

Shadow Puppets

Teacher's Resource



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What is Wayang?

Wayang Kulit consists of two words of separate meanings. Wayang is a Javanese word meaning shadow, Kulit means leather, and added together, Wayang Kulit means 'shadow from leather'.

There is no evidence that Wayang existed before Hinduism came to Southeast Asia but there may have been indigenous storytelling traditions that had a profound impact on the development of the traditional puppet theatre.

The first record of a Wayang performance is from an inscription dated 930 AD which says "si Galigi mawayang," or "Sir Galigi played Wayang".

From that time till today, it seems certain features of traditional puppet theatre have remained. Galigi was an itinerant performer who was requested to perform for a special royal occasion. He performed a story about the hero Bima, from the Mahabharata.

Wayang is of Javanese origin with animistic features. Originally it was not individuals who were depicted on stage but legendary beings. They were represented by the most important puppets, and were used to explain the relationship between heaven, the human society, as well as the origin and structure of the world. The introduction of narratives, the Hindu epics, increased the number of puppets and brought more individuality to the characters.

When Islam began spreading in Indonesia, the display of God or Gods in human form was prohibited, and thus this style of painting and shadow play was suppressed. King Raden Patah of Demak, Java wanted to see the Wayang in its traditional form but failed to obtain permission from the Muslim religious leaders. As an alternative, the religious leaders converted the Wayang Golek (three dimensional puppeteering) into Wayang Purwa (two dimensional puppeteering) made from leather, and displayed only the shadow instead of the figures themselves. Instead of the forbidden figures only their shadow picture was displayed. This was the birth of the Wayang Kulit.



What is Gamelan?

Gamelan music is the most popular and important kind in Indonesia (pronounced Gah-Meh-Lahn). It is an integral part of Indonesian culture, and this music often accompanies dance, Wayang puppet performances, rituals, or ceremonies.

Gamelan orchestras are usually percussion oriented, but some varieties may feature flutes, bowed and plucked strings, or vocalists in a prominent role. Gamel means 'to hammer', and most of the instruments of a Gamelan orchestra are struck with wooden mallets, padded sticks or hammers.

A traditional Javanese Gamelan orchestra is made of thirteen musicians playing as many as fifteen different instruments. Among those instruments you can find many bronze percussion instruments, ranging from a huge gong to a smaller kempul, to the kenong and the tiny ketuk. There are also bronze bar instruments and drums. Typically players in the Gamelan will be familiar with dance moves and poetry, while dancers are able to play in the ensemble.

The term Gamelan refers more to the set of instruments than to the players of those instruments. A Gamelan is a set of instruments as a distinct entity, built and tuned to stay together – instruments from different Gamelan are generally not interchangeable.

Traditionally, a Wayang performance is accompanied by Gamelan music. The Gamelan orchestra plays a vital part in setting the moods and reinforcing the actions of the complex dramas. The musicians sit behind the Dalang (puppeteer) and play during his performance. The Dalang must have a thorough knowledge of Gamelan, as he gives the cues for the music.

Puppet shows are rarely rehearsed, so an orchestra and the Dalang will often be performing together for the first time. However the performance is invariably a great success because of the formal conventions and training each player and Dalang has received. Many of the characters have a special piece of music that is played as they enter or exit the screen, and their movements are synchronised with percussion sound effects.

Gamelan musicians are trained in every instrument and can easily jump from the gongs or the cymbals to the xylophone or two-headed drum at a moment's notice. The conductor of a Gamelan orchestra is a drummer who is part of the orchestra. Gamelan music is complicated. It is an ancient form of music and has been handed down for many generations, never written down, but learned by being played. Gamelan is an essential part of Indonesian life. It differs slightly from island to island.



Who is the Dalang?

The central figure in a Wayang Kulit performance is the Dalang (puppeteer), who operates the puppets while narrating the story, speaking all of the dialogue, providing the sound effects, and conducting the Gamelan orchestra. Traditionally, a performance lasts an entire night, beginning soon after sunset with an overture (talun) of Gamelan music, and continuing, without a break, until dawn.

The audience is not expected to sit silently. People meet others and talk to them, they look around, sometimes get up for a snack from the stall, and those who need to rest take a nap. Ultimately, the point of this is not the content of the story but the ritual efficacy of the performance. Sometimes people regard the puppets themselves as being entered by spirits during the performance; and a good Dalang is often said to be entranced.

A Dalang is highly respected and is often believed to possess supernatural qualities, especially healing, because of his position as a mediator between people, gods and spirits. His work is difficult because he needs to have many talents and to conform to a number of court-derived prescriptions and traditions.

