

ELP and ESP Station Handout Rag Dolls



INTRODUCTION

This handout will give you historical background of rag dolls and show you how to make the dolls. Through the Rag Doll station, your students will learn how to make their own rag dolls. They will also get the opportunity to compare and contrast toys and entertainment of the 1840s with those of the present day.

HISTORY

Rag dolls were sometimes called pioneer dolls or rag babies. Mothers made these dolls when coming to California in the 1840s and 1850s. The dolls would be something with which the children could play while walking along the trail or resting in camp at night. The dolls were made from scrap cotton fabric from clothing; cotton print was typically no more than 2-3 colors.

MAKING RAG DOLLS

Materials Required to Make One Doll

- 1 piece of cloth roughly 12 inches by 10 inches
- 4 pieces of string 4 inches in length
- 1 cotton ball or fiberfill about the size of a golf ball (approximately 2 inches in diameter)
- Additional pieces of cloth to make apron, scarf or bonnet, if desired.

Note: Used fabrics work well as they give an authentic look to the doll

Directions

Head and Body: Lay the fabric down with the shorter sides at the top and bottom and place the batting about 1/3 way down. Fold the top of the fabric down over the batting leaving about a third free at the bottom. Gather the fabric at the fold around the batting to form the head, then use one of the strings to tie around the batting to form the neck. Tighten the fabric around the batting and then unfold all the fabric and lay the doll flat.



Arms and Hands: Gather the fabric from the edge directly to the side of the head, and from the center at the top. Bring the two edges to the center of the head, then tie with string against the string around the neck. Repeat for the other side, then spread the arm sections out (they will look like wings). The “hands” are just knots at the end of the arms. Start by pulling the arm out straight, then make a large, loose knot at the body. Tighten the knot as you pull it down the arm to the end. Repeat on the other side.



The finished body for a girl doll looks like the photo on the left. For a boy doll, tear the fabric at the center bottom up to the arms. You can make a knot at the ends of the sections to form feet. The finished body for the boy doll is at the right.



Dressing the dolls: The girl dolls can be dressed in fabric to create a dress, apron, shawl and head scarf. For the boy doll use a shorter dress tied around the waist with a strip of fabric to represent a tunic. Girls' head scarfs should tie under the chin in front and boys' should tie behind the neck, pirate style.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The advantage of the Rag Doll station is that it is very flexible; it can be set up almost anywhere in the fort, including indoors if it is raining. For that reason, and because working with cold water (required for Corn Husk Dolls) in the winter is difficult, Rag Dolls is a good station to have during the late fall and winter, while Corn Husk Dolls is best during the spring and early summer.