

Corn Husk Dolls



Cornhusk doll, cloth, beads, leather, silver.
NMAI

Edward Guarino Collection.



Cornhusk dolls, c. 1900, cloth, beads,
leather, yarn; male (on left): 10 1/2" tall;
female (right): 9 1/2" tall.



Making a Seneca Cornhusk Doll

Author: Kathryn Jamieson, Allegany, Steamburg, NY, August 1974

Ne' ekathyúwi' he nekayeöök ekasyöniák ne unônya' kaya'ta'.

I'm talking about how to make a husk doll.

Ne' tyutyeëhtö êhsates'á' unônya' êkyeöök te'utki', ta unë êhseshatët, ta unë êhsestyak ne' watakwêhta's'aa'kêök.

First get the husks ready and clean them, and then dampen them, and then cut them in small, narrow strips.

Yeí' nýô têhsat'esyútë'.

Take six strips and lay them in a pile.

Ta unë yeí' nýô ahsö', ta unë êhswatase' ne unö'ëë' awôtö'.

Then take six more, and then wrap them around the end of the first pile to make the head of the doll.

Ne'hu nýô êhswatase' ewiyu'he't unö'ëë' awôtö'.

Wrap enough to make and shape the head.

Êhsehsiyätëhtäë' akwas watakwët unônya' têthsekwathu'.

Lay a string across a wide husk and fold one end over the string.

Êthsehsiyätyëêthu' ewötöskwi ne awôtö' unö'ëëkêyát awuwe'shæ' unö'ëë'ke.

Pull the string and shirr to make the top of the head and head covering.

Êhse'húwék n-unö'ëë' ne' n-akwas twatákët unônya'.

Fit the wrapped head piece into the head covering.

Êhswatase' kahsiyæ'ta' unö'ëë' awôtö'.

Tie the string around the base of the head real tight.

Têhsekhahsi' teuwatúwe' kaya'ta'ke.

Split the ends from neck down to make the body.

Keí nýô êhswe'nôni' unêsha' awôtö'.

Trim pieces to roll for arms.

Tësyôwë' heôwe tesakhahsô.



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Cross the roll at base of head where you split the body apart.

Tëhsya'túwét nëkaneshésô'.

Think how long the arms are going to be.

Kahsíyæ' èhsehsiyætase' unëshu'ktö'.

Tie the ends of the arms.

Ëhsya'k tekniák ne' ëwötötaá yenësha'ke.

Cut two for cross pieces on the shoulders.

Ëhswáhá' kaya'ta'ke.

Tie under arms to hold in place.

Tekní ëwötakwëhtô' ka'khwá' awôtö' ëwöthwatáse' yeya'ta'ke.

Two wide pieces for skirt to go around the body.

Ëswáhá' kahsíyæ' yeya'ta'ke thaayaku'kháë's.

Tie string around her waist so her skirt won't come down.



Some of the dolls have faces drawn on the cornhusk. It was not always done this way. The story below explains why. However, doll makers began to paint or ink faces on the dolls so that the tourists would be more likely to buy them. After reading this story, you decide about whether you would put a face on the doll or not.

Legend Of The No Face Doll

By Kay Olan, Akwesasne Mohawk

For a long time the Haudenosaunee have referred to the corn, beans, and squash as the three sisters or the sustainers of life. One of the three sisters, the Spirit of the Corn, was so pleased at having been given this distinction that she asked the Creator to think of something special that she could do to be of further assistance to the people who had so honored her. The Creator suggested that she make a doll from her husk and so she did. She fashioned a lovely cornhusk doll with a strikingly beautiful face. She instructed the doll to entertain all of the little children in the villages. The lovely cornhusk doll did as she was instructed. She traveled from village to village telling wonderful stories and playing happy games with the children. All of the people grew to love the cornhusk doll, and they expressed their joy in smiles and laughter. They frequently complimented her on her great beauty. All was well at first, but as time went on and more and more people told the cornhusk doll how lovely she looked, something began to change. The cornhusk doll began to spend less and less time with the children and more and more time gazing at her handsome reflection in the waters of the many lakes, rivers, and streams. She began to think only of herself.

Eventually, the Creator called her to the Creator's lodge. On the way there, she stopped by a pool of water to admire her reflection and in so doing kept the Creator waiting for her arrival. When she finally did enter the Creator's lodge, the Creator reminded her of her responsibility to the children and cautioned her against spending her time in self-admiration. The Creator warned her that if she did not change her ways, something would have to be done about it. The doll assured the Creator that she would remember her responsibilities and she returned to the children of the villages. Before long, however, the people reminded her again of her great beauty. She began to spend less time with the children because she became too busy admiring herself.

The Creator summoned her again and just as before, the doll succumbed to the temptation of stopping to gaze at her reflection. When she finally arrived at the lodge of the Creator, the Creator expressed disappointment in her behavior. The Creator reminded her of how she had neglected the children because she had become too preoccupied with thoughts of herself and her appearance. The Creator reminded her that she had been created with a purpose and that purpose was to bring happiness to the little children. The Creator told her that she needed help controlling her vanity since she couldn't do it herself. Then, the Creator instructed the cornhusk doll to leave the lodge and look at her reflection in a nearby pond in order to comprehend the significance of the Creator's word. She left the lodge, walked to the pond, and looked into the waters. Now she understood. She no longer had a face. The Creator had taken it away.

From that time on, the Haudenosaunee did not put faces on their cornhusk dolls as a reminder that vanity can be an obstacle preventing us from accomplishing our appointed tasks. The people are also cautioned against placing too much emphasis on superficialities.

**Deyohahá:ge: Indigenous Knowledge Centre
Hodinohso:ni Art Lesson #9**



Indigenous Knowledge Centre - Hodinohso:ni Art Lessons

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