



ABOUT THE SHOW

“After a shipwreck in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, a sixteen-year-old boy named Pi survives on a lifeboat with four other companions—a hyena, a zebra, an orangutan, and a 450-pound Royal Bengal tiger. What happens next leads them on an edge of your seat unforgettable journey.

Told with jaw-dropping visuals, world class, innovative puppetry and exquisite stagecraft, the Broadway and West End sensation LIFE OF PI creates a visually breathtaking journey that will leave you filled with awe and joy.”

This companion activity can be done before or after seeing the production and utilizes materials you probably have in your home or classroom. We invite families, educators, and other audience members to use or adapt these activities, which were created for Center Theatre Group by Resident Teaching Artists Christine Breihan and Estela García. You can find a companion activity on the show pages for all productions in our 2024/2025 season.

As you watch LIFE OF PI, notice how the performers bring these inanimate objects to life through the magic of puppeteering.

TIGER PUPPET MAKING AND PLAY

FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL AND UP

DURATION: 30 MINUTES – 1 HOUR

For this activity, we are going to take inspiration from the show and make a Bengal tiger prototype using things from your craft closet. After you build it, we will give you a few pointers for learning how to puppeteer your animal.



MATERIALS

- Scissors
- Tape or stapler
- Cardboard (fits 2 sheets of 8.5"x11")
- Template printouts (2 pages)
- 2 Pipe cleaners (orange & black)
- 4 Brad fasteners
- Writing utensils
- A pointy tool (awl, gimlet, scissors, or box cutter)
- Optional: Paint, googly eyes, yarn, faux fur

BEFORE BUILDING YOUR PUPPET

Building a puppet starts with understanding how it moves and what story you want it to tell. For this Bengal tiger puppet, we considered:

- What kinds of movements the tiger makes—leaping, prowling, turning its head
- Whether the puppet will be operated by one person or a group
- Whether it rests on the body or is fully handheld
- What size feels right (and manageable)
- What materials are easy to find and affordable for prototyping

Remember: the Bengal tiger is strong, fast, and graceful. It can leap up to 30 feet, weighs over 400 pounds, and has a unique gait—lifting both limbs on one side at once. These traits inspired our design.

This puppet is lightweight, made from cardboard, and designed for a single puppeteer. Instead of realism, we're focused on capturing the essence of the tiger – its spirit and movement.

LET'S GET BUILDING.



The instructions on this page will help you construct a Bengal tiger puppet that can move fast and be operated by one person. Because of this, we are going to choose to use cardboard as the foundation of the puppet. We will also focus on the essence of the animal instead of trying to make the animal realistic.

BUILDING YOUR BENGAL TIGER PUPPET



FINISHED TIGER PUPPET

Decorated, layered head and full body

Time: 1 hour

Follow all steps



SIMPLIFIED TIGER PUPPET

Focus on function, not looks

Basic head and full body

Time: 30 minutes

Skip most decoration and some parts of the head

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Print and cut templates (provided below)

- Print and cut all pieces from both pages. Keep the printed templates nearby as they include visual guides.
- **Simplified Version:**
 - Print and cut the following pieces:
 - From Page 1, cut: Piece #1 and #8
 - From Page 2, cut: (4) Legs - A, (2) Bodies - B, (2) Straps - C, (2) optional Strips - D

2. Trace and Prep Cardboard

- Trace pieces onto cardboard and cut them out.
- Poke small holes where marked (just big enough for fasteners).
- Painting? Paint the "outside" before assembly. You may need to mirror the template.





