



## Soap Carving

**Objective:** Students will explore a subtractive method of creating sculpture using soap and the grid method transfer.

**Level:** 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> Grades (adaptable for upper levels)

### Supplies:

- Bar of soft soap, such as *Ivory*
- Woodcraft sticks
- Pencil
- 8½" X 11" sheet of paper
- Paper plate
- Small plastic bag with a seal or plastic wrap
- Box or bag to put soap scraps in
- Optional:
  - Toothpicks
  - Metal spoons and forks

### Process:

A well ventilated room with worktables, chairs, and blackboard or demonstration board is needed for this activity. Each student should have a setting that includes one sheet of paper and pencil, a paper plate, a woodcraft stick, a small plastic bag, and a bar of soap. Place samples of relief and in-the-round soap sculptures on tables.

The activity director may want to mention the significance of this activity to the Marshall Fredericks Sculpture Museum. When he was age four, he was being a nuisance to his mother. She, in order to keep him quiet, gave him a bar of soap and he carved it into a small pig.

Write the words **relief**, **in-the-round**, and **subtractive sculpture** on the board and discuss them. Ask for a volunteer to demonstrate these terms. Relate these definitions to sculptures in the museum. Use the sculpture samples on their tables to demonstrate relief and in-the-round sculpture.

Discuss ideas and themes for sculptures. Ask them to do a drawing using any theme: animal, human, etc. Students can begin to do a very simple linear drawing, not too much detail, using the whole sheet of paper. The whole drawing should almost touch the edges of the sheet of paper when finished. The activity director should do a sample drawing on the board. Encourage students to use a theme that relates to them if they have difficulty with selecting an image. Encourage representational, non-representational, and abstract images.

When the drawings are complete, have the students fold the drawing in half and fold in half once more. Unfold the paper completely and the folds should divide the paper into four rectangular sections. Set the drawing aside.

Have students unwrap their bar of soap. Make sure no one is allergic to the soap. They should not to rub their eyes with their hands after they handle the soap and not to eat it or put it near their mouth. Handle the soap on the plate because if it gets too warm it becomes soft and breaks more easily. Using the straight side of their woodcraft sticks, have students gently scrape off (away from them) the embossed name of the soap. The activity director can demonstrate this. Students can do the other side, too. Using their stick, they should lightly make guidelines in the soap exactly where the folds are on their drawing (center left to right and center top to bottom). Afterwards the grid lines on the soap piece should resemble the folds on the drawing. The activity director should demonstrate this whole process on the board and with the soap. Using their pencil or stick, students should lightly reproduce the drawing, grid section by section, to the soap. Have them start in the top left quarter, then top right, then bottom left, and then bottom right.

When the students are finished with transferring their drawing onto the soap, the activity director should do a few demonstrations on how to remove layers of soap in a subtractive method. The activity director should interact with each student and help them to problem solve, if needed. Many students think two-dimensionally and try to carve away at the lines of their drawing deeper into the soap instead of carving away at either the positive or negative areas to create a form. Students should be allowed to work at their own pace. This activity should take 30 to 45 minutes to do.

Afterwards students can place them in their plastic bag and take them home.

### **Suggestions for Carving:**

- Keep the bar of soap on the plate as much as possible.
- The bar may be held in the hand and carved or peeled like an apple, but it is often more difficult to control. The soap also becomes warm and mushy from the heat of a hand.
- Work slowly. Take only small portions of the soap away at a time.  
**If you do not, the bar will crack.**

- Students may create three-dimensional forms by removing all excess soap (i.e., between legs of animals), so positive and negative forms are more pronounced. Relief sculpture may also be created by removing the soap in the negative space area until about half-way through to the other side of the soap. The positive form pops out while leaving a wall of soap on the reverse side for the form/sculpture to rest on. Relief sculpture is excellent for forms with fine detail or for younger children that have not developed advanced motor skills.
- **Do not eat the soap. Do not rub eyes when using soap, it burns. Carve soap in a well-ventilated area.**
- Similar soft sculpting media may be substituted for the soap.

Note: You can design a powerpoint presentation with visuals for this lesson plan.

### **National Common Core Standards for Visual Arts**

#### **5th grade**

VA:Cr1.2.5a Identify and demonstrate diverse methods of artistic investigation to choose an approach for beginning a work of art.

#### **6th grade**

VA:Cr1.1.6a Combine concepts collaboratively to generate innovative ideas for creating art.