He must be able to make the distinction between the voices of each character (all of which have their own characteristic voice); handle the puppets correctly and properly; distinguish between their movements (especially during fight scenes); and recite the traditional eulogy prior to the performance. A Dalang must also be able to correctly explain the nicknames of all kings and nobles mentioned in the performance; know the different ways that gods, giants or humans speak in their various social positions (social hierarchy is strongly embedded in the Javanese language); and know the writings on which a performance may be based. All of the above are necessary to determine the content of the narrative announcements and pieces of music.

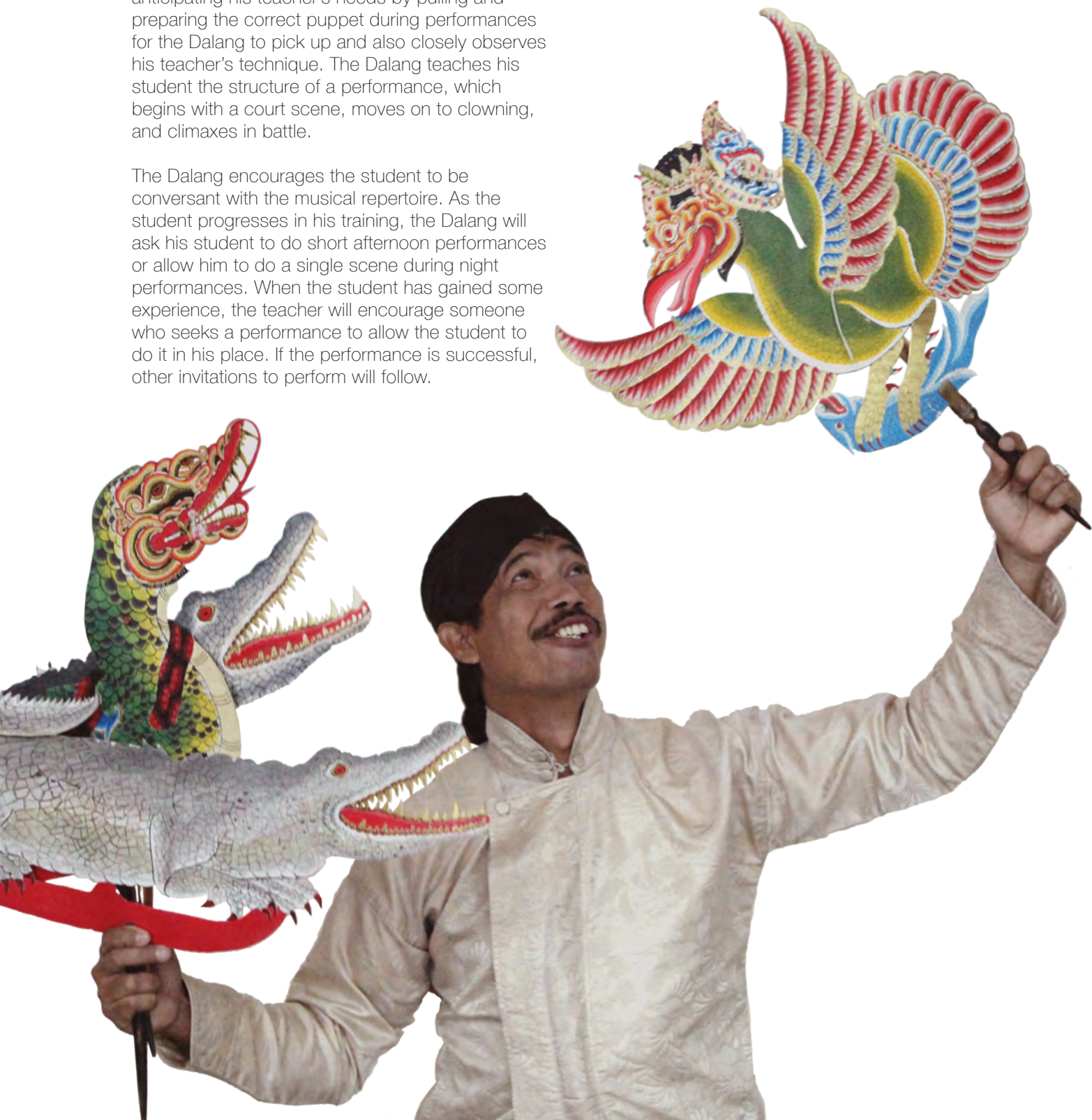
Finally, the Dalang has to know all of the tales referred to in a performance and the verse, measure and singing techniques which are to be used in each performance.



How do you become a Dalang ?

