



Handicraft

For our handicraft lesson, we will create a “shellwork” trinket box (or frame). This is a simple activity that all ages can enjoy — from your younger children (with a bit of help to press their shells carefully onto their box lid), to teens who can design and embellish their own intricate creations.

Use seashells from your family’s vacation at the beach, or pick up an inexpensive pack of shells at your local craft store and have fun creating these practical pieces for yourself or giving them as gifts!

“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

Victorian Shellwork Trinket Box



During the Victorian Era, people became fascinated with creating beautiful pieces from seashells found at the beach. This was called “shellwork” or “shell craft.”

Since England is a small island, the seaside was never too far a distance for Victorian families to travel. They believed that embracing the salty sea air was healthy. But rather than sunbathe (which wasn’t fashionable), they would “sea bathe” fully clothed or walk along the shoreline for their health.

Inevitably, they would find and pick up beautiful seashells to take home as souvenirs. Their love for natural elements in the home caused shellwork to gain popularity as a charming form of domestic art. These crafts became a favored pastime, particularly among women, who utilized seashells to decorate various household items including boxes, frames, and even furniture. The practice eventually elevated to high art through intricate designs and patterns.

Even sailors would often meticulously craft pieces, known as “Sailor’s Valentines,” during long sea voyages as tokens of love for their sweethearts back home. The Victorian fascination with shellwork crafts also reflected the era’s broader interest in natural history and collection.

Supplies

- Seashells
- Papier-mâché box or frame
- Tacky glue (Tacky glue will work well for repositioning the shells if necessary while adding them to your piece. However, hot glue or E6000 would work for older students.)
- Acrylic paint in your choice of color
- Paint brush
- Sponge brush
- (Optional: pearl beads)



Directions

1. Paint the papier-mâché box (or frame) with a couple coats of paint and allow it to dry completely. (We chose gold to give it that “gilded” Victorian look.) [Image 1]
2. While the paint is drying, separate the seashells by size and color to decide which ones to use. [Image 2]
3. Think about the design you’d like to create and lay the shells out in that pattern before you apply them to the lid. [Image 3]
4. Once you’ve decided on your design, use your sponge brush to cover the entire surface with tacky glue. (NOTE: If using hot glue or E6000, simply glue each piece in place. No need to cover the surface area.)
5. Add your largest shells first, then fill in your design or the entire surface until you’re satisfied. Tiny shells or pearl beads can be added as fillers towards the end.
6. Allow the glue to dry completely before using as a trinket box or frame. (Tacky glue will dry clear.)

