

# Ways to Get People Thinking and Acting:

## Village Theater and Puppet Shows

### CHAPTER 27

Role playing, sociodramas, people's theater, and puppet shows are all forms of action-packed story telling by a group. Each can be used to explore problems or situations by acting them out. At best, they are an excellent learning process for both actors and watchers, based on participation and discovery.

The difference between these dramatic forms is one of methods and subject:

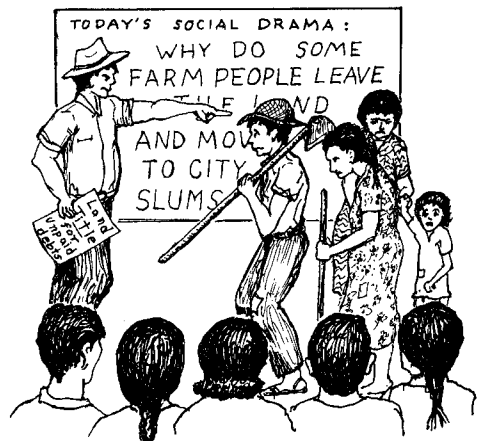
**ROLE PLAYING** is the simplest form, often used as a learning game in class. Several students, or the whole group, act out a problem or situation. Each student pretends, or 'plays the role' of a particular person—for example a sick child, the child's mother or older sister, or the health worker. Usually role playing is done with little or no practice ahead of time, and no memorizing of parts. The story's details are developed by the group as they act it out.

Because role playing is such an excellent classroom method for bringing problems to life, we have discussed it already in Chapter 14. And there are more examples in other parts of this book. For instance, in Chapter 1 we use two role plays to compare 'the bossy teacher' with 'the good group leader' (see pages 1-17 to 1-20).

**SOCIODRAMAS**—or social dramas—are used to explore people's attitudes, feelings, and behavior. They often focus on social or political concerns: how some people affect the lives of others. Their main purpose is to **increase people's awareness** of underlying human problems, and to **explore possibilities for action and change**.

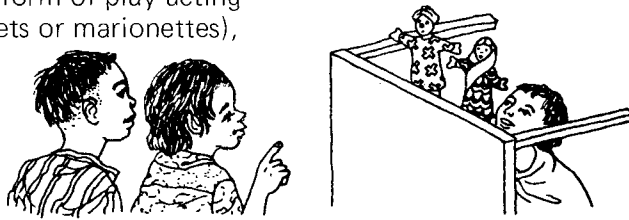
Sociodramas can be developed in class as spontaneous (unpracticed) role playing. Or they can be presented in public, perhaps before the whole village, with or without much practice and preparation.

**THEATER** is a form of public play acting. The story or 'play' is usually planned and practiced in advance. Parts may be memorized, but it is often more effective and a better learning process if participants understand their roles and speak in their own words.



Health-related theater is a good way to bring people together, including many who do not go to meetings or health talks. Theater can communicate messages, ideas, or concerns in a way that holds people's attention and makes them think—and act! **Make-believe action on stage can lead to real action in the community.**

**PUPPET SHOWS** are a form of play acting using small models (puppets or marionettes), or sometimes masks or 'giant heads' to act out stories or messages.



Puppets are especially fun for children. Children can make the puppets, as well as take part in creating and putting on the show.

However, puppets can also be used with adults, especially for exploring difficult social issues. A puppet can often make social criticisms or point out conflicting interests without causing personal offense. (If a 'real person' were to say the same things publicly, some people might be angry or hurt.) **Puppets add a sense of pretending and humor that can make the feared parts of our daily life easier to look at.**



**COMBINED FORMS OF DRAMA.** In actual practice, there need be no sharp divisions between role playing, sociodrama, theater, and puppet shows. These different forms can be mixed, or one can lead to another.

## WORKING SOCIAL DRAMA INTO CLASSROOM ROLE PLAYS

Any form of role playing, drama, or 'make believe' becomes more real and meaningful if it consciously includes social factors that relate to the situation. This is true even of role plays (or 'simulation exercises') to practice diagnosis and treatment.

Example: **A sociodrama about measles**

Suppose a group of student health workers acts out a scene in which a mother brings in a child with signs of measles. A student acting the role of health worker tries to diagnose the problem and advise the mother. This role play can be made far more real and useful if local social factors that commonly relate to the problem are acted out. Social factors can include those that relate to local traditions (*cultural factors*), those that relate to money or its lack (*economic factors*), and those that relate to who has power over whom (*political factors*).

Here are some possibilities (based on social factors in Mexico):

**CULTURAL FACTORS:** The 'mother' insists that her child with measles should be given a purge or enema of kapok bark to bring out his rash (see *Where There Is No Doctor*, p. 11). She also believes it is dangerous to feed her child while he has a fever. *Can the health worker help the mother change her views without making her feel stupid or ashamed, or showing disrespect for her traditions?*



**ECONOMIC FACTORS:** The mother has several other small children who do not yet have measles, but who are poorly nourished. The father has no land and most of the time no work. The health worker reads in the book that measles is especially dangerous for malnourished children. *What can the health worker do for this particular family?*

**POLITICAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS:** Let us suppose the mother lacks confidence in the health worker. This is partly because the health worker is from a poor family, and partly because the doctor on his weekly visits orders him around like a servant. The mother insists on giving her child a purge unless the health worker gives him an injection—which she believes the doctor would do. *Can the health worker convince her, in a friendly way, that both purge and injection are unnecessary and might be harmful?*

Acting out these kinds of social factors that arise from the local reality can make the role play—or 'sociodrama'—a far more useful learning experience. It helps prepare health workers to handle the human problems that are bound to arise when they work in a community.

## CLASSROOM ROLE PLAYS THAT LEAD TO COMMUNITY THEATER PRODUCTIONS

Some of the best village theater presentations we have seen have grown out of role plays and sociodramas that first took place in the classroom.

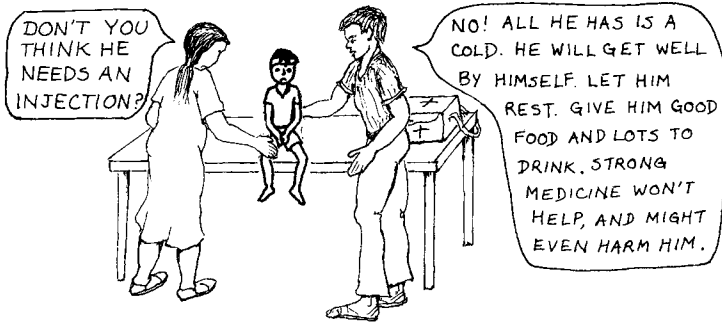
Example: **A skit about sensible treatment of the common cold**

A common difficulty for health workers is trying to convince people that injections and antibiotics are not needed for the common cold. Some health workers in Mexico used role playing to explore this problem. They acted out such a powerful skit that they decided to develop it into a short play and present it to the whole village. In its final form it included the following scenes:

**Scene 1.** A mother, Marta, arrives at the health post with her small son, Ringo, who has a bad cold. She asks the health worker to give him an injection. The health worker examines the boy and finds only signs of a common cold.



He gives the appropriate advice:

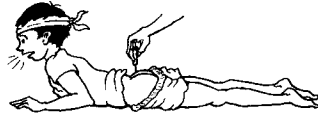


**Note:** This is an example of how some of the pictures in *Where There Is No Doctor* and this book can be developed into role plays, stories, and skits. (Picture from p. w19 of *WTND*.)

But Marta insists that her son needs an injection of *Respicil*. (This is an antibiotic containing penicillin and streptomycin, commonly used in Mexico for colds, by doctors and by people in general.) The health worker explains as best he can why antibiotics are of no help for colds and may be harmful, but Marta looks doubtful. She thanks the health worker and leaves.

**Scene 2.** Another mother, Gloria, arrives with her daughter, Ana, who has a bad cold, too. Gloria also wants her child to be injected. But she listens to the health worker's advice and decides to try treating Ana with fruit juice, aspirin, and good food. For the cough, she agrees to give her daughter lots of water, and to have her breathe hot water vapors. The health worker shows Gloria how.

**Scene 3.** Marta, on leaving the health post, goes to the home of an *inyectadora* (a woman who injects). Much to Ringo's protests, the woman injects him. He screams in pain. Then, limping and crying, Ringo is led away by his mother.



**Scene 4.** (Several days later.) Marta brings Ringo to the health worker. The boy limps in with the aid of a stick. He has a high fever, and an abscess on his backside where he was injected. The health worker recommends hot soaks and other appropriate treatment. He reminds Marta not to inject any of her children the next time they have a cold.

**Scene 5.** On their way home, Marta and Ringo meet Gloria and Ana on the street. Gloria asks Marta why her boy is limping. Marta explains, but adds, "At least the injection cured him of his cold!"

