



## CORN HUSK DOLLS

### I. GOAL:

Students will learn how children in the 1840s entertained themselves by making simple toys.

### II. OBJECTIVES:

- A. Each child will make a corn husk doll.
- B. Through discussion and hands on activity, the students will compare "play time" toys of the 1840s with "play time" toys of today.

### III. THE PEOPLE / THE PLACE:

The self-sufficiency of the early settlers has been discussed many times. Nowhere was settler ingenuity more evident than in the home. Everything was used and reused. The settlers found pleasure in the simple things in life such homemade toys.

### IV. THE CRAFT:

#### Materials needed:

- Corn Husks (may be purchased at Mexican Food supply markets or some super markets)-- 20 per doll
- Artificial sinew or heavy string (sinew available at S.F. Trade Store)
- Scissors
- Warm Water in large tub (The Fort will provide galvanized wash tubs)
- Cloth Scraps for clothing
- Bath Towels

#### Directions:

1. Fill a large tub with warm water. Soak husks about 10 to 15 minutes to make them pliable. Keep the husks wet while working. Always keep the smooth side of the husks turned outside.
2. Lay the bath towels on your work table to absorb excess water from the husks.
3. Hold six or seven large husks together as if you were arranging them in layers.
4. Tightly tie the bundle in the middle with strong string or sinew. Wind the string around the husks several times before you tie a knot so the husks will not fall apart.
5. Turn down the husks above the knot one by one as you would peel a banana. Pull the husks down until the ends are about even with the ends below the knot.



6. Firmly wrap string or sinew around the husks and tie a knot about one inch from the top. The part above the sinew will be the doll's head.
7. To make arms take one husk, turn the ends inside and roll tightly. Do not make the arms thick.
8. Tie the ends and center with a string.
9. Separate the husks below the doll's head and push the arm piece between the layers under and against the head so the arms stick out at each side.
10. Roll a small strip of husk into a ball. Separate the husk layers just below the arms and fill the pocket with rolled husk.
11. Close the husks around the ball and tie them securely below the ball. Now you have a chest and waistline.
12. Choose two wide cornhusk strips and drape one over each shoulder, crossing the strips in front and back.
13. Tie sinew around the waist to fasten the ends.
14. Cut a thin strip of husk about a quarter of an inch wide to cover the neck thread.
15. Tie the husk off by making a knot or tying a bow in front.
16. Bend the arms to make hands, if you wish.
17. To make a skirt, choose wide soft husks and place them with the pointed ends at the waist and the wide stem ends over the head.
18. Securely tie all the husks at the waist and turn down (toward the feet of the doll) the husk layers as you would peel a banana.
19. Trim the ends that now form the skirt's hem to make the hem even so the doll can stand.
20. To make a male doll, simply cut the lower husks in half to the waist and use sinew to tie the two pieces into bundles forming legs.
21. Use pieces of scrap cloth to make bonnets, shirt, bag, shawls, bandana, etc. Use your imagination. Corn silk can be used for hair.
22. Let dolls dry 1 – 2 days. Before they are completely dry, do not put them in a closed space or they will mold.



Lay 6 or 7 husks together & tie in the middle.



Turn down husks above the tie.



Tie a knot about an inch from the top for the doll's head to form the neck.



Cover thread that formed neck with a thin strip of husk & tie into a knot or bow.



Roll one husk tightly. Tie ends and center.



Push the arm piece between bust layers below head.



Roll a small piece of husk into a ball.



Fill pocket below arms with a ball of husk to form the chest.



Then tie the waist.



Drape a husk over the shoulders & tie at the waist.



Make simple clothes.



Dry doll for a day or two.

### Simplified Directions:

If you don't have the time or patience to make the dolls described above, following is a simpler method. The materials needed are the same, but you won't need as many corn husks.

1. Soak corn husks in warm water 10 – 15 minutes. Keep moist.
2. Use 6 husks for 1 large body, 4 husks for a small body, 2 husks for arms. If a husk is too large you can tear it in half.
3. On a towel-draped table, place the husks in front of you making sure all narrow ends are together, on top of each other.
4. Take an 8 inch piece of artificial sinew or string and wrap it around the narrow end of the husks about 2 inches down from the top. Wrap the sinew or string twice around the husks and tie in a secure knot.
5. Turn the husks upside down, with the loose ends up.
6. Pull down one husk from one side, then one from the other as if you were peeling a banana. Do this until all husks have been pulled down.
7. Pull the husks down tightly, but not so tightly that you pull them out of the tied end.
8. With another piece of twine, tie the husks about one inch from the top to form the doll's head.



9. To make arms lay 2 corn husks in front of you. Place them on top of each other with the narrow ends opposite each other. Roll them up tightly.
10. Tie the husks (arms) in the middle with sinew or string.
11. Trim the ends evenly by folding the arm piece in half at the center and trimming the ends.
12. Choosing the smoothest side of the head for the front, lift up the loose ends of husks until you are at the center. Place the arms as far up and close to the neck as possible. With another piece of sinew tightly tie off the husks as you did before around the body to hold the arms in place.
13. To form hands, with the doll facing you fold 1/4 to 1/2 inch of arm in towards the body. Tie off securely on each side.
14. Let doll dry 1 – 2 days.



Tie 2 inches down.



Turn husks down over tie.



Tie 2 inches down to form head.



Tie ends and center to form arms.



Divide skirt and push arms up just under head.



Tie below arms to form waist.



## Story of the Corn Husk Doll

(This story is told by Mrs. Snow, a talented Seneca craftswoman.\*)

Many, many years ago, the corn, one of the Three Sisters, wanted to make something different. She made the moccasin and the salt boxes, the mats, and the face. She wanted to do something different so the Great Spirit gave her permission. So she made the little people out of corn husk and they were to roam the earth so that they would bring brotherhood and contentment to the Iroquois tribe. But she made one that was very, very beautiful. This beautiful corn person, you might call her, went into the woods and saw herself in a pool. She saw how beautiful she was and she became very vain and naughty. That began to make the people very unhappy and so the Great Spirit decided that wasn't what she was to do. She didn't pay attention to his warning, so the last time the messenger came and told her that she was going to have her punishment. Her punishment would be that she'd have no face, she would not converse with the Seneca or the birds or the animals. She'd roam the earth forever, looking for something to do to gain her face back again. So that's why we don't put faces on the husk dolls.



\*Story from **Our Mother Corn**, Mather, Fernandes, Brescia, 1981