A puppeteer usually begins training in Wayang performance as a boy (aged 10 or 12) while traveling with his teacher, who is often a relative. The apprentice Dalang acts as an assistant, anticipating his teacher's needs by pulling and preparing the correct puppet during performances for the Dalang to pick up and also closely observes his teacher's technique. The Dalang teaches his student the structure of a performance, which begins with a court scene, moves on to clowning, and climaxes in battle.

The Dalang encourages the student to be conversant with the musical repertoire. As the student progresses in his training, the Dalang will ask his student to do short afternoon performances or allow him to do a single scene during night performances. When the student has gained some experience, the teacher will encourage someone who seeks a performance to allow the student to do it in his place. If the performance is successful, other invitations to perform will follow.



The puppets

The types of puppets used are carefully cut out of buffalo skin and then decorated with paint. Tiny holes are punched all over the puppet to create the outlines and textures of the character's clothes.

Over an evening performance, hundreds of puppets are controlled by the Dalang who moves them in front of a lamp to create shadows on a screen. The story is accompanied by music, which helps to create an atmosphere and to emphasize dramatic parts of the story.

Traditionally, the making of shadow puppets is a long and painstaking process. Skin of a female buffalo is dried, scraped and then cured for up to ten years to achieve the correct stiffness and eliminate warping or splitting. On maturity, a skin is carved and pierced to fashion the required character.

This technique involves extensive knowledge of the character's iconography and appearance, since all lines – angles of the head, slant of the eyes and mouth, profile of the body – are specific to every character that is made.

When carving is completed, the traditional pigments are applied. The cempurit (short sticks to manipulate the puppets) are made of buffalo horn, while the studs attaching the arms to the torso are made from metal (sometimes gold), bone, bamboo, or in rare courtly examples, gold studded with diamonds.

The puppets are fastened to a tortoise-shell stick, running from their head to below their feet, where the Dalang grasps the stick as a sort of handle. The arms, the only movable parts, have the cempurit attached to them where the Dalang holds in the same hand and manipulates with his fingers. He holds the puppets up in either hand over his head and interposes them between the light and the screen. If the characters are nobles, as most are, he must be doubly careful never to let them get lower than his head.



What is a Gunungan?

The Gunungan (literal translation: "imitation mountain") is a highly decorated element shaped like a pointed leaf that symbolizes the mountain of the gods. The scene you can see on it represents a tree-like plan (the tree of life) on which birds, monkeys and other beasts climb. Below the tree, you can find two fierce demons guarding the entrance to paradise.

Its function during the performance is to point to the beginning of each scene. When the Gunungan looks like they are flying during the story, it signals the beginning of a passing story. When the Gunungans are covering each other, it means the performance is over.



Wayang stories

UNESCO proclaimed the Wayang Puppet Theatre as a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity on the 7th of November 2003.

The two most popular and common subjects of both Wayang Kulit and Wayang Golek (Wooden Puppet theatre) are the epic Mahabharata and Ramayana stories from India. There are also folk stories and newer creations. Although the stories are well known to Indonesians and retold many times, the fluidity of Wayang Kulit allows for adaptation and humour, keeping the stories up to date and interesting.

To appreciate the Wayang Kulit, it's necessary to be able to distinguish the good puppets from the bad. First, the good puppets tend to have delicate features. They sport almond-shaped eyes, thin noses, and are generally thinner and smaller in stature. Evil puppets, on the other hand, have large bulging eyes, big noses, big feet, and are usually larger than the good puppets. Second, Wayang villains look straight ahead in what is considered an aggressive manner while Wayang heroes and heroines usually take a more demure stance with their heads tilted downward, which signifies politeness and is less confrontational. Last, during a performance the Dalang always arranges the good puppets to the right of the stage and the evil puppets to the left. Symbolically, the puppets represent mankind and experience the same trials and tribulations that people do. Because of this, the Indonesians have for centuries used the puppets as instructional tools and role models.



The Ramayana story

During his 50 minutes show, Sumardi is performing the Ramayana story:

In a country far away, a handsome prince called Rama and a beautiful princess called Dewi Sinta met, fell in love and, as is the way of things, got married. However, Rama's jealous stepmother soon banished the happy couple to live in the forest for fourteen years.

They were joined by Rama's brother, Laksmana, who shared their simple yet contented life.

But their peace was soon to shatter. Ravana, a wicked demon king with ten heads and twenty arms, caught sight of the beautiful Dewi Sinta and decided to capture her for himself.

First, he had to get her alone. He ordered a servant to become a golden deer, which Dewi Sinta begged Rama to catch for her. Keen to keep his wife happy, Rama set off asking Laksmana to look after Dewi Sinta. Rama's cries for help suddenly exploded from the forest. Dewi Sinta pleaded with Laksmana to help her beloved Rama. Reluctantly he agreed as long as she promised to stay inside a magic circle he drew around her. And so Ravana tricked her into being alone, as he had pretended to be Rama in distress.

