

New Guinean "Plant Paste" Doll

Make a hand-built ritual doll using three simple materials **(art + social studies)**

Papua New Guinea is a country in Oceania, comprised of the eastern part of the island of New Guinea and many adjacent islands. It is estimated that more than a thousand different cultural groups exist in Papua New Guinea. This diversity has inspired many different forms of cultural expression, with each group creating its own forms of art, dance, dress, song, and architecture. People who live near the Sepik River, for example, practice a tradition of carving plants and animal forms in wood that represent their ancestor spirits. People of the highlands engage in colorful local rituals called "sing sings," adorning themselves with feathers, pearls, and animal skins to represent birds, trees, or mountain spirits.

In the early 19th century, ritual dolls or figures were often made out of plant paste, fibers, feathers, shells, and seed beads. They were painted with natural pigments and often stood more than 20" tall. In this project, students mix their own "plant paste" out of air dry clay, burlap fibers, and papier mâché mix. Once the dolls are formed, "body paint" and adornments are applied using markers and other materials.

GRADES 4-12 Note: instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 25 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Look at images of the people of Papua New Guinea and their artwork.
2. Provide each student with approximately 1-lb of clay.
3. Give each student a 3" x 8" piece of natural or colored burlap.
4. Give each student approximately 1/4 cup of dry instant papier maché.
5. Cover tables with canvas.

Process

1. Make a "plant paste" by flattening clay into a thin rectangular slab using hands or a rolling pin.
2. Cut the burlap into small pieces and pull the fibers apart (the should be no more than 1" long). Sprinkle the fibers evenly on top of the clay slab.



Materials

- Amaco[®] Mexican Pottery Clay, 25-lb box (33205-3025); share one among class
- Blick's[®] Mix Instant Papier Mache', 5-lb bag (33102-1005); share one among class
- Natural Burlap, 46" w x 1-yd (63202-1436); share one among class
- Blick[®] Studio Markers, Black (22148-2020); share 12 among class

Optional Materials

- Hygloss Bucket O' Shells, White Mix, 10-oz (61451-1040)
- Glass Indian Seed Beads, 3-oz (60725-)
- Books By Hand[™] Waxed Linen Thread, package of three Spools (64209-1020)

3. Sprinkle the dry papier maché mix onto the clay. Fold the clay slab over onto itself many times and knead the clay until the burlap fibers and papier maché are well mixed.
4. Begin building a figure by rolling out two coils (about 1" Dia each) for the legs. Bend the coils at one end to create feet (they must be large enough to enable the figure to stand). Flatten the bottoms of the feet on the table and fashion toes, if desired.
5. Next, form a trunk for the figure and attach it to the tops of the legs. Scratch into the clay to make strong joints (if needed, a very small amount of water can be added). Smooth the edges to make sure the joints are solidly attached.



Step 1: Spread dry instant papier maché mix and burlap fibers over slab of clay.



Step 2: After wedging (kneading) materials together, form a figure, starting with the legs and feet.



Step 3: Press white seed beads into the soft clay to create "teeth."

Process, continued

6. Lastly, create the arms, head and neck. Push beads into the head for eyes. Use white seed beads or small shells as teeth. Add hair by pushing burlap strands into the clay. (The head should be embellished fully before attaching it to the body to avoid unnecessary stress at the attachment point).
7. After the figure has dried, it can be embellished in many ways. Use Blick® Studio Markers to add ritual body paint. You can also add a shell necklace, a burlap skirt, or add bracelets made of waxed linen thread.



Step 4: Add "body paint" with Blick Studio Markers.



Step 5: Embellish with seed beads, linen thread, burlap and shells.

National Standards for Visual Arts Education

Content Standard #1 — Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes.

- K-4** Students know the differences between materials, techniques, and processes.
- 5-8** Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas.
- 9-12** Students apply media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks.

Content Standard #4 Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

- K-4** Students know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationships to various cultures.
- 5-8** Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures.
- 9-12** Students differentiate among a variety of historical and cultural contexts in terms of characteristics and purposes of works of art.