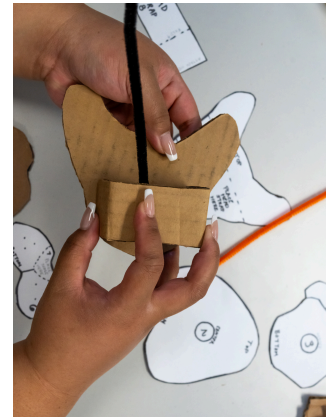
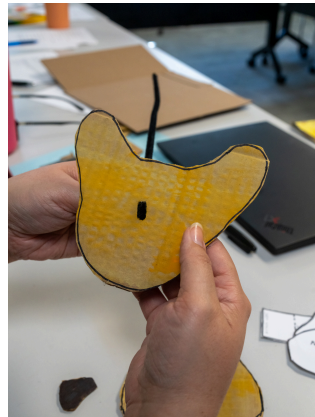
TIPS

- Reinforce the Head Strap with tape inside and out.
- Add tape over brads on the inside for extra strength.

HEAD ASSEMBLY (TEMPLATE 1)

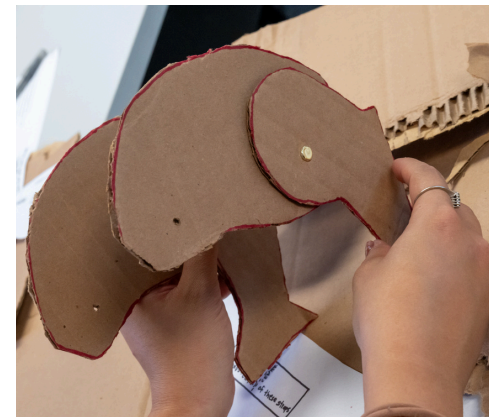
Simple Tiger? Start at Step #5.

1. Use Piece #1: poke a small center hole.
2. Thread 1 pipe cleaner through from the back, leaving about one-half inch at the front. Tape or staple to secure.
3. Stack and glue the pieces in order, aligning the “Center” circles on pieces #1–5 and following the visual guides on pieces #6 and #7.
4. Grab Piece #8 and fold as directed on the template.
 - Tape or glue the “Attach Here” tabs to the back of the head to create a finger pocket (Head Strap).
5. Simple Version: Just bend one-half inch of pipe cleaner and tape it flat to the back of Piece #1. Skip layering.
6. Set the finished head aside.



BODY ASSEMBLY (TEMPLATE 2)

1. Fold 1 inch tabs on both Strap C pieces.
2. Build each side: stack Leg → Body → Strap, aligning holes. Fasten with brads.
 - Check leg direction! Template shows which end faces the head.
 - Strap folds should point down.
3. When done, both straps should connect the two body halves horizontally, with legs attached.





TIPS

- Wrap tape around the pipe cleaner where it passes under the front strap to create a stopper — this keeps it from sliding forward or backward.
- Do the same at the tail end to hold the spine in place.
- Your goal: a secure, flexible spine that holds its position but still moves naturally when you puppeteer.

ATTACH HEAD TO BODY

1. Thread the pipe cleaner from the head under both leg straps – this acts as the puppet's spine.
 - Position the head about one-half inch to one inch in front of the front strap.
2. Using bonus strips (Piece D)?
 - Place one strip under the pipe cleaner between the straps to “sandwich” it.
 - Tape the front strap to the bonus strip very close to both sides of the pipe cleaner – this keeps it from shifting side to side while still allowing front-to-back movement.
3. No bonus strips?
 - Tape the pipe cleaner directly to the center area under the front strap.
 - Again, place tape as close as possible to both sides of the pipe cleaner to keep it stable.



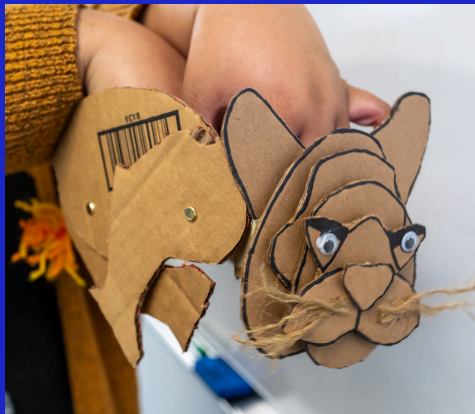
TAIL

1. Take your second pipe cleaner (orange works great for contrast).
2. Fold it in half and tie it around the end of the spine (where the first pipe cleaner exits the back of the body). This helps secure it in place.
3. Twist the orange and black pipe cleaners together to create a striped look that mimics a tiger's tail.
4. Bend or curl the tail into your desired shape.