An old, sick man came stumbling towards Dewi Sinta and asked her for some water. As Dewi Sinta was explaining how she had to stay inside the circle, he suddenly collapsed. The pure and gentle-hearted Dewi Sinta stepped out to help him without thinking. She realized her mistake an instant later as she stood before Ravana.

Dewi Sinta screamed when she realized that his plan was to take her back to the island of Lanka in his chariot. Hearing her cries, Garuda, King of the Birds, swooped down to her rescue. But as Ravana cut off first one wing and then the other, he spun to the ground. Hearing all the noise, Rama and Laksmana came dashing back just in time for Garuda to break the devastating news of Dewi Sinta's kidnap before he died.

The twists and turns of Rama's journey to get Dewi Sinta back form the epic tale of the Ramayana, but his adventures are too many to tell here. Throughout his travels he had the help of the monkey warrior Hanuman and his monkey army. They built a causeway across the sea to Lanka which they travelled along to face Ravana and his demons in a mighty battle.

It is hard to fight demons who make themselves invisible and fire arrows that turn into poison-biting, breath-snatching snakes, so the monkey army suffered. When all seemed lost, Hanuman remembered there was a magical healing flower that grew on a far away mountain. He flew there at once but became distressed as he could not find the flower. In desperation, he lifted up the entire mountain and carried it back to the battlefield where the flowers were found and used to restore the strength of the monkey soldiers.

At last our hero and villain, Rama and Ravana, stood face to face. Rama was surprised that each time he cut off one of Ravana's arms or heads, it just grew back again. As long as he touched the ground, Ravana had special powers. Tiger-headed arrows roared past Rama as he sat down in the middle of the battlefield and meditated. With clearness of mind, he remembered that he had in his backpack an arrow that had been blessed by the gods. Carefully taking aim, the arrow fired Ravana so soaringly high into the sky that he was dead by the time he came back to earth.

Rama raced off to find Dewi Sinta, and, on being reunited, they decided to go home. Hanuman flew ahead to the villages asking them to line the paths with lamps so the couple could find their way home. It is this safe return of Rama and Dewi Sinta that is celebrated every year at Diwali – the Hindu festival of lights.

The Mahabharata story

The Mahabharata story is part of Wayang Kulit, however Sumardi will not perform this part.

The largest epic ever written elegantly depicts Hindu ideals and philosophies, and has provided a wealth of inspiration for many cultures. The Balinese and Javanese, who accepted these verses long ago, combined the Hindu stories with Buddhist philosophy and their own folk lore.

Throughout the stories two related families, the Pandus and Kurus (cousins), or Pandawas and Kurawas, represent, respectively, forces of good and evil and are always pitted against each other in epic struggles for balance and justice.

The Mahabharata is presented in many different individual episodes. Staple episodes include Arjuna Wiwaha, the marriage of Arjuna, and Bima Suarga, Bima's travels in the underworld. There are many others and often the Dalang will contribute new and original episodes to the story.

Arjuna is an example of a refined and noble character. He has thin, narrow eyes, a pointed nose, and a small slender body. His lowered gaze is a sign of self-control. His voice is low and gentle. His movements are controlled and graceful. He is very polite to the people he respects but he is extremely powerful and kills his opponents with dance-like movements. He has the characteristic hairstyle of the Pandawa brothers – very finely curled black hair. In a large set of Wayang puppets, there are about a dozen puppets to represent Arjuna in different moods and several of these can be used in a single performance.

Gareng appears in every play as one of the clown servants of a noble or 'halus' warrior (such as Arjuna). He is physically deformed in every way. He is Semar's son. Semar is one of the most powerful gods who agreed to live on the earth among people. Clowns offer wise advice to their masters. They also introduce an element of light-heartedness in the story through their silly jokes.



What happens during the Wayang Kulit performance?

If there is enough space in the room, Sumardi will set his screen up in the middle so half of the students can be on one side of the screen and see the shadows while the other group sees how Sumardi handles the puppets and the percussion instrument at his feet. In the middle of the session, Sumardi will stop and ask the students to swap places. All the students will have the opportunity to observe the performance from each side of the screen.

- Introduction to Sumardi, the Indonesian Master Shadow Puppeteer and Wayang Kulit.
- Sumardi will explain the plot of the Ramayana story.
- Sumardi will perform the first part of the Ramayana story for 20 minutes.
- If enough space in the room, students will swap places to see the other side of the screen.
- At the end, Sumardi will explain how he is dressed and answer questions.

What happens during the Wayang Workshop?

