

Make your Mark with a Handmade Brush!

Create a customized mark-making brush
for ink sketching or painting

(art + history)

The paintbrush came into existence more than 12,000 years ago in a very primitive form. The earliest brushes were made of sticks, shavings of wood, split palm leaves, and even whale bone. It wasn't until the rise of calligraphy in China that the paintbrush came into its own as a revered tool.

The very first brushes were designed for writing with ink, but others were meant to decorate pottery. The handle was often bamboo, and the hairs of the brush may have come from animals such as hogs, goats, oxen, horses, or even mink depending on the stiffness or softness required from the bristles.

When we use a paintbrush today, we often pair it with the type of medium we are working in. For instance, sable brushes are considered the best for watercolor. Sometimes knowledgeable artists wait for sable brushes that can only be made after extremely cold winters. In these conditions, the tail hairs become bushier and stronger, and the hair makes better, larger brushes. Artists using acrylics might like stronger synthetic bristles, while potters might employ natural bristle brushes to apply thick glazes.

Even the shape of the bristles can be customized to the task at hand; flat, filbert, round, liner, fan, or mop are words used to describe the shape of the brush bristles.

Most brushes today are made by machine; however, particularly in Asia, some fine artist brushes are still individually made by hand. Master brushmakers are often women, who may study for many years to master the numerous steps required to create a beautiful and professional brush.

The tools we choose to use for mark-making have a significant effect on the artwork. Make a mark that's as individual as the artist by creating a one-of-a-kind, handmade tool! v



Materials (required)

[K&S Metal Sizes and Shapes](#), 1 lb (33719-7070); share one package among class

Note: This assorted package has many sizes of tubes. Most, but not all, will be suitable for this project.

[Weldbond Universal Adhesive](#), 5.4 oz (23912-1160); share one bottle across class

[Hawk Tools, Rubber Mallet](#), 1/2 lb (35136-1008); share two across class

[Books by Hand Waxed Linen Thread](#), Basic Pack of 3 Spools (64209-1020); share one pack across class

Some Materials for Bristles:

[Jute Twine](#) (62984-)

[Plumage Feathers](#) (62147-)

[Creativity Street Craft Hair](#) (61760-)

[Suede lace](#) (63014-)

[Lion Brand Wool-Ease Yarn](#) (65247-)

Pine needles

Human or animal hair

Some Materials for Brush Handles:

[Creativity Street Wooden Dowel Rods](#), 1/4", 3/8", or 1/2" (60448-)

Found sticks

Bamboo pieces

Recycled plastic pens

Sturdy drinking straws

Optional Materials

[Fiskars Hand Drill](#) (35101-0000)

[Blick Black Cat Waterproof India Ink](#) (21101-)



GRADES 5-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Gather fibers, hair, or other potential mark-making materials.
xoo, or upcycled tube from a ballpoint pen for the handle of the mark-making tool that will fit well into one of the metal tubes in the assortment bag.
3. Discuss the parts of a brush: handle, bristles or mark-making material, and ferrule. The ferrule is most often a metal ring that is used for fastening. Some examples of a ferrule are the plastic sleeve that keeps shoelaces from unraveling, the metal sleeve that holds a pencil's eraser in place, or the metal band that binds the bristles of a brush to its handle.

Process

1. Consider what type of material will make up the bristles of the brush being made. Anything can be used to make a brush! Try human or animal hair (get permission first, or save the hair from a haircut), any type of twine or yarn, suede or leather lacing, shoestrings, pine needles, feathers, etc. If using twine or yarn, wrap it around a piece of cardboard many times, then remove it from the cardboard to pull it into a bundle.
2. Next, use waxed linen thread to tie the materials into a tight bundle. Wrap the thread at least 1/4" up from the bottom of the bristles. If twine or yarn is used, cut the top loops to create bristles.



Step 1: Using waxed linen thread, tightly tie a bundle of bristles near the base, then dip the end in glue. Allow to dry.



Step 2: Match a handle material to a metal tube for size. If necessary, wrap the handle to create a tight fit. Glue the handle to the tube.



Step 3: Glue the bristle bundle into the metal tube. Flatten the end of the metal tube nearest the bristles with a mallet.



BLICK® art materials

Process, continued

3. Now, dip the tied ends of the bundled bristles into glue, making sure to get the glue into the middle of the bristles. Pouring a bit of glue into a small dish will help. Set the bundle of bristles aside on waxed paper and allow to dry.
4. While the bristles are drying, prepare the handle of the brush. Choose a handle made of a stick, dowel rod, or a piece of bamboo. Find a metal tube that will fit snugly over the handle. Glue the handle into the metal tube, leaving an inch or so at the top of the tube clear where the bristles will be inserted. Lastly, glue the bristle bundle into the metal tube. If needed, wrap more waxed linen around the bundle to tighten the fit. When the glue is dry, use a rubber mallet to flatten the metal tube where the bristles are inserted to create a brush ferrule.
5. If desired, add further embellishment by wrapping linen cord where the ferrule meets the handle. This will create a finished look.

Options

- Use permanent markers to embellish the handle of the brush.
- Drill a hole into the bottom of the handle and tie a loop to hang the brush while storing or drying.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

