

STORYSACKS MANUAL



NWT Literacy Council

The NWT Literacy Council is a not-for-profit organization that supports literacy development in all official languages of the Northwest Territories. For more information on storysacks or any of our work, please contact:

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This manual was written by Jill Vaydik.

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Canada



What is a Storysack?

A storysack is a fun resource that encourages parents and children to read together in an interactive way. Storysacks usually contain a high quality picture book, props or costumes for acting out the story, an audio recording of the story, a non-fiction book and an idea card with activities to do together. You can also make storysacks for oral stories or legends. Parents and children use the characters and props to act out the story as they read together.

Storysacks Canada is a national program created by British author and educator Neil Griffiths. This manual is based on the Storysacks Canada program. For more on Storysacks Canada visit their website: www.storysacks.nald.ca/english/start.htm

Why Are Storysacks Useful?

Reading books and hearing stories is a lot of fun and very important for children. However, not all children like to sit still and listen to a story. Also, not all parents and caregivers have strong literacy skills, so they may feel uncomfortable and avoid reading out loud. Storysacks can make reading more fun and interactive for children, while taking pressure away from the readers. Storysacks are also great in group settings, such as family literacy programs and early childhood programs.

Here are some groups that can use storysacks:

- Children and parents at home
- Family literacy programs
- Early childhood programs and daycares
- Aboriginal Headstart programs
- Schools and after-school programs
- Libraries
- Family centres
- Playgroups
- Home visitors



When you use a storysack, you do not have to read the story word for word. Children can use the props and characters in the story to act along with the story, or make up their own stories and endings.

What Are the Benefits of Storysacks?

Storysacks are more than just a fun activity for children. There are many benefits to storysacks, including:

- Children learn early literacy, listening and creative play skills.
- Children and parents spend quality time together.
- Parents who do not have strong literacy skills feel more comfortable sharing books and stories with their children.
- Parents gain confidence in their reading and parenting skills.
- Storysack makers feel that they have contributed to the community in a positive way.

Who Can Make Storysacks?

People with different skills and talents are needed to make a storysack. Just about anyone can get involved. Here are some groups that may be interested in making storysacks:

- Seniors' or elders' groups
- Girl guides
- Adult learners
- Sewing or craft groups
- Parents' groups



When making a storysack, there are many different jobs for people with different skills, including:

- Sewers
- Knitters
- Artists



- Woodworkers
- Garage salers and thrift shoppers
- People to draw and paint
- People to make games and activities
- Readers to record the story



Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What Do You Hear? By Eric Carle



Choosing a Book for a Storysack

Storysacks can be made for a wide variety of books and stories, but not every book makes a good storysack. Good books for storysacks:

- Have strong characters and a good storyline.
- Have attractive illustrations.
- Are large enough to be read to a big group.
- Have a manageable number of props and characters that you will be able to create yourself.
- Do not have too much text on each page.
- Often have repeated lines that children can join in on.
- Are children's favorites that they like to read again and again.



Carry Me, Mama by Monica Devine

Here is a list of books that have made successful storysacks. However, you do not have to feel limited to these choices. With a little creative thinking, you can transform your favourite books into storysacks.

- *The Paper Bag Princess* by Robert Munsch
- *Kumak's Fish* by Michael Bania
- *Carry Me Mama* by Monica Devine
- *Peter's Moccasins* by Jan Truss
- *Something from Nothing* by Phoebe Gillman
- *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle
- *Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed* by Eileen Christelow
- *The Three Snow Bears* by Jan Brett
- *The Mitten* by Jan Brett
- *Red is Best* by Kathy Stinson



Creating Storysacks Using Oral Stories

Storysacks are also a great way to pass on traditional stories and to make them come alive for children. You can create a storysack for an oral story in almost exactly the same way as for a picture book, except that the audio recording will become more important. The storyteller will need a good quality audio recording to learn and practice the story. It is also a good idea to type out the story and include it on a laminated card.

If there are not a lot of books for children in your language, storysacks are a fun and inexpensive way to create new language resources.

You can also create storysacks for well-known fairy tales or nursery rhymes. Children will love to put on costumes to act out stories like *Little Red Riding Hood* or *The Three Little Pigs*. Some songs, such as *Old MacDonald Had a Farm* or *There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly*, could also be made into storysacks.



