



Handicraft

For our handicraft lesson, we will create a pierced tinwork (or tin punched) piece. This is a simple and beautiful craft that has been used for centuries to decorate items such as lanterns and pie safes. By carefully tapping holes into metal, you can create patterns that let light shine through.

For younger students, you can substitute the tin sheet with an aluminum foil pan. Students may also choose to punch an aluminum can and create a lantern instead. (Directions for that are available on multiple online sites.)

"I've filled him with the Spirit of God, giving him skill and know-how and expertise in every kind of craft to create designs ... he's an all-around craftsman."

~ Exodus 31:3-5

Handicraft Lesson

Pierced Tinwork



A Brief History of Pierced Tinwork

Pierced tinwork, also called tin punching, is a simple yet beautiful craft in which designs are created by punching small holes into thin sheets of metal. Light shines through these tiny openings, forming patterns that glow in the darkness. Though humble in its materials and tools, pierced tinwork has a long and meaningful history that connects everyday life, skilled handiwork, and the changing world of the Industrial Revolution.

The story of tin punching begins in Europe, where metalworkers learned to coat thin sheets of iron with tin to prevent rust. This material, called tinfoil, was durable, lightweight, and relatively inexpensive compared to solid metals. By the 17th and 18th centuries, tinfoil goods were being produced in large quantities, especially in places like England and Germany. These goods

included household items such as lanterns, candle holders, boxes, kitchenware, and pie safes—objects used daily by ordinary people.

Artisans soon discovered that tinplate could also be decorated. Using a hammer and small nail or chisel, they could punch patterns into the metal, creating designs of stars, flowers, or geometric shapes. When used on lanterns or candle holders, these patterns allowed light to shine through, casting warm, decorative shapes on nearby surfaces. In this way, a practical object became something both useful and beautiful.

As the Industrial Revolution began to take hold in the late 1700s and early 1800s, the production of tinplate increased dramatically. New rolling mills and manufacturing processes made it possible to produce large sheets of metal quickly and efficiently. This meant that tin goods became even more common and accessible. Factories could now turn out large numbers of identical items, replacing many of the handmade goods that had once been crafted individually.

Yet even as factories grew and machines took over much of production, tin punching remained a small but meaningful form of craftsmanship. While machines could stamp out identical patterns, they could not fully replace the careful, personal touch of a hand-punched design. Today, pierced tinwork is often practiced as a traditional craft, allowing us to step back into that earlier way of working.

Supplies Needed:

- Thin sheet metal (tin or aluminum)
- Printed pattern
- Tape
- Nail (screwdriver &/or nail sets are optional)
- Hammer
- Soft backing surface (wood board, layered cardboard, or styrofoam)
- Safety gloves (recommended)

NOTE: For younger kids, substitute a *heavy-duty* aluminum foil pan (preferably one without a textured bottom). Simply cut away the sides of the pan, place on top of a cork board, then use a pushpin instead of a hammer and nail.



Instructions:

1. Print out and cut your pattern to the size of your tin sheet, center and tape the pattern securely in place. (Optional: Tape tin sheet to wood board with masking tape to hold in place while hammering.)
2. Place nail over each dot, holding it at a 90° angle, and gently tap the top of the nail with your hammer to create a small hole. Work slowly and carefully, moving from dot to dot. Try to keep your spacing even and your holes consistent in size.



3. Once all holes are punched, carefully remove the paper pattern, then gently flatten any raised edges by turning the metal over and lightly tapping the back. Wipe clean if necessary.
4. Frame and display your finished piece. (If using a tin can, add a battery-operated tea light candle for illumination.)





