The Curious Theatre: a free drawing toy that brings a child's picture to life

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A free browser toy for ages 2 to 7 that turns a child's drawing into a paper puppet on a little stage, with no account, no ads and nothing uploaded.

The Curious Theatre (thecuriousthing.com/play) is a free drawing toy for children of about 2 to 7. A child draws something with a finger, or a grown-up photographs a drawing made on paper, and it is cut out as a paper puppet with googly eyes that walks onto a little lit stage. Every tap or key makes it jump, spin or sneeze, and the show saves as a short video. There's no account, no ads, and the drawing never leaves the device. Steve from The Curious Thing wrote to us about it, and we're so glad he did. We've added it to our directory of art, music and story makers and at number four on our list of the best apps for preschoolers. Peabody (peabody.kids) is free for everyone through the end of 2026.

We make Peabody, which has its own art studio, so weigh our view with that in mind. We wrote this from The Curious Thing's own pages on 9 November 2026.

What makes it special

Most drawing apps for young children redraw the picture, tidy it up or replace it with something polished. The Curious Theatre does the opposite: it animates the drawing exactly as the child made it, wobbly lines and all. A three-year-old's purple blob with seven legs becomes the star of the show, and that's the whole point. Children feel proud of what they made, and a toy that takes their drawing seriously tells them it matters.

How it works

- Pick a star or draw one. A ready-made crayon puppet (a unicorn octopus, a cat, a dinosaur, a puppy or a robot) is there for the first go. Or a child draws with a finger in a box of ten crayons.
- Or bring in a paper drawing. A grown-up photographs a picture made at the kitchen table, and the page lifts it off the paper. Crayons and real paper stay part of the fun.
- Scissors and googly eyes. Scissors go round the drawing, it lifts off as a puppet, and two taps give it eyes.
- The show. It walks onto a stage at the North Pole, in outer space or under the sea. Every key or tap makes it do something, so even a two-year-old who just bangs the keyboard gets a show.
- Keep it. Each show saves as a short video on the device.

There's also a letter to Santa for children too young to write one, and step-by-step

draw-alongs.

Privacy

This is where it really shines. There's no account and no name or email. The drawing stays on the device. No AI draws or animates anything; a small model running in the browser only finds the outline of a painted figure in a photo, and that stays on the device too. The maker says the page has no ad pixels, session recording or ad cookies, and its privacy policy has a children's section saying the theatre collects nothing from children.

Good to know

The Curious Thing's main business is keepsakes: puzzles, canvases, blankets and more, made from children's drawings and photos. That shop sits on the same site, but behind a press-and-hold button for grown-ups, so a toddler won't wander in. The portrait products in the shop work differently from the theatre: there, a grown-up uploads a photo that is sent to an AI image service. The theatre itself uploads nothing.

How to use it at home

Draw together first, on paper, then bring the picture into the theatre and watch your child's face when their drawing takes a bow. Ask them what the character's name is and where it's going on stage. You've made a story without meaning to. Afterwards, curl up with a story from our library and look for a character that could be the puppet's friend.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/curious-theatre-drawing-toy-for-toddlers