Storysack based on a traditional oral story created by Mary Rose Sundburg of Goyatikò Language Society.

What Goes into a Storysack?

Most storysacks contain:

- A copy of the book, story or song
- Main characters - puppets, stuffed animals or costumes to represent the main characters of the story
- Props relating to the story
- A backdrop
- A non-fiction book related to the storybook
- An activity card with ideas for extended learning activities
- An audio recording of the story
- A checklist of all items in the sack

Good Quality Children's Book

If available, a hardcover book is best. For more information about choosing quality books, see "Choosing a Book for a Storysack."

Main Characters

Decide how you will represent the main characters of the story. Depending on the numbers and types of characters, you can use:

- Stuffed animals
- Finger puppets
- Hand puppets
- Masks or costumes
- Dolls – either purchased or handmade

Look in the patterns and templates section of this manual to find templates for hand and finger puppets.



The Mitten by Jan Brett



Props

Include some of the important items in the story so that children can act it out. Make sure the props you include are sturdy and large enough so that they are not easily lost.

Some of the best sources for inexpensive props and costumes are second-hand stores, garage sales and flea markets. Most sell gently used toys for only a few dollars. Just make sure to wash all toys in hot, soapy water before you include them in the storysack.



Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed by Eileen Christelow

Backdrop

There are several ways to make a backdrop:

- Draw or paint on a folding presentation board.
- Make felt scenery that will stick to a felt-covered piece of cardboard.
- Paint a backdrop on a piece of cloth.
- Ask someone in your community who is good at sewing to get involved by making an appliqué backdrop.



Non-Fiction Book

A non-fiction book is about true information, rather than a story. Many young children are interested in facts and can learn them very quickly. For a storysack, you should try to find a book that relates to the main theme of the story.

Idea Card

The idea card should include prompt and story extender activities that parents and children can do together, such as:

- Comprehension questions about the story
- Rhymes or songs that relate to the theme of the story
- Crafts that relate to the story
- Recipes
- Sequencing or matching games
- Board games



The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle



Audio Recording

The easiest way to make an audio recording is on a computer, using an external microphone or headphones with a microphone.

To record sound, open up the start menu on your computer. Then choose All Programs > Accessories > Entertainment > Sound Recorder. The Sound Recorder will look like this:



Press the red button to start and stop recording. If it is working, you will see the green line move as you speak.

You should practice reading your story a few times. Try to read **very slowly and clearly**, with a lot of expression in your voice. Before you begin recording, make sure you are in a quiet room and turn off sources of noise like phones, music and heaters. When you have finished, save your sound file and burn it to a CD.

Checklist

Make a list of everything in the storysack. Print it off and laminate it so that it doesn't get damaged. Put one copy in the storysack and keep one copy so that you can check that all of the pieces have been returned.



How to Make the Sack

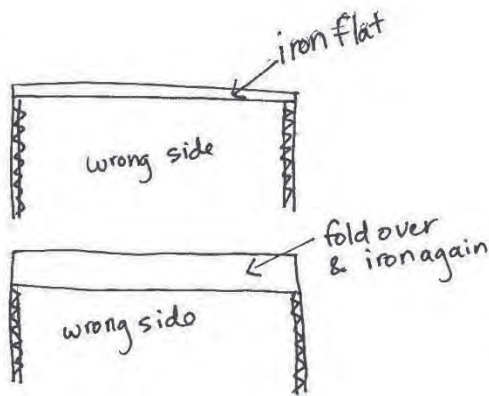
All of the storysack items should be kept in a large, sturdy bag that can be machine washed. Here is how to make a storysack bag:

- 1) Choose fabric for your bag. Broadcloth, canvas, flannel or fleece are good choices. You will also need about 60'' of cord or heavy string.
- 2) Cut two large rectangles out of the fabric. The size of your bag will depend on the number of props you need to fit inside.
- 3) Place your fabric with right sides together. Using the straight stitch on a sewing machine, sew seams along 3 sides of the rectangle.