- The first 50 minutes will be the same as the Wayang Kulit performance
- 2nd activity (1h 10min):

30 minutes making puppets:

- 5 min: Sumardi explains the colours and the differences between the puppets
- 5 min: Students choose their puppets
- 10 min: Students colour the puppets
- 10 min: Students assemble the puppet

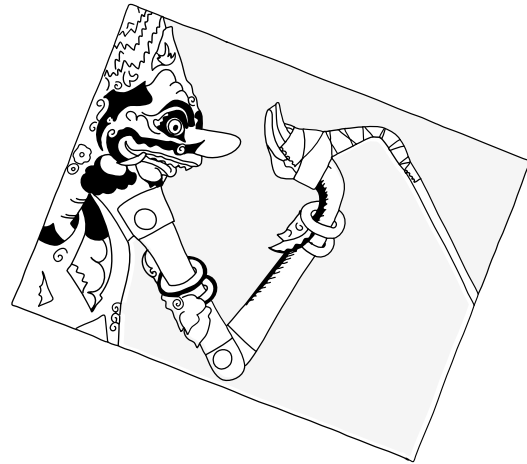
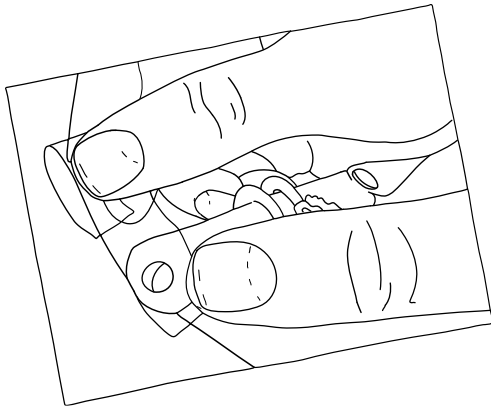
40 minutes playing with the puppets:

- 10 min: Sumardi shows how to hold the puppets and how to move the arms
- 30 min: Students play with the puppets and practice the skills involved

How to make Indonesian puppets

You will need:

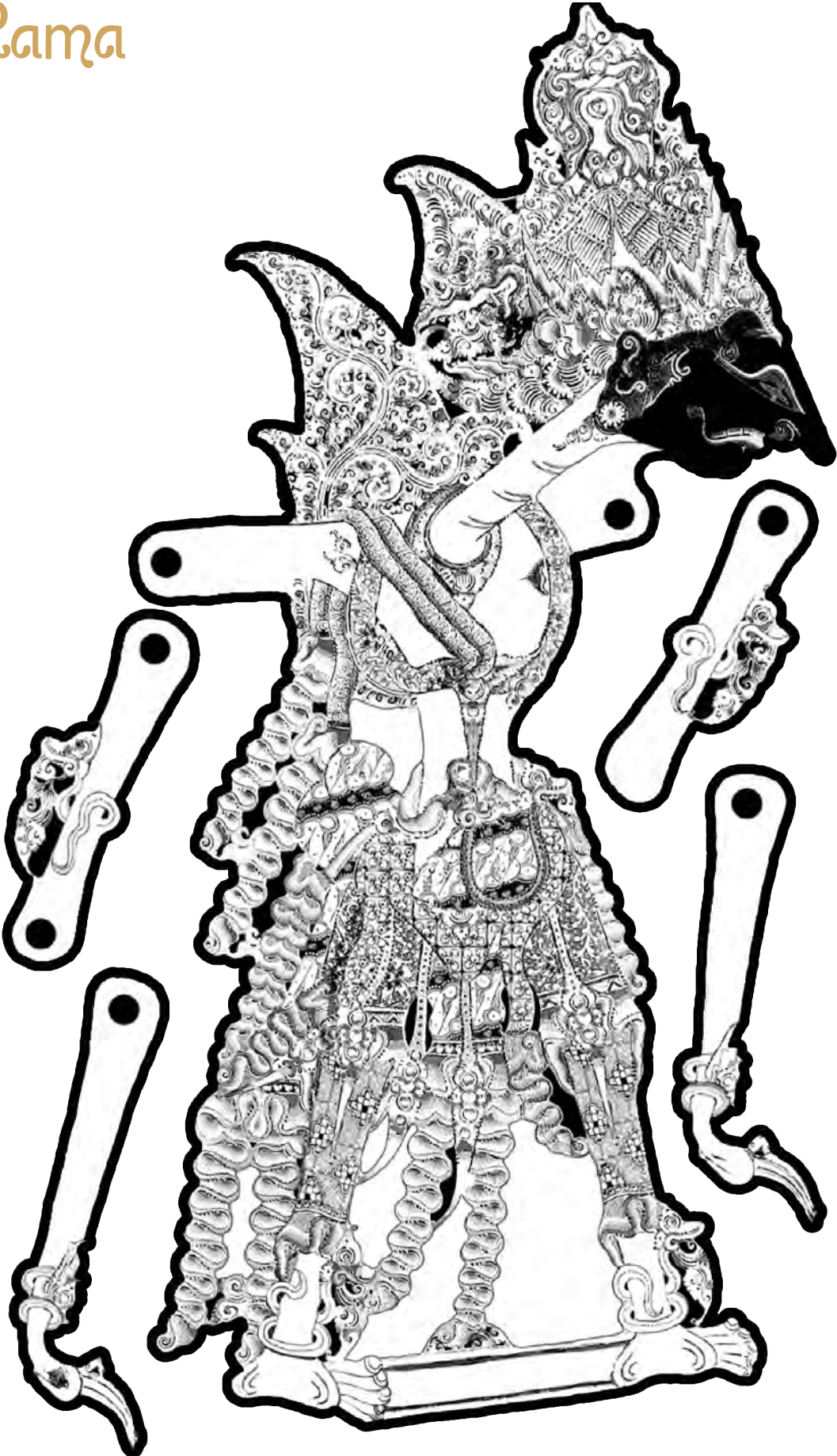
- Tracing paper
- Card
- Sticky tape
- Scissors
- Hole puncher
- Thin sticks bamboo skewers colouring pencils or Crayons paper fasteners