"Maybe not," says Gloria. "My Ana had a bad cold at the same time as your son. But I followed the health worker's advice. I gave her lots of fruit juices and aspirin and good food. She got over her cold in no time!"

"I'm sure glad I didn't get an injection and end up like you," says Ana to Ringo.

"Next time my boy has a cold, I won't have him injected either," says Marta. "I'll just give him aspirin!"

"Don't forget fruit juice, lots of water, and good food," says Ana. "They help fight off the cold. Next time Ringo will get well again as fast as I did!"





# IDEAS FOR USING DRAMA TO TEACH ABOUT HEALTH

## 1. The value of homemade, open-ended drama

In this chapter we describe in detail some 'skits' that have been performed by health workers and villagers. But it is not our hope that any of these will be repeated as such. They are examples of how groups of health workers, mothers, and children can create their own performances.

**Those who present a play or skit will learn twice as much if they also take part in creating or writing it.** The story can be developed from the actual ideas and experiences of the participants. The group must invent the story and figure out how to present local problems in a convincing way. This helps them develop skills in planning, thinking, problem solving, organizing, and communicating. All these extra benefits are lost when students simply memorize a script written by someone else.

## 2. Encouraging people to speak in their own words (not memorize parts)

Speaking in public is not easy for many health workers and villagers. Often the poor are used to remaining silent in village meetings, while a select few do the talking and make the decisions. At first, health workers-in-training may be embarrassed to speak or play act in front of a group. Too shy to say things in their own words, they will often prefer to memorize the words of someone else. This takes more work, but seems safer. They feel less exposed.

However, the ability to stand up and state one's own thoughts with confidence is an extremely important skill—especially for those who would speak for the 'voiceless poor'. So encourage health workers to use their own words in role plays rather than simply parroting lines they have memorized.

But go slowly. Help people gain confidence little by little. Start with role plays in the classroom or with a small group in which everyone takes part. This way there is no audience. Or rather, all are actors and audience at the same time. As the students become more confident, they can begin to do presentations for larger groups.

BEFORE



Taking part in role playing and people's theater helps the 'voiceless poor' gain confidence, courage, and skill to speak their thoughts.

AFTER



With practice, it is amazing how fast people's self-confidence can grow. We have seen a student group of village health workers who at first were so shy they would blush in confusion when asked a question in class. By the end of the two-month course, they enthusiastically presented a half-hour social drama for visiting instructors from several countries, speaking loud and clear in their own words. Their increase in confidence made the effort more than worth it!

### 3. Involving mothers and children—Be sure the drama is important to them

Health workers may be able to interest women or children in putting on skits or puppet shows for the community. People are more likely to take part if the subject of the drama is important to them.

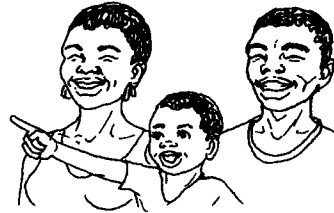
For example, in Ajoya, Mexico most of the women refused in principle to be seen 'on stage'. But when they learned that a play was being planned on the problem of drunkenness, even some of the most reserved elderly women were eager to take part. (See p. 27-19.)

### 4. Entertainment is more powerful than preaching

If popular theater is to reach many people, especially those who are most difficult to reach, it needs above all to be entertaining.

Theater can be used for health education. It can help get people thinking about specific problems and possibilities for action. It can contain a strong social message. But if it is to hold an audience and convince people to come back for more, **care must be taken not to preach**. Few people enjoy being told what they should or should not do, especially when they have come to have a good time.

It is more effective if the message is built into the story. The positive or negative results of the actors' actions can be made obvious. But let the people in the audience be free to draw their own conclusions. Respect their judgement and their intelligence!



### 5. Leaving time for discussion afterwards

Whether it is a role play in the classroom or a theater presentation in the village, a discussion afterwards will help people relate personally to what they have seen. A follow-up discussion can help turn playful acting on the stage into positive action in the community.



For example, following a village skit on "Useless Medicines that Sometimes Kill" (see p. 27-14), the audience formed a committee to visit all the stores in town. The committee asked storekeepers not to sell common useless or dangerous medicines, or at least to warn people about their dangers and proper use. As a result, some of the shopkeepers actually stopped selling certain medicines. When customers asked for those medicines, the shopkeepers took time to explain why they no longer sold them.

**Follow-up discussions get people personally involved!**

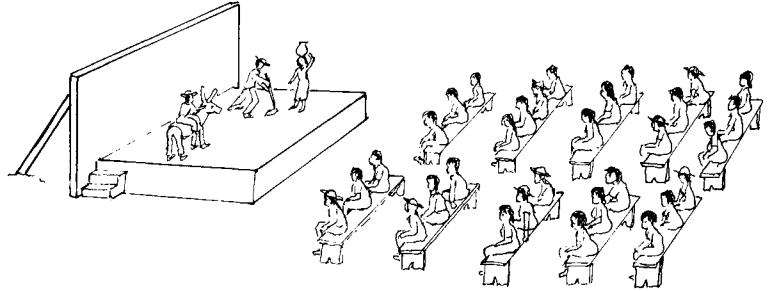
# TECHNIQUES FOR EFFECTIVE, ENTERTAINING THEATER

## 1. The place and the stage

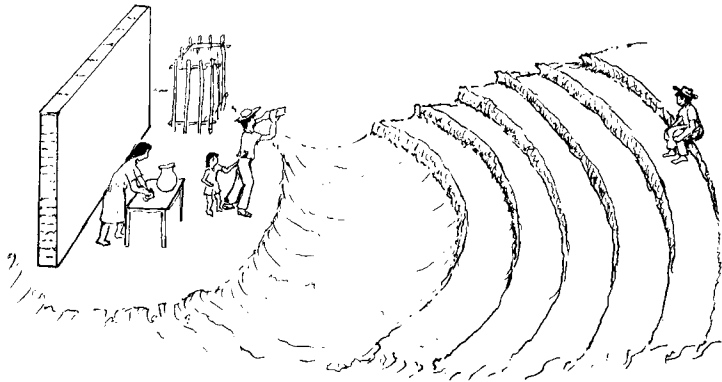
Popular theater can be performed almost anywhere. Sometimes a group of actors may simply begin to perform on the street. Little by little, people gather around to watch. Sometimes children or other persons from the crowd are encouraged to join in the spontaneous performance. The stage is life itself.

More often, however, a fixed area is used—either indoors, or outdoors in a large courtyard or enclosure.

Some sort of stage or platform lets the audience see better. You can build one from wood or blocks of adobe (mud brick). But this is expensive.



Your town may have a natural stage: a small hill in front of a slope where people can sit. If the school children and other villagers help with picks and shovels, the area can soon be made into a natural theater, or 'amphitheater'.



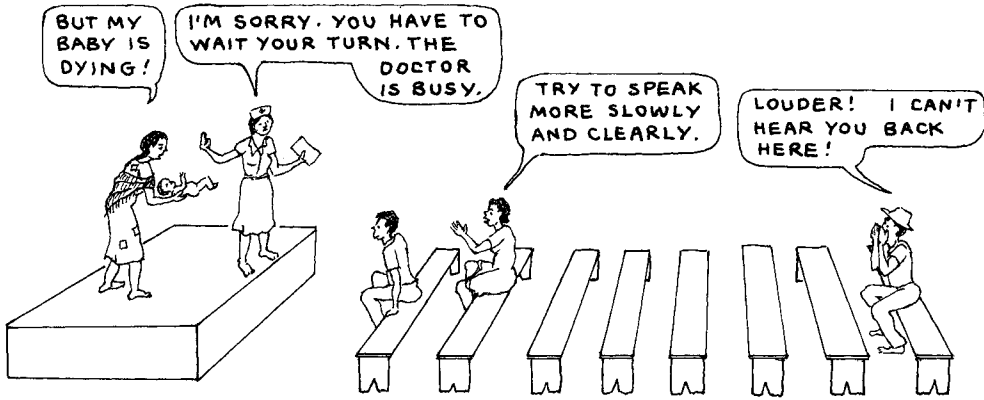
## 2. The crowd and being heard

In popular theater, one of the biggest difficulties the actors have is trying to be heard. When a whole village attends, mothers will be there with babies who begin to cry. Children of all ages will shout, laugh, play, and fight. There is almost always some sort of noise.

In villages that have electricity or a generator, microphones with loudspeakers may be available. But commonly they do not work. They buzz and squeak, or distort voices so much that it is hard to understand what is being said.

Usually the best solution is for the actors to shout. **They should try to speak so that the people farthest away can hear them.** When practicing, it helps if someone stands far away and interrupts every time he cannot understand what is said. Speaking slowly and clearly also helps. And never speak with your back to the audience.

