A Movable Man or Woman for the Overhead Projector

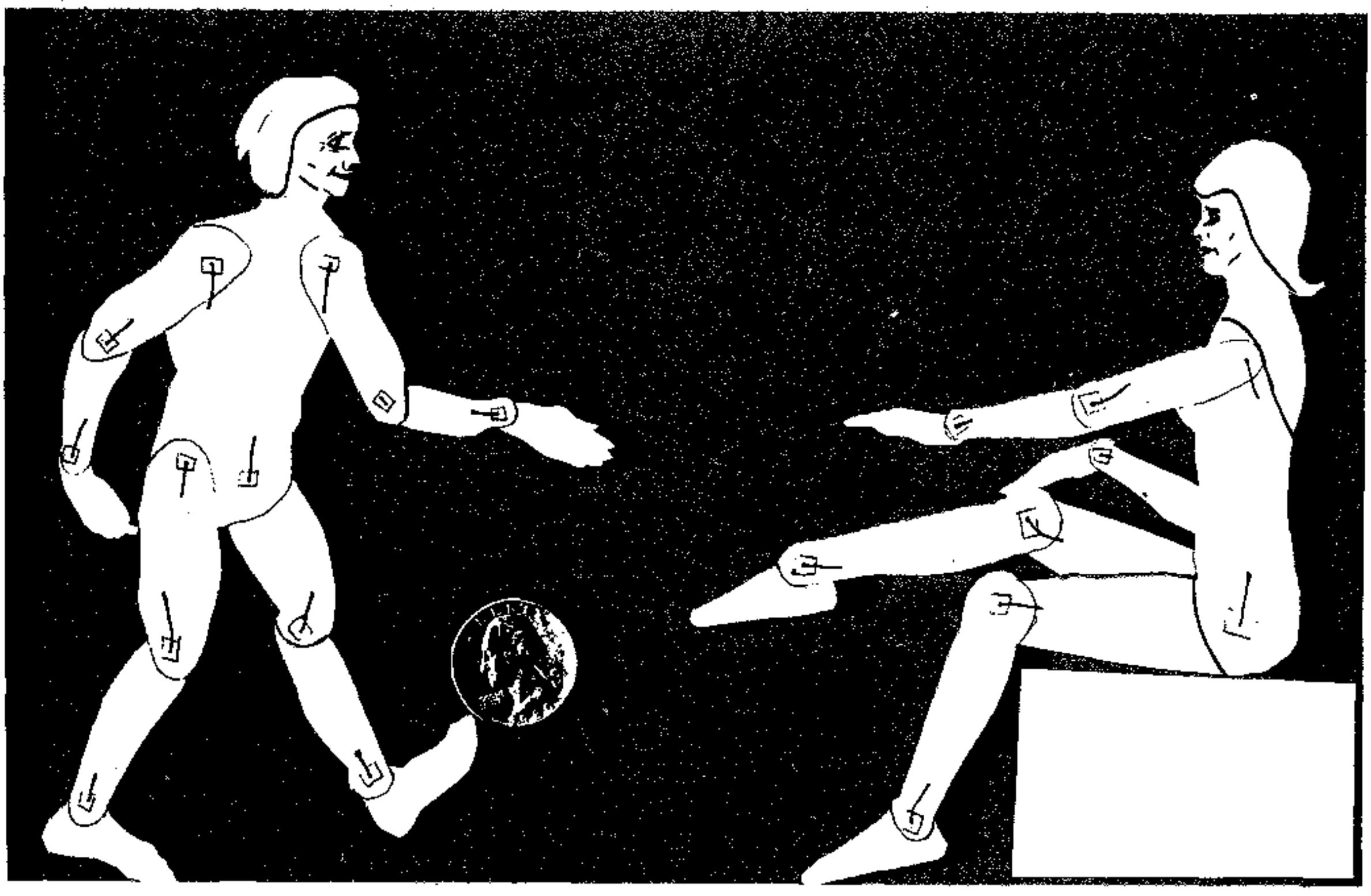
by Mark W. Seng

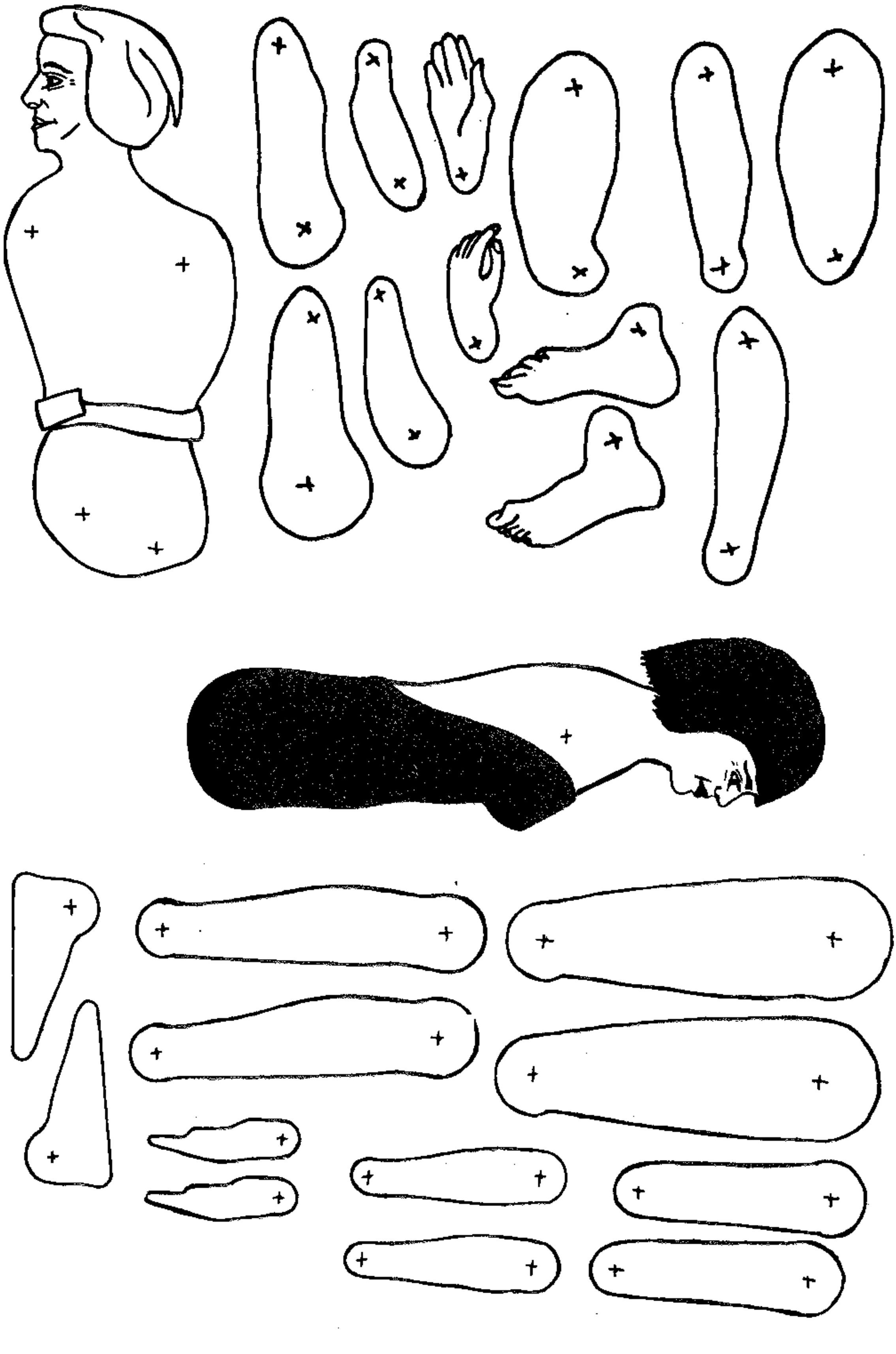
In the many years that overhead projectors have helped teachers, many ingenious transparency devices have been invented by teachers to put some life into their explanations and learning activities. When this agile young man is placed on the overhead projector stage, your class will see his silhouette dramatically jump from one activity to another. The effect is really quite startling and will provide you and your students with many happy hours of language learning activities. Best of all, this movable man (or woman) can be made easily at little cost.

