

# PLAYMAKERS

Theatre from around the world

## Kathakali

The name Kathakali comes from two Malayalam words: **Katha** which means **story**, and **Kali**, which means **play**.

Kathakali is a classical form of storytelling, which recalls the stories of the lives, loves and conflicts of the gods and heroes of Hindu mythology, fables and legends.

It gradually developed in the temples of Kerala, in South India from as early as the 2nd century until the end of the 16th century. The fully developed style of Kathakali is said to have originated in the mid 17th century, using ritual, elaborate make up, costumes, dance, drama, mime and music to tell stories. Men traditionally played all roles.

There are 101 classical Kathakali stories and traditionally the plays would last the whole night, but have been shortened for modern audiences.

In this pack you will find Kathakali history, themes and activities.

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# Kerala

Kerala is a state on the southwestern Malabar Coast of India. Malayalam is the most widely spoken language and is also the official language of the state, with a population of approximately 34.8 million. Approximately 54% are Hindus, while Kerala has the largest population of Christians in India. Kerala has a very rich culture with over 10,000 festivals celebrated in the state every year.



# Hinduism

Hinduism is the world's oldest religion, with roots and customs dating back more than 4,000 years. The religion has no specific founder, it's difficult to trace its origins and history. Today, Hinduism is the third-largest religion behind Christianity and Islam with 900 million followers. Approximately 95% of the world's Hindus live in India. Hinduism is unique in that it's not a single religion but a compilation of many traditions and philosophies. Hinduism is referred to as a way of life. Hinduism is closely related to other Indian religions including Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism.



# Costumes

Kathakali costumes are very decorative, and both male and female characters wear huge layered skirts and one or more layered jackets. They have pleated fabric around the neck with gold necklaces. They have 4 ornate accessories on the arm and bells on the lower legs. All performers have a headdress. The costumes and make up bring attention to the actor's eyes and facial expressions, as well as their hands and feet.



# Facial Expressions

Navarasam (facial expressions) are important in Kathakali dance. There are a total of nine main facial expressions and they are used to convey various emotions. The nine emotions are: Sringara (amour/love), Hasyam (comic), Karunam (pathetic), Raudram (furious/anger), Viram (heroic), Bhayanakam (terrible), Bibhatsam (odious), Adbhutham (wonder) and Santam (tranquillity/peace).



# Mudras

A mudra is a symbolic or ritual gesture or pose in Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. While some mudras involve the entire body, most are performed with the hands and fingers. There are 24 Basic Mudras (hand gestures).

There are two types:

**Asamyutha Mudras** using a single hand

**Samyutha Mudras** using both hands

There are a total of 470 different symbols used in Kathakali.

# The Characters

Characters in Kathakali are divided into:

**Satvik** The upper world of the devas (gods) which means heroic, noble and virtuous.

**Rajasik** The middle world of humans which means passionate, heroic but aggressive.

**Tamasik** The nether world of the asuras (demons) which means evil.

Characters come from a mythological background, and colour holds symbolic meaning, as do many of the features. This informs the audience of each character's nature.

## Kari

Demonic, gruesome, evil.

Their faces are jet-black with dotted red and white markings on them.

## Kathi

Evil, wealthy, arrogant.

The make-up is mainly green, with a red mark like a knife above the mouth and white circles on noses and foreheads.

## Minukku

Female, wise, gentle, spiritual.

The make-up is mainly yellow.

## Thadi

There are three different characters that are symbolised by their different colour beards.

**Bali (red beard)** Vicious and evil characters

**Thadi (white beard)** God, divine being character of Hanuman, the monkey god.

**Karutha Thadi (black beard)** Primitive beings, hunters and forest dwellers.

## Pacha

Noble male characters such as Kings and divine beings.

The make-up is mainly green.

# The Musicians

There are traditionally four musicians who perform, two drummers and two singers. The drummers stand on the left hand side of the stage and the singers stand at the back on the right.

One drummer plays the chenda (cylindrical drum), which is held vertically and played with drum sticks. The other drummer plays the maddalam, which is held horizontally and played with the drummer's hands, both with the palm and fingertips.

The singers play a gong and a pair of cymbals, and tell the story of the play by verse in Sanskritized Malayalam. The actors interpret the story word by word through their Mudras and facial expressions.



# Activity 1

See if you can learn these 16 Mudras that are used in Kathakali. Capture what you learn as a photo or video, and then share on social media (tag @PlaymakersWinch) - we'd love to see what you can do!



