

AT-HOME ART PROJECT: Family Medallions INSTRUCTIONS



Photograph by Henry Rocher, c.1870

INSPIRATION ARTIST:

Edmonia Lewis (1845-1907, historical estimate)

Edmonia Lewis was born on July 14, 1845, in Greenbush, NY. Her father was Haitian and her mother was of African American and Ojibwa (Chippewa) descent.

Despite experiencing many hurdles throughout her life, Edmonia persevered in her pursuit of a career as a Neoclassical sculptor. Lewis' first work seen publicly was a medallion that featured the head of militant abolitionist John Brown in 1864. Later that same year she earned praise for her bust of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, a hero of the American Civil War who had been killed leading Black troops in battle. Sales of copies of the bust were incredibly successful and with the money she earned, Edmonia sailed to Rome, Italy, in 1865. In Rome, members of the U.S. artistic community took her under their wing. Lewis mastered working in marble and refused to hire Italian stone carvers to transfer her plaster models to marble, in order to dismiss any question that the work was her own.

Lewis quickly achieved success as a sculptor. Her medallions, busts, and marble sculptures were inspired by important people and events of her time. Her artworks were shown internationally and one of her greatest honors was having several of her sculptures shown at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition.

One of her most famous sculptures, *The Death of Cleopatra*, 1876, considered her largest and most powerful work, was removed from the artworld for more than a century. Lewis sent the enormous and heavy statue from Rome to Philadelphia, where it was celebrated and lauded. After its exhibition, through many twists of fate, the sculpture passed through various locations in Chicago: an Industrial Expo, saloon, horse cemetery, race track, golf course, Navy munitions site, and finally a bulk mail center, where it was finally recognized and rescued. The thoroughly cleaned and restored sculpture now has a place of honor in the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.

Edmonia Lewis was also honored by Google when a banner dedicated to her appeared worldwide on February 1, 2017. The company said "Lewis's legacy continues to thrive through her art and the path she helped forge for women and artists of color. Today, we celebrate her and what she stands for – self-expression through art, even in the face of adversity."

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Medallion of Wendell Phillips, 1871



Forever Free, 1867



Death of Cleopatra, 1876

MATERIALS NEEDED FROM HOME:

- No Bake Clay (recipe & ingredients needed shown in **Step 1**)
or Crayola White Model Magic Clay, 4 oz. or White Playdough
- Toothpick or Paper Clip (that is unfolded out so that it has a pointed end to draw with)
- Family member to use as a live model (or a profile photo of a family member if no actual person is available)

ADDITIONAL TOOLS NEEDED:

- Something to protect your work surface which keeps the clay clean and prevents the clay from sticking to the work surface (Parchment or Wax Paper, Foil, Plastic wrap)
- Can (standard size, 14-18 oz., example: can of beans, vegetables or fruit)
- Optional: Tape (Masking or Painters Tape suggested)
- Optional: Small cup of water

ART PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Participants will create and etch a clay medallion inspired by the artwork of Edmonia Lewis, featuring the profile of a family member.

VOCABULARY:

Neoclassical: movement in the arts that draws inspiration from the “classical” art and culture of ancient Greece and Rome, invoking the ideas of harmony, clarity, restraint, universality, and idealism

Medallion: an ancient art form said to have been first introduced by the Romans to display portraits of noted persons. Art medallions were not to be worn but rather decorative and often depict the person in profile. This art form has continued until the 21st century

Abolitionist: a person who wants to stop or abolish slavery; more specifically, these individuals sought the immediate and full emancipation of all enslaved people

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Profile: the outline or contour of the human face, especially the face viewed from one side

PROMPT QUESTIONS:

1. Have you ever worked with clay? Have you ever created a medallion or a sculpture?
2. Who will you ask in your family to be your live model? Why? Have you ever done artwork while looking at a live model?
3. How would studying and looking closely at a person's profile help you draw the profile line accurately, recreating it in your art?

ART MAKING PROCESS:

Step 1:

If you don't have Crayola Model Magic clay or Playdough at home, that's no problem! You can make your own clay with this simple At-Home recipe that is easy (this recipe makes enough clay for 2 medallions. Any unused clay can be stored in an airtight container and be used up to 3 days after making it).

Ingredients:

1 Cup of Flour

¼ Cup of Table Salt

1/3 Cup + 2 teaspoons of Warm Water

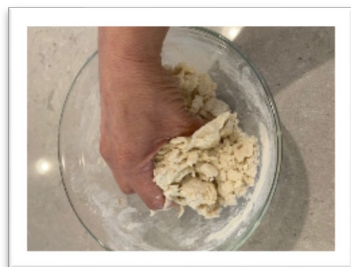
Mixing Spoon (like a wooden or rubber spoon, if available)

- A. Mix 1 cup of flour and 1/4 cup of table salt in a medium sized bowl



- B. Add 1/3 cup of warm water to the flour/salt mixture. Mix with spoon for about 3 mins. Add the 2 remaining teaspoons of warm water and start working the clay with your hands to get the ingredients to combine (this amount of water is enough though it may not appear to be correct at first).

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C. Knead the clay dough for 10-15 minutes. When it's thoroughly mixed together and is pliable, it's ready to use. Separate it into 2 equal portions (it doesn't have to be exact) and roll each portion into a round ball. Leave the clay balls in the bowl until **Step 3**.



