SCULPTURAL NEEDLE FELTING
by Christine Miller, Dallas, TX
Middle School and up

Needle felting is a magical process that uses wool fibers and a barbed needle to create a sturdy fiber material. Using wire to create an armature, wool fibers are wrapped around to create a felted skin, and fine detail work can be added with bits of wool and a single needle. The process of changing woolen fibers into a sturdy cloth is remarkably quick. Layers of wool are added and felted into the structure until the sculpture is fully formed. The last steps are including details that bring the sculpture to life. Needle felting is fast, fun and my students’ favorite art project of the year!
Lesson Plan Goals & Objectives

• Students will design a 3 dimensional creature or animal on paper for the needle felted sculpture
• Students will create a sculptural armature from their 2 dimensional design
• Students will create a needle felted 3 dimensional sculpture by building an armature
• Students will blend color and details to echo their 2 dimensional design

Tools & Materials

• Sketchbook or drawing paper for designing
• Pencil or drawing tool
• Dense foam felting pad at least 2” thick (can get from upholstery supplier)
• Floral wire and/or pipe cleaners
• Polyester fiberfill, old woolen blankets or wool fabric scraps for stuffing armature cavities
• Wool batting or roving in a variety of colors
• Felting needles (Note – we have used any size for any job):
  o 40 triangle for fine details & small indentations
  o 38 star for all purpose sculpting without leaving large holes
  o 36 triangle for attaching parts, deep indentations and holes.
• Scissors

National Core Arts Standards

• Formulate an artistic investigation of personally relevant content for creating art.
• Demonstrate openness in trying new ideas, materials, methods and approaches in making works of art and design.
• Reflect on whether personal artwork conveys the intended meaning and revise accordingly.
• Develop and apply relevant criteria to evaluate a work of art.
• Generate a collection of ideas reflecting current interests and concerns that could be investigated in art making.

Image retrieved from: http://www.wikihow.com/Needle-Felt-Wool-Sculptures
Vocabulary

- **Armature** – a framework used to support material being modeled in sculpture
- **Felting** – wool fibers have scales that will lock together when subjected to head, friction or agitation. Felting occurs when the fibers lock together to form a solid mat or form as in sculpture.
- **Felting needles** – steel barbed needles that when used to prick animal fibers such as wool, facilitate the felting process.
- **Wool batting or roving** – wool fibers processed and combined into rolls or sheets of fibers.

Motivation

- Artist Kay Petal - [http://www.feltalive.com/links.htm](http://www.feltalive.com/links.htm)
- Jackie Huang - [http://woolbuddy.com/](http://woolbuddy.com/)
- Teresa Perleberg - [http://bearcreekfelting.com/felted-sculptures](http://bearcreekfelting.com/felted-sculptures)

Resources

- Basic Tools and Techniques for Felting: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_AD1VG6hE2I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_AD1VG6hE2I)
- Professional Needle Felting Tutorial Basics 1 (Great beginning video): [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8JYOhxHLXI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8JYOhxHLXI)
- DIY: How to Make an Armature for Needle Felting: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hweFjAxgVpo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hweFjAxgVpo)
- Needle Felting Tip – Working with an Armature: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5vnzdWZbtQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5vnzdWZbtQ)
Procedures

Step 1 – Instructor presents artist websites for students to see a variety of approaches for their needle felted sculpture. Realistic or fantasy creatures and people can be created.

Step 2 – Student creates drawings of desired sculpture showing 3 views of 3D sculpture as well as including color in design for colors to be used. Instructor can determine how many days for designing and drawing, typically 2-3 days to complete.

Step 3 – Student uses floral wire or pipe cleaners to create an armature for sculpture. Small details like feet or hands do not need to be completed at this point. Any portions that the student wants to be able to be bent should be included in wire armature like tails, etc. The basic armature should include head, torso, arms, legs and tail if in design.

Step 4 – Fill the armature cavities with stuffing materials and pack fairly tightly.

Step 5 – Once an armature cavity is stuffed, completely wrap area with a layer of wool batting or roving (undyed colors are appropriate for this step). Wrap fairly tightly so the beginning shape of the sculpture is established. Use a 38 star (or coarse) needle to secure wool outer layer and to create some stability in that portion of the sculpture. Repeat the process for the other areas of the sculpture that have cavities (head, torso) or limbs (arms, legs). Integrate areas like head onto the torso, and limbs into the torso for maximum support.

We used woolen blanket scraps to fill the cavities instead of wool to save on cost. Polyester fiberfill doesn’t pack as densely as needed for a sturdy structure, but can be used in some instances. When using a wool blanket, you can use the needle to lightly felt the blankets so that they loosely hold together.
Procedures cont’d.

Step 6 – When entire sculpture has been wrapped with the base layer of wool and needle felted in place, student should make adjustments to sculpture shape by adding additional wool to build up areas like belly, large face details like nose, or muscular shapes for arms and legs. Check connections between limbs and tails and add wool for an overall solid feel to the sculpture.

Step 7 – When the overall sculptural shape is completed, the color layers and details are added to the sculpture. Working in small patches or areas, add fluffed out wool and needle felt to the base sculpture. Wool colors can be blended for subtle color changes. Small details like ears can be needle felted as separate elements on the foam felting pad, then needle felted directly onto the sculpture.

The felting process does create a small amount of shrinkage, so start with wool that is 25-30% larger than the desired size. Using single fine felting needles, the student can shape and lay in additional color and line details to their sculpture. Working from the bottom base colors, the student will layer design areas in such a way that the finest details for the sculpture will be the last to complete.

Twisting and rolling very small amounts of wool fibers can give such fine details as the iris of the eye or even the highlight on an eye. Many shapes and lines can be created by manipulating the wool and by felting on the pillow. Students should be encouraged to explore techniques or effects they have in their imagination.

Working on wrapping the leg & foot – needle felting small details on the felting pad.
Assessment & Evaluation - A project rubric can be created with categories for overall design, craftsmanship, the ability to be self supporting, good design in the round, and attention to detail.

Completed Sculpture

Detail of completed sculpture