

Using Props: Making a Video Camera

Excerpted from “Movies, Music, and Math” workshop
By Wolf Trap Master Teaching Artist Michele Valeri

A. Materials needed

- Empty laundry detergent bottle
- Ratchet (to give the illusion of the camera’s film turning in the camera)
- Clapboard
- Story of choice to be “filmed”



Tide bottle turned into a camera



Clapboard



Ratchet

How to make a pretend camera:

1. Use an empty bottle of laundry detergent or a fabric softener bottle.
2. Make sure the bottle is thoroughly dry inside and out.
3. Cut a round hole in the top of the lid.
4. Cut a round hole in the bottom of the bottle large enough to allow the lid to fit in it, and reinforce the connection with more hot glue.
5. Cover the labels on both sides with craft foam adhered to the surface of the bottle with hot glue.
6. Decorate the craft foam on both sides of the bottle with knobs or beads and use a magic marker to complete the appearance of a camera.
7. Buy small plastic ratchets at a party store. They shouldn’t cost more than a few dollars for a set of eight or ten.
8. Demonstrate to the children how the camera works.
9. Let the children practice using the camera.

How to make a clapboard:

1. Clapboards are available online at several sites like:
<http://www.hollywoodmegastore.com> or www.thisishollywood.com
2. If you don’t want to spend the money on a store model, you can make a facsimile with two thin strips of wood each about 1.5 feet long attached to each other with a simple hinge. Or you can use small blocks from the block corner. It’s the sound of the two pieces of wood snapping together when the director (you) says “action!” that lends an air of authenticity to the process.

B. Process

1. Review the story with the children.
2. Divide the story into scenes to be shot.
3. Let the children all practice handling the props for movie making.
4. Set up the room for the shot. It can be as elaborate or simple as you like. The simpler it is, the more the children will have to rely on their imaginations to play the scene.
5. Rehearse the scene before the “shoot.”
6. Once you’ve rehearsed, you may need to take a break before the actual movie making takes place.

C. Suggestions on Presentation

1. Write a short descriptive step-by-step outline of the action that you want to “film” and post it in the room. It will help you and the children remember the order of events.
2. Music and/or environmental sounds playing softly behind the action can help the children focus on the scene. (For example: If the scene takes place outdoors, a recording of outdoor nature sounds can be played while shooting the scene.)
3. It’s always fun to use the movie terms we all know from being part of a movie culture. (For example: “Quiet on the set!” “Camera’s rolling” and “We have sound...and action!”)
4. Just as they originally did before talkies, your movie can unfold while you – or whoever is the director – are giving directions.
5. Sometimes fabric remnants that imply the setting can help the children with a sense of place for the action of the film. Examples: blue fabric for water or sky, or brown and green for a forest or jungle setting.