

Lesson Plan **Incense 101**



GRADES

3rd–5th grade
Adaptable to all grade levels

SUBJECT

Art, Mathematics, Literature
and History

DURATION

10–45 minute sessions x 4 lessons

LESSON SYNOPSIS

Wedge, knead, and shape your way into the scented world of incense. Students will explore the art of incense making by discovering the smells and textures of nature, and their own kitchen. Your students will begin by creating their own incense holder using clay, natural textures, and patterns. Then they will mix, blend, and shape their own incense from Makko powder to create Joss sticks, incense cones and incense sticks.

Get inspired by Mingei International Museum’s collection of incense holders, mortars, and pestles. We will finish the lesson by reading *A Sweet Smell of Roses*, by Angela Johnson and Eric Valazques. A story inspired by scent, a civil rights march led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and the young people that contributed to the civil rights movement. Remind your students that **burning incense can be dangerous please be sure to go over all safety precautions with students. Parent supervision recommended.**

RESOURCES

- Find incense holders, mortars and pestles from Mingei International Museum’s permanent collection! Start your search here: mingei.org/collections
- Incense diagrams, videos and resources can be found here: mingei.org/learn/outreachathome
- Read: *A Sweet Smell of Roses*, by Angela Johnson and Eric Valazques

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Through this unit students will:

- Learn about incense and its traditions, history, and many uses.
- Explore the process of incense making, demonstrating a safe and proficient use of incense making materials, tools, and equipment .
- Explore using their sense of smell, to create a custom scent.
- Learn through repetition, experimentation, reflection, and failure.
- Use fractions, ratios, and conversions to measure and follow the incense recipe.
- Use craft specific vocabulary to discuss the process, procedures, and outcomes.

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PROCEDURES

Skills taught in four class sessions with videos for each day:

Day 1: How to make an incense holder

Day 2: How to make incense

Day 3: Custom Incense Recipe

Day 4: Burning incense, and reading *A Sweet Smell of Roses*.

MATERIALS

- Makko Powder
 - Dropper
 - Clay
 - Popsicle sticks
 - Aromatics: rose, flowers, spices, etc
 - Tooth pick
 - Measuring spoon
 - Cardboard
 - Scissor
 - Essential oil (optional)
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VOCABULARY

Incense: Wood, leaves, and other combustible materials used to produce a fragrant odor when burnt.

Incense Holder/Burner/Censer: A vessel used for holding burning incense.

Makko Powder: Incense powder or *Tabu no ki* is made from the bark of the *Machilus Thunbergii* tree. Is the binder and combustible material used in crafting incense. Other wood powders are often combined or used as substitutes in incense making.

Aromatics: A material having a pleasant smell or scent, used in incense making.

Wedge: Process of preparing clay for use by kneading out air bubbles, lumps, and hard spots.

Clay: An earthy material used in ceramics, elastic and pliable when moist, and hard when fired.

Joss Stick: A slender stick of rolled or extruded incense.

Incense Cone: Incense shaped in to the form of a cone.

Incense Stick: Incense formed on a thin stick, pine needle, or wood split.

Mortar & Pestle: Tools used since ancient times used to grind and crush ingredients into pastes or powder. Mortar is the vessel. Pestle is the hand held tool used to crush and grind.

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DAY 1

Introduction to Incense and How to Make an Incense Holder

Video Day 1: vimeo.com/showcase/7766541/video/476099135

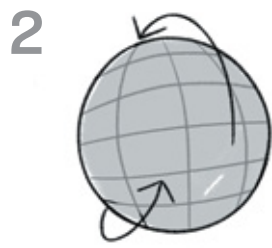
Incense is used by almost every culture all over the world. It is used in sacred ceremonies, to scent houses and in cleansing. Use this as an opportunity to talk about other cultures or have the students explore their own through their experiences with incense. Now create your own incense holder using clay.

How To: Make an Incense Holder

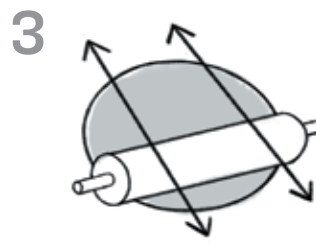
Wedge and roll out clay. Students will use collected natural materials to experiment and create textures and patterns to decorate their incense holder. Then let dry for 2–5 days.



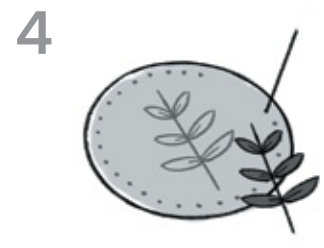
Wedge/knead clay.



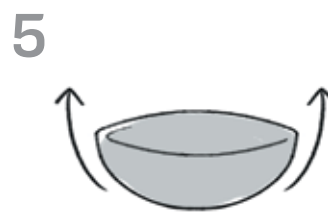
Roll to a round ball, smoothing out cracks.



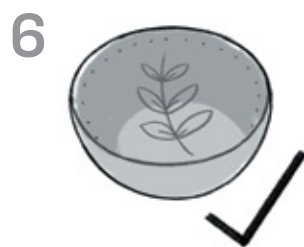
Roll out flat, 1/4 inch to 1/2 inch thick.



