Build a **Booth**

There are many ways to build a hand puppet booth. Here is our current setup, “Z. Briggs version 5” - use it exactly or remix it into your own design!

MATERIALS NEEDED

Wood (all 3/4” thick):

1 Puppet Board: 3.5” wide by 4’ long

1 Playboard: 2.5” wide by 4’ long

1 Scrim Board: 2.5” wide by 4‘ long

2 Top / Back: 1.5” wide by 4’ long

4 Side Boards (two middle, two top): 1.5” wide by 3’ long

Four 6’ or 8’ light stands

2 Spring clamps

2 Super clamps

Fabric for outside

Roof fabric

Scrim fabric

2 Clamp lights 19” (gooseneck)

4 Light stand tip adapters

16 Cup hooks (1”)

Our booth weighs 30 lbs and measures 4’ wide x 3’ deep which is wide enough for two puppeteers inside. It packs into a wheeled dufflebag with backpack straps for carrying it up stairs.


scrim board goes here
light clamps here
extra wood for layering fabrics
wood sits on top of adjuster
cup hooks
super clamp

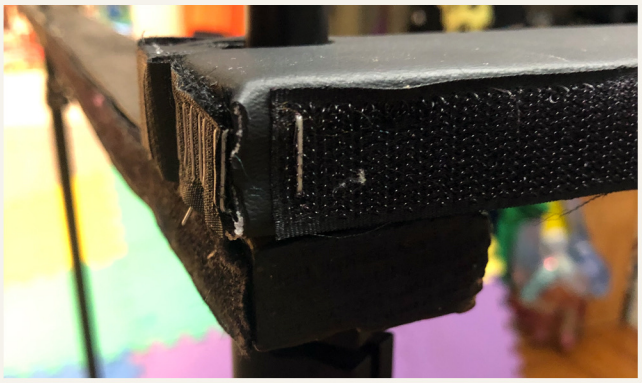
Bottom Layer

Set up the light stands and extend their height to 6'. Secure two super clamps onto the poles and place the Puppet Board directly on top. We sandwich the Puppet Board between a clamp and the lowest telescoping adjuster (the part with the screw) on each front stand. Staple velcro onto the Playboard front.

WOOD SLOT

Cut a light stand-sized slot into each side of the Puppet Board, Middle Sides and Playboard. They should fit snugly onto the light stands. A velcro side piece helps keep it secure.

WOOD ORDER



On top of the front light stands' middle telescoping adjusters, we place the Middle Sides and Playboard on top. If the Playboard is wiggly, secure with super clamps on top.

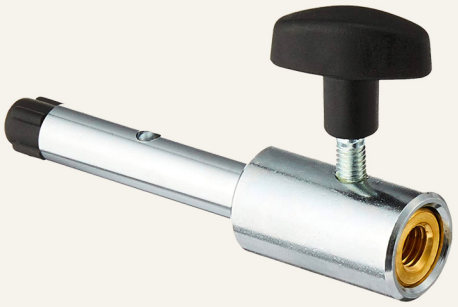
Drill 16 holes into the Puppet Board and screw in 1" cup hooks. We hang puppets and props on these hooks (remember to put metal key rings on your puppets). You can store props on top of the board.

You may want to use small magnets or ties to secure the outer fabric around the light stand bottoms.

Top Layer

The four wood pieces on the top of the booth have velcro stapled to one side to hold up the outer fabric. The roof fabric is separate, with holes on each corner that fit onto the tip adapters and extra velcro in case of wind.

LIGHT STAND TIP ADAPTERS



These sit on top of the light stands, adding an extra layer. The Top, Back, and Top Sides wood pieces (holes drilled in to fit) and roof fabric sit stop these.

CLAMP LIGHTS

Clamp these small, flexible lights near the top of the two front light stand poles, aiming the lights toward center stage on the playboard.

The outer fabric should cover the entire booth, except for directly above the playboard. Choose a lightweight fabric with an eye-catching color - the old Punchmen used red and white stripes.

The Scrim

A feature that separates this booth from other hand puppet setups is the use of a scrim. We use a scrim because we perform standing up with the puppets directly in front of our faces. The scrim hangs between us and the puppets, hiding the puppeteer and allowing great visibility of the puppets and the audience.

WHY A SCRIM?

The scrim fabric is black silk with ultra-fine holes. The lights hitting the booth make it seem solid, yet you can see out. If there is no light inside the booth, you will be invisible.

