

Cool Tools – The Art of Sweet Fakery for Theatre & Film

4 Lessons @ 1 Hour per Session
Cross-curricular-Art and Social Studies
Grades 7-12

Description

Most students are amazed at how much time, effort and detail goes into making movie props, costumes and replicas. In their own right they are 'works-of-art.'

There are a number of reasons for deciding to make a prop. It technically does not exist, it needs to withstand harsh treatment and or it is too expensive to purchase to name just a few.

In our case we will make a food prop because food spoils and the scene in the hypothetical play that is expected to run for several weeks calls for fresh baked goods. We choose this prop as its creation has so many applications. The same method we use for making this chocolate bunt cake is used for mask making and assorted rubber props such as swords, armor pieces and items that need durability but are easy to handle and do not hurt if an actor is hit or while being hurled (as a stone or fake brick).



This highly realistic chocolate, icing coated bunt cake was molded and cast from the original baked goods. It looks good enough to eat. You can easily make a stage prop like this one with just a few basic material and a little time. The only thing missing is the chocolate aroma.

The other reason to choose this prop is that students will see how realistic fake food is made similar to the displays now used in restaurants, model home staging and home décor.

This is four-part lesson plan due to the fact that it takes time to create the piece. It takes a day's drying to create the mold, another day for the latex casting to dry and still another to complete the decoration. In between the wait time students are provided with a variety of exercises to help them understand the art of prop making and the cool tools of fakery for film and stage.

Objectives

- Identify considerations prop makers keep in mind when creating props for movies and television.
- Describe the process a prop maker goes through in creating a prop (discussions, research, drawings, and then models).
- Create actual props for a movie set.

Materials

- Monster Movie Masks - Part 1, ArtMolds — DVD Video VD100380R
- Copies of well-known or familiar scenes from plays, one per group, plus copies of one scene for the whole class. (Appropriate scenes can be found in *Childsplay: A Collection of Scenes and Monologues for Children*, by Kerry Muir (Limelight Editions, 2004) and *Great Scenes and Monologues for Children (Young Actors Series)*, edited by Craig Slight and Jack Sharrar (Smith & Kraus Books for Kids, 2003.)
- Real store bought bunt cake (3) Purchase locally
- Non perils — for decoration Purchase locally
- Plastic knives Purchase locally
- Paper plate—for cakes and as a palette Purchase locally
- Cake doily — for display on plate Purchase locally
- 407 Latex for slip casting — 1 Gallon SP110711R
- CastRite Plaster 2 each 10-lb boxes SM102015R
- KastEZ Resin Pint Kit (1) SP40001R
- Latex based paints — Brown, Black, Red PP300601R
- Talc powder Drug store
- Modeling clay or Plasticine clay AP1ST0102R
- Craft Sticks— 1 Package Purchase locally
- Assorted Paint Brushes Purchase locally
- Disposable Cups, 9-Oz. (50) Purchase locally
- Plastic bowls, 3 ea. — to mix CastRite Purchase locally
- Paper towels Purchase locally

Suggested Resources

- *Monster Movie Masks - Part 1: ArtMolds*, DVD Video
- *Making Stage Props: A Practical Guide* by Andy Wilson: Crowood Press, Ltd: March 1, 2003

Procedure

Lesson 1: Introduction to the Artistry of Props and Prop Making

1. Have the class watch "Monster Movie Masks - Part 1." Then discuss the work of a prop designer. Ask students: Who does a prop maker discuss sets with? Why? What do prop makers do before setting to work? How do drawings help them? What factors must they consider during the creative process? What sources they use for inspiration and research?
2. Distribute a copy of a scene from a play and have the class pick out appropriate props from the description of the set. Then discuss the scene. Ask students: What is taking place in this scene? Who is in it? Do we know when it is taking place, such as during a particular time in history, during the day? What is the setting? Is it a particular kind of room or building? What should the props be? Why? Talk about the props that might be included and discuss some reference tools students might use to research ideas for props.

Lesson 2: Creating the Prop Mold

1. Once students have a solid understanding of how a prop master determines the need about for props, divide the class into three groups each with a bunt cake that they will recreate realistically. Tell the groups that they will use cardboard boxes, CastRite and mixing bowls to cover each cake in a three inch thickness of



1. Bunt cake and materials required to make the plaster mold



2. Plaster covers the bunt cake to a depth of 3-inches all around



3. After the plaster dries overnight the soggy cake is removed. The mold is cleaned and left to dry.



4. 407 Latex is poured into the mold all the way to the brim and left standing for 30-minutes.

wet plaster. Measure out dry plaster powder and water in accordance with direction on the box. Allow the plaster to thicken and then scoop it out of the bowl and gently begin covering the cake until the top and sides are about 3-inches thick. This will be the plaster mold. Allow it to dry overnight so it is ready for the next class – at least 24-hours.

