

“Scrimshaw” Craft Activity

Traditionally, scrimshaw was the name given to the craft of scratching, carving or etching designs into bone or ivory, and filling the scratched-in designs with ink or similar substance. Native people living along the northwest coast of North America created scrimshaw in the prehistoric period. However, the greatest era of scrimshaw was the early-mid 1800s, when the art form was practiced by sailors on long whaling voyages. Sailors carved their designs into whale teeth or bone. Imagery included ships and seafaring scenes; whales, birds and other wildlife; patriotic motifs; and scenes encountered at ports of call.

Activity Instructions:

Materials:

Plastic container lids - Pencils – Nails - Black or Dark Blue Crayons - Paper Towels

Instructions:

1. Turn plastic lid upside down so that you have a plain surface on which to work, and a rim around the perimeter.
2. Draw a picture on the lid in pencil. For inspiration take a look at the pictures of historical scrimshaw below.
3. Use a nail to trace over the picture and/or to fill it in by scratching many lines into the plastic. Bear down hard on the nail so the scratches or grooves are deep enough.
4. Use the crayon on its side (or nearly so) to color over the scratched-in design. The crayon wax will become embedded and will show up more darkly in the scratches or grooves.
5. Take a paper towel and clean off the excess crayon. It should wipe off the smooth plastic surface readily. What is left are the black or dark blue lines comprising your design.
6. That’s it – you’re done! Want to do another?

