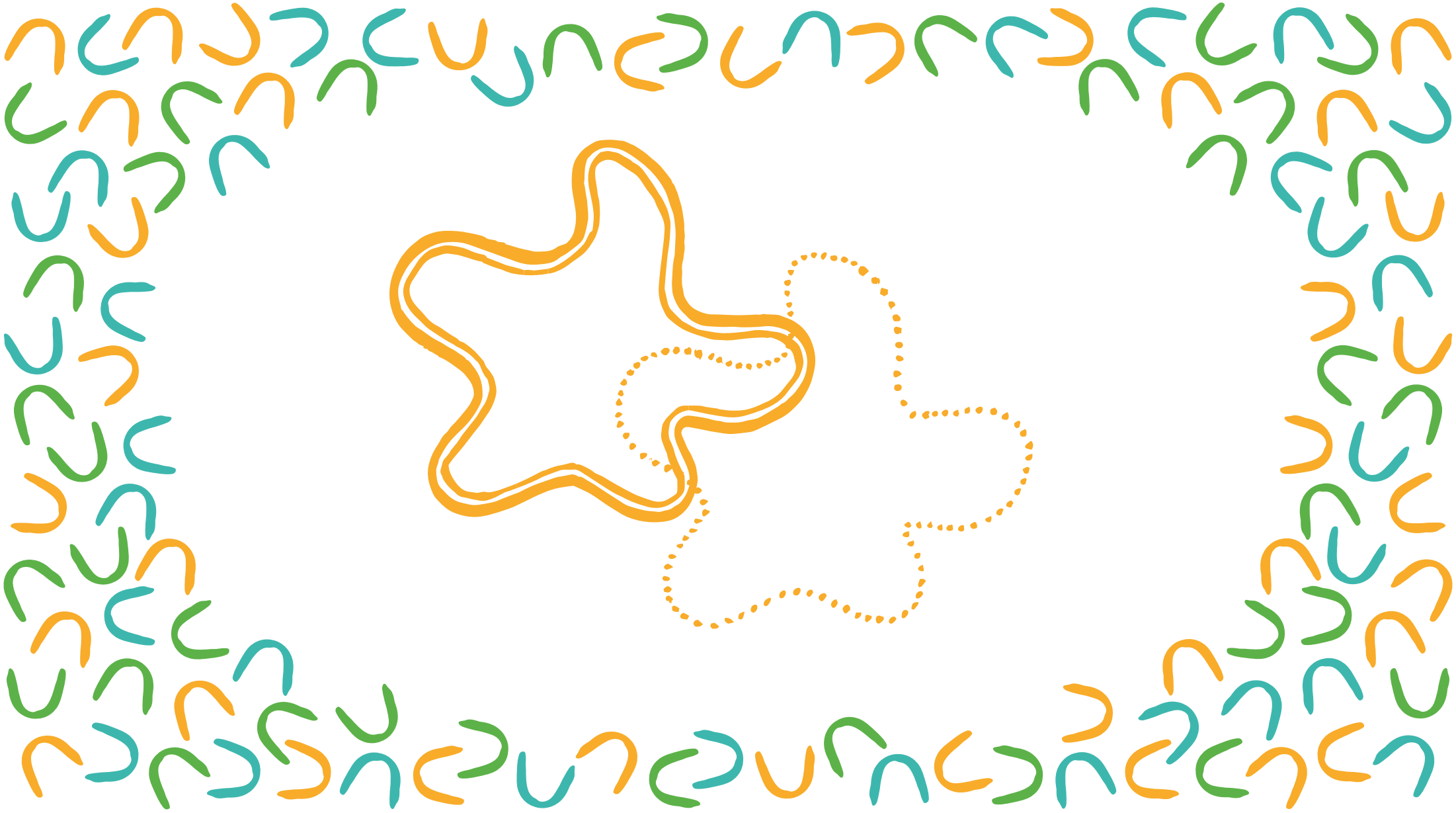
MAKING IMPRESSIONS

by Stefanie Ying Lin Cheong



MAKE
Learn

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About this activity:

Learn about, explore and understand materials and their connection to the natural world. Create your own future fossil using natural materials, your insight and vision.

This activity will take around three hours and is split into three sessions (plus drying time).

WATCH THE FILM

Watch the film with Stefanie before you begin.

Session 1: Collecting and Questioning

Make a mini museum

Making Impressions

An impression is a difference made by the action or presence of someone or something, an impact, an imprint or a feeling.