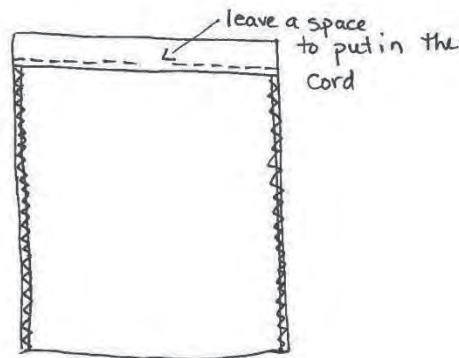


- 4) Iron the seams flat. If your fabric frays easily, you may want to zigzag stitch along the edges of the seam allowance.
- 5) Fold over the top ½'' of the open end of the rectangle and iron it flat. Then fold down a further 1'' and iron it flat. Add pins to keep the folds in place.

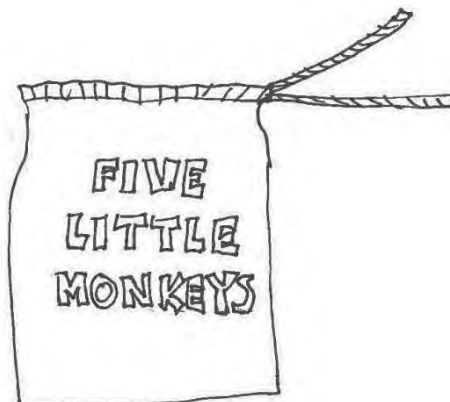




- 6) Stich around the bottom of the folded edge using a straight stitch. Be sure to leave at least 1 1/2 " between where you begin and end stitching so you can thread the cord through.



- 7) Thread the cord through the casing you have sewn. Attaching a safety pin to the end of the cord will help you thread it. Turn the bag right side out.
- 8) Write the name of the book on the outside of the bag. You can use fabric markers, cut letters out of felt and sew them on, or use stencils and fabric paints.



Storysack Planning Sheet

Use this sheet to plan out how you will make your storysack.

Title of Book:	
Main Characters	Materials needed
Props	Materials needed
Scenery	Materials needed
Non-fiction Book	Who will find it?
Audio Recording	Who will do it?
Idea Card Activities	Who will make them?
The Sack	Who will make it?
Any other jobs	Who will do them?



Storysack Safety

When making a storysack, safety should come first. Here are some guidelines for storysack safety:

- Always supervise children when using a storysack.
- Do not include any parts that are small enough to be choking hazards.
- Do not include any toys with sharp points or prongs.
- Do not include electronic toys or toys that make noises.
- Wash any secondhand toys in hot, soapy water before including them in the storysack. Rewash toys regularly after you have lent out the storysacks.
- Check storysacks in your lending library often to make sure that the toys are clean and not broken.

You should attach a safety label to every storysack. Here is a sample label that you can photocopy and laminate:

**WARNING! Storysacks
are not toys. They
contain small parts and
should be used with adult
supervision.**



Copyright

When making a storysack, it is important not to break copyright law. You can do this by following these guidelines:

- Storysacks are for educational purposes only. You cannot produce or sell storysacks for profit.
- Do not copy characters exactly from books. Make your own versions instead.
- Do not photocopy illustrations from a book to use in your storysack. Instead, draw or paint your own.
- Get permission from the publisher before making an audio tape of a story. Let them know that you want to make one copy for educational purposes only. If a commercial CD is already available, you will have to buy it instead of making your own. You can use the sample letter or email below to ask for permission.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am involved in a (community/family literacy/parents', etc.) group that is making a storysack of the book _____ by _____. A storysack is a cloth bag containing a book, props to act out the book and games and related activities. Families will borrow it so that they can enjoy reading the story together. We would like permission to make an audio recording of the book to put in the sack. We will make only one copy of the story, and will use it for educational purposes within our program.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

For more information about copyright, go to www.cancopy.com.



Using a Storysack

Tips for Reading the Story

- Read the story through several times before you read it out loud.
- Use a lot of expression in your voice.
- Use different voices for the different characters.
- You don't necessarily have to read every word of the story. Try telling it in your own words.
- Try not to rush through the story. Leave enough time to look at the pictures and to ask questions.



Using the Props and Characters

There are many different way to use the props and characters in a storysack. Here are some suggestions:

- Have the child(ren) act out the story as you read it.
- Give one prop to each child in the group. Tell them to listen carefully and hold up their prop as it appears in the story.
- Read the story to a group of children, and then have them put on a play afterwards.
- Read the story one day, and have the child retell it to you the next day using the props.