DECORATE!

Paint, add googly eyes, fur, yarn, stripes – make it your own!





TIPS

- Keep pointer, middle, and ring finger on one side of the pipe cleaner, pinky on the other. Squeeze fingers together to "sandwich" the spine for better control.

PUPPETEERING GUIDE

HOW TO HOLD YOUR PUPPET:

- Make a "C" with your dominant hand.
- Flip it so fingers point down, knuckles up.
- Slide fingers into the head strap and your thumb under the front leg strap.
- Move your hand to tilt the head up/down/sideways.
- Use your other hand for tail or leg articulation.

PUPPETER FOCUS:

- Give focus to your puppet by looking toward your puppet. Other people will follow your gaze!
- Don't upstage your puppet with your body or sudden movements. "Upstaging" means getting in front of your puppet or pulling people's focus toward you instead of your puppet. Give the puppet the focus by standing behind them.
- Connect to your puppet with your energy and physical body. The puppet is an extension of you!

PUPPET FOCUS:

- Where is the eye-line of the puppet? Even if the puppet doesn't have literal eyes, designate where it looks from. Let its experience seeing the world lead the movement.
- Stillness is your friend. Less is more.
- Puppet timing is slower than people timing!

BREATH:

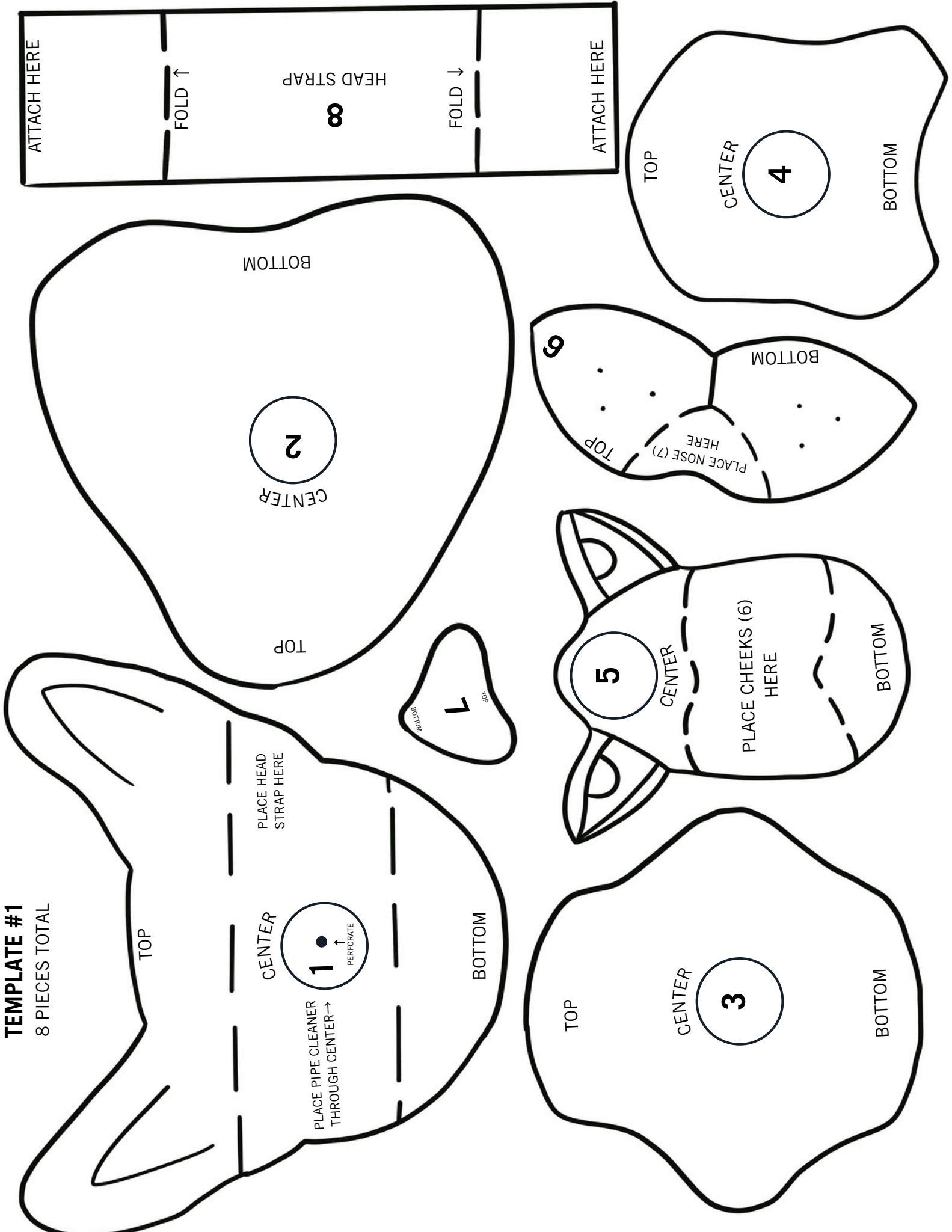
- Breath is the foundation of all movement and expression. Articulate the breath.
- Breathe with your puppet. Exaggerate the breath of the puppet to punctuate movement. The breath comes before action. The breath marks ideas/intention.
- Breath helps share emotion.
- Breath compresses down and up.