CLAMP SCRIM TO SIDE

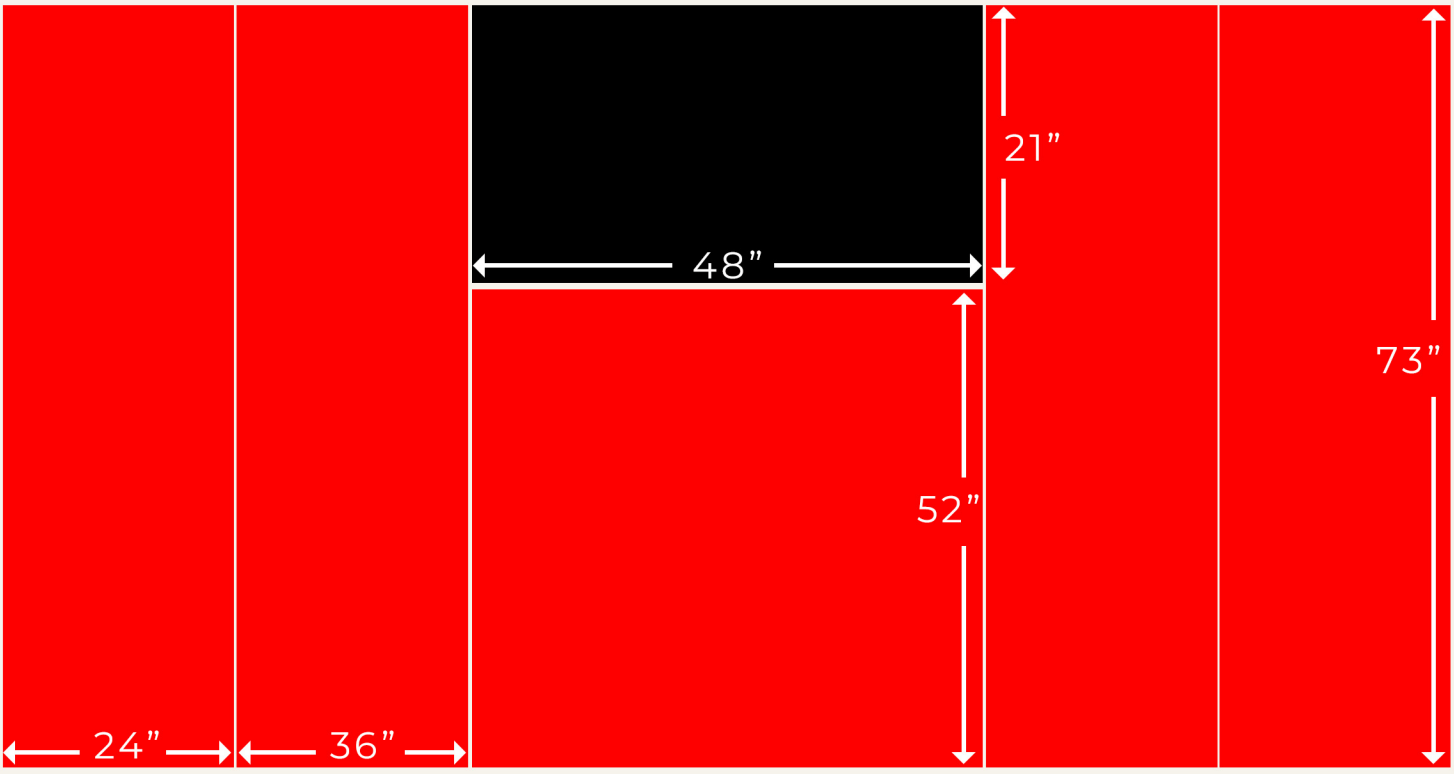
Staple the scrim fabric to the Scrim board and place it on top of the top side wood about 1' away from the Front piece. Use a spring clamp to secure it to the Side pieces.

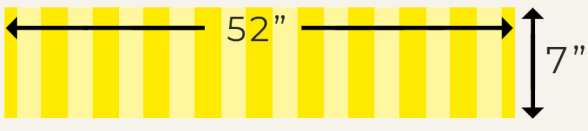
I originally performed on my knees with my arms over my head, which brought its share of problems. My knees and back ached, and I could not see exactly where the puppets were looking. Once we changed to standing up, my technique improved 1000%.

Outer Layer

The booth should match your height. I am 5' 9", so a 6' 3" tall booth is perfect for me. I can stand with my arms in "puppet position" and not feel any tension. Try putting together a rehearsal stage and try out different heights for your Playboard. With your hands in position, the Playboard should cover the bottom 1-2" of the puppet's costume.

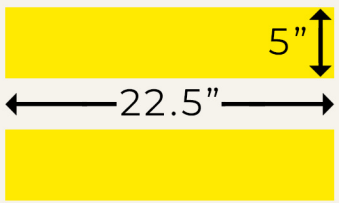
Once you have assembled the skeleton of the booth, adjusting the light stands to fit your height, you should be able to measure how much fabric you are going to need to cover it. For the sake of a template, I have included our fabric dimensions below.





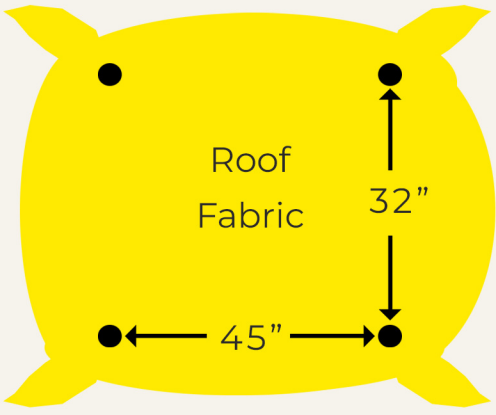
Under Playboard Fabric

(wraps around a bit)



Playboard Framing Fabric

(2 pieces)



Archenemies!

Wind and sun can ruin your outdoor performance (sometimes indoors too!). This booth is not very heavy so a moderate wind could pick it up and send everything into the audience. Here are some strategies to avoid that terrible fate.

WIND

1. Weigh down each light stand with 20 lb sand bags BEFORE putting the fabric on.
2. Attach your bags, suitcases etc to the light stands inside the booth after the fabric is attached.
3. Use wooden clothespins on the light stand adapters above the roof fabric so it cannot fly away.
4. Attach extra velcro to the roof fabric overhang to attach it to the booth when needed.
5. Warn outdoor clients about wind and ask to set up against a wall or in a less exposed spot.

SUN

Light hitting the booth will spoil the scrim illusion by illuminating what's inside the booth (you!). Always try to control your lighting situation and use colored or cotton fabrics (thicker) to ensure that you get a darker inner booth area. I always have an extra 4' x 4' piece of fabric (we wrap our scrim in it) to potentially clothespin to the outside of the booth in case there is sun or light hitting it on a specific side. If the sun is hitting the front of the booth (ideal) an added benefit is that the audience doesn't have to look into the light and squint to see the show.