Extender Activities

You can do the extender activities all at once, or spread them out over several days.

You may want to build a theme around the storysack and do one activity relating to the story each day for a week. You can also make up your own activities to go along with the story. Remember to connect the activities to the story. For example, you could say, “Remember how the very hungry caterpillar ate all different kinds of fruit? Today we are going to make fruit salad so we can eat lots of fruit like the very hungry caterpillar.”



To watch a video about using storysacks, go to

<http://www.nwt.literacy.ca/FamilyLiteracyVideoClips/index.html> or visit the NWT Literacy Council's YouTube page.





Storysacks: A Guide for Parents

The following pages are a guide for parents. They explain what storysacks are and give parents information on how to use them with their children.

If you are lending storysacks out to parents to use at home with their children, you may want to photocopy these pages, laminate them and include them in the storysack. If you are lending out storysacks to families in a family literacy program, you may want to spend part of a session going over the information with parents and demonstrating how to use a storysack.



Storysacks: A Guide for Parents

Storysacks give you ways to enjoy books and reading with your child. Not all of us find it easy to read stories. Reading is fun and easy with all the materials in the storysack. This guide will help you use storysacks with your children.

When you use a storysack with your child, you help your child to:

- Love stories and reading.
- Improve his confidence in reading.
- Talk and learn new words.
- Make sense of what she is reading.
- Have fun with words and learning activities.

What's in a Storysack?

1. A storybook and non-fiction book
2. Main characters and props
3. Games
4. Idea card
5. An audio recording of the story



1. The Storybook and Non-fiction Book

There are two books in the storysack. One is the storybook. The other book is non-fiction. This book is filled with facts about the theme of the storybook. Children don't always choose non-fiction books to read. Non-fiction books are important because they help children learn new things.

Some ideas for sharing a storybook:

- Read the book aloud to your child.
- Point to the words with your finger when you read.
- Talk to your child about the book. Look at the cover, title, author and illustration.
- Retell the story after you have read it once.
- Act out the story.
- Ask questions about the story
 - What do you think this book is about?
 - What has happened so far? What do you think will happen next?
 - Which was your favourite part? Why?
 - Did you like the story?

Some ideas for sharing a non-fiction book:

- Find out what your child knows about the topic.
- Ask them what they would like to learn.
- Talk about the table of contents and how he can use it to find what's in the book.
- Talk about the glossary and the index.
- Write down your child's favourite facts.
- Make up a quiz to share with friends about the topic.



2. Main Characters and Props

Your child will love to handle the toys and props. Give them time to play with them. It is fun and important. They help your child learn new words and really get to know the story characters. The props and characters will help your child understand the story.

You can use the characters and props to:

- Act out the story.
- Put on a puppet show.
- Pretend play.
- Make up new stories.
- Ask questions about the story and characters.
- Talk about the story and what other props they can make.



3. Games

Each storysack has a game that is related to the story. Games teach new skills and expand children's vocabulary.

When you play the game, remember to:

- Read the directions.
- Teach your child that it is okay to lose.
- Talk as you play.
- Play often.
- Relate the game to the story.
- Have fun.



4. Idea Card

In every storysack there is an idea card. It will help you have fun with your child. Use the idea card to add to your own great ideas.

The idea card has:

- A list of things in the storysack.
- Questions to ask your child about the story.
- Ways to play with words in the story.
- Fun learning activities you can do with your child.



