

Matryoshka Dolls:

They're "What It's Stacked-Up to Be"



Overview & Purpose

Students will learn about one of Russia's most popular toys. The Matryoshka toy has been one of the most popular symbols of Russian culture for centuries. The students will create their own matryoshka toy and personalize them to resemble important people in their lives.

Background History for the Teacher

Some historians of Russian life argue that matryoshka dolls originated from **Japanese traditional dolls**. However it's known that Russian masters would make hollow detachable **Easter eggs** from the wood long before the first nesting doll was made. The first Russian nesting doll set appeared in Moscow in 1890's. It was carved by Vasily Zvyozdochkin from a design by a folk crafts painter Sergey Malyutin. The doll set consisted of eight dolls of decreasing sizes placed one inside the other.

All eight dolls depicted children -- the outermost was a girl holding a rooster, six inner dolls were girls, the fifth doll was a boy, and the innermost was a baby.

Despite the fact that first matryoshka dolls were intended for children, their price was so high that only adults could afford to buy them on special occasions. Matryoshka dolls were often given as a present to young women from their beloved ones. In 1900, the dolls earned a bronze medal at the World Exhibition in Paris. Soon after, Russian nesting dolls became wildly popular. The toys were being produced in several well-known manufacturing centers, the most famous of them being Sergiev Posad and Semenov. In the early twentieth century, Russian nesting dolls were being exported abroad in large quantities. The popularity of the dolls even gave rise to a few companies in Germany which produced counterfeit nesting dolls and sold them as Russian toys.

Education Standards

Creative expression. The student communicates ideas through original artworks using a variety of media with appropriate skills. The student expresses thoughts and ideas creatively while challenging the imagination, fostering reflective thinking, and developing disciplined effort and progressive problem solving skills. The student is expected to:

- (A) integrate ideas drawn from life experiences to create original works of art;
- (B) create compositions using the elements of art and principles of design; and
- (C) produce drawings; paintings; prints; sculpture, including modeled forms; and other art forms such as ceramics, fiber art, constructions, mixed media, installation art, digital art and media, and photographic imagery using a variety of materials.

Historical and cultural relevance. The student demonstrates an understanding of art history and culture by analyzing artistic styles, historical periods, and a variety of cultures. The student develops global awareness and respect for the traditions and contributions of diverse cultures. The student is expected to:

- (A) identify simple main ideas expressed in artworks from various times and places;

Materials Needed

Paper cups (4 different sizes- 3 oz, 6 oz, 8 oz, 12 oz.)

Gluestick

Flesh coloured paper

Scrapbook or patterned paper

Pens/markers

The History of the Matryoshka Dolls Powerpoint

Vocabulary

Tradition

Symbol

Culture

Student Objectives

1. Students will learn the history of the Matryoshka Dolls, including a Russian nursery tale, *Happy Together*.
2. Students will create a set of nesting dolls to depict their family.

Activity

1. The teacher will discuss the history of the nesting dolls and will read the inspired tale, *Happy Together* (Powerpoint found in Resource Folder).
2. Students will choose 4-5 important people in their family to represent their nesting dolls.
3. Students will use the template provided to cut circles from the flesh coloured paper for faces and will decorate with the pens or markers to depict these people.
4. Templates can also be used to cut the body panels from the scrapbook paper. Glue these panels onto the cups to make a doll.
5. Students can share who the dolls represent.

Extension

Write a brief composition explaining who the dolls represent. What importance do these people have in your life? Stack them within each other and take them home to share with your family.