



ART BRIDGES: Lesson Plans for Enrichment, Growth and Healing

Worry Dolls/Creatures

Objectives:

1. To explore the history of the Guatemalan Worry Doll
2. To help participants identify their worries, hopes and desires and explore ways to cope and dream
3. To help participants to create their own Worry Dolls/Creatures

Note to Facilitator:

For purposes of brevity for this lesson plan, we will be referring to these artistic creations as Worry “Dolls” but please be aware that some participants in your class may balk at creating “dolls” but might be willing to create and work with “Creatures”, action figures or “heroes”. Make sure you have some embellishments on hand such as feathers, camouflage fabric, etc. for those participants who want to stray away from a traditional Worry Doll but still wish to create their own worry “creature”.



Audiences:

Anyone can use this lesson. It can be especially helpful for those who are struggling with anxiety, stress and worry to symbolically deal with their worries through the creation and use of a doll.

Learning Opportunities (Optional):

Worry Dolls come to us from Guatemala through Mayan legends and were used by generations of indigenous people as a remedy for worrying. Mayan legend says that when worrying keeps a person awake, he or she should tell their worries to as many dolls as necessary. The “worrier” then places the dolls under their pillow and it is the doll’s “job” to take over the worrying for the person while they are sleeping peacefully—soothing their fears and worries. In the morning, the person wakes refreshed without the worries that the dolls took away during the night. A variation on the legend instructs the “worrier” to tell the dolls their worries and then place them in a cloth pouch or wooden box before going to bed. Dolls can even be shared among family members and friends to carry the worries.



Historically, Guatemalan artists bound pieces of wood together or twisted together short lengths of wire to create a body, legs, arms and head for the Worry Doll that was traditionally ½ to 1 inch tall. Cloth and yarn were then wrapped around the frame to give the doll a shape. Additional scrapes of fabric and other materials were used to create costumes for the dolls as well as head, hair, feet and arms. The dolls could even carry accessories such as tiny woven baskets.

Supplies/Materials:

- A wooden base for the dolls such as toothpicks, popsicle/art sticks, 1/8" dowels, bamboo skewers and/or wooden clothespins
- Brightly colored yarn
- Coated pliable wire, string, twist ties, colored thread and/or pipe-cleaners
- Small pieces of fabric and felt
- Colored embroidery floss
- Markers and colored pencils
- Wooden beads for heads (to be attached with a glue gun)--optional
- Embellishments such as fuzzy balls, beads, feathers, sequins, glitter, ribbon, trim, bric-a-brac, doll hair, etc.
- Scissors
- Elmer's glue and/or glue guns with glue sticks
- Small bags or boxes to hold the worry dolls
- Sandpaper (optional)

Prior to Class:

- If necessary, cut any wood elements to size to create arms and legs (1 to 1 ½ inches depending upon the size of the body. If you are working with children, use sandpaper to sand the ends and edges of all cut wood materials to prevent injuries.
- Set up stations for each child and provide the basic materials to create three or more Worry Dolls: the wood base you are using (Popsicle sticks, clothes pins, etc.), scissors, colored pencils/markers, glue and other fasteners such as twist ties, pipe cleaners, yarn, etc.



- Set up a center to be used by all the children that for the rest of materials (fabric, felt, yarn, embellishments, etc.).

Class Instruction:

1. To make a Worry Doll out of clothespins, apply white craft glue (or glue from the glue gun) to the clothespin, beginning where the rounded head meets the shoulders and ending at the waist.
2. If you want to add arms and legs, place the cut-to-size skewers or other materials used for the limbs onto the body and glue then into the arm and leg positions.



3. Wrap the glued area with bright-colored embroidery floss, yarn, feathers, or other materials, covering the body, arms and legs, leaving the “hands” uncovered. Tie the last loop in a knot and add glue as needed during the wrapping process to secure.



4. Next you can also wrap fabric, pipe cleaners, yarn, thread, etc. around the body of the doll and secure it with pipe cleaners, twist ties, etc. or hot glue.



5. You can draw a face on your clothespin "head" or let the Worry Doll remain faceless.



6. Add hair if you'd like using yarn, doll hair or other materials such as embroidery floss or pom-poms with glue as a base.



7. You can glue some black felt to the doll for feet/shoes if desired.



8. Add sequins, beads, feathers, etc. for decorations.



Using Toothpicks to create a Worry Doll:

1. Cut five lengths of toothpick to form the torso, arms and legs of your Worry Doll. You can choose the size you want, but the torso should be about 1-1/2 inches long, with the arms slightly longer than the torso, and the legs slightly longer than the arms.
2. Glue the legs to the torso with a hot glue gun. Space them as far apart as you want, but traditional Worry Dolls are small and compact, and most have their legs close together.
3. Place a dab of glue on the back of the doll, where the waist would be. Place a piece of embroidery thread into the glue, and with that as the starting point.
4. Follow the rest of the procedures for making the Worry Doll and you're set! Sand the exposed edges of toothpicks so they are flat and safe. Make a few worry dolls and present them in a small pouch or box for safekeeping.



Using the Worry Dolls:

If a counselor or therapist is using the Worry Dolls to help clients/patients, they may ask their clients to whisper one of their worries to each doll they have created. If the client is feeling brave, he or she may share their worries with their counselor and/or the group. The client can then either put the worries “away” into a bag or box or take it home to put it under their pillow as the Legend states. Many needs, desires, wishes and worries can be expressed to and with these little dolls.

Extensions and Adaptations:

The concept of worry dolls can be extended to other formats:

- Take a shoe box, seal and cover it completely with tape and construction paper, wrapping paper or butcher paper so that it is sealed shut. The participant can decorate the box if desired as directed by the counselor or

therapist. The facilitator will then cut a slit in the top of the box to allow the participant to insert slips of paper. The counselor or therapist can then work with the participant to decide what to put into the box—either in word or picture form—examples could include fears, worries, past hurts, etc.—those things that need to be discarded and put away. The therapist/counselor can then burn the box with the participant present to watch their worries, fears, etc. be destroyed.

- An alternative is create a box or envelope with the same opening to insert messages but with the therapist/counselor’s encouragement, reopen the package after a time, review the contents and see how the participant has grown, healed, etc.
- The participant can create several boxes to store a number of “things” in picture or word form: good things, challenges, fears, dreams, etc. This will encourage looking forward to a brighter future and focusing on positive possibilities
- The group can create a large box that they decorate together. Then each class member writes or draws his or her worries on a slip of paper, sharing them with the group if they feel brave enough, and then putting them in the box together. It’s a reminder that when you have other people who share worries and cares, the burden is lighter and you are not alone. Allow a few seconds of silence after placing all the worries into the box to tell them goodbye and put them away forever.

If you have used this lesson plan, we’d love to hear from you! Please send questions or comments through our website www.hildegardcenter.org .

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