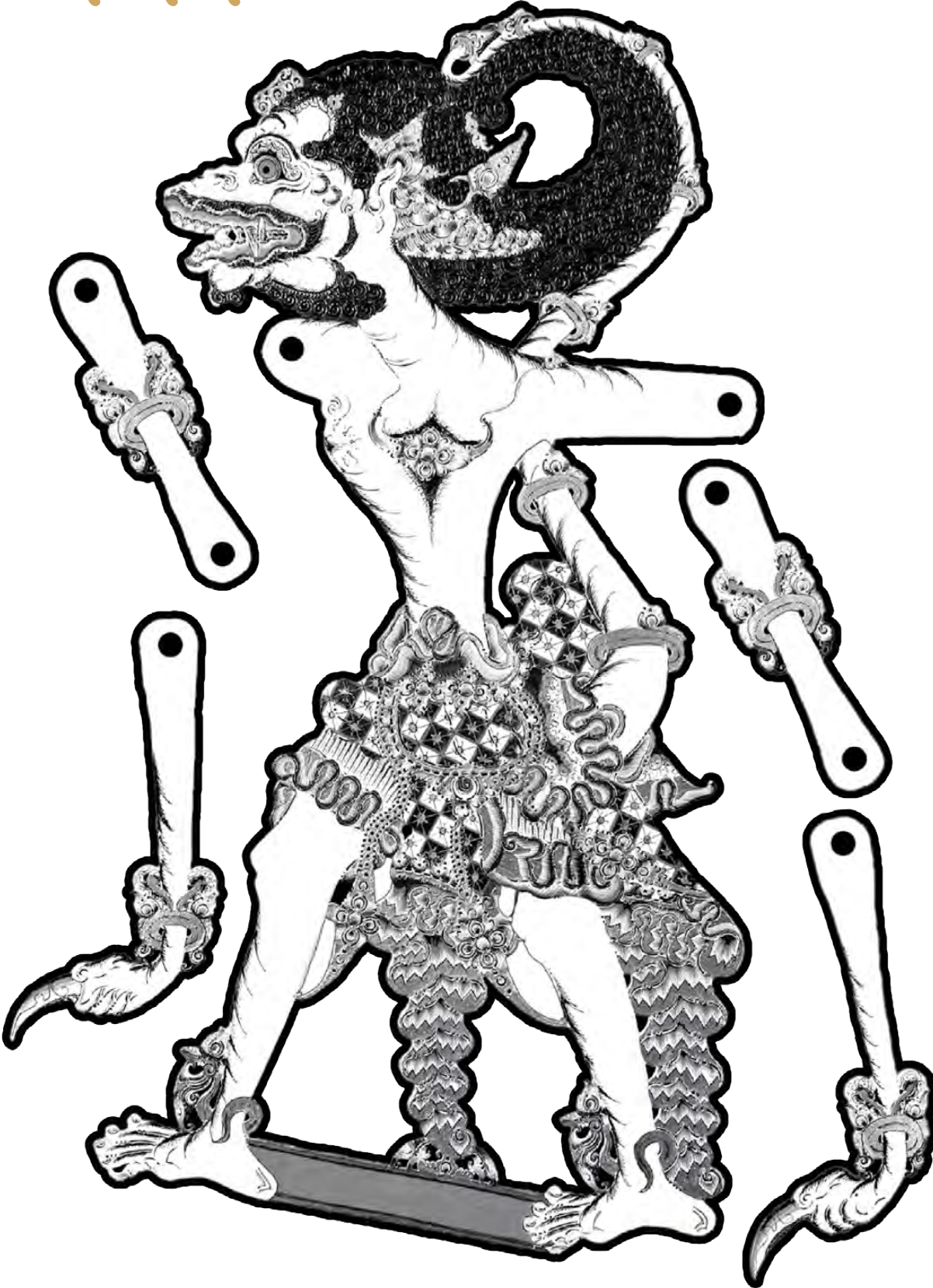
- 1) Colour it in.
- 2) Cut out the puppet's body and arm pieces.
- 3) Put a piece of tape around the ends of the shoulder and arm joints to keep them strong.
- 4) Punch a hole at the end of each arm joint.
- 5) Attach the arm joints together using paper fasteners. Make sure you don't make them too tight or your puppet won't move!
- 6) Stick a straw on to the back of the puppet, leaving enough sticking out at the bottom to hold on to. Wind the sticky tape around the end of the skewer a few times, so that you have a small bundle of tape sticking out.
- 7) Attach the sticky tape bundle to the puppet's hand. This gives your puppet's arms more flexibility to move.