Patterns and Templates



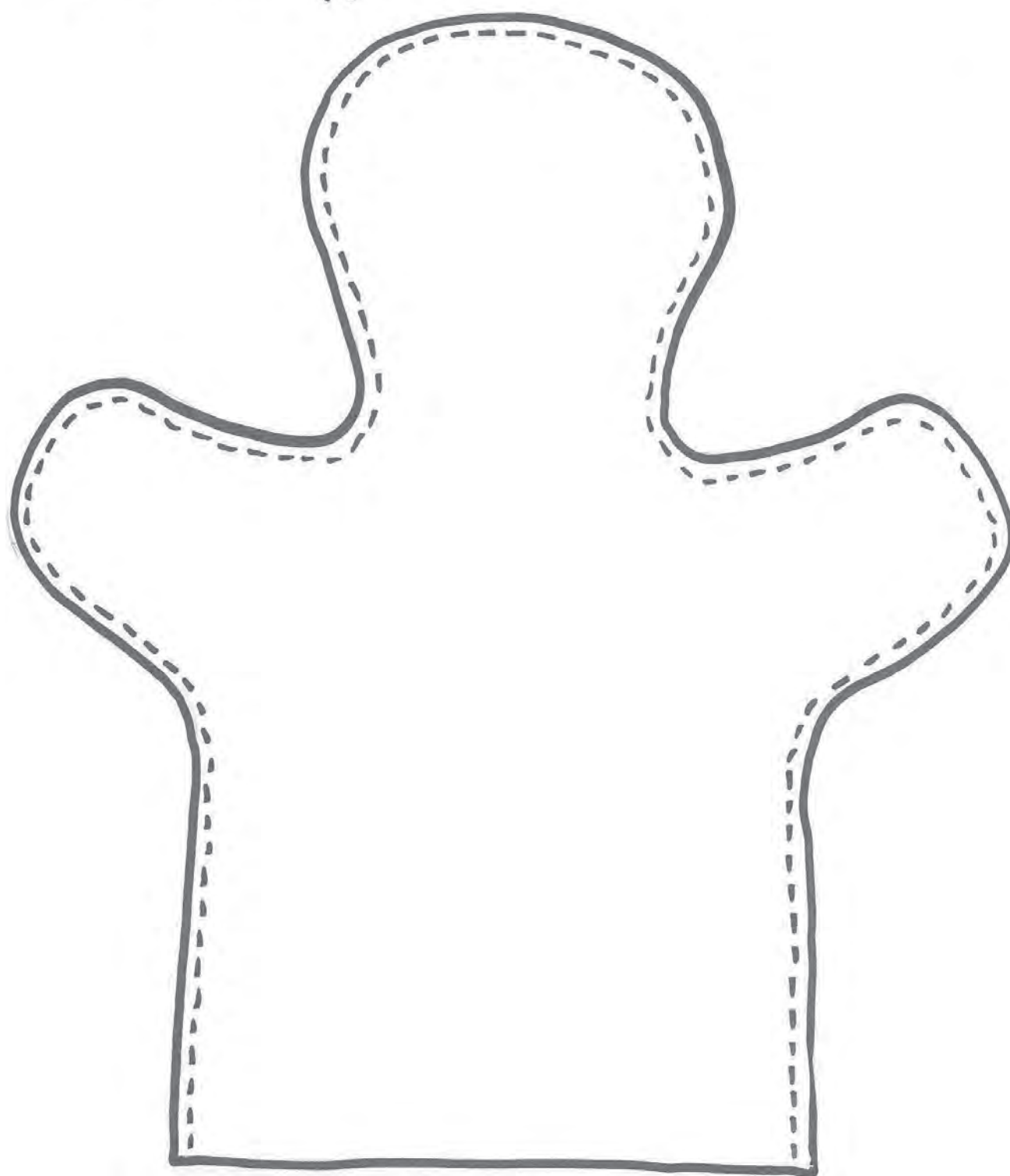
Hand and Finger Puppets

On the following pages you will find templates for hand and finger puppets. Trace the template on two layers of felt, cut them out and sew around the edges. Turn them inside out and decorate them using felt pieces, yarn, cloth, feathers or googly eyes. With a little creativity, you can make a puppet of almost any character.

