

Fenimore Art Museum

Corn Husk Doll Lesson

Corn was a staple crop of the Haudenosaunee and a respected plant. Corn was dried, stored, and used throughout the year. The husks, the green leaves around the ear of the corn, were woven into mats, baskets, and moccasins. The cobs of corns were used as scrubbers and container stoppers. Corn husks were also used to make dolls, like the one you are going to make today. After the corn was picked, the husks were dried and stored. Dried husks are soaked in warm water to make them pliable so they can be made into dolls, moccasins, mats, and baskets. Many girls adorn their dolls with intricately made clothing.

The Legend of the No Face Doll

Many Native American stories have important messages tied to them, like the story of the Corn Husk Doll, or No Face Doll, which reminds us of the importance of being humble. This version of the story comes from the Oneida Nation:



The Haudenosaunee people respect what they call the sustainers of life, the Three Sisters – Corn, Beans and Squash. The Corn Spirit was so thrilled to be one of the sustainers of life that she asked the Great Spirit if there was anything more that she could do for her people.

The Great Spirit told her that a doll could be formed from her husk. So she made the doll from her husk and gave the doll a beautiful face. Then, the doll went from village to village and played with the children. Everywhere she went everyone kept telling her how beautiful she was. So, it wasn't long before she became conceited. The Great Spirit called to her. But, before she went into the Great Spirit's lodge she looked into a pool of water to admire herself. The Great Spirit talked to her and told her that if she kept thinking that she was better than everyone else a terrible punishment would come upon her, but he wouldn't tell her what it would be. So, again the doll went from village to village playing with the children and again everyone kept telling her how beautiful she was. It wasn't long before she became conceited again. The Great Spirit called her and once again she looked into the pool of water to admire herself before going into the lodge. Upon entering, the Great Spirit said to her: "I have given you one warning, now a great punishment will come upon you." But he still wouldn't tell her what it was. When she left the lodge, she again looked into the pool of water to admire herself, but this time she didn't have a face. The Great Spirit had taken it away. Since that time, the Haudenosaunee people do not put a face on their corn husk dolls. This is to remind people, never to think that they are better than anyone else or a great punishment will fall upon them.

<https://www.oneidaindiannation.com/the-legend-of-the-no-face-doll/>

Vocabulary:

Humble: Not proud, having a modest or low opinion of yourself, not showing off your talents

Conceited: Too proud, having too high an opinion of yourself, showing off your talents

Making a Corn Husk Doll

Materials:

Corn Husks

Large Bowl filled with warm water

Paper Towels

String or twine

Glue

Scissors

Embellishments: felt, corn silk, yarn, cotton balls, cloth scraps, dried flowers—use your imagination!

Step 1: Fill a large bowl with warm water and soak your corn husks in it. Allow the corn husks to soak for about 10 minutes before you make your doll, separating your husks as they become more pliable, or bendy. Lay out your other materials: 5-7 pieces of twine or string that are about 5 inches long each, scissors, and paper towels to clean up the extra water. After your husks have soaked, pick 3-4 large pieces that are about the same size.

Step 2: Create the head: Lay one of your pieces of string on the table in front of you. Lay the 3-4 pieces of husk on top of the string with the wide ends of the husks about one inch above the string. Tie the string tightly around the husks. Cut off the extra string.

Step 3: Pick up the husks you just tied and holding the tied section of corn husk with one hand, gently fold or peel the layers of corn husk over the tied section. Then, use another piece of string to tightly tie a head. This will cover the inside of the head you just made. Cut off the extra string.

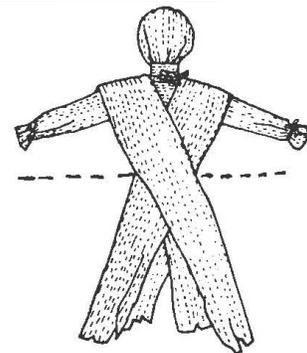




Step 4: The arms and body: Take another piece of corn husk. Cut off the pointy end to make this piece a rectangle. Don't cut it too short because you can always trim it later. Roll this piece up like a newspaper lengthwise. Tie strings at each end to create hands. Lift up one piece of husk to the doll's neck and tuck the arms you just rolled into that spot. Lower the piece of husk. Tie a string under the arms around the body to hold the arms in place. Trim off the extra string.



Step 5: Shoulders and Body: Take 2 more pieces of cornhusk. These pieces should be thin. You can cut or rip a larger piece into 2 smaller pieces to do this step. Drape each piece across the doll over the arms, bringing to an X shape in front and back. This gives your doll shoulders. Take another piece of string and tie it around the waist of your doll. Trim the pieces if necessary to make them even with your doll.



Step 6: Legs or Dress: Now you can decide if you want to make a boy doll or a girl doll. For a boy doll, take 4 pieces of string. Divide the corn husks under the waist of your doll in half. Tie a string around the top and bottom of each half. Trim the extra string. Now your doll has legs. For a girl doll, take another piece of cornhusk, lay it on the doll so the pointy, skinny end is at the bottom and the fat end is over the doll's face. Tie a string around the waist area and fold the fat end down to the bottom. This creates a dress for your doll.



Step 8: Get creative! Use any materials you have, felt, cloth, dried flowers, corn silk, yarn, or other items to dress up your doll. You can give your doll hair, a shirt, belt, jewelry, or anything you like to make the doll yours. Just remember, no face!

We would love to see your Cornhusk Doll! Please post a picture of your doll on our Fenimore Art Museum Facebook or Instagram Page for a chance to win tickets to the museum. You can also email us your photo and we can post it for you w.baker@farmersmuseum.org