Step 2:

Prepare your workspace: Find a clean, flat surface to work on. To protect your work surface and keep your clay clean, place your paper (parchment, wax paper, foil, plastic wrap) onto the work surface. If you have tape, use a small piece on each corner of your paper to secure it to your work surface (**FIG.1**).

Step 3:

Take one of the balls of clay and place it onto your work surface (**FIG.2**). Use your can to slowly and firmly push down on top of the clay ball (**FIG.3**). Stop pushing before the can touches the table so that you flatten the clay but do not cut through the clay with the edges of the can. Your circular clay piece should be roughly $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick. Use your hands to gently reshape the clay's edges so that it has a circular shape. You'll see that the can has flattened the top of the clay to give you a flat drawing surface (**FIG.4**). Many cans also have a textured bottom that can give your medallion a nice circular design!

Step 4:

Next, choose a family member and ask them to be your live model for this artwork. Have them sit in front of your workspace so that you can see the profile (the side outline) of their head. Let them know that you will need them to sit still for a few minutes while you create your medallion. If no one is available, find a profile picture of a family member that you can use. Once they are sitting in front of you, take some time to really look at their profile. Notice the lines and shapes that make up their profile. Imagine a continuous line that forms a large shape making up the outer edge of their head. Study the smaller lines and shapes within it that represent their eyes, ears, nose and mouth, noting the spaces between the lines you see.

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Step 5:

Use your toothpick or paper clip to begin drawing the outline shape of the profile, from one side of the bottom of the medallion to the other bottom side of the medallion. Start by lightly poking the clay gently and slowly to create your line (**FIG.5**). Take your time and be careful not to drag your toothpick through the clay because it will just stretch it and you won't be able to draw the line the way you want. Go over the line several times- again, gently poking into the clay as you move along the line. As you are deepening and continuing your line, small clay pieces might come out onto your toothpick. If they do, just pick them off the toothpick and set them aside on the parchment paper to throw away later. Next, look at the lines that are within the profile: the lines of the eyes, the mouth, the ear if you can see it, the hair. Use the same gentle poking motion to create these smaller lines (**FIG.6**).

Take your time looking at your model, then drawing the lines into your clay medallion. Your medallion may have some dry areas and rough areas around the edges or along the lines, and this is totally fine, it's the nature of clay as a medium. But if you want to smooth out any areas of your medallion when you are finished drawing, you can use a small amount of water to do that. Rub your moistened finger along the outside edge of the medallion to smooth where it is dry and crackly and if the lines you have drawn are very dry and crackly, you can dip your toothpick into a little water to create a smoother line (**FIG.7**).

Step 6:

When you are finished, show your work of art to your model! Leave your medallion in a safe, dry place so that the clay can dry and harden. It may take 2-3 days. Use your other piece of clay to create another medallion or create something else- have fun!

POST PROJECT PROMPT QUESTIONS:

1. How did you like drawing a profile from a live model? Or a profile from a photo? Was it easier to draw once you thought in terms of lines and shapes?
2. Was it challenging to work with clay? If so, why?
3. Would you like to make more clay and do more sculpting in the future?

ART PROJECT STEP-BY-STEP EXAMPLES:



FIG.1

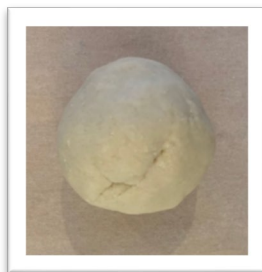


FIG.2

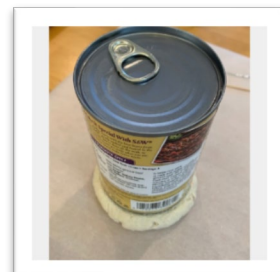


FIG.3

LESSON PLAN



FIG.4



FIG.5



FIG.6



FIG.7

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FIG.8

EXTRA FUN: If you have any leftover clay, ask more family members to be your models and make medallions for everyone in the family. Challenge yourself and make a medallion of one of your pets- they won't sit still for very long! Do you think you can create a self-portrait profile medallion?

OTHER ARTISTS FROM THIS ERA TO CONSIDER (Civil War and Reconstruction Era, 1861-1877):

- Edward Mitchell Bannister
- John G. Chaplin

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CITY OF CARLSBAD LIBRARY SOURCES:

Digital

[ProQuest Ebook Central database](#)

[Britannica High School article](#)

[Gale in Context Biography database](#)

[Gale in Context: High School database](#)

[Gale in Context: U.S. History database](#)

[SIRS Discoverer database](#) (grades 3-8)

[SIRS Issues Researcher database](#) (grade 6 - adult)

[ProQuest eLibrary](#)

Print

Teen:

YA ATKINS, J.

[Stone mirrors: the sculpture and silence of Edmonia Lewis](#) / Atkins, Jeannine

ONLINE SOURCES:

1. Black Past: <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/lewis-edmonia-1845/>
2. Inside History: <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/abolitionist-movement>
3. Oxford African American Studies Center: <https://oxfordaasc.com/page/photo-essay-african-american-artists-before-the-twentieth-century>

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