Lesson 3: Creating the Prop Casting

1. The next class period the cake should now be scooped out of the mold. The cake will be soggy and thus, easily removed. However, there will be residual coating left behind on the plaster mold which will need to be cleaned out in the sink. Once clean, the plaster must be dried using paper towels to remove all moisture. Turn the mold upside down and fill it to the brim with 407 Latex. It must sit for 30-minutes after which time pour out the 407-Latex from the mold back into the container. A wet latex skin is left behind on the mold. That needs to dry overnight. You can hasten drying with a hair dryer or small heater.
2. While you wait to pour out the latex from the mold have the students make sketches or drawings of possible prop ideas for the scene. Each student should participate in discussing the scene, presenting prop ideas to the class, and drawing sketches, researching period architecture or furnishings, or creating suggested props, or all tasks. When students have decided on the need of the final props, give let them suggest appropriate supplies to create them. Allow enough time to work in class or as a homework assignment.

Lesson 4: Completing the Prop

1. The next class period have the students demold their latex castings. The latex needs to be dry. If it is still moist you can use a hair dryer to finish setting the rubber. Before attempting removal powder the inside of the casting with talc to prevent it sticking to itself. Carefully separate the latex. Stuff the inside of the fresh cast of the cake with paper towels to give it support. Using latex paints (other paint such as acrylic will not stay) mix brown, a little red and black to create a chocolate color and paint the outside of the casting. A hair dryer will help speed the drying process.
2. To give the cake a realist icing look. Mix about two ounces of Part A with two ounces of Part B KastEZ Resin and drizzle it on top of the cake allowing it to drip down the sides. Now take the jar of non perils and shake the on top of the cake for additional decoration. To complete the prop, place the cake on a cake doily on a clean paper plate. Add a plastic knife along side the cake for display for added realism
3. After completing, have students write a paragraph describing the role they played in their group and what they learned about prop design. Display the finished models in the classroom so students and visitors can look at them.



5. After 30-minutes the 407 Latex is pour out of the mold back into the container. The casting is left to dry overnight.



6. A hair dryer is used to speed drying time. Talc is then shaken into the fresh cast to prevent sticking on removal.



7. The dry latex casting is carefully removed by peeling off the side of the plaster mold.



8. Paper towels are inserted in the hollow casting to give the casting support.

Extension Activity

If students have theatrical experience, allow them to bring in props from a play they were in or pictures to discuss with the class. For a prop, have them prepare a short presentation on what the prop is and its function in the performance. For pictures of a production, have them prepare a short presentation on the set's appearance and why it was designed that way.

Having students list everything in their own home which has been created by a mold and then cast. A student's own history and their reflections regarding casting in current events will enable students to shape their ideas. Students may also inspire each other by sharing their lists of casting and mold making along with their opinions on what the absence of these techniques would mean to them in their world today.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students accurately identified several considerations of prop makers; clearly described and used the latex prop making process (discussions, research, drawings, then models); and created unique, creative, and well-crafted latex prop that accurately and appropriately reflected the requirements of a scene.
- **2 points:** Students somewhat accurately identified a few considerations of prop maker; adequately described and used the latex prop making process (discussions, research, drawings, and then models); and created somewhat unique, creative, and well-crafted prop models that generally reflected their scene.
- **1 point:** Students were unable to identify any considerations of latex prop making; inadequately described and used the latex prop making process (discussions, research, drawings, and then models); and created incomplete or inappropriate latex props that did not reflect their scene.

Vocabulary

collaborate

Definition: To work together, especially in a joint intellectual effort
Context: A movie set is a place to collaborate; a director does not arbitrarily make hacks and cuts and toss things away.

inspire

Definition: To fill with enlivening or exalting emotion; to affect, guide, or arouse emotion
Context: A prop designer looks for things that inspire, such as paintings or photos of period architecture.



9. The casting is now painted a chocolate brown to replicate the original cake



10. Some KastEZ Resin is mixed and poured over the cake to create an icing. Non perils provide the finishing touch.

latex

Definition: A milky sap from certain plants that coagulates on exposure to air

Context: An emulsion of rubber or plastic globules in water, used in paints, adhesives, and various synthetic rubber products.

mold

Definition: A hollow form or matrix for shaping a fluid or plastic substance

Context: A mold is used to cast a shape or duplicate an object

prop

Definition: Short for a theatrical property

Context: A prop should contribute to the audience's experience.

set

Definition: The scenery constructed for a theatrical performance

Context: A set designed with appropriate props helps tell a story on stage in a finite amount of space.

visualize

Definition: To form a mental image of; envisage

Context: Often a prop designer will visualize a prop written into a script at its first reading.

National Standards

National Art Education Association (NAEA)

The National Art Education Association has developed national guidelines for what students should know and be able to do in the arts. To view the standards online, go to artsedge.kennedy-center.org/teach/standards.cfm. This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures
- Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K–12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>. This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Visual Arts – Understands the visual arts in relation to history and cultures; Understands the characteristics and merits of one's own artwork and the artwork of others
- Arts: Art Connections – Understands connections among the various art forms and other disciplines

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

The National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association have developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching the English language arts. To view the standards online, go to www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.htm.

This lesson plan addresses the following English standards:

- Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities
- Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information)

This Lesson Plan Conforms to the National Art Education Association (NAEA) Standards for Lesson Plans.