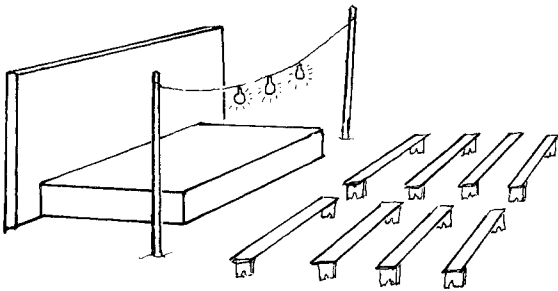
If you think that the crowd will be too big, it may help to put on 2 or 3 performances. Invite part of the village one time, and the rest another time.



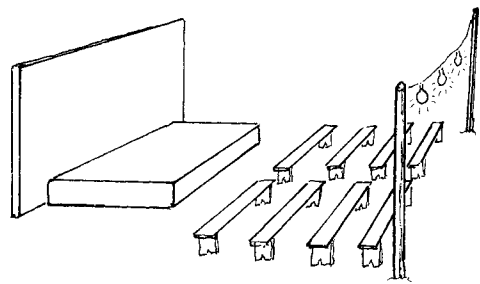
### 3. Lighting

Performances are often more effective after dark. Also, more working people can attend at night. But some form of lighting is needed. Gasoline or kerosene lamps can be used, or electric lights if available.

**Be careful not to place the lights between the audience and the actors,** unless the lights are covered so they do not shine in people's eyes.

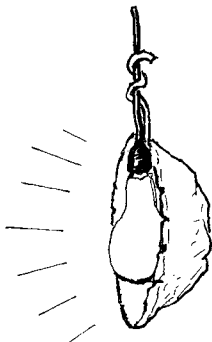


**BAD**  
(unless reflective shields are used)

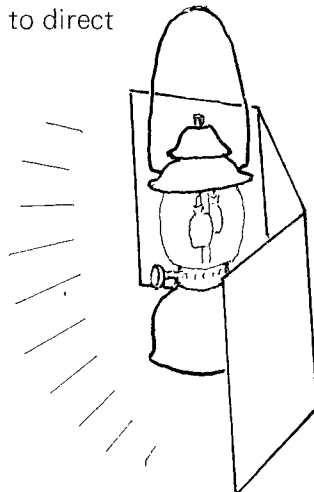


**BETTER**

If possible, use a **reflective shield** to direct light toward the stage.



A shield of tin or aluminum foil.



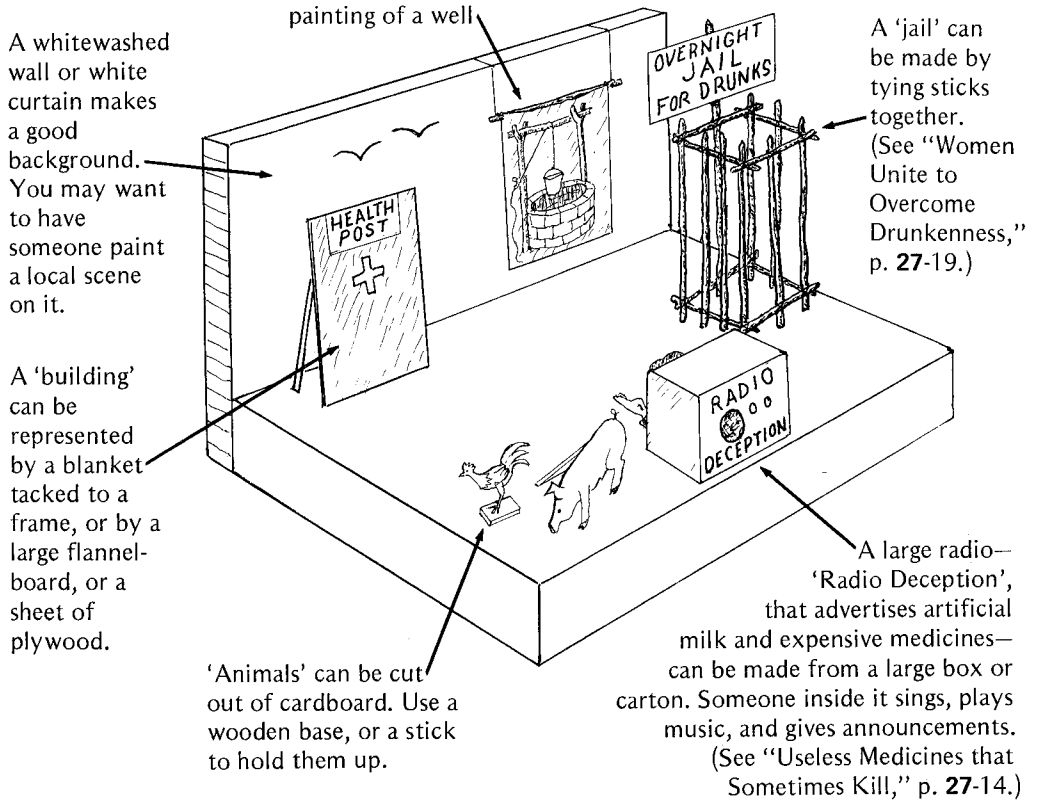
Shield reflector made from an old tin.

(These lamps can be put on the front edge of the stage, but take care not to kick them off!)

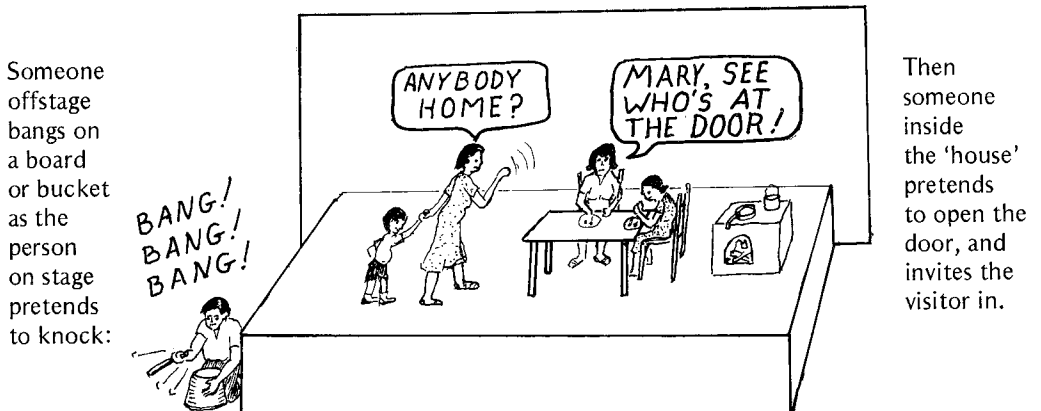
#### 4. Props and costumes

Props are objects such as tables, chairs, and tools, that are used on stage to add a sense of reality to a play.

A few simple props can be helpful, especially if they are colorful or imaginative. Here are some ideas:

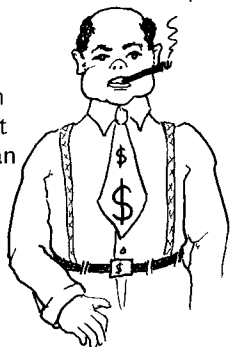


A few good, simple props are usually all that are needed. Many things, like walls and doors, can be imagined. The actors can help the audience imagine things are there, and this adds to the fun. For example, if the scene is inside a house, someone can pretend to knock on an unseen door:



Costumes, like props, can usually be kept simple. Easy-to-understand symbols help get ideas across. For example:

A tie with a money sign can represent a businessman (or expert from the city).



Ragged clothes with brightly colored patches represent the poor farmer.



## 5. Keeping people's attention: Action, tears, and fun

Entertainment does not simply mean being funny. Some amount of humor is important, but too much can quickly become boring. A play or drama will hold people's attention best if it has lots of movement, action, and surprises.

Try for a **balance between serious or sad events, and light or humorous ones.** Moments of humor or 'comic relief' are especially important when the story is disturbing or threatening. Humor can be introduced in many ways. Here are a few possibilities:

### a) Use of strange-looking or comical masks or puppets.

It helps if these look enough like real people or things to be recognizable. Some puppets or masks can be worked into almost any kind of theater production.



### b) Persons dressed up as animals always bring laughter.



### c) Giving amusing or symbolic names to the characters.

For example, in the play in Spanish, "Small Farmers Unite to Overcome Exploitation" (see page 27-27), the rich maize-lender was named Brutelio, and his wife Doña Exploitiva. The poor man who worked for Brutelio rather than joining the others in their struggle for their rights was called Lamberino, which in Spanish means 'Boot-licker'.

d) **'Comic relief'**

A play called "Farmworkers Unite to Overcome Hunger" was put on by student health workers to get people thinking about how they might recover land held illegally by the rich. If irrigated, this land could produce two harvests a year and help landless farmworkers to feed their families. This serious play was made lighter at moments by the use of a papier mache donkey with two people inside it.