What you'll need

- A large box
- Cardboard (to cut into strips)
- Newspaper or a tablecloth to cover your desk, table, or space where you will be making
- A paper straw
- Water
- Plaster of Paris
- Wooden pastry bristle brush
- Sand
- Mixing spoon
- Casting bowl
- Water measuring cup
- White mixing cup
- Cup and lid
- Pouch for plaster
- Ribbon for amulet
- Your imagination

You'll also need question cards, a display easel template and an amulet stand template. You can find these at the end of this workbook – simply print out and fold.

If you don't have a printer, have a go at writing out the questions onto a piece of paper, or your exercise book or journal and cutting out the templates from your own drawings of them. Be as creative as you like, you could even use objects from your own home instead of the templates!

1 Take your large box, this will house your mini museum! Measure the box width and length. Is one side longer than the other, or is the box square?

2. If the box has one side longer than the other, the longest side is called the ‘length’. Cut two strips of your cardboard so that they are the same length and depth as your box (depth is the height of the box).

3. If the box has one side longer than the other, the shortest side is called the ‘width’. Cut three strips of your cardboard so that they are the same width and depth as your box.

4. If your box is square then the length and the width are the same measurement. Cut all of the strips of card to this measurement. For all box measurements, you should now have five strips of card.

5. Measure and mark four even sections on the two longer strips. Make cuts half way into the depth of the cardboard strips as pictured on page 1.

6. Now measure the three shorter strips into three sections and do the same.

7. Now you can slot the strips together to create dividers inside your box, enough for 12 spaces.


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8. Collect six natural materials or objects that you are drawn to, you may need to go outside to do this.

9. Collect six fabricated (man-made) materials or objects from around you. These can be a whole object or part of an object.

10. Arrange your found materials within your mini museum (have a look at the picture for inspiration).


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11. Take your question cards (see page 12) and answer questions about each material or object you have chosen, using a new card for each. These will help you to explore the materials and question what impressions they have made on the planet. You can use an encyclopedia, ask your parents, carers and friends or research online to find your answers. If you don’t have a printer at home to print out the question cards, don’t worry! You can write out the questions and your answers on a blank piece of paper.

Note
Before you begin, check out the table in this activity guide, on the next page.

On each card are the questions:

- What are the materials?
- How was it made?
- Why was it made?
- Where did it come from?
- Where do you think it will go when you are finished with it?
- Will it degrade? How long will it take?


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Note
Degrade means to break down or decay.

Listed in the table below are some general materials and the time they take to degrade.

Material	Time to degrade and break down	Can it be recycled?
Plastics		
Plastic bags	10 – 1000 years	Yes (some larger supermarkets have collection bins)
Fishing line	600 years	Yes
Straws	200 years	Yes (but few places do)
Plastic bottles	450 years	Yes
Lego	1200 years	No
Rubber		
Natural latex gloves	A few months	Yes (in compost pile)
Synthetic rubber	80 years	
Rubber bands	1 year	Yes (via Royal Mail)
Tyres	2000 years	Yes
Metal		
Tins cans	50 years	Yes
Aerosol cans	200 – 500 years	Yes
Aluminium foil	Never	Yes
Aluminium drinks cans	80 – 100 years	Yes
Precious metals (silver and gold)	Never	Yes
Iron	4 years	Yes
Fabrics		
Nylon	30 – 40 years	Yes (but expensive)
Cotton	6 months	Yes
Wool	1 – 5 years	Yes
Thread	3 – 4 months	Yes
Synthetic fabrics	80 – 100 years	Yes (through clothes retailers like H&M)
Natural rope	3 – 14 months	Yes
Synthetic rope	40 years	No
Leather	40 years	Yes
Canvas (cotton or linen)	1 year	Yes
Other		
Paper	2 – 6 weeks	Yes
Wood	10 – 15 years	Yes
Cardboard	2 months	Yes
Batteries	100 years	Yes
Vegetables	5 days – 1 month	Yes (in compost pile)
Fruit	5 days – 6 months	Yes (in compost pile)
General food waste	Several months – years	Yes (in compost pile)
Glass	Never	Yes
Styrofoam	Never	No
Leaves	1 month	Yes (in compost pile)

Even though a lot of these items can degrade we must also remember that some have other materials mixed in such as heavy metals like lead, oils, and other pollutants that contaminate the environment. A lot of plastics leave micro particles of plastic that are dangerous, especially in our oceans.

Question!
Were you shocked by any of your answers? I hope this has made you look at materials in a new way.

Session 2: Experimentation and Play

Casting your material in sand

1. You can use all or any of the materials you collected in Session 1.

2. Empty the sand into a large round container and pour in water (roughly 350g of sand to 100ml water). Mix thoroughly then smooth out the top of the sand to create a flat top layer (I used the back of the spoon to do this).

