Corn Husk Doll

The history of the corn husk doll dates back to Native American craftsmanship. It is unknown when the practice of making corn husk dolls began among colonial peoples, however, we know that these dolls were made by European settlers, and enslaved African Americans. The looks and decorations of the dolls can vary greatly, despite similar techniques being used.

At the farm on the Hampton estate, each year crops would be harvested, the people that would have harvested the crops before the Civil War, would have been the enslaved people on the estate. Through the Ridgley's time owning the Hampton property, hundreds of enslaved people were forced to work on the land. Enslaved children made up a significant number of the enslaved population at Hampton. Being enslaved, they would not have had access to the same toys or activities that the Ridgely children did, however, this did not stop the desire to play that all children have. So, in the following instructions we will be showing you how to make one of the toys that the enslaved children at Hampton would have made; a corn husk doll.

A corn husk doll would have been a popular toy at the time because the husks would have been a material enslaved child could have had access to since their parents were likely to be the ones harvesting the fields. So, as you make a corn husk doll remember to consider the long history of children who would have made this same type of doll.

Supplies Needed; Corn Husks (8-10), Scissors and String.

Step 1

Gather 7-8 husks for a larger doll or 6 husks for a smaller doll, leave two husks off to the side to use for the arms later. Place each husk on top of each other, keeping the narrow ends of the husk together.

Step 2

Take the string and wrap it around the narrow end of the husks about 2 inches from the top, wrap the string around a few times before tying it in a knot. Make sure it is secure before moving on.

Step 3

Flip the husks upside down so the tied end is at the bottom, now ‘peel’ each husk down as if peeling a banana. At the end of this step all husks should be ‘peeled’ down.

Step 4

Tie the husks together about an inch from the top, this will be the dolls head.

Step 5

To make the arms, take the two husks you put aside earlier and lay them on top of each other, the narrow ends should be opposite each other.

Step 6

Roll the husks tightly together and tie the middle tight so the husks are secure.

Step 7

Lift up half of the loose husks on the front of the doll and slide the behind them. There should be loose husks behind, and in front of the arms now.

Step 8

Tie another piece of string below the arms to keep the arms in place and make the body of the doll. Next trim the husks that make the arms to make them even, and shorter, then tie a string near each of the ends of the arms to make ‘hands.’

If you want your corn husk doll to be wearing a dress, you are done! However, if you would like your doll to be wearing pants, continue onto the next step.

Step 9

Cut the middle of the ‘skirt’ of the doll so there are now two even pieces, then tie the bottom of each side of the corn husk to make the dolls legs.

Good Job, your doll is done!