During one of the most serious scenes, 'comic relief' was provided by the donkey. It would nod its head in agreement with the farmworkers' decisions to take over the land.

e) **Use of songs, dance, and music**

Songs and music make a drama more entertaining. The play mentioned above opened with the singing of popular songs for which the health workers had written new words. And one scene showed a 'work festival' in which people dug an irrigation ditch to the rhythm of songs and music by the village musicians. The play finished with a celebration and dance—in which even the donkey began to dance!



Songs with health messages can be introduced through popular theater. If the songs are clever enough, people may pick them up and continue singing them. This happened in Africa with a song about preventing eye disease, called "Brush the Flies from Baby's Eyes."

You might try giving a group of health workers, mothers, or school children a line like "Brush the flies from baby's eyes . . ." and see who can come up with the best song. Then perhaps it could be presented in a skit or puppet show. (See also the songs on pages 1-27 and 15-15.)



### f) Sound effects

Sound effects, or artificial noises can be produced in many ways. Children can also help with sound effects for a play.



Children can make animal noises at the right moment while they are hidden from the audience.



You can make the sound of thunder by shaking a large piece of sheet metal.

### g) Including the audience in the act

People in the audience will become more interested and involved if they have a chance to take part along with the actors in a skit or play.

Try asking the audience to join in songs that are sung as a part of the drama.

Or, when the actors have a 'village meeting' on stage, invite a few persons from the audience to attend, too. Or include the entire audience in the 'meeting'. Ask the opinions of people in the audience to resolve arguments that are being acted out during the play.

At the end of a scene or of the play, the actors (or puppets) can come down from the stage and move through the audience, shaking hands and greeting people. Or, if the play ends in a dance of celebration, the whole audience can be invited to join in.

## HEALTH FESTIVALS AND CIRCUSES

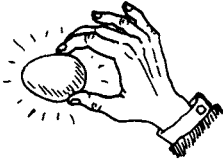
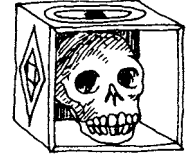
Some community programs organize periodic 'health festivals', or evenings of theater and entertainment.

In Ajoya, Mexico, such an evening of entertainment and farmworkers' theater is planned for the end of each 2-month training course. The health workers-in-training, together with mothers' groups and school children, put on several skits, plays, or puppet shows. These focus on important health and social concerns in the village. Between shows, the village musicians play and sing, or young people perform traditional dances.



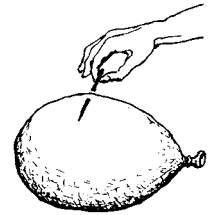
In the "Hospital without Walls" program in San Ramon, Costa Rica, the health team conducts a traveling 'health circus' with music, skits, and games. One of the biggest attractions is the 'magic show' in which Don Valeriano, a local magician, performs tricks that help teach aspects of health care. Here are 3 of his tricks:\*

First he 'magically' changes several glassfuls of water into *guaro* (a cheap alcoholic drink). He then takes an empty box, covers it with a cloth, and asks children from the audience to guard it. He says a few magic words, pulls away the cloth, and the skull of a man who died from alcoholism appears inside the box. The skull starts to tell the audience about the dangers of drinking.



Don Valeriano waves a handkerchief over his hand, blows on it, says some magic words, and an egg appears in his hand. He then explains the importance of eggs in good nutrition.

He blows up a white balloon, which represents a bottle-fed, malnourished baby who has not been vaccinated. He then takes a needle, stating that it is a disease, and pricks the balloon. The balloon pops, which means the child dies. He then blows up a red balloon, representing a healthy, breastfed, vaccinated baby. When he tries to prick this balloon, it does not pop. The needle appears to pass right through it!



Having local entertainers help people learn about health can be exciting and effective. But beware of giving the idea that health care is 'magic', and therefore outside people's control.

## EXAMPLES OF SOCIODRAMAS AND FARMPEOPLE'S THEATER

To follow are 4 examples of plays that have been put on by groups of mothers, children, and health workers in Ajoja, Mexico. These were all performed toward the end of 2-month training programs. The student health workers worked together with the mothers and children to plan and present the plays. In this way the students gain practical experience that helps them organize similar activities in their own villages.

Notice that each of these plays deals with an important social issue affecting people's health. Less dramatic forms of health education often are not effective in dealing with these issues because of people's strong attitudes, fears, and beliefs. But when people actually see (on stage) the harm or suffering that can result from certain practices, they are far more likely to take the message to heart.

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\*Adapted from *Salubritas*, American Public Health Association, vol. 3, number 2. April, 1979.

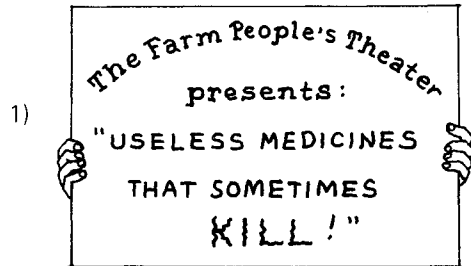
## VILLAGE THEATER

### EXAMPLE 1: USELESS MEDICINES THAT SOMETIMES KILL

Overuse and misuse of medicines is a problem in many countries (see Ch. 18). In Mexico, this problem is made worse by international drug companies that advertise '**patent medicines**' by radio. They do this during the hours before dawn, when many farm families listen to popular country music. The medicines advertised are very expensive and of little use, yet many people are convinced by the smooth-talking voice in the radio. So they waste their limited money on vitamin tonics and other 'wonder drugs'.

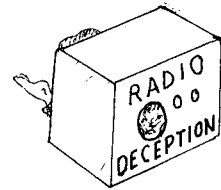
Also, many rural people in Mexico and elsewhere believe that **intravenous solution** has tremendous healing powers. Villagers call it "artificial life." Instead of buying nutritious food, older people who are weak or anemic sometimes spend their last pesos to have a nurse or 'modern healer' put a liter of I.V. solution into their veins.

The following play tries to show the dangers of this kind of misuse of medicines. It was put on for the village of Ajoja by the team of local health workers, as part of a training program.



2) It is nearly dawn. The rooster crows, "Cock-a-doodle-doo." (The rooster is actually a health worker in costume; see p. 27-10.) The old man and his wife stir in bed, as they usually wake up early in the morning.

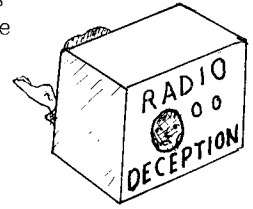
Beside the bed is an enormous 'radio' with a sign that reads "RADIO DECEPTION." Hidden inside the radio is an actor.



3) Old Doña Luisa turns on the radio. There are the sounds of country music. Then the voice from the radio says, "Good morning to you all. The last song was dedicated to Juanita Torres in Ajoja, Sinaloa. And now, before we play more country favorites, a word from Meyerhov Drug Company: Are you feeling weak and tired? Do you find it hard to wake up in the morning? You may be suffering from 'tired blood'. What you need are the new VITA-MEYERHOV vitamin pills. You'll wake up every morning feeling like dancing! Remember, VITA-MEYERHOV!"



4) As Doña Luisa gets up and begins to make maize tortillas for breakfast, the music and advertisements continue. But look! Her husband, Don Lino, is still in bed!



He feels too weak to get up.



5) Finally Doña Luisa coaxes him out of bed and gives him a cup of coffee. He asks what there is for breakfast. She answers, "Just tortillas. You know that's all we have."



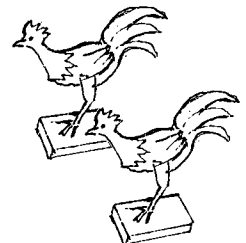
6) Just then, they hear a knock on the door. (Bang, bang, bang.) It is their neighbor, who makes his living by selling medicines that he buys in the city.



7) Today he is selling VITA-MEYERHOV. Old Luisa is excited because she just heard about VITA-MEYERHOV on the radio. She is sure that it will make her husband wake up strong and eager to work, like before. The salesman tells them the bottle is worth 300 pesos. But since they are such good friends, he will let them have it for only 150 pesos.

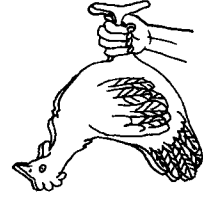


8) But the old couple only has 50 pesos. So they have to sell their 2 chickens, at 50 pesos each, in order to pay for the vitamins.





9) As their neighbor, the salesman, walks away with the chickens, the couple eagerly talks about how wonderful things will be when old Lino's health is restored.



10) The next scene takes place a few weeks later. Again it is dawn, the rooster crows, "Cock-a-doodle-dooo," and Doña Luisa turns on the radio. The beat of ranchero music drifts out into the silent dawn. The radio announcer wishes a good morning to all, and goes on with more praise for the products from Meyerhov Drug Company.