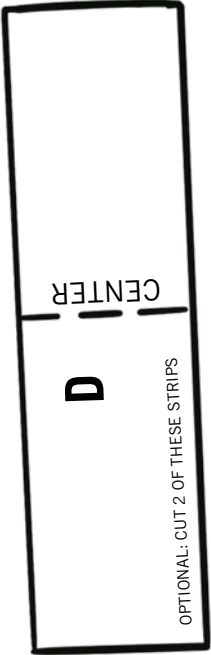
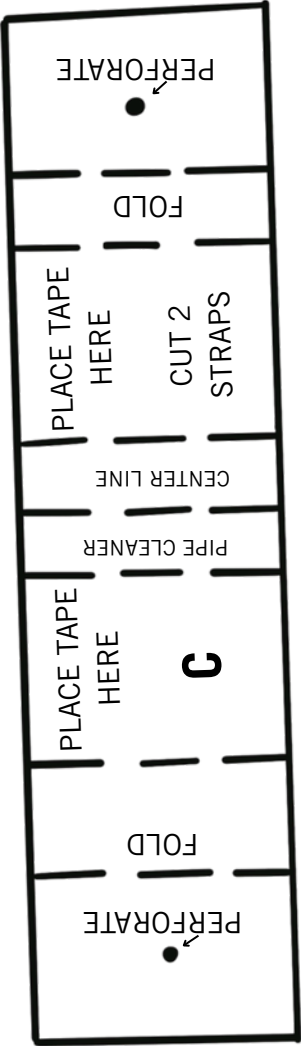
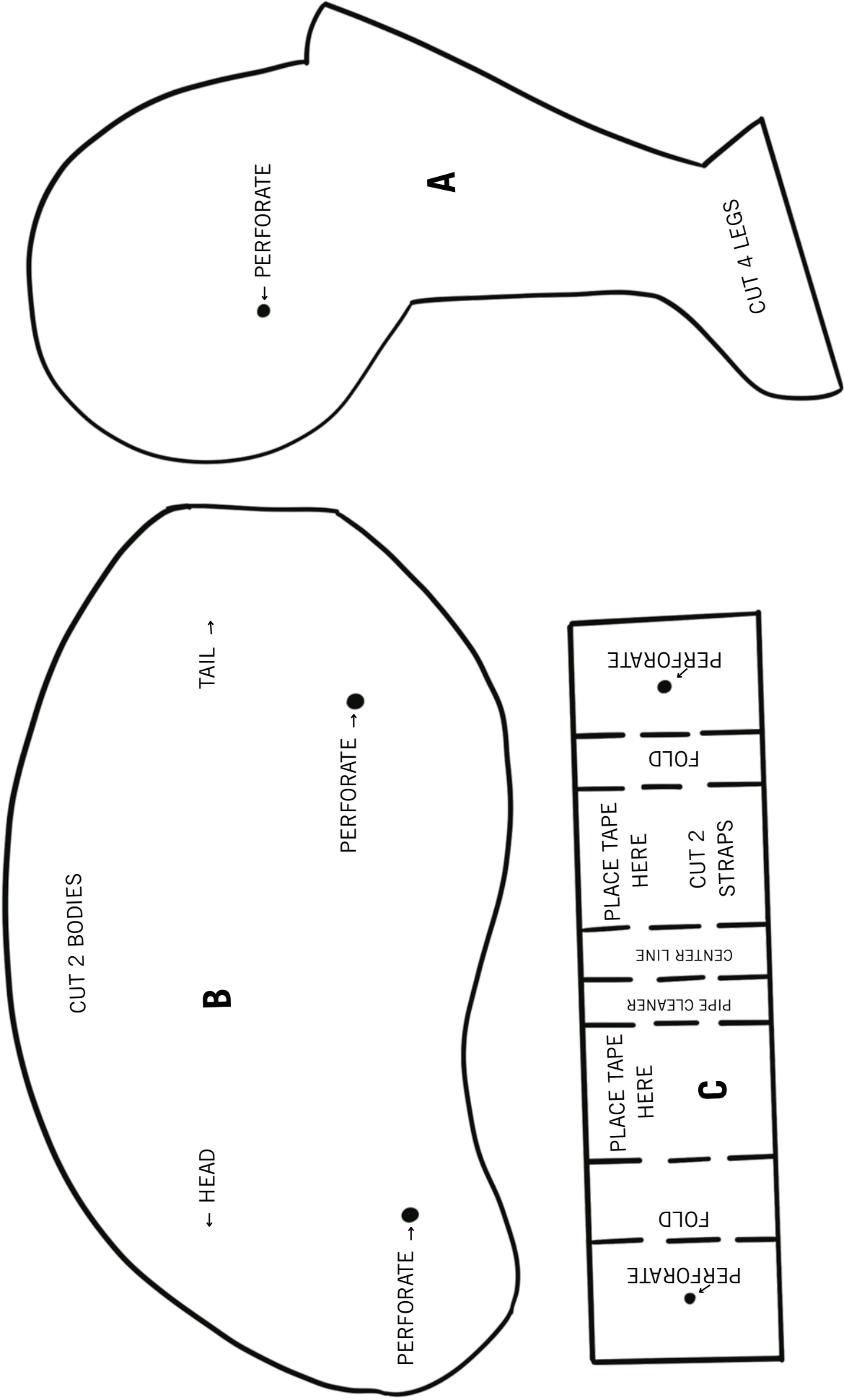
"ARTICULATING" (MOVING) YOUR PUPPET:

- Relationship to gravity: The puppet's "feet" can be on the floor, lifted off the ground on a table or levitating in the air. Let your choice be informed by the puppet's real-life relationship to the ground and what you need your puppet to do.
- Consider weight, tension, rhythm and if gestures are direct/geometric/punctuated or indirect/curvy/soft.
- What is the puppet's neutral resting position? Experiment with your puppet at rest.
- Is your gesture expressing emotions, action or thoughts?
- Big movements instead of lots of little movements work best.

TEMPLATE #1

8 PIECES TOTAL





TEMPLATE #2

- A1 AND A3: RIGHT FRONT AND HIND LEGS
- A2 AND A4: LEFT FRONT AND HIND LEGS
- B1: RIGHT BODY
- B2: LEFT BODY
- C1 AND C2: FRONT AND BACK STRAPS
- OPTIONAL D1: FRONT STRAP
- OPTIONAL D2: LEFT STRAP