The shadow puppets have lots of tiny holes punched into them to create patterns and texture. You could do something similar using a thick embroidery needle. Put a piece of Blu-tack onto the back of the puppet and press the needle through to make a small hole.

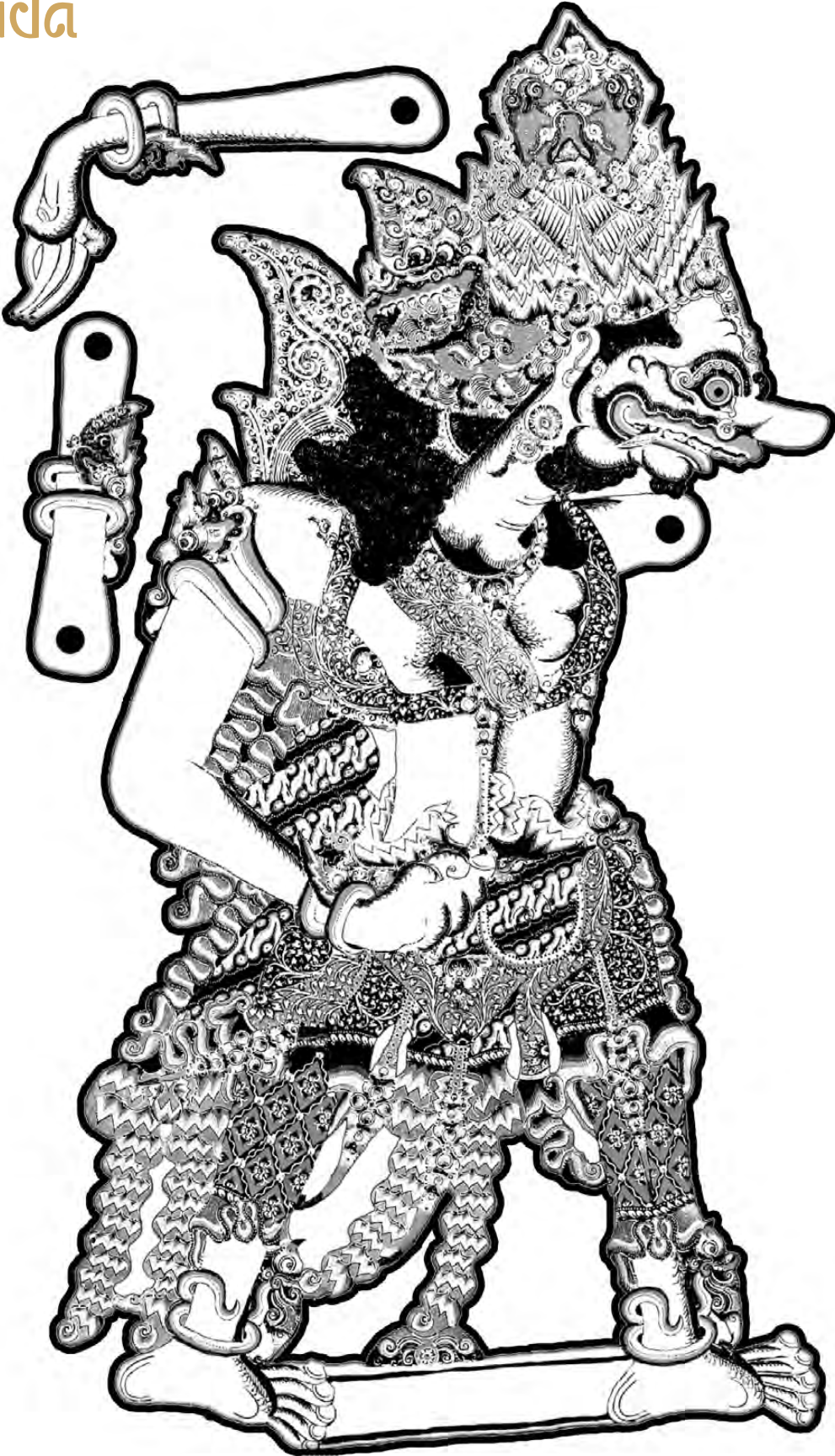
Rama



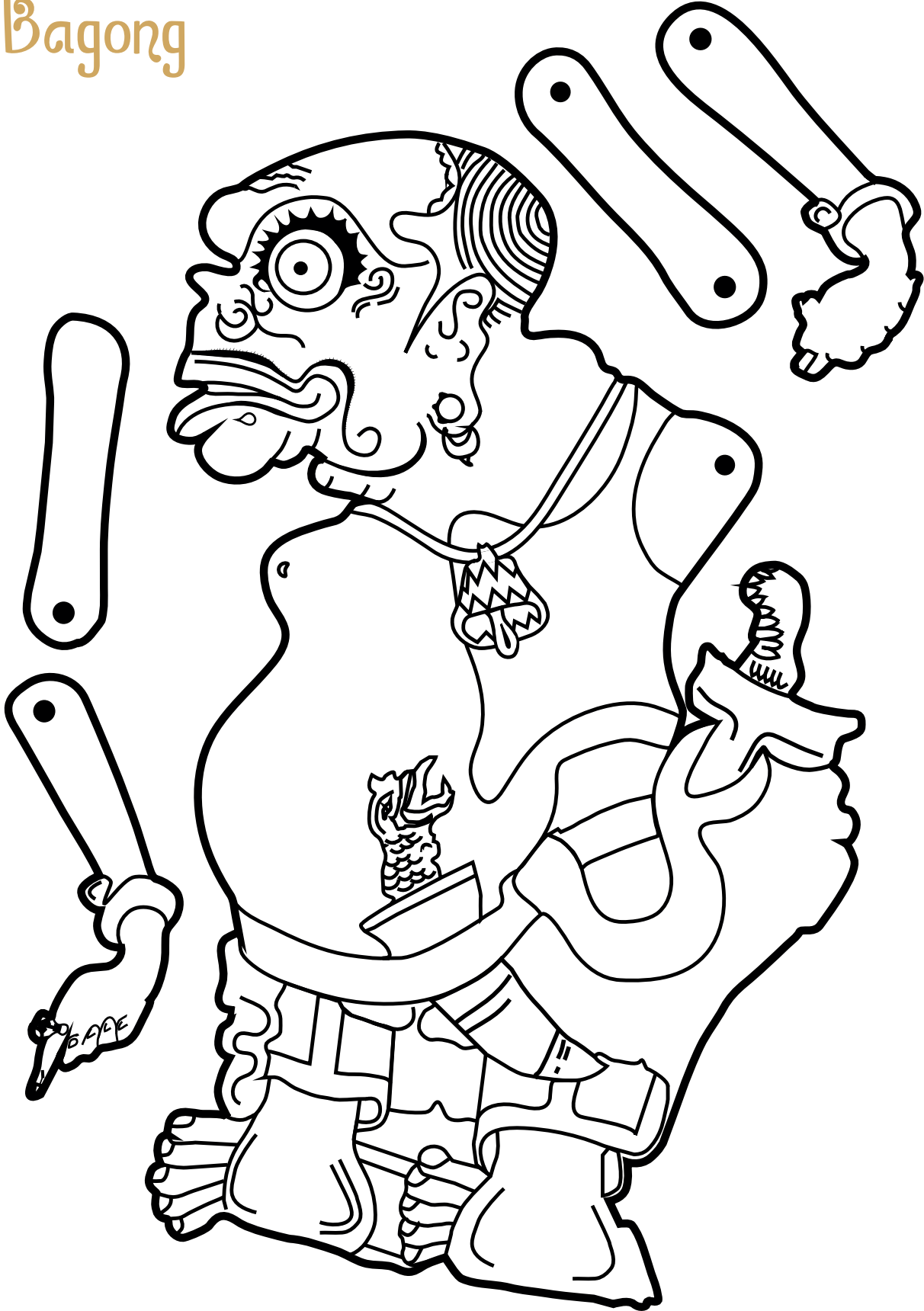
Hanuman



Garuda



Bagong



Petrùk