Some Uses

Language is communication. Language means people, and people *do* things. Of course, that means verbs. This man can *run*; he can *jump* over fences or hills—even tall buildings (if you have a sense of humor). He can run *between* two cars or run *up to* a door. Place a coin or other disc near his foot and your students will see a ball, which he can kick or (if you're teaching the passive construction) which *is kicked* by him. He can bend over, climb a ladder made from paper or cardboard, or even demonstrate the backstroke swimming in water. (Draw some water waves on a sheet of clear plastic upon which you place the man.) He can also walk on the water, dive below the surface, or sit on a cardboard boat with a fishing pole in hand. A transparent or cardboard fish may even swim up to the hook and take it inside its mouth.

If you construct more than one person, many more language teaching points can be demonstrated and practiced. For example, "She is taller than he." "He is walking but





she is running" (or sitting, or stretching, or bending over). "He picks up the hammer, but she picks up the saw." "They are both sitting," or "They are dancing."

A question mark on the projector stage can cue one student to ask the question, "What is he doing?" That student may then choose another student to answer the question. Then that student can ask another question to still another student.

A modified Total Physical Response activity can involve two students–one at the projector and another giving commands, such as, "Put the ball inside the box which is on the table," or, "after putting down the ball, place the box on the table." The other students in the class will be most interested in seeing if their classmate at the projector can rise to the challenge (especially if someone might call on them to perform next.)

One may also project pictures (which may be transparent or opaque silhouettes) of all the things that people use. Some examples might be a hat, a shirt, socks, pants, a briefcase, golf clubs, a tennis racket, a football, a table, a chair, a handbag, or books.

Construction

The idea of this movable man was conceived some years ago by an ingenious University of Texas student, David Hatcher. Over time, many changes have been made from his original transparency. For instance, the model may be constructed from transparency materials or from cardboard (a manila folder works quite well). Transparency materials offer the advantage that facial features are visible, and clothing cut from paper may be overlaid. But the use of cardboard eliminates the need for a transparency making machine.

A completed figure about five to six inches long will prove convenient for projection and movement. Some teachers may want to make the figure even larger. (If an overhead projector is not available, this idea may still be used without projection by increasing the model's size to the point where all students in the class can easily see it and then fastening it to a bulletin board or chalkboard. A felt board approach would also work quite well.) The easiest way to enlarge the drawing on cardboard is to use one of many brands of enlarging photo copy machines. Most machines which do enlarge will also enlarge on card stock. One can also enlarge the illustration by inserting it into an opaque projector or by placing a transparency of it on the overhead projector, projecting the image upon a piece of cardboard, and then tracing the drawing. Although the color of the cardboard will not show when projected, you can select a bright color to make the device more attractive if placed on a bulletin board.

Mark W. Seng, Ph.D., is an associate professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Texas at Austin, where he serves as coordinator of adult education. He teaches courses in media in language teaching, learning theories, and inexpensive media.

Next, carefully cut out the drawing. Depending upon the size you choose, use either sharp scissors, a single edge razor blade, or a craft knife. Careful work at this step will ensure that the projected image proves realistic and attractive. (You might also request help from your class to construct more than one model since it is also possible for one or two students to work with this device at their desks.)

Through the years, many teachers have made transparencies with parts that moved. Trying to solve the problem of joining two pieces of material so they can pivot has proved challenging. One of the first techniques for achieving this articulation of materials was a common thumbtack pushed up through both pieces. To cover the sharp point, a pencil eraser was used. Brass paper fasteners can also be used to join moving parts.

While the thumbtack or paper fastener approaches are still adequate for simple

designs, the complexity of this project requires a more delicate solution. A single strand of polyester thread is used in order to allow free movement and to facilitate manipulation of the arms and legs on the overhead projector stage. Select a heavy weight polyester thread. Close inspection will reveal that this thread is composed of several strands, twisted together. Use a single strand of this very strong material and draw it through the two pieces of cardboard. Secure both the top and the bottom of the thread with a small square of transparent tape. Cut off the free ends of the thread neatly.

Another way of fastening the man together (taught to me by a creative woman in Japan) is to tie a double knot in the thread above and below the joint. This method eliminates the need for the tape but requires considerable skill and care. To insure that the completed joint articulates smoothly and precisely, the thread must be drawn taut before tying the final knot and trimming it.

Finally, tape both sides of an ordinary manila folder closed to create an envelope in which both figures and accessories can be stored and protected until the next time you use them in class. The complete package will be a teaching tool you can use for many years in a variety of ways limited only by your imagination.