11) While the radio announcer is praising the miraculous VITA-MEYERHOV, we see old Lino is too weak to get out of bed by himself. His wife tries to pull him out.



12) Lino tries to get up, but falls to the ground. Doña Luisa cannot lift him up by herself.



13) Frightened, she runs out to get help from the village health worker. The health worker comes running.



14) Between them, Doña Luisa and the health worker lift Lino back onto the bed. The health worker figures out that his weakness comes from not eating well. The family has barely enough maize to make tortillas, and none to trade for beans. They sold their last 2 chickens to buy the VITA-MEYERHOV vitamins.



15) The health worker explains that the eggs from those chickens would have helped Lino much more than the vitamin pills. But



Doña Luisa is not convinced. She thinks that her husband should be given 'artificial life' (I.V. solution). The health worker tells her that this is just sugar water; it would be safer and cheaper for Lino simply to mix sugar and water, and drink it. But what the old man really needs is more and better food. Maybe their neighbors can get together and help them out with the food problem. He will speak to them.



16) After the village health worker leaves, the old man and his wife talk things over. They are not sure they trust the young health worker. "What does he know? He is just a villager like us! We saw him when he was born. An ugly baby at that!" They decide to get Miss Ivy, the nurse, to give Lino an I.V.



17) So that afternoon, Miss Ivy comes to the house. (To make the play more entertaining, the role of Miss Ivy is played by the same young man who plays the health worker. He has to change costumes quickly!)



18) Nurse Ivy gives Lino an intravenous solution. He says he feels a little stronger already.



19) Because they do not have much money, the old couple gives the nurse their prize rooster as partial payment for her services. But they will still owe her money.



20) The next morning when old Luisa wakes up, she notices that Lino has a fever and seems very ill. She cannot waken him.



21) She runs to get the village health worker. He comes right away. He asks what could have happened to cause this sudden turn for the worse. Doña Luisa admits that they did not follow his advice and instead gave Lino I.V. solution.



22) The health worker examines Lino and finds that he is in critical condition, probably because of an infection in the blood introduced with the I.V. solution. He runs back to the health post to get antibiotics to fight the infection.



23) But before the health worker can return with the medicine, Lino dies. The lesson is painfully clear:

**FOOD, NOT MEDICINE, IS THE KEY TO GOOD HEALTH--  
ESPECIALLY FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE WEAK AND HUNGRY.  
DO NOT WASTE YOUR MONEY ON VITAMINS OR OTHER  
MEDICINES ADVERTISED ON THE RADIO.**

**BUY FOOD--NOT VITAMINS!**

**AND DO NOT USE I.V. SOLUTIONS TO GAIN STRENGTH.**

## VILLAGE THEATER

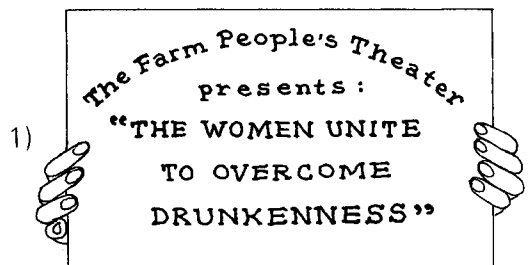
### EXAMPLE 2: THE WOMEN JOIN TOGETHER TO OVERCOME DRUNKENNESS

In many parts of the world, the drinking of alcohol is one of the biggest problems affecting family health. It is also one of the most difficult problems for health workers, mothers, or other concerned persons to do anything about.

The idea for this play came from a collectively run squatter community on the outskirts of Monterrey, Mexico. Alarmed by the abuses of drunken men, the women of the community joined together to put a stop to drinking. They convinced the community leaders to make a special jail, so that men who became abusive when drunk could be locked up until they became sober. They also went with the leaders to all the local bars and whorehouses, taking away their beer, wine, and liquor. The women thought of handing it over to the health authorities, but feared it would be sold back to illegal bars. So they held a public 'bottle-smashing festival', in which they destroyed all the confiscated alcohol.

In Ajoya (200 miles away), the village women learned about the action taken by the courageous women in Monterrey. They decided to put on a play, to show everyone what a group of women could do. Many women, including some grandmothers who would normally refuse to be seen on stage, eagerly took part when they found the play was about the problem of drinking.

The men in the play were given funny names related to drinking. Also, there were many jokes and puns in Spanish. Many of them have been lost in this translation. But if you decide to try a similar play, be sure to make it entertaining by including plenty of jokes and funny names. These provide 'comic relief' (see p. 27-11).



2) "Mama, I'm hungry!" With these words, the play begins. The scene is the home of Al Cole and his wife, Tristina. (*Triste* means 'sad' in Spanish.) Tristina is sweeping while her children cry with hunger. She explains that their father left an hour ago with the family's last money, to buy food at the village store. He should be back any minute. In fact, he is late. Tristina does not know what could be taking him so long. The children are hungry, and continue to cry and complain.



3) Finally, here comes Al Cole, Tristina's husband. He has a beer bottle in his hand. (Al and the other men's parts are played by women dressed up to look like men.)



4) Tristina asks, "Where is the food you went to buy for dinner?" Al admits that he forgot. He tries to explain that he met some friends at the store. They gave him one drink, and then another and another. "And little by little, my judgement left me!" he says. "I felt I had to buy them drinks in return. So the money is gone. I'm sorry, Tristina. Really sorry!" The children begin to cry again from hunger, louder than before. Al feels ashamed and promises never to drink again.



5) At that moment, Al's drinking buddies come along, singing loudly. (One could be named Mr. Whiskey, and his friends could call him Whiskey. The other could be called Lee Core.) They shout for Al to join them. "The night is young. We just bought more beer."



6) Tristina begs Al not to go. "You promised!" she cries. "And I'll keep my promise. This is the last time, honey. I swear it!" says Al, as he leaves with his friends. The children cry even harder.

**MAMA,  
I'M  
HUNGRY!**



7) The scene changes to the home of Whiskey, one of Al's drinking buddies. His wife, Dolores, is serving dinner to their two children. "Mama," complains the older daughter, "Why do we always eat just plain tortillas?" Her mother explains that they have no other food because Father already sold the maize crop before harvest time to get money for drinking.





8) Here comes Whiskey now, with Al Cole and Lee Core. All 3 are drunk. Whiskey demands that Dolores feed them dinner. She answers that there is nothing but plain tortillas. He gets angry. He shouts that she is a useless wife because she cannot prepare a decent dinner.



9) Dolores shouts back, "That's because you already sold the maize crop and wasted all the money on drink! How can I feed you if you don't provide the food?" Whiskey hits her. She screams and the children begin to cry.



10) At this moment, there is a knock on the door. It is Whiskey's mother. She has heard the crying and come to see what it is all about.



11) While Dolores and the children keep sobbing, the grandmother pleads with her son to stop drinking. "Can't you see the suffering you cause your wife and children?" Whiskey turns his back on her. He and his buddies begin to sing a drunken song.



12) The grandmother sends the older daughter to tell the mayor that Whiskey has beaten his wife and that the police should come to put the drunkards out of the house.

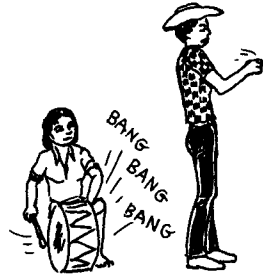




13) The daughter, at the mayor's house, explains the situation. Reluctantly, the mayor sends his policeman to throw the drunks out.



14) The policeman knocks on the door. He shouts, "I have come to bring law and order into this house."



15) The drunks jokingly ask him, "What's your order, beer or whiskey?" Since they are all old friends, the policeman joins in the drinking.



16) In despair, Grandmother sends the girl back to the mayor to report that the policeman is drinking with the other men. The girl insists that the mayor himself go to throw out the drunks.



17) The mayor admits, "The same thing always happens when I send the policeman. But since the county chief appoints only his relatives to police jobs, nothing can be done about it." So the mayor himself goes and knocks on the door. Grandmother explains the situation to him.



18) But in no time the men convince the mayor, too, to join them in a drink.



19) Soon all the men, including the mayor, are shouting and shooting 'joy shots' into the air with their guns. (In the play, firecrackers were exploded inside the pretend guns.)



20) The women decide it is too dangerous to stay at home, and they leave with the children. The drunks laugh and say they are glad to get rid of them. "We can have a better time by ourselves!" they roar.



21) The scene changes back to Al Cole's house. By now, the children have cried themselves to sleep. Tristina sits alone, weeping. "How hard life is for a woman whose man drinks. What can a woman alone do when the men have all the power?" Just then, the women and children who were driven out of Whiskey's home knock on the door. They ask if they can stay with Tristina.