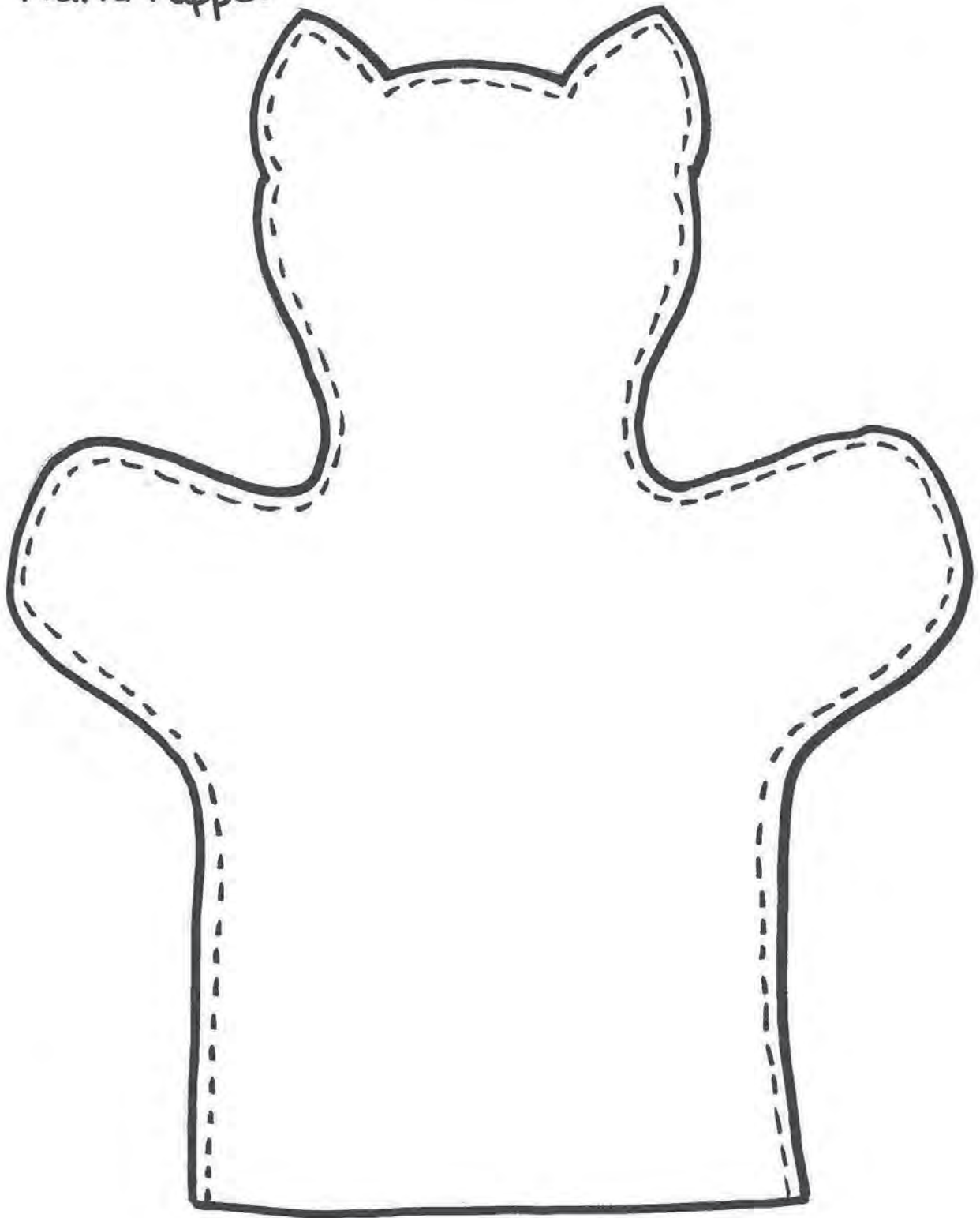
Puppet Ideas

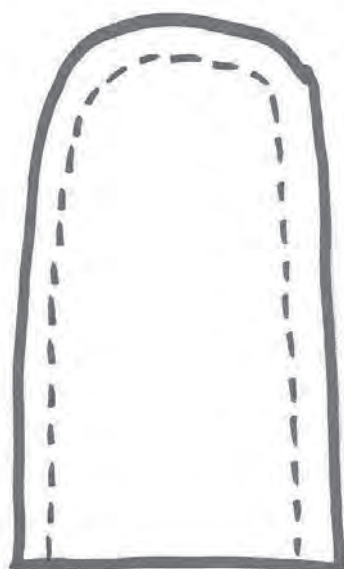


Basic Hand Puppet

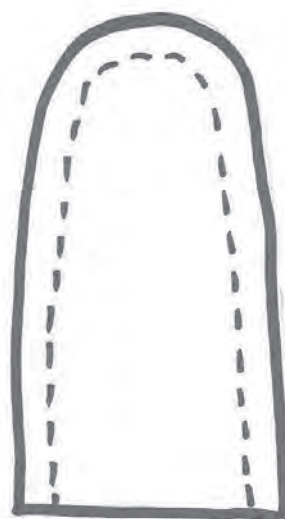


Hand Puppet

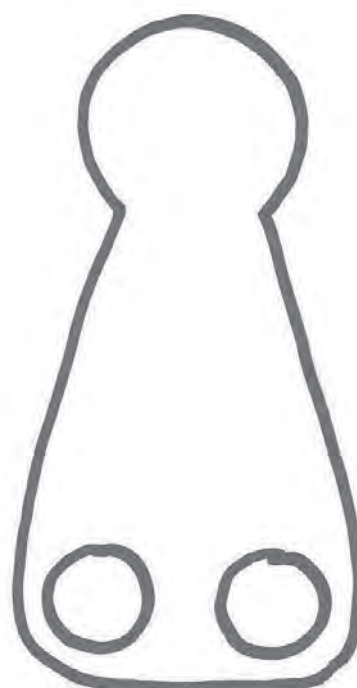