3. Now that you have a flat layer of wet sand, you can begin to make impressions into it. Decide if you want to push a whole object from your collection into the sand, or if you want to press one or two sides of one, or more, of your objects into the flat surface of the sand. You can try out a few ideas first before committing to the final impression, to reset the sand just flatten again and restart the process of mark making.

Note

Plaster should be handled with care. As it cures* it reaches a high temperature, therefore ensure you do not place any parts of your body in the plaster that is hardening as it may cause burns.

*As well as relieving the symptoms of an illness or disease, to cure also means preserving by salting, smoking or, in this case, drying out.

4. Once you're happy with your sand impression it's now time to capture it in plaster. Measure out one full medium cup of plaster and one full small cup of water (ratio is 1 part herculite plaster to 0.42 parts water, or refer to the plaster mixing guide on your packet of plaster). Add the water to your white mixing cup and then the plaster, mix well until all the lumps are gone and it looks like pancake batter. If you're finding it too thick then add a little more water, if it's too thin add a little more powder.

5. Pour the plaster mix over the sand that you have marked with impressions evenly ensuring you fill the more indented spaces first. Tap the side of the container to help remove any bubbles.

6. Let it set for 40 minutes, after that it can be demolded. Be careful when removing the hardened plaster. You can tip the container over a tray or piece of newspaper so you do not lose any of the sand as you will be reusing this for the last session.

7. Brush off the sand gently, there will be sand that sticks. Leave to cure fully overnight and brush the remaining sand off once fully dry.

8. Try a second sample by adding in colour or texture. You can also experiment by embedding materials into the plaster. If you are using poster paint, or other runny paint from a tube or bottle, add it during step 2 and use a little less water to make your plaster mix.

A lot of my best discoveries have come from material investigation and allowing myself time to play and experiment.

Making impressions in sand (top); brushing sand from plaster mold (bottom)

Amulet in the National Museum of Scotland (top); Fossils in the Hunterian Museum (bottom)

Session 3: Respond and Present

Making a future fossil

Fossils are a remnant, impression, or trace of an animal or plant from a past geologic age that has been preserved in the Earth's crust. The information taken from a fossil is used by scientists to understand the history of life on Earth. Fossils are usually displayed on stands and in cabinets in a museum.

We are living in an age called the Anthropocene – this is explained as the age of humans, for the first time we have become the primary agents of change on a planetary scale. We will use this idea to imagine what a future fossil may look like.

Using the research from the materials you have collected, you can now make a future fossil that may show what impressions we as humans could leave behind on Earth.

You can make your fossil as either an object or an amulet. Amulets are a kind of object, either natural or man-made, believed to be endowed with special powers to protect or bring good luck. They are usually portable and include string, ribbon or chain, so can be worn or placed wherever necessary.

1. What impression would you like to leave on this planet? Use an object or selection of objects from your museum collection to design your fossil object or amulet. Think about colour, texture, shape and size.

2. To make your fossil you can decide what shape you want. You could use a different container to pour your plaster mix into, or shape a piece of thick card to create a new wall for the plaster - this could be wavy or jagged or whatever you can think of.

3. Design either a fossil object or amulet, use the space below to sketch some ideas. If you don't have a printer, design your fossil on a piece of paper.


An exhibition of future fossils

4 Mix up the plaster as before and repeat the drying process. If you are making an amulet use the paper straw and place it where you would like the hole for your ribbon to be. Once dried add the amulet to the ribbon by threading the ribbon through the hole.

5 Using the cut-out display templates (see pages 13 and 14) make either a stand for your fossil or a stand for the amulet to be displayed on. If you don't have a printer, you can copy the templates or find objects in your house to display your fossils on – be creative!

6 Hold an exhibition with your friends or household to display all the pieces you have made. Explain why you chose to create the piece you did! Ask questions and enjoy each other's work.

Craft is often thought of as beautiful and rooted in skills and technique but it can also be made to represent an idea or concept or to make a statement.

Once you have completed the three sessions, check which materials in this pack can be reused or recycled. The brown pots can be composted, if you have ordered them from the links in this guide, but make sure you empty all plaster and sand out first. The sand can be given back to nature.

Details of future fossils, which have been tinted with different coloured paints

About the Maker

Stefanie Ying Lin Cheong

Stefanie Ying Lin Cheong is an artist jeweller with self-taught stone-working skills. Whilst studying she discovered a lot of exploitation, conflict and environmental damage in the processing of the materials that jewellers use, such as gold, diamonds and other precious gemstones and metals.

