

Personalized Signet Rings

A personal, functional stamp that's always within arm's reach ... literally!

art + social studies

Signet rings are popular today as jewelry, but have a history dating back to courts and forts of ancient Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, Egypt, and South Arabia! Worn on the finger of important dignitaries and pressed into wax, they served as the unbreakable signature and seal on documents that affected the course of history. And not just that — ordinary people, w to their families and loved ones, would seal their i and personally in the same way.

In modern times, decorative signet rings are popular, even though they are mostly wax-free in the age of email. They serve as a showcase for individuality — featuring decorative initials or family crests, membership in a group, or accomplishments, such as a school graduation year or sports championship.

Any sort of meaningful symbol can be carved on a signet ring, the more creative, the better. Ancient signet rings were valued for their unique, difficult-to-copy designs, as this meant the seals were almost impossible to forge.

In this lesson, students can let their imagination run free and pick a stamp design as unique as they are!

Students will first conceptualize a personalized image or symbol to press into Sculpey. For a functioning ring, simple designs scored deeply into the clay work best. Keep in mind that, when used, the image will stamp in reverse. Sculpey is a polymer clay, and will not dry or harden until baked. This means that students who need more time can come back to their piece if it is not finished in one class session. After baked, the rings can be stamped into clay, warm sealing wax or a stamp pad to show off their design!

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

Preparation

1. Cut each 2 oz package of Sculpey along the three dividing lines, then cut in half. Each student should need about 1/8 of the package for one ring base; more will be needed for embellishments.
2. Show students images of ancient signet rings and impressions. Ask students to think of something important to them such as a sport, club, or family symbol. They can draw inspiration from nature, existing jewelry they own, geometric designs, a favorite animal ...inspiration can come from anywhere! Before students sketch their ideas, remind them that the design must be simple enough to transfer to a small area.



Materials (required)

Premo! Sculpey, 2 oz (33920-); share at least four across class

Blick Copper Wire, 18 gauge, 25 ft (33415-1018); share two across class

Sculpey Glaze, Gloss 1 oz (33218-1013); share one bottle across class

Forged Steel Jewelry Pliers, long nose (60618-1245); share one among five students

Kemper Double Ball Stylus Embossing Tools, (30316-0000); one per student

Richeson Student Clay Modeling Tool Sets, package of 35 assorted (30387-1035); share across class

Optional Materials

Das Modeling Clay, (30538-)

Krylon Low-Odor Clear Finish, Gloss (23710-1001)

Leather Tooling Sets, (63008-)

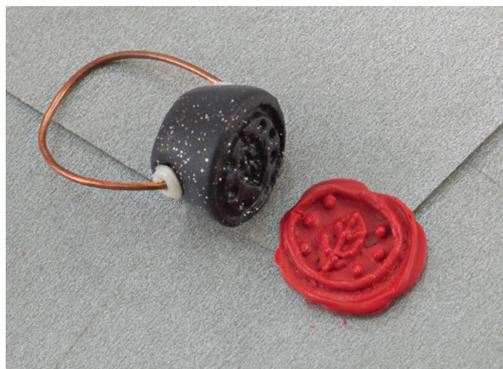


Process

1. Divide Sculpey into halves, rolling one half into a cylinder and taking care to ensure both the top and bottom of the cylinder are even and flat. Dimensions should be about 1/4" thick, with a 1/2" circumference. The exact size will vary by student. Signet rings are large by design, but should not be wider than the finger.
2. Choose a side to be the top. Students can draw out a design using a soft lead pencil and transfer the image by lightly pressing the clay onto the paper.
3. Use the embossing tool to impress the design. First, make a dotted line, and then smooth it out. If mistakes are made, simply flatten out the top and start again! Don't worry if there are a few places that need more definition, as this can be cleaned up at the end. Once the design is complete, set it aside.
4. Cut a piece of wire about 2-1/2" long. This will be the structure for the ring. Begin shaping it into a "U" shape. Using the pliers, bend the top of the "U" at a 90 degree angle and repeat the same for the other side, cutting the ends so they don't overlap. When shaping, be sure to make the ring slightly larger than needed. Have students try on their rings to be sure they will fit when finalized with a clay covering.
5. Attach the copper wire to the signet disk by pushing the wire into each side, about 1/16" from the bottom.
6. Using the second ball of clay roll out a slab about 1/16" thick. Dowel rods or balsa wood placed on either side of the clay can be used to ensure uniformity.
7. Make a paper stencil roughly the shape of a golf tee, sized to the signet disk. This will be the sides and back of the ring, covering the copper wire. Place it onto the slab and cut it out using a clay tool.
8. Press the wide end of the clay shape to the side of the signet disk, just above where the wire is attached, and smooth the remaining clay along the wire to the back of the ring. Repeat on the other side. Remove any excess where the pieces meet and burnish the joint.
9. To finish, small clay embellishments can be added and the design and the face of the ring can be cleaned up.
10. Once the ring is finished, it can be baked in a toaster oven at 275°F for 5-20 min depending on thickness. Light colors can darken or burn quickly, as can thinner parts of the ring, so it's best to keep a sharp eye on them while baking. Sculpey is still slightly malleable when it first comes out. Allow it to cool before handling.
11. Seal with Sculpey glaze. This will not only make the piece shine, but will aid in the use of stamping. The glaze makes it a breeze to clean off excess clay, wax, or ink left on the ring in the stamping process.

Options

- Make a disk and poke holes that are centered on each side. Wrap wire after baking.
- Follow steps 1-5, leaving the copper wire exposed.
- Air dry clay, such as Das Modeling Clay, can also be used and sealed with Krylon.



National Core Arts Standards Visual Arts

Creating

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

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Responding

Anchor Standard 8: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.



Step 1: Roll a cylinder and carve a design.



Step 2: Make the wire backing and attach it to the cylinder near the bottom.



Step 3: Cover wire with Sculpey.