

Exploring African Beadwork and Making Your Own Beads

This lesson will guide you on how to use air-dry clay to create your own colorful beads with unique patterns and designs inspired by the Museum's work *Chief's Ceremonial Hat* by the Bamileke peoples of Cameroon in Africa.

Time: 30 minutes to create beads,
72 hours for beads to harden,
20 minutes to string

Difficulty level: Easy

Messy level: Low



Investigate the Work of Art!

1. How long do you think it took the artist to make this hat?
2. Who do you think would wear this hat?
3. What animal is on top of the hat?

To view a hi-res image of the work, visit the [MFAH Collection online database](#).

Let's Make Some Art!

Gather These Art Materials

- Air-dry clay (Model Magic, Sculpey, Cloud Clay, or any air-dry clay you may have)
- Twine (or string/yarn)
- Toothpicks (or regular pencils)
- Scissors
- Model Magic Glossy Glaze (or regular white school glue)
- Small paintbrush

Step-by-Step Artist Instructions

1. Find a clear spot at home where you can make art and get a little messy.
2. Take the air-dry clay and use your hands to create a variety of spheres, cylinders, tubes, and other shapes. They can be as big or small as you want.
3. You can also experiment with mixing colors of clay to create a marbled look.
4. Think about how using different sizes, shapes, and colors can create patterns with your beads.
5. Take the toothpick to make a hole in each clay bead. Make sure it is wide enough for the twine or string you will use. Younger artists may want to use a pencil to make the hole so it is bigger and easier to thread.
6. Set beads aside to harden. This can take between 24 and 72 hours.
7. For a glossy look, use a paintbrush to add a thin layer of Glossy Glaze (or white school glue). Let dry.
8. Cut a piece of twine or string and add the beads to create a necklace, bracelet, headband, or other piece of wearable art!

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Bamileke peoples, *Chief's Ceremonial Hat*, 1900–1930, plant fibers, cloth, beads, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, museum purchase funded by Mrs. John P. Bullington, by exchange, 2012.263.