

# “Poor Man’s Gilding”

## (art + history)

Natural wood, straw and other fibers placed together to form patterns and movement is thought to be one of the first uses of material for embellishments. Straw collage is often associated with the folk art of Lithuania, Poland and the Czech Republic and was sometimes referred to as “poor man’s gilding”. Similarly, in the 1700’s when the process of decorating religious objects with gold became too expensive and impractical, artisans in the villages of northern New Mexico began substituting straw and wheat to imitate the gleaming grandeur of gold. Straw appliqué is similar to mosaic artwork and commonly involves three techniques: gluing straws onto a surface, encrusting glued straws within many layers of varnish, and inlaying straws in a recessed wood surface.

A current resurgence of this art is found in the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico ([www.moifa.org](http://www.moifa.org)). The American Museum of Straw Art in Long Beach, California ([strawartmuseum.org](http://strawartmuseum.org)) features a Straw Appliqué exhibit. Current working artists include Paula and Eliseo Rodriguez and Jimmy Trujillo.

In this lesson plan, thin, naturally colored wood sticks are used to imitate the texture and “gilded” color of straw. Students use mini-sticks to create an abstract pattern that expresses movement.

## Grade Levels 5-12

*Note: instructions and materials based on a class of 25 students. Adjust as needed.*

## Process

1. Paint the 8" x 10" canvas panel. Do not use white or yellow — they are too light and would not let the wood design show.
2. This abstract project offers a chance to use the elements of design in a pattern using wood sticks. In order to create a line that is natural and graceful use a piece of string. Place the string on the painted canvas panel and draw the line with the white pencil. Remove the string.
3. Squeeze a quarter-sized drop of glue onto a scrap piece of paper. Pick up a small amount of glue on the stick. Place the tip of the stick on



## Materials

[Forster® Mini Sticks](#) (60403-0500), share one bag between three students

[Blick Multi Purpose White Glue](#) (23872-1064), 4-oz, share one bottle between two students

[Blick Canvas Panels](#) (07008-0810) 8" x 10", need one per student

[Blickrylic™ Student Acrylics](#) (00711-3136), Venetian red or any medium or darker color, need one half-gallon per class

[Medium Fine Sandpaper](#) (34916-1403), package of 10 sheets, share across classroom

[Blick Studio Artist Colored Pencil](#), White (22063-1021), need one per student

[Acme™ Titanium Blade Scissors](#) (57059-1007), need one per student

15" Length of String or Yarn

## Optional Materials

[Blickrylic Polymer Gloss Medium](#) (00711-1027)

[Blick E-Z Grip Knife](#) (57419-2980)

## Process, continued

the white line. The stick has four sides so it will lay flat. Utilize the full size of the stick, do not cut to size. The most important technique for your design is to continue to lay the sticks on the line and slightly away from the previous stick. There is no right or wrong place to start laying the sticks. Repeat until the entire space is filled. The more carefully the sticks are arranged, the more striking the results. The natural wood pattern backed by the acrylic paint creates depth that enhances the rhythm of the art.

Depending on the line the sticks may run off the canvas panel. Using a pair of sturdy scissors, trim the sticks to size as you work. Hold both ends of the stick while cutting so that the pieces do not fly from your hand.

5. Tear the sandpaper into small 1" x 2" pieces. Turn the canvas board right side up and gently sand the trimmed edges until smooth.

## Options

- Brush polymer gloss medium over the completed piece and let dry to achieve the encrusted straw design.

## National Standards

**Content Standard #1** — Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes

**5-8** Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas

**9-12** Students conceive and create works of visual art that demonstrate an understanding of how the communication of their ideas relates to the media, techniques, and processes they use

**Content Standard #3** — Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

**5-8** Students integrate visual, spatial, and temporal concepts with content to communicate intended meaning in their artworks

**9-12** Students reflect on how artworks differ visually, spatially, temporally, and functionally, and describe how these are related to history and culture

**Content Standard #4** — Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

**5-8** Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures

**9-12** Students differentiate among a variety of historical and cultural contexts in terms of characteristics and purposes of works of art