Website

stefaniecheong.co.uk

Social Media

instagram.com/stefaniecheong
facebook.com/stefanieyinglincheong

From the collection 'Interchangeable' by Stefanie Ying Lin Cheong

Appendix
Additional resources and templates

—Find out more about the Anthropocene
nhm.ac.uk/discover/what-is-the-anthropocene.html

—Scottish Geology and Fossils: further links and downloadable publications in the resource section
scottishgeology.com

—Materials Library and more
instituteofmaking.org.uk/materials-library

—Future Materials Library: materials that inspire, promote, and support the transition towards a more sustainable way of working as an artist
futurematerialsbank.com/

—Find out what you can and cannot recycle in the UK
recycling.co.uk

—Great examples of Scottish and UK-wide Contemporary Craft
craftscotland.org
craftscouncil.org.uk

Rock with mirrors
by Stefanie Ying Lin Cheong

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How was it made?

Why was it made?

Where did it come from?

Where do you think it will go when you are finished with it?

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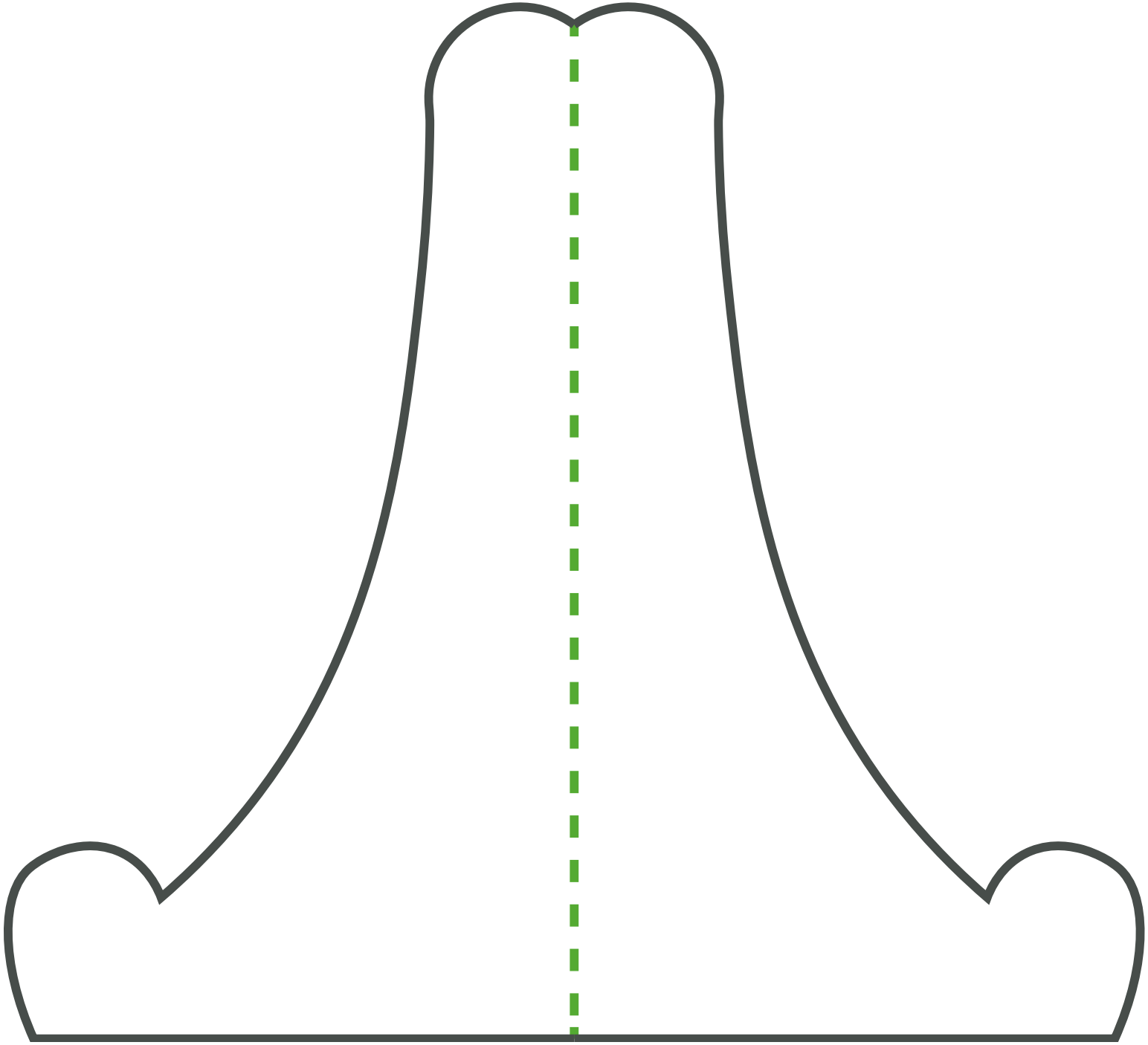
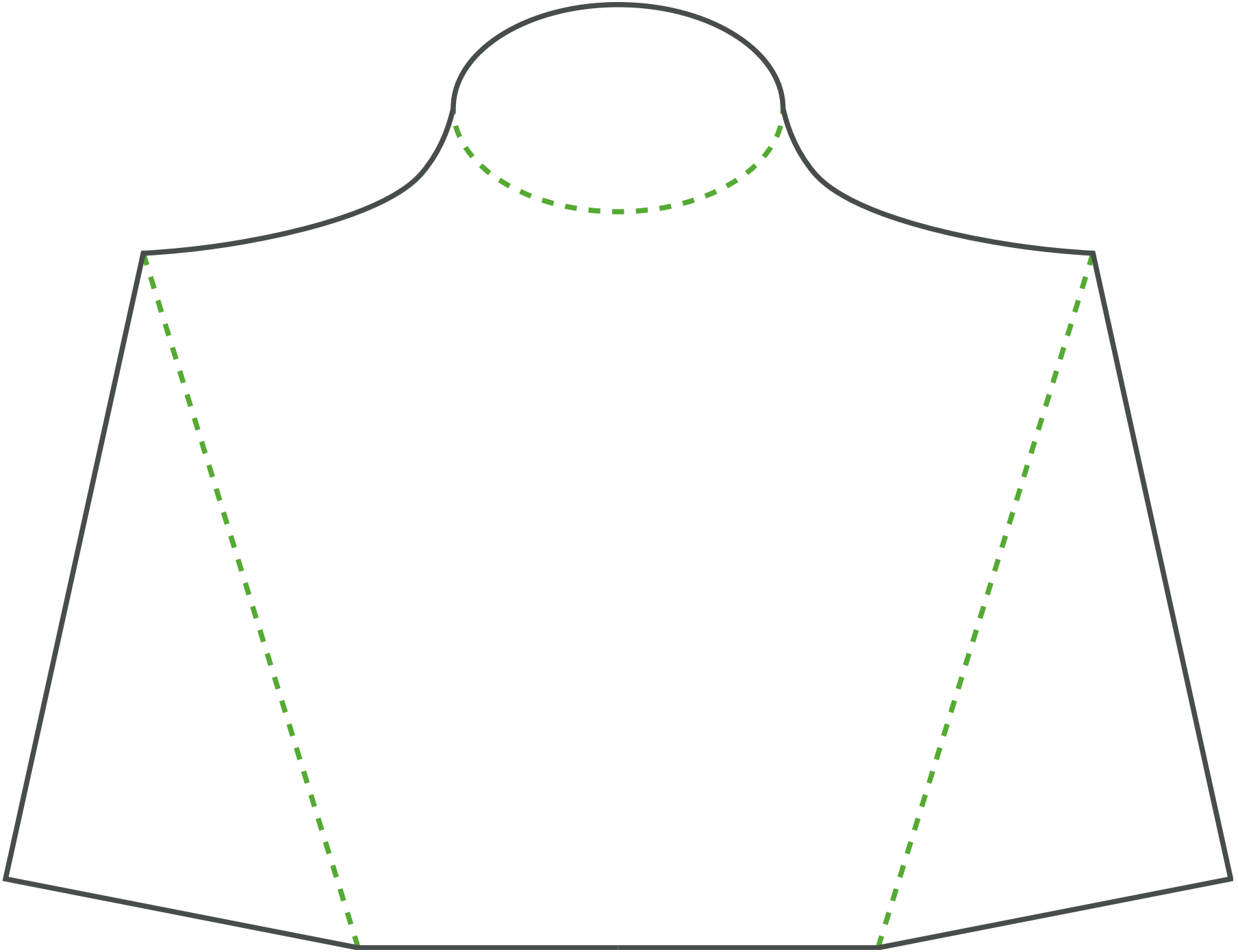
Display easel template



Amulet stand template



MAKE | Learn is a partnership between MAKE and Craft Scotland, designed to strengthen Scotland's craft sector through a review of craft education within Scotland's primary and secondary schools and beyond.

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Geometric geology stack rings
by Stefanie Ying Lin Cheong

Find out more:
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