22) Tristina, still weeping, explains her sad story, and the others realize that it is their sad story, too. They all cry together.





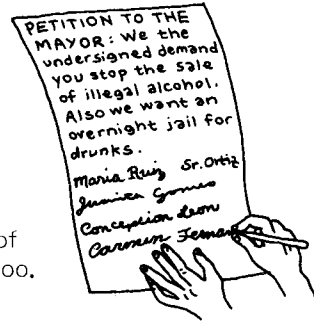
23) Other women in the neighborhood hear the loud crying and come over to see what the trouble is. They ask if they can help.



24) Together, the women discuss the drinking problem in their village. Dolores cries, "But what can a woman alone do in this world of men?" Another woman says, "Right now, we're not alone! There are lots of us here together!" She tells the others she has heard about the way women in Monterrey organized to fight drunkenness.



25) The women decide they must take action to stop the sale of illegal alcohol in their village. And they like the idea of an overnight jail for sobering up the drunks! So they write a petition and get all the women in town to sign it. Some of the men sign it, too.



26) Two days later.



27) The women's group presents their petition to the mayor. They say that if he does not meet their demands, they will go to the municipal authorities or even to the state capital to have him removed from office. The mayor shakes his head, unable to believe what he hears. "This is the first time I have ever been pushed around by a bunch of old hens!" But the women realize that united they have power. They know the mayor fears being caught for accepting bribes from the people who sell the illegal liquor—and they tell him so.



28) One month later.



29) Here, the women's group meets in the home of Dolores. They discuss how life in the village has improved now that there is an overnight jail for drunks and less selling of illegal liquor. With their new-found strength and unity, the women are discussing other local problems and what they can do about them.



30) Just as they are commenting on how few drunks there have been lately, along come two men, singing loudly. They are Al Cole and Whiskey, drunk again.



31) They stagger into the women's meeting, interrupting with loud, rude insults. They knock Tristina down because they are angry about how hard it is to buy alcohol now.



32) The women's group goes at once to the mayor and demands that the two drunks be thrown into jail until they sober up. The mayor protests, saying that they are his buddies. But the women remind him of their agreement and their threat to have him removed from office.





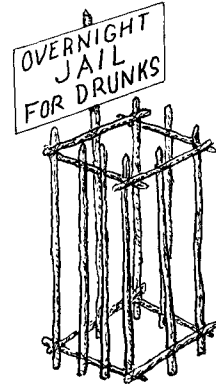
33) So, under pressure, the mayor and policeman go with the women.



34) After a short struggle, the mayor and policeman arrest Al Cole and Whiskey.



35) They throw the two drunks into jail to sober up. Here are Al and Whiskey begging to be let out. The angry women tell them they will not be released until the next morning, when they are sober.



36) At the end of the play, the women and children celebrate the strength of their unity and their efforts to improve life in their village. They cheer, "Women united will never be overcome!"

Although a lively discussion followed this skit, nothing clearly came of it until 2 years later. At that time, local officials tried to open a public bar in the village for personal profit. The community protested, and officials jailed several local health workers for being 'agitators'. The village women collected signatures for a petition against the unfair jailings and the public bar. They took their protest to the state capital, where they gained the support of newspapers, which printed this photo. As a result of the villagers' action, state officials have had no choice but to prohibit the bar from opening.

#### THE ACTION THAT FOLLOWED THE PLAY



HEALTH YES, PUB NO!

## VILLAGE THEATER

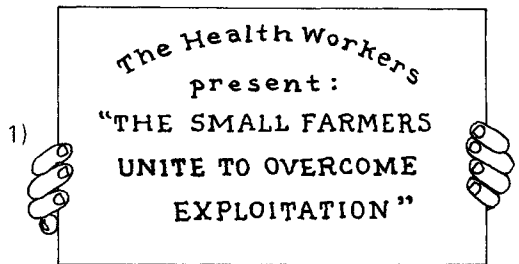
### EXAMPLE 3: SMALL FARMERS JOIN TOGETHER TO OVERCOME EXPLOITATION

Poor nutrition is a common and serious problem in most areas, yet its causes are complicated, often rooted in social injustice.

In the Project Piaxtla Clinic in Ajoja, Mexico, health workers give advice about eating well, but often the people say, "What can we do? We don't have any land. We have already borrowed maize and gone into debt. After paying the high interest rates, we never have enough left to feed and care for our families well—no matter how hard we work!"

In this part of Mexico, poor farmers often borrow maize from the rich landholders at planting time. In return, the landholders demand 2½ to 3 times as much after the harvest. That is 150 to 200% interest in five months! This high-interest loan system is one of the main causes of malnutrition in the area. Because of this, the village health team formed a cooperative maize bank, to loan maize to poor farmers at much lower interest.

After the cooperative maize bank had been operating successfully for more than 2 years, the health workers put on this play. The play helped make everyone in the village aware of why the maize bank had been started.



2) The beginning of June.



3) This is the home of a rich landholder, Don Brutelio, and his wife, Doña Explotiva. Here, on a Sunday afternoon, they sip beer and eat chocolates. Their servant, Bootkiss, is sharpening tools for the coming planting season.



4) And this (on the other side of the stage) is the home of Adan and Silvia, a poor family. Their supply of maize from last year's harvest has almost run out. They are discussing whether or not to borrow maize for the planting season from Don Brutelio. Silvia is against borrowing because, she says, the interest is so high that they might never be able to pay back what they would owe.

But they both know they have no other choice.



5) So Adan visits Brutelio to ask him for a loan, and Brutelio agrees to lend him 3 bags of maize. In December Adan will have to pay back 9 bags of maize for the 3 bags he borrowed.



6) Near the end of December.

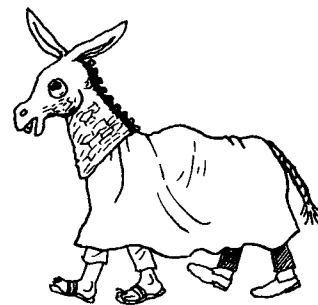
The growing season is over and the harvest has been picked.



7) Adan is delivering the last of the 9 bags of maize that he owes. Don Brutelio has Bootkiss, his servant, measure it. He tells Adan that it is not enough; some maize is still owed. Adan insists that he measured it carefully at home before bringing it. But what can he do?



8) Adan is forced to give Brutelio his only donkey to complete the payment.







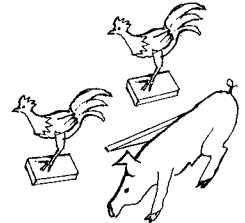
9) Adan returns home and tells Silvia the sad story. Now, without the donkey, it will be much harder to carry firewood and water to their house. They have only two bags of maize left to last them till the next harvest. Adan and Silvia suspect that Brutelio cheats them by using one scale when he lends the maize, and another when he is paid back.



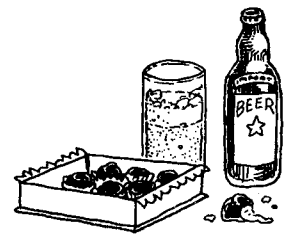
10) Because it did not rain enough during the growing season, other families are also having trouble paying their debts. This man, Carlos, explains to Brutelio that if he pays all the maize he owes him, he will have nothing left for his family. He asks for an extension of the loan.



11) Brutelio refuses to extend the loan. Instead, he sends Bootkiss to take away all the family's animals. They have only one pig and two chickens. As Bootkiss takes the animals, Carlos tries to comfort his wife, who is weeping. With nothing left, they may have to move to the slums of the city.



12) When Bootkiss returns with the animals, Brutelio and Explotiva sit drinking beer and eating chocolates, as usual.



13) Doña Explotiva is overjoyed. "With what we have collected in interest this year, we can buy a color television set—this big!"





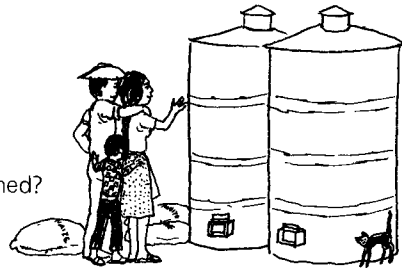
14) The next months are hard ones for the poor families in the area. Carlos and his wife, Juanita, bring their sick daughter to the two village health workers in the local clinic. The girl has chronic diarrhea and is getting very thin. While they are talking, Adan and Silvia arrive. Their daughter has a bad cold that has lasted for weeks without getting better. At night her coughing keeps everyone awake.



15) As they all talk together, they realize that both health problems are caused, at least in part, by the same thing: **not eating enough good food**. But what can they do about it? The health workers tell them about a village in Guatemala where the farmers started a co-op to loan grain at low interest rates to people in the area. Everyone agrees that, by working together, they may be able to solve their common problem. Eagerly they begin to make plans.



16) Two years later. What has been accomplished?



