

Tips for casting with Plast'r Craft

Mrs. Lauren Bruntjens, T. F. South High School, Lansing, IL. Email LBruntjens@tfd215.org

Here's some handy classroom tips for casting hands/arms and faces with students. I've found this lesson to be a fun, creative and relatively easy way to create a successful sculpture for all ranges of skills and abilities.

Materials	
<i>Plast'r Craft</i>	Purchased through Nasco art supplies; two twenty-pound boxes for my class of twenty-two students. I have also had success with 'Activa RigidWrap Plaster Cloth' and 'E-Z Form Plaster cloth Wrap'. Best when fresh, new. Old plaster tends to be firm and does not hold the form when casting.
<i>Vaseline</i>	Apply generously to all skin areas to be covered in plaster.
<i>Face wash and lotion</i>	If you provide these, students will be more likely to cast their face! These turn out so great!
<i>Plastic wrap</i>	Used to cover arms, eyebrows/eyes, hairline; purchase at dollar store.
<i>Large plastic bowls</i>	Fill with warm water to dip the plaster strips; purchase at dollar store.
<i>Large plastic garbage bags</i>	Cut these open to lay flat and provide desk/tabletop coverage. Can be reused many times until too dirty to be useful.
<i>Bandage cutting scissors</i>	MUST use these kinds of scissors for cutting off arm/hand casts!! Found mine at a dollar store, so I bought several pairs.
<i>Old towels/rags</i>	For covering clothing and hair during face casting.
<i>Plastic gallon ziplocs or grocery bags</i>	For storage of plaster strips before casting.

1. Read the directions on the packaging; they are very clear and easy to understand. When the first student is ready to cast, I call everyone over to see a demonstration, and I assist in the beginning.
2. Always be prepared by cutting different sizes of strips the day prior to casting. Better to have too many than to run out in the middle of casting and rush around to cut more. Cut some small (postage stamp size), medium (thumb sized) and large (palm of hand sized). Store in a plastic bag.
3. The student should begin casting within 10 minutes after class has begun; this way, they can set up their materials, cast, allow for ample drying time, have it cut off, and clean up. If they start too late during the period, they tend to rush, their work is messy, and then they need to be late to their next class because the plaster is not dry yet, which equals more work for the teacher.
4. For casting hands and arms, apply Vaseline generously to the hands. Put a dab of Vaseline on the arm to hold the plastic wrap in place; this is necessary to avoid ripping out arm hair!
5. When casting the hands, plan to use three days. Day One: cast arm, palm, top of hand, thumb. Day Two: cast fingers. Day Three: use small strips to attach all pieces together. You cannot easily cast bent fingers.
6. For casting the face, again apply plenty of Vaseline. Cover the eyebrows and eyes with plastic wrap. If they want plastic over their whole face, first snip a hole in the center for their nostrils. Plastic wrap prevents capturing the features as well as just using Vaseline. Many teens are hesitant to cast their face, as it seems weird, or girls don't want to mess up hair or makeup. If you provide face wash, lotion, and plenty of clean up time to fix themselves up, most will be more receptive, and happy afterwards that they did it! However, I've also provided plastic reusable masks for those who wanted a face, but were too uncomfortable to make their own.
7. Attach to foamcore, cardboard, or canvas board using plaster strips; no glue necessary.



Students must assist one another in casting the face. The Vaseline protects the skin and the plastic wrap covers the hair. Have several clean towels handy for drips and to protect clothing. Provide tabletop areas for students to lie down to cast the face.



Students can generally cast their own hands; in this case, she wanted her hands formed together. Messes will happen!! Cover tables and work areas for easier clean-up.



Students were given a choice to cast different parts. As long as they first sketched an interesting composition, and could arrange the components on a board, they could decide what to cast to create a successful piece.



Each sculpture was required to be accompanied by a typed statement, poem, or expressive writing sample to further explain the content of the work. This piece displays the student's love of photography.



This piece was created by a student with a hearing impairment; she employed her sign language abilities to express her love of swimming. This piece, like most, used a canvas board as a base; these were old ones we recycled by adding a coat of gesso before painting.



Most students discovered that the overall interest and creativity of the piece would increase with the addition of certain found objects. A base with dowel rods was constructed to support the forms, and some crystals and tissue paper accents added to its originality.