

Make Your Own Pendant

This Scrimshaw necklace is a unique art project for preschoolers that uses a traditional whaler technique of etching designs into a malleable material (they used to use whale teeth and bone) to create works of art. While your child creates his design, you can teach him about the artistic techniques of other cultures and time periods.

What You Need:

- 1/3 cup (70 g) plaster of Paris
- 2/3 cup (150 ml) water
- Wax paper
- Nail or pin
- Felt pens
- Measuring cups
- Leather string
- Spoon
- Shellac (optional)
- Rag

What You Do:

1. Mix the plaster of Paris with the water in a measuring cup with a spoon until thick and smooth. Remember to work fast because plaster hardens quickly.
2. Drop spoonfuls of plaster on the wax paper. The plaster spoonfuls should form flat discs of any size your child wants. Young artists often like to make pendants VERY large, but this is fine—they'll enjoy wearing them all the same. Smooth plaster with the back of a spoon if necessary.
3. Let the plaster of Paris harden for 5-10 minutes.
4. If your child is planning to make a necklace or pendant, poke a hole in the top of the plaster blob on the wax paper while the plaster is still soft.
5. When the plaster has hardened, help your child carefully etch a design into the plaster using a nail or pin. This is a traditional technique used by whalers to create designs on shark teeth, whale bones, and walrus tusks.
6. Have your child draw over the etched design with felt pens and then rub away the excess. The ink will fill the etched portion and color the design.
7. Draw additional designs and pictures on the plaster as desired.
8. To better preserve the design, cover the pendant with shellac (optional).
9. Thread a leather string through the hole and tie the ends together to create a necklace.



Now your child has a beautiful, handmade scrimshaw necklace to wear! Try making more scrimshaw discs in other shapes and sizes for a varied collection, or give the pendants away as gifts for friends and family!