17) Here are the same villagers, scooping maize out of one of the co-op's homemade storage bins. This maize is loaned at much lower interest than the rich landholders used to charge. The poor farmers are now almost free from debt. They have built themselves a brighter future. Never again will they have to turn over their harvests to the rich while their children go hungry!



18) The play ends as everyone shouts,

**WE FARM PEOPLE UNITED  
WILL NEVER BE  
DEFEATED!  
HURRAH FOR THE  
CO-OP MAIZE BANK!**

## VILLAGE THEATER

### EXAMPLE 4: THE IMPORTANCE OF BREAST FEEDING

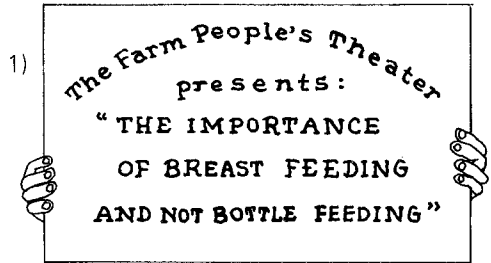
As part of the CHILD-to-child Program in Ajoya, Mexico, school children conducted a 'diarrhea survey' in their own homes. (This is described on page 24-17.) From the survey the children learned that, in their village, **diarrhea is 5 times more common in bottle-fed babies than in breast-fed babies.** They also found that over 70% of the mothers were bottle feeding their babies!

Some of the women in Ajoya were very disturbed by the children's findings. A group of them decided to put on this play, to make the whole community aware of the importance of breast feeding. The health workers helped the women plan and organize the play.

**Note:** The 'babies' used in this play were made from cardboard, carefully colored to make them look real. To show the 3 babies at different ages and states of health, 8 different cardboard figures were used.



This bottle-fed baby, malnourished and with diarrhea, was brought to village health workers in Ajoya for treatment.



2) First, the main characters introduce themselves. Their names are symbolic. Adapted for this translation, they are:

- CHARITY: the village health worker
- VANITY: a rich woman, but vain (overly proud)
- MODESTY: a poor woman, but modest
- PRUDENCE: a poor woman, but prudent (wise)



3) One day Modesty and Vanity meet in the street. They stop to chat about their babies. Both babies were born during the same week, and both look beautiful and healthy.



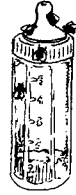
4) Prudence arrives with her baby, also healthy and about the same age. The 3 mothers compare how they feed their babies. Modesty has decided to bottle feed hers because the radio says it is better. But she admits it will be a sacrifice to buy the milk and she might have to add a lot of water to it. Vanity says she bottle feeds her baby because it is more convenient, and "so my breasts won't sag." Prudence does not agree. In her family, breast feeding has always been the tradition. She insists that breast-fed babies are more likely to grow up strong and healthy.



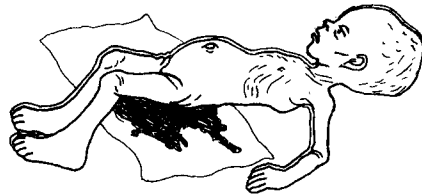
5) Modesty and Vanity laugh at Prudence. They say she is old fashioned because she does not bottle feed her baby.



6) But let us look at the babies ONE MONTH LATER.



7) Modesty and Vanity meet in the street. Notice how thin and sick their babies are.



8) Vanity explains that her baby has had diarrhea for weeks, and does not seem to get any better. Right now the baby poops again. (She shows the dirty nappy.)



9) Modesty says that her baby also has a lot of diarrhea. Right then her baby poops, too! What can the mothers do with their skinny, sick children?



10) Just then Prudence comes by. Her baby looks strong and healthy. It has grown a lot. The other two mothers look at it jealously. Modesty suddenly realizes that bottle feeding may be the cause of her baby's diarrhea. She wishes she could breast feed her child, but says it is too late. Her breasts have dried up. But Prudence tells her about an aunt who started to breast feed her baby again after her milk was gone. She suggests that Modesty speak with Charity, the health worker, to see if she has any advice.



11) Modesty is eager to talk with Charity. She asks Vanity if she wants to go with her. But Vanity says, "Not me!" and leaves to buy medicine for her baby's diarrhea.



12) Modesty visits Charity and explains her problem. Charity tells her that, in many cases, mothers can get their milk back after their breasts have dried up. She gives her 4 suggestions from *Where There Is No Doctor*:

1. Drink lots of liquid—water, juice, tea, or any other drink.
2. Eat as well as possible—especially milk, milk products, and foods rich in protein, such as beans, nuts, dark green leafy vegetables, eggs, chicken, meat, and fish.
3. Get plenty of sleep, and try to avoid getting tired or upset.
4. Nurse the baby often. Put him on the breast each time he is hungry, before you feed him other food.



Modesty is eager to try the suggestions.

13) Let us see the results TWO MONTHS LATER.



14) Modesty and Prudence meet in the street. Notice that Modesty's baby is now as fat and healthy as Prudence's baby. The 2 mothers are happy to see their children so healthy. They realize that it is because they are breast fed.

But what about Vanity's baby?



15) Just then Vanity arrives. By the black veil she is wearing, we can tell that her baby has died. With sad eyes she looks at Modesty's child. "How vain and foolish I was not to breast feed my baby. It cost his life to teach me that breast is best. If I have another baby, I'll breast feed him, believe me!"



16) At the end of the skit, the health worker comes out with two posters made by the children of Ajoya. She gives a summary of what the children found out in their survey.

**BOTTLE FEEDING  
CAUSES DIARRHEA.**



17)

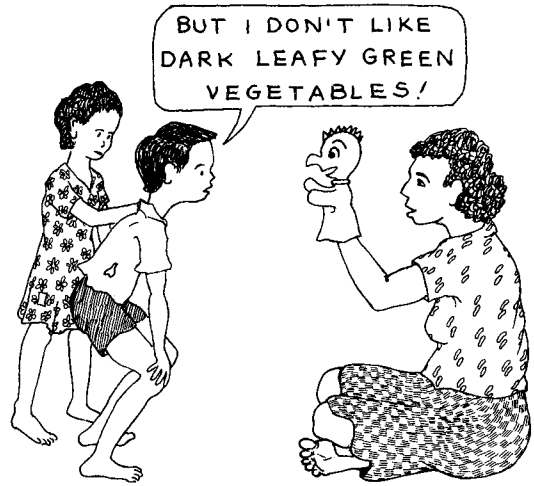
**BREAST FEEDING  
KEEPS BABY  
HEALTHY !**

**Questions to ask health workers or people from the community after presenting this play** (or the color slides or filmstrip):

- Does this problem exist in our community?
- Could the children or families here make a similar survey?
- What do you think of this idea for presenting the results of the survey in a short skit for the entire community?
- What else can we do to help solve the problem?

## PUPPET SHOWS

Using puppets is a fun way to help children learn about health. Some health workers who have had trouble holding children's attention or getting them to speak their ideas, have found simple hand puppets especially useful. Children who are afraid to speak or argue with an adult will often talk freely to puppets.



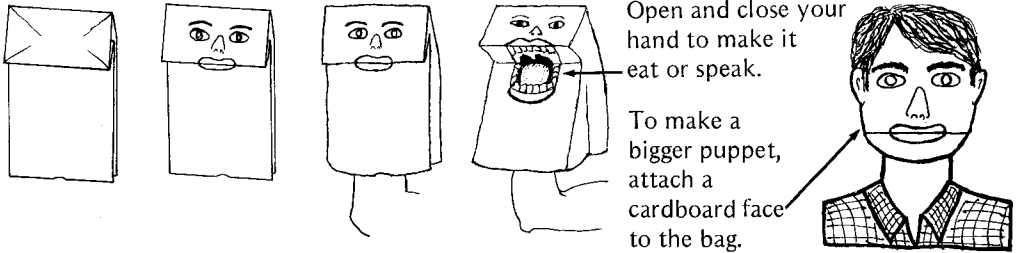
### HOW CHILDREN CAN MAKE PUPPETS

#### Puppets that open their mouths:

These work especially well for health skits about the mouth, throat, or teeth.