Decorate using textures and patterns.



Gently shape, be careful not to squish the design.



Check lines and designs for needed repairs.



Add a small hole to hold an incense stick.



Let it slowly air-dry. It will take 2–5 days to fully harden.

TIPS:

- Cover the work space with cardboard or table cloth (it can get messy!)
- Collect materials from a nature walk or just find textures around the house/classroom.

DAY 2

How To: Make Incense

Video Day 2: vimeo.com/showcase/7766541/video/479104059

Create rose and floral incense. You will need a mixing bowl, measuring spoon, water, dropper, makko powder, dried aromatics (rose, lavender, jasmine etc.). Begin by grinding up aromatics and combining in a ratio of 3 parts aromatics to 6 parts makko. Add a few drops of water at a time, until mixture clumps, then form into a dough. Split up into 5 or more parts and shape into joss sticks, cones, and incense sticks. Finally, let dry for 7–14 days.



Crush and grind aromatics (rose, cinnamon, clove, etc).



Mix aromatics with Makko powder.



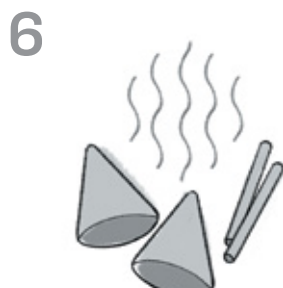
Slowly add a few liquid drops at a time and mix until mixture clumps.



Knead with hands and form the incense dough into a ball (if incense dough cracks or crumbles, add drops of water and knead).



Split up and shape. Try: cones or sticks.



Slowly dry for 7–10 days.



Bonus: Try making an incense stick.



Only light with adult supervision. Don't leave burning incense unattended.

TIPS:

- To grind ingredients use a mortar and pestle, or try a rock, rolling pin, water canteen, or other hard tool. Intermix grinding by cutting with scissors.
- Always start with just a few drops of liquid (7–10 drops), test to see if it comes together by pressing it together, if it is still crumbly then just add more water 1–2 drops at a time.

PROBLEM SOLVING:

- If added too much water, let mixture dry. Then try again!

DAY 3

Incense Recipe

Video Day 3: vimeo.com/showcase/7766541/video/481827311

Using tools and techniques learned on day 2, students will create their own custom incense. Follow the recipe card below, encourage students to explore using their nose. Embrace the spirit of experimentation by combining scents into a custom incense dough and shaping into sticks, cones, and joss sticks.

Incense Recipe

INGREDIENTS

- 3 parts ground aromatics (cinnamon, clove, rose, etc)
- 6 parts Makko powder
- Liquid (water, tea, or juice)
- Optional: Add a few drops of essential oils

INSTRUCTIONS

Add liquid slowly and stir until it starts to clump up. Then knead incense dough with hands, keep adding liquid slowly till it forms a nice dough that holds together and doesn't crack or crumble. Shape into cones or sticks, then slowly dry for 7–14 days. Enjoy safely!

TIPS:

- Use natural materials or food safe ingredients for aromatics:
- Try tea leaves, spices, dried leaves, flowers etc.
- Encourage experimentation — remind them it is “okay to fail” and they might make a terrible smelling incense
I once used clove to make my incense not remembering it is often used as an ingredient in cigarettes and so when burned it smelled terrible.

DAY 4

Watch Day 4: vimeo.com/showcase/7766541/video/483331352

Get cozy, light some incense and read stories inspired by scent. Remind students to only light incense with parent supervision.

Literacy Connections:

A Sweet Smell of Roses, by Angela Johnson and Eric Valazques

Incense Making Suppliers:

scents-of-earth.com/
theincensedragon.com/

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STANDARDS:

National Core Arts Standards:

3rd Grade:

VA:Cr1.2.3a, VA:Cr2.1.3a, VA:Cr2.2.3a

4th Grade:

VA:Cr1.1.4a, VA:Cr1.2.4a, VA:Cr2.1.4a, VA:Cr2.2.4a, VA:Cn10.1.4a

5th grade:

VA:Cr1.1.5a, VA:Cr2.1.5a, VA:Cr2.2.5a, VA:Cr2.3.5a, VA:Cr3.1.5a, VA:Cn11.1.5a

6th Grade:

VA:Cr2.1.6a, VA:Re.7.1.6a, VA:Cn11.1.6a

7th Grade:

VA:Cr1.1.7a, VA:Cr1.2.7a, VA:Cr2.1.7a, VA:Cr3.1.7a, VA:Cn11.1.7a

8th Grade:

VA:Cr2.1.8a

HS Proficient:

VA:Cr1.1.1a, VA:Cr2.1.1a

HS Accomplished:

VA:Cr2.1.IIa

HS Advanced:

VA:Cr2.2.IIIa

Common Core

3rd Grade: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.7, CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.3.MD.A.2, CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.3.NF.A.3.B

California Art Standards for Visual Arts

3rd Grade: 3.VA:Cr2.1, 3.VA:Cn10, 3.VA:Cr2.2