

# Scrimshaw

## What is scrimshaw?

Scrimshaw—whale teeth, whale bone, and animal tusks carved with intricate designs and pictures—is a truly American art form. It likely originated among Native American cultures, and was developed and refined by sailors on whaling ships in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. During whaling voyages, which often took years, many whalers took up hobbies to pass the time. Making scrimshaw was practiced by whalers, as well as navy and merchant seamen while aboard their ships.



President Kennedy had a personal collection of scrimshaw. He even kept some pieces of scrimshaw on his desk in the Oval Office of the White House.

## Design a Piece of Scrimshaw

### Materials:

- Index card
- Bar of soap
- Carving toothpick (a replacement can be a sharp pencil)
- Q-tip
- Paper towels
- Plastic bag
- Black shoe polish (a replacement can be coffee grounds or lipstick)
- Clean wipes

### Directions:

1. Make a drawing on the small notecard to practice.
2. Use your toothpick or pencil to carve your drawing onto the soap. Trace your design 2-3 times so it is well defined.
3. Ask the adult for shoe polish and use a Q-tip to rub shoe polish over the design on the soap. Make sure to get the shoe polish in the design lines. (If you do not have shoe polish, you can use coffee grounds or lipstick instead.)
4. Use clean paper towels to wipe off all the extra shoe polish.
5. Show off your “scrimshaw” in a place to proudly display your artwork.
6. Wipe your hands and your work area clean.

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