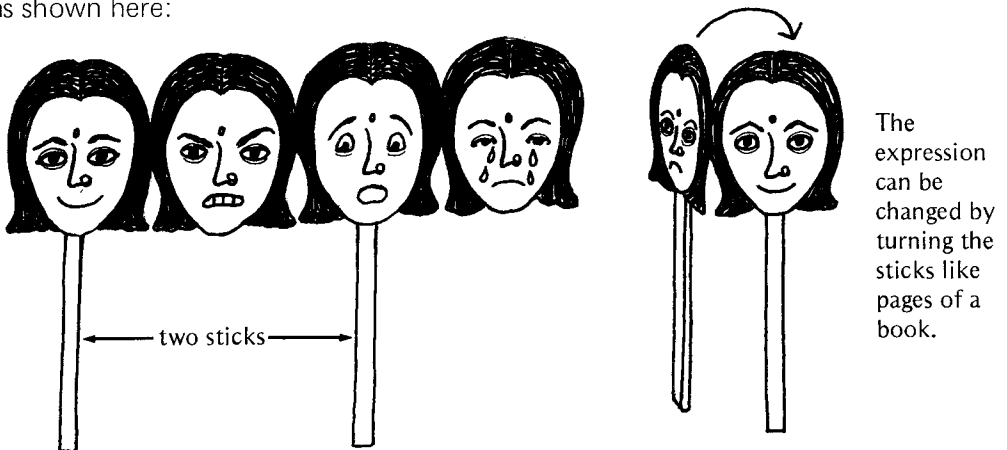
Children are more likely to say what they think when talking with puppets.

They are easy to make from a paper bag with the bottom folded over:



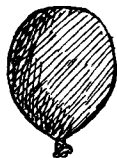
#### Puppets that change faces:

On page 24-8 we show how 'stick puppets' can be made to change the expression on their faces. However, in the way shown, only 2 different expressions are possible. The puppet below can have 4 different expressions—happy, angry, worried, and sad. Glue 2 pairs of faces back-to-back and attach them to 2 sticks as shown here:



## Making hand puppets out of papier mache (one of many ways):

balloon  
or  
gourd



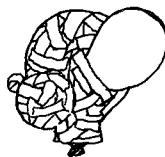
paste made  
of flour  
and water



strips of  
newsprint or  
other paper

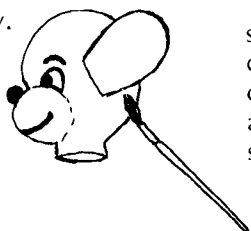


Put on  
several  
layers.

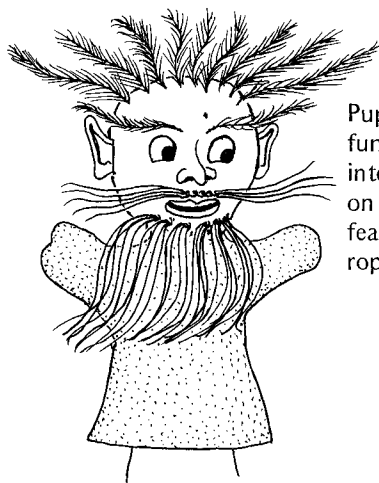


Let it dry.

Pop the  
balloon  
and  
paint it.



soft  
cloth  
cut  
and  
sewn



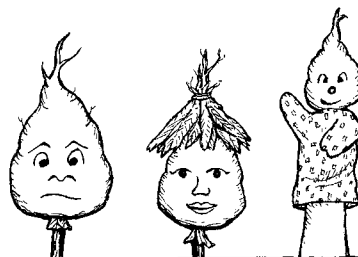
Puppets can be made  
funnier or more  
interesting by gluing  
on 'hair' made of  
feathers or unraveled  
rope.

A local artist  
from Nepal  
makes a papier  
mache puppet.



### Vegetable puppets:

Carve faces  
on squash,  
turnips,  
potatoes,  
etc.



### Guidelines for children's puppet shows:

- Keep your puppet facing the audience (especially flat puppets).
- Stay hidden behind the curtain.
- Move and nod your puppet when it speaks.
- Speak loudly, so everyone can hear.
- Use your own words instead of memorizing.
- Practice until everyone knows what to say and when.



## PUPPET SHOWS—AN EXAMPLE

### HOW TO CARE FOR THE TEETH

#### Preparations with the children

The Ajoya training course for health workers usually ends with an evening of skits and plays for the public. These usually deal with the causes of health problems in the town.

One year the school children also wanted to take part in the 'cultural festival'. So with the help of the health workers-in-training, a group of children planned and prepared their own skit. The health workers encouraged the children to make most of the decisions themselves. The children decided:

**Where** to meet and practice (the school, since it was empty in the evenings).

**How** to present the skit. They decided to use puppets (because they had seen puppets in another festival and liked them a lot).

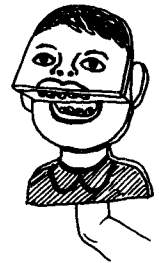
**What** idea to present. They decided on prevention of tooth cavities because many of them suffered from this problem. (Children often insult each other by saying, "You have rotten teeth!")



1) At the beginning, the children thought they could not make puppets themselves. But some of the health workers knew an easy way to make puppets out of paper bags. Because these puppets can open their mouths, they are particularly good for showing teeth. Here we see the children and one of the health workers making the puppets.

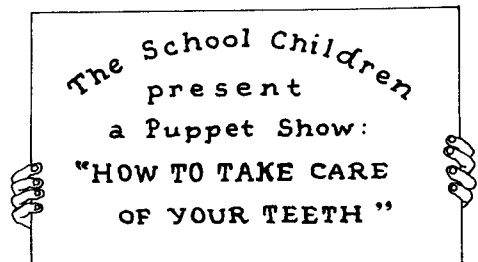


2) Each child gave his puppet a name. This boy named his puppet Sweet Tooth. It became one of the main characters. Puppets with good teeth were given names like Whitey, Pearl, and Sparkie. Puppets with bad teeth were named Candy, Sweetie, Sugar, Lolly, and Pop.



#### THE PUPPET SHOW

3) Here we see the children showing their puppets before going behind the curtain to present the show. The sign reads:

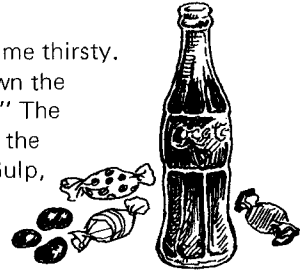




4) The show opens with Sweet Tooth alone, eating candy. The child working the puppet puts candies in Sweet Tooth's mouth, and he chews them. Crunch, crunch, crunch. "Ahhhh, I like candy so much! I could spend all day eating sweets!"



5) "Boy, that made me thirsty. I think I'll wash down the sweets with a Coke." The child lifts a Coke to the puppet's mouth. "Gulp, gulp, gulp."



6) Sweet Tooth's friend, Pearl, appears. "Hello Pearl," he says. "My, you have such pretty teeth! How do you do it?" "I brush my teeth every day," says Pearl. "And I don't eat a lot of sweets like you do. Let's see your teeth, Sweet Tooth."

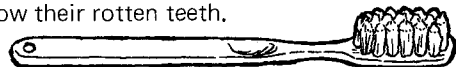


7) Sweet Tooth opens his mouth very wide. All his teeth are rotten. "Do you mean my teeth are like this because I eat so many sweets?"



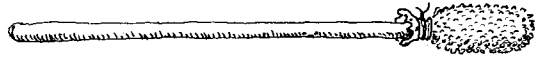
8) Other puppets appear: Whitey, Candy, and Lolly. "Yes," answers Whitey, "and because you drink a lot of sweet, fizzy drinks like Coke." "And because you don't brush your teeth," adds Pearl.

"But some of us can't afford toothbrushes and toothpaste," says Candy. "Like Lolly and me!" Candy and Lolly open their mouths wide to show their rotten teeth.





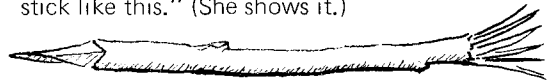
9) "But you don't need a toothbrush or toothpaste to keep your teeth clean," says Whitey. "Just look at mine!" He opens his mouth and shows his sparkling white teeth. "In our family, we clean our teeth like this, with a piece of rough cloth wrapped around a stick. Instead of toothpaste, we dip the stick in a mixture of salt and baking soda. It works great!" The child rubs the puppet's teeth with a stick wrapped in cloth.



"Maybe you're right," says Lolly. "My grandfather still has perfect teeth and he has never had a toothbrush. He cleans his teeth with a powder made of burnt tortilla, on his finger! He also doesn't eat sweet things."



10) Pearl explains, "In our family, we don't have toothbrushes either. Instead, we use a stick like this." (She shows it.)



"We chew one end, like this, to make a brush, and sharpen the other end, like this, to clean between the teeth." (She reaches up and cleans her teeth.)



11) "Hurray!" shout the puppets. "Now we know how to clean our teeth without spending money on toothbrushes and toothpaste!" "And don't forget what my grandfather says," adds Lolly. "If you want to keep your teeth strong and healthy like his, don't eat a lot of sweet things or drink sweet, fizzy drinks!"



12) Everyone shouts together:

**" LEARNING TOGETHER  
WE LEARN A LOT :  
CANDY IS DANDY,  
BUT ROT IS NOT !**

**WE'VE FOUND A WAY  
TO FIGHT TOOTH DECAY.**

**WE ALL HELP EACH OTHER  
STAY HEALTHY, HURRAY!**

