the Collections*, Victoria & Albert Museum, 2017, [collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O96356/toy-theatre-unknown/](http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O96356/toy-theatre-unknown/).