1. Pataka (Flag)



2. Mudrakhya (Seal)



3. Kataka  
(Golden Bangle)



4. Mushti (Fist)



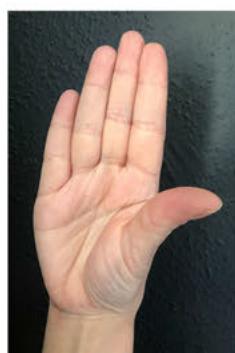
5. Kartharemukha  
(Scissor's point)



6. Sukatunda  
(Parrot's beak)



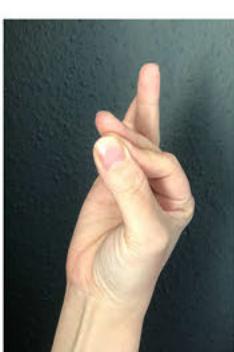
7. Kapithaka  
(Apple tree)



8. Hamsapaksha  
(Swan's wing)



9. Sikhana  
(Mountain peak)



10. Hamsasya  
(Swan's beak)



11. Anjali  
(Salutation)



12. Ardhachandra  
(Half moon)



13. Mukura  
(Mirror)



14. Bhramara  
(Bee)



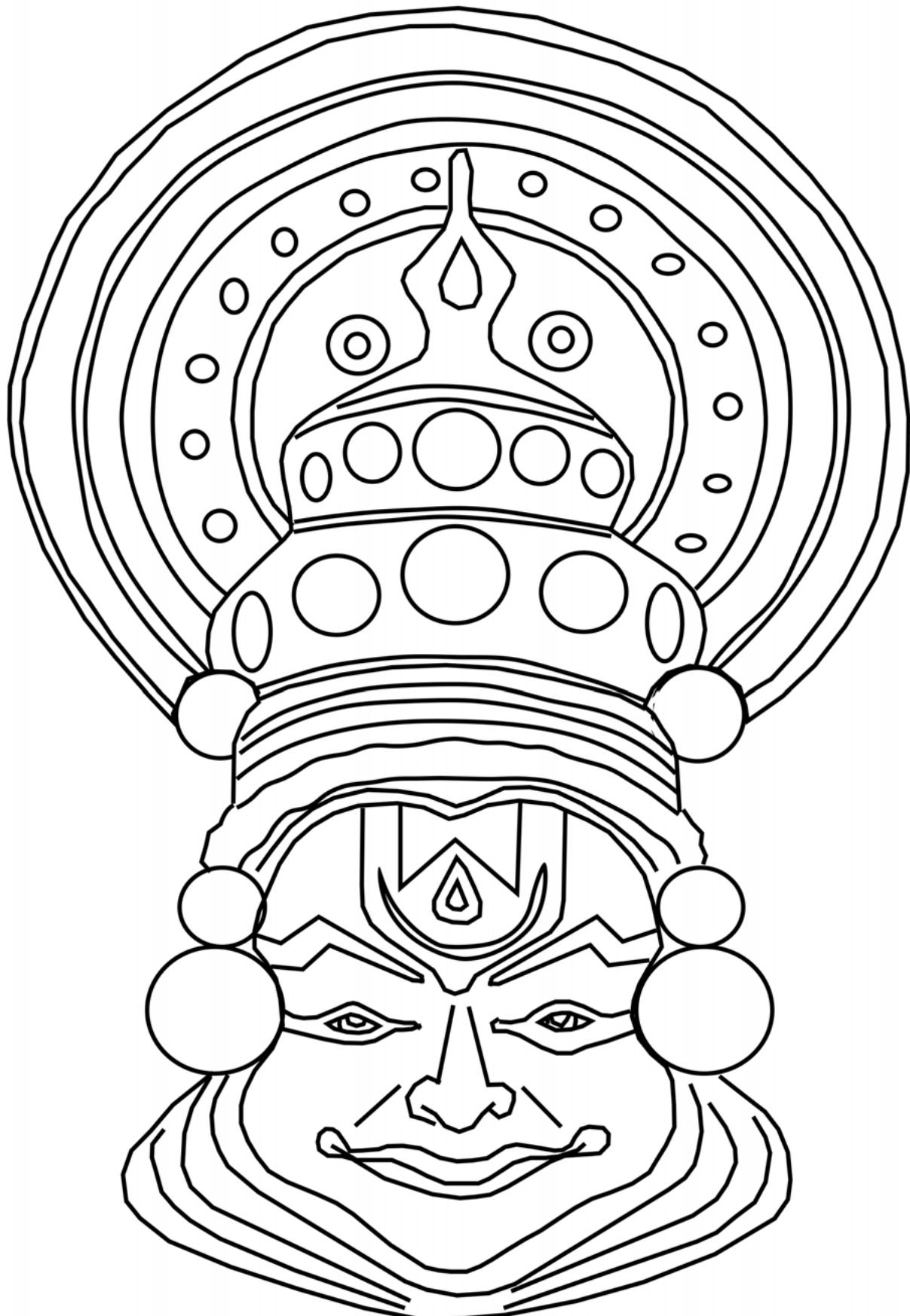
15. Suchimukha  
(eye of a needle)



16. Pallava  
(Tender Leaf)

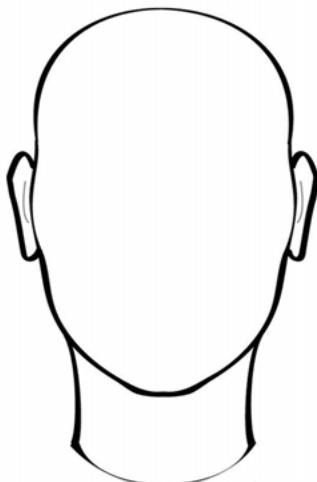
# Activity 2

Add detail to Pacha's head-dress and jewellery, then colour him in!

