

**Singapore HeritageFest 2009**  
**“Arte (factually) Speaking” Story-Writing Competition**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Prize Winner (Lower Secondary Category)**



Contest ID: 17  
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Artefact: Glove Puppets  
Museum: National Museum of Singapore

Dance of the Puppets

The stage was set for the performance of the night. The backdrop, the picturesque scenery of a typical Chinese garden covered the background of the temporary stage. The spotlight was intense, shining on the middle of the platform.

Set in the centre of Chinatown, the temporary stage, which was small in size, was home to the stars of the show— 15 hand-sewn glove puppets. As the trishaws zoomed past the busy streets, and the *Samsui* women carried baskets laden with rocks, with sweat forming at the edges of their iconic red bandanas, streams of young children filled the town square, sitting on wooden benches which were arranged before the performance.

I tugged my parents to the front row of the benches forcefully, and quickly sat down when I found a good spot. To the annoyance of my father, an affluent Chinese spice trader, I continued to talk about the show, irritating him. After all, this was the fifth time I was going to watch the puppet show, and I was lost in the world of colourful ancient Chinese puppetry since my first viewing of the performance. As the lights dimmed, and the brass trumpets resounded which caught everybody's attention, the show started.

The stage lit up instantaneously and the puppets emerged through a cloud of smoke. Festooned in shimmery sequins and diamonds, the warrior puppets appeared with miniature cloth swords. The melody of the trumpets, gongs and Chinese fiddles reverberated throughout the theatre. The puppets engaged in a battle of dance, song and romance with the oriental marionettes appearing in colourful costumes, each puppet portraying various characters such as courageous generals who led their armies to victory, philosophical scholars who changed history and stunningly beautiful princesses who captured the hearts of many.

Before I knew it, the stage dimmed, and the procession of melodies ended with a loud bang. The show had ended. My mother reminded me that it was time to go home in fluent Mandarin. I nodded grudgingly, and clutched my mother's hand and walked towards our driver. I turned my head, taking a final glimpse of the theatre, whilst bidding a silent farewell to the puppets.

As my childhood slowly faded with the blow of time, I was a young man, who was ready to make his own decisions. I was greatly fascinated by ancient Chinese puppetry from my childhood days, and was bent on studying puppetry and become a renowned puppeteer.

Moreover, I believed that it was only through a spellbinding art form, such as puppetry that would remind people of their past.

However, my father greatly disapproved my academic and career choice. He wanted me to focus on the family business, and be the successor to his flourishing business corporation. I was frustrated, angry and in a dilemma. I had to obey my father, but I wanted to follow my dreams. Hence, I obliged to both. I worked at my father's office during the day as an apprentice, and would visit an old puppeteer every night after his daily performances to learn puppetry. However, my father soon found out about this. He realised that I was not interested in business and finally approved of me being a puppeteer.

Years passed.

The stage was set for the performance of the night. The backdrop was of a Chinese garden, and the spotlight was intense. I was overwhelmed with nervousness as the pre-recorded traditional music played in the background. The music gradually thundered and I knew it was my time to shine— as the master of puppets.

(589 words)