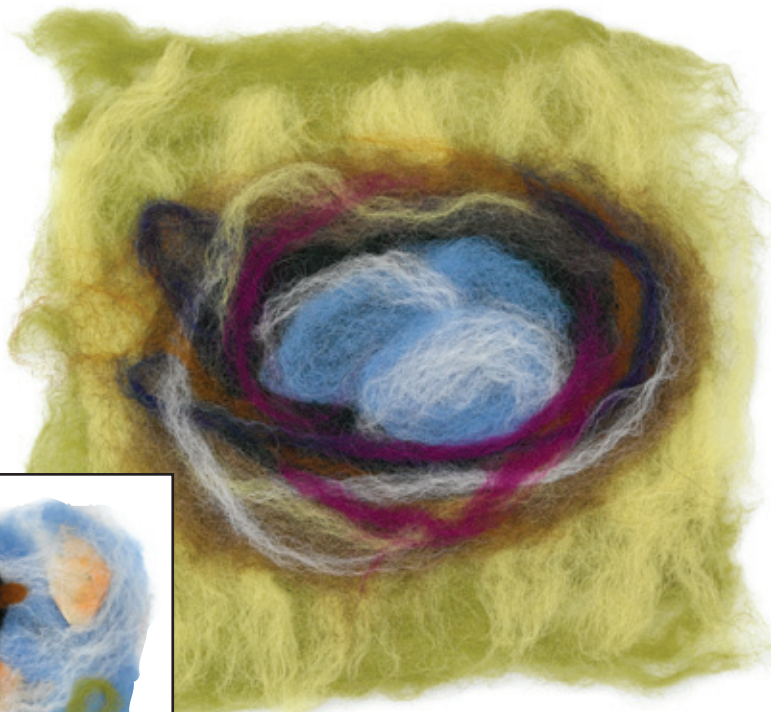


“Nesting” with Wool

Roll up a felted masterpiece with just wool, soap and water!

The technique of wet felting has been practiced for thousands of years. Based on archaeological findings from the Central Asian Steppes, felting of animal hair has been a means of creating unwoven fabric for clothing, shelter, and artistic expression since at least 600 BCE, soon after people started to keep and breed tame sheep to grow wool.

Nobody knows who figured out how to felt wool, but numerous cultures have legends as to the origins of felt. A story from the Middle Ages features Saint Clement and Saint Christopher, who, while fleeing persecution, packed their sandals with wool to prevent blisters. By journey's end, the movement and sweat had turned the wool into felt! People from Central Asia sometimes made felt by rolling up wool inside leather skins and having a horse drag the roll around until the wool was felted.



Felting occurs when fiber is moist, alkaline, and physically agitated. The microscopic scales that cover the individual filaments of animal hair are responsible for the fiber's ability to felt together. In this lesson plan, tufts of fluffed wool are rubbed with soap and water to make a beautiful piece of felt. The warm water and soap causes the scales to swell and open, and the filaments snag together when massaged and agitated (imagine miniature Velcro[®] swatches connecting to each other).

This process is very user-friendly. Requiring only water, soap, wool, and something to roll it in, the results are “high success,” as students easily create a beautiful wool fiber masterpiece. The composition can be sketched ahead of time, or it can be very spontaneous as students respond intuitively to the texture and color of the wool.

GRADES K-12 Note: instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 25 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Gather 8" x 10" pieces of bubble wrap for each student.
2. Cut pieces of plastic canvas in half, resulting in a 6-1/2" x 10-1/2" piece for each student.

Materials

[Wistyrta Editions 100% Wool Roving](#), package of 8 (63235-); share 2-3 packages among class

[Plastic Canvas](#), 10-1/2" x 13-1/2" (63103-); share one between two students

[The Master™ Artist's Hand Soap](#), 4.5-oz bar(04818-1006); share one among class

[Aida Cloth](#), 60" x 1-yd (63101-1060); share two yards among class

[Oval Poly Sponge](#), 5" x 3" x 2" (32902-1000), share five among class

Bubble wrap, approx 11" x 14", need one piece per student

Optional Materials

[Arnold Grummer's Botanicals](#) (12741-1004)

3. Cut stitchery canvas into 10" x 12" pieces
4. Have an area for wet work available, such as a sink. Old towels are also handy to have available.

Process

1. Begin by pulling pieces of wool apart. Wool felts better when torn than when cut. Each student will need several 6" long and 8" long pieces. Pull the wool apart until it is thinned out and “gauzy.”
2. Lay the 6" pieces of wool across the bubble wrap. This will make up the first layer, and will be seen from the back of the felt when finished. The 6" pieces should cover about 8" of space from top to bottom.

Process, continued

- Next, lay the 8" pieces of wool vertically on top of the horizontally placed 6" layer.
- The third and final layer will be the painting. Using pieces of thinned-out wool, compose a painting. If desired, add decorative inclusions, making sure to cover them sparingly with very thin pieces of wool so they adhere to the background.
- Take the painting to the sink, and cover it with the plastic canvas.
- Evenly drip small amounts of warm water over the plastic canvas until the wool is evenly damp, but not soaking wet. Using a soapy sponge, rub it across the plastic canvas in a circular motion, covering the whole piece. Repeat this process with your hands until the soap foams slightly.
- Remove the felt from the bubble wrap and roll it up tightly in a piece of aida cloth or other loose-weave cloth. Roll the felt and canvas back and forth across the towel for about a minute. Unroll it, and turn the felt piece 90°. Roll again. Unroll it a third time, turn it 90° and repeat until the piece is nicely felted. It is helpful if one student holds the towel while the other rolls the felt.
- Rinse the soap from the felt, and lay the wool painting on a flat surface to dry overnight.



Step 1: Apply two layers of wool by first separating fibers. Lay the first layer horizontally, then lay the second layer vertically.

Options

Use dried botanicals on the top layer of the wool to add visual interest and texture. Place the dried petals on the wool painting and add a very thin veil of wool fibers to help felt them into place. Then proceed with steps 5-8 above.

National Standards for Visual Arts Education

Content Standard #1 — Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes.

K-4 Students know the differences between materials, techniques, and processes.

5-8 Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas.

9-12 Students apply media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks.

Content Standard #4 Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.

K-4 Students know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationships to various cultures.

5-8 Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures.

9-12 Students differentiate among a variety of historical and cultural contexts in terms of characteristics and purposes of works of art.



Step 2: "Paint" with wool by laying color down to create a composition.



Step 3: With bubble wrap under the wool and plastic canvas on top, add drops of warm water and soap in a circular motion, covering the entire piece. Continue to agitate the wool by moving hands over the mesh.



Step 4: Roll the wool painting tightly in aida cloth. Roll for one minute. Unroll, turn the piece 90°. Repeat. Rinse out soap and lay flat to dry.