

Papier Mâché - Animals

The children use papier mâché to create a menagerie of animals. For ages 6 to 13. Plan 5 to 6 sessions.

KEY IDEAS

- Working with papier mâché
- Building three-dimensionally
- Observing the anatomy of animals

LANGUAGE

papier mâché, three-dimensional, anatomy, overlapping

YOU WILL NEED

- Newspapers
- Pieces of cardboard
- Non-toxic wheat paste (I use PlayBox Wheat Paste.)
- Masking tape
- Scissors
- Tempera paints
- Paint brushes
- Water containers for rinsing brushes
- Sponges for drying brushes
- Waxed paper
- Aluminum foil
- White craft glue
- Water-based polyurethane
- Small pieces of paper and permanent markers for attaching names
- Photographs of animals (see note below)

Note: When introducing this project, avoid showing the children artists' illustrations of animals. Observing the actual animals at a zoo or in photographs will allow the children to be more creative in their interpretations.

THE PROJECT

First/Second Session

Preparation

- Cut newspapers into quarter sheets to make them easier to wad and to keep the size of the animals in the range of seven to ten inches tall.
- Set out tape, scissors, and cardboard.
- Have available the pictures of animals.

How to Begin

- Explain to the children that they will be making animals with *papier mâché*, a process using paper dipped into paste. When the paste-soaked paper dries, it becomes very

hard and can then be painted. In this session, the children will be forming the animals' bodies with wadded and rolled newspapers.

- While looking at pictures of animals, discuss their *anatomy*, or structure, pointing out any defining characteristics, such as large ears and trunks on elephants, long necks on giraffes, and manes on lions.
- Demonstrate how to build *three-dimensional* (viewable from all sides) foundations for the animals' bodies. Set aside several strips of pulled tape. Tightly wad pieces of newspaper and press them into the body shape of the desired animal, holding them together with the strips of tape. Wad newspaper for the head and attach it to the body with more tape. Emphasize that the tape needs to follow the contours of the parts being attached so that their forms won't get lost when the papier mâché is applied.
- To make legs, tightly roll several sheets of newspaper into tubes that are sturdy enough to withstand the wetness of papier mâché. The newspaper tubes can be taped onto the sides of the animal's body or, for stronger support, wrap the tubes across the animal's back and then tape in place.
- Items, such as ears, beaks, or a peacock's tail, can be cut from cardboard and attached with tape. For the lion's mane pictured above, several sheets of newspaper were glued together and dried. The mane was cut into the dried newspaper, leaving a half-inch edge uncut to attach around the lion's head. After the final layer of papier mâché was applied to the lion's body, the mane was attached to the head with a few more strips of papier mâché. The elephant's trunk pictured below was made by wrapping newspaper around a piece of wire, securing it with tape, and then bending it into shape.
- Have the children make the foundations for their animals' bodies. Be sure the children understand that the newspapers need to be tightly wadded so they will not sag after getting wet with the papier mâché.

Third Session

Preparation

- Cover the work area with newspaper.
- Mix the wheat paste to a creamy consistency and put into bowls, planning one for every two children.
- Tear newspapers into roughly 1- by 3-inch strips.
- Set out the foundations for the animals, wheat paste, and newspaper strips.
- Prepare a space with a non-stick surface, such as waxed paper, for the animals to dry.
- Have aluminum foil available for any additions to the animals that may need support while drying.

How to Begin

- Explain to the children that, in this session, they will be applying three coats of papier mâché to their animals.
- Demonstrate the papier mâché process by dipping strips of torn newspaper into the prepared paste. Pull the wet strips between two fingers to remove the excess paste. This step is important to keep the foundations from becoming too wet. Lay dampened strips on the animals, *overlapping* (laying each piece slightly over the previous one) and

smoothing the edges as you cover the entire body with one layer, tightly wrapping the papier mâché around any additions to maintain their shapes.

- Explain to the children that the first coat is the hardest; the second coat is easier because the paste-soaked paper will stick to itself.
- When the animals are covered with three coats of papier mâché, the children should smooth the surface as much as possible before the animals are dried. Have the children write their names on small pieces of paper with permanent markers and paste them to their animals.

Note: Dry the animals on a non-stick surface, such as waxed paper. Small wedges of aluminum foil can be used where support is needed until the papier mâché dries.

Fourth/Fifth Session

Preparation

- Set out the tempera paints, brushes, water containers, and sponges.
- Set out the dried papier mâché animals.

How to Begin

- In this session, the children will be painting a first layer of paint on their animals. In the last session, they will be adding details. Once again, discuss some of the defining characteristics of the animals, such as the stripes on tigers, spots on giraffes, and markings around the eyes of raccoons.
- Show the children how to paint the rough surface of the dried papier mâché. Load the brush with paint and dab into the crevices. Smooth over the area, leaving no puddles of paint that tend to chip off when dried.
- Explain to the children that when mixing their colors, they should make enough to cover the surface of their animals. These colors can be stored in small jars for repairing mistakes and sharing with other children.
- Have the children mix their colors and cover the entire surface of their animals with a first layer of paint.
- Let the animals dry before painting on the details in the last session.

Note: Have an adult apply a coat of polyurethane to the dried animals to protect their surface.

NOTES

- Newspapers that use soy-based ink are more flexible.
- The rough edges created by tearing, rather than cutting, the newspaper strips are easier to smooth. When ripped vertically, newspapers will tear easily.
- Although not as easy to work with, thinned white liquid glue can be substituted for the wheat paste.
- Be sure that all the attachments are secured with tape before getting the foundation wet with paste.
- Avoid having the animals become too large. Keeping them approximately seven to ten inches high will allow more time for adding the details that make them so delightful.
- Very small parts, such as cats' ears, can be formed with folded pieces of paste-soaked newspaper when applying the papier mâché

LET'S TALK ABOUT OUR WORK

- Are the animals viewable from all sides?
- Have the animals been carefully painted, completely covering the newspaper.
- Review with the children the process of working with papier mâché.

What the children might say...

- *How much tape can I use?*
- *My tiger is dripping wet and starting to fall apart.*
- *After painting my giraffe, I still see lots of newspaper showing through.*
- *Oops. I forgot to add horns on my giraffe and it's already painted.*
- *How can I make whiskers for my cat?*

What you might say...

- *Since papier mâché doesn't stick to the tape as easily, use only as much as you need to hold your animal together.*
- *Don't forget to pull the wet newspaper strips through your fingers to take off the extra paste. If your animal is too wet, try putting on a layer of dry newspaper to soak up the extra paste.*
- *Remember to keep your brush filled with paint and to dab into any bumpy areas. Then smooth the paint to avoid puddles which might chip off after the paint dries.*
- *Another way to make horns for your giraffe is to bend some soft wire into the shape of the horns. Then we'll make a hole in the giraffe's head where the horns will be placed. You can dip the wires into some white glue and push them into the holes.*
- *Let's think of some items you might use for the cat's whiskers, like straw from a broom or pieces of plastic-coated wire.*