



The Urge to Embellish

Activities & Projects

What Did They Use Back Then?

What Did People Use Back Then? And How Did They Embellish It?

Look through the image gallery for objects that were used for the same or similar purpose as the objects pictured on the worksheet.

Write the name of the object on the line. Discuss what materials the older objects were made from and how they were embellished.



What was used to make fancy cookies?

What is it made of?



Which exhibit object preserves memories with objects?

How are the little mementos preserved in it?



What were handmade and worn on the legs like these modern leg warmers?



What was used to store sewing tools?

What is it made of?

Who made it?



What exhibit object was used to protect the wall behind a sink?

What is it made of?

How is it decorated?



What was made of metal and used for lighting?

Answers

Knitted wedding stockings of wool yarn

Fat Lamp of cutout metal and paint

Cookie press of carved wood

Huron tribe sewing box, bark and porcupine quills

Memory Jug, glass bottle with objects embedded in clay

Stenciled cloth backsplash or wall protector

Decorative Function

Modern eyes have grown accustomed to the sleek, streamlined designs devoid of unnecessary ornamentation found in utilitarian items of our century. One advantage to this aesthetic is its facility for quicker, less expensive manufacture of objects made in substantial quantities. When constructed by hand in earlier times, however, objects with equivalent or parallel functions were often candidates for some degree of embellishment.

Most of the objects in this section may see strange or unidentifiable, yet their various functions have direct parallels to contemporary living. Embellishment for some of these objects is directly related to their intended purposes, such as the fishing lures and cookie mold.

The ornamented surfaces of the others may have resulted from the desire to boost market appeal, create a special object to give as a gift, or simply as pure enjoyment for the maker.



Cookie Press

What Is The Urge to Embellish?

The **urge to embellish** is a universal human impulse. It is not limited by age restrictions. It has no cultural boundaries, only variations. It is not suppressed by personal economic restraints but, indeed, is sometimes enabled by such barriers. The urge may be hidden, ignored, left unexplored, even delayed, but rarely without presence.

To embellish implies the conscious act of transforming a surface or object with the intent purpose to beautify, ornament or adorn. This “additive” transformation relies on the use of various materials, processes, creative expressions, and levels of skill.

What motivates humans to embellish? Gratification of an innate need to experiment, create, or express oneself is a possible explanation. Alternately, embellishments may result from learned behaviors and possibly regulated by traditions. Significant public or private events may inspire out-of-the-ordinary objects to mark such occasions. Social expectations, too, can be a powerful motivator.

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