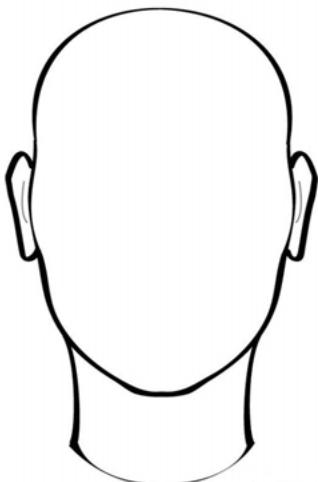


# Activity 3

In Kathakali, Navarasam (facial expressions) are very important. There are nine different emotions in Kathakali. Draw the different emotions on the faces below!



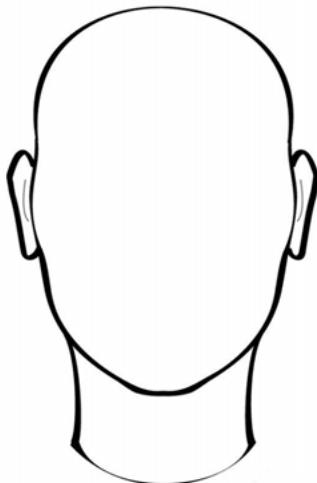
Love- (Sringara)



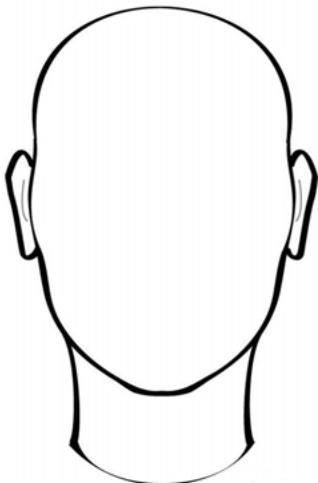
Comic- (Hasyam)



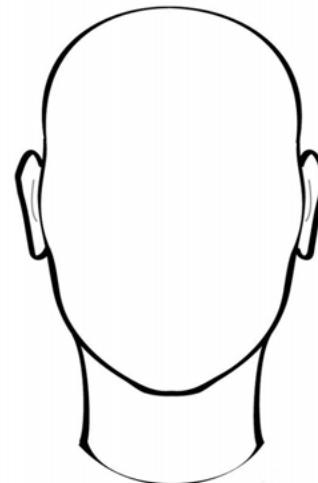
Furious/Anger (Raudram)



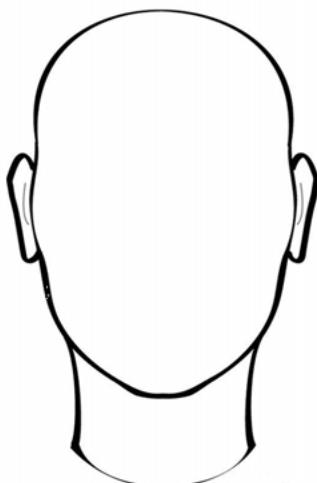
Heroic (Viram)



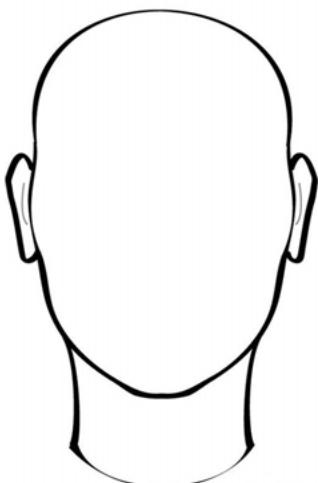
Evil (Bhayanakam)



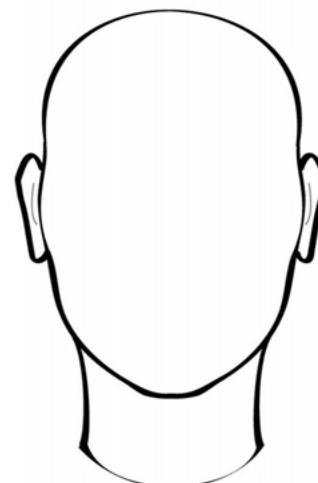
Repulsive/ Unpleasant (Bibhatsam)



Amazement/ Admiration



Calm/ Happy/ Peaceful



Pitiful/ Pathetic