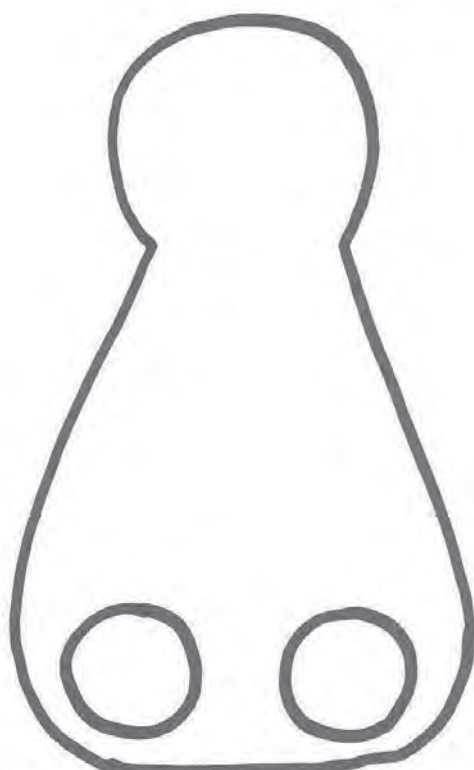




Adult Finger Puppet



child Finger Puppet



Cardboard Finger Puppets



Basic Doll

Use the basic doll template on the next page to create a variety of characters. Here's how:

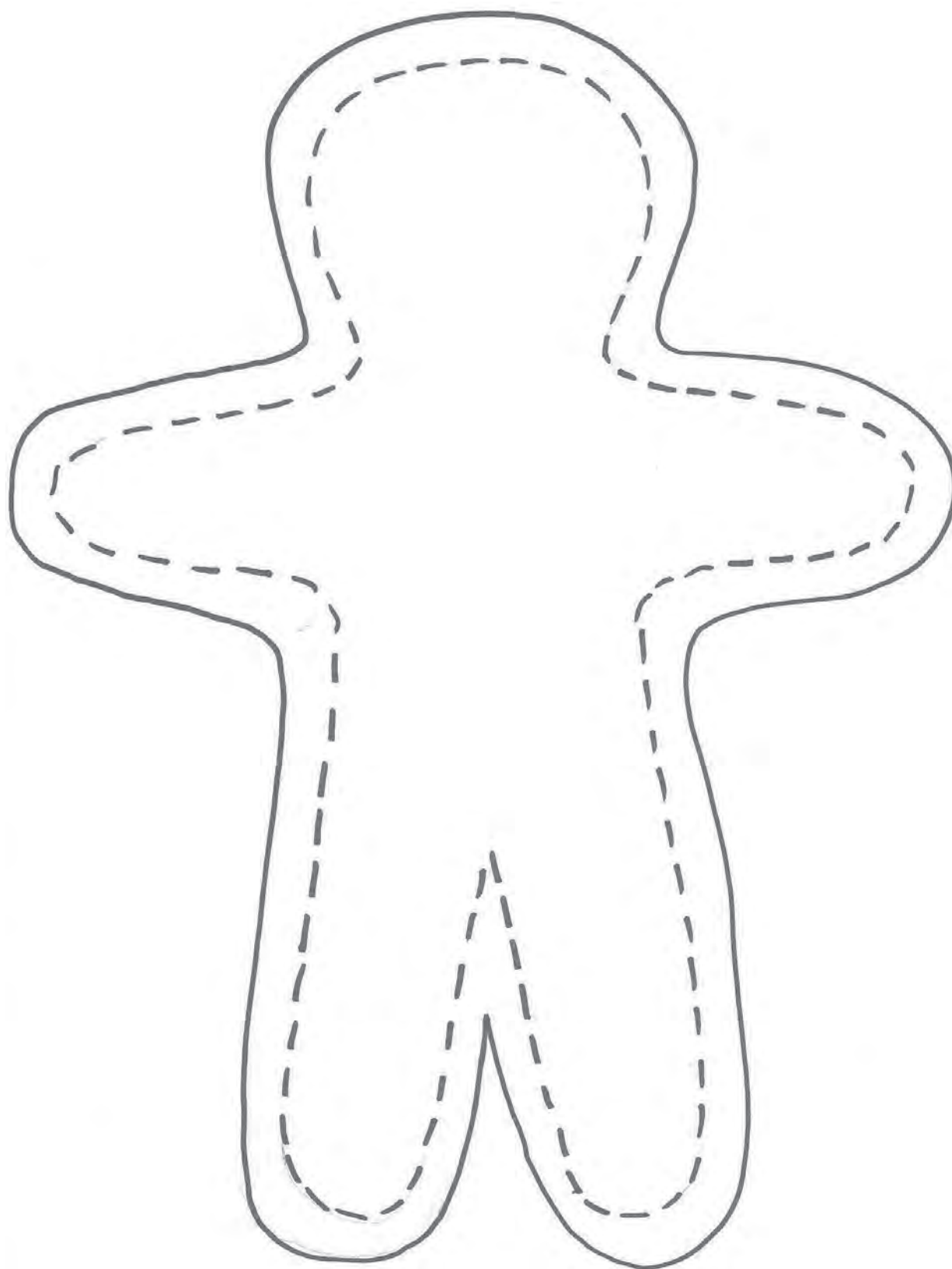
- 1) Cut out the template and pin it to fabric that has been folded in half. Cut around the template.
- 2) Pin the two layers with right sides together. Stitch along the dotted line using a sewing machine or a hand backstitch. Leave part of one side open for stuffing.
- 3) Turn the doll right-side out and stuff with batting or fiber fill.
- 4) Stitch the opening closed by hand.
- 5) Add embellishments to create your character.



Ideas for creating different characters:

- Use a photocopier to enlarge or shrink the template.
- Embroider a face, or draw one with fabric markers.
- Add yarn for hair.
- Add googly eyes.
- Draw your own ears on the template to create different animals.
- Add a nose or tail.
- Add clothes made from scrap fabric.





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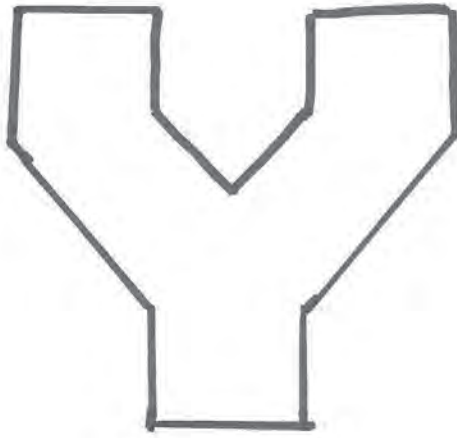
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Matching Cards

Use these templates to make matching cards to go along with the story. You can use them to play Concentration or Snap. For young children, match 2 pictures. For older children, match the picture with the word. Glue them to thin cardboard or laminate them using a laminator or packing tape.



How Can the NWT Literacy Council Help?

The NWT Literacy Council has a library of storysacks that you can borrow. Titles include:

The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle

The Mitten by Jan Brett

Kumak's Fish by Michael Bania

The Paper Bag Princess by Robert Munsch

Five Little Monkeys by Eileen Christelow

On Mother's Lap by Anne Herbert Scott

A Barbecue for Charlotte by Marc Tetro

We also hold storysack workshops, where you can learn to make your own storysacks. You may be able to receive funding to make storysacks in your community. For more information, ideas or training dates, contact us:

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