

## Make a totemic sculpture inspired by Louise Bourgeois

Louise Bourgeois' 'Personages' series are tall, people sized sculptures that she made to represent someone that she missed, after leaving France to live in New York.

The sculpture we featured in the Portable Sculpture exhibition is made of wooden shapes stacked up to form a column, and has some similarities to totem poles. Totem poles are important cultural symbols for Native American people, and are carved from a single tree. They include carvings of animals, and patterns and colours that all have symbolic meanings.



Louise Bourgeois, *Untitled* (Personages Series) 1953



Native American totem poles, image credit: AAAnativearts.com

This resource will show you how to make a 'totemic' sculpture by making shapes from modelling clay and stacking the on a central pole.

## Your Challenge

Make a 'totemic' sculpture that represents somebody important to you.

**Step 1.** Choose the person that you want your sculpture to represent. This could be a family member, friend, or someone you miss.

Think about this person while you make your sculpture. What colours, shapes and patterns represent them?

Depending on the material you use, you could use a few different colours. Choose colours that look nice together, and that represent the person it is about. What are their favourite colours? What colours do they like to wear? Are there any colours that are important to them (like colours from a sports team or a flag?)



This is my example sculpture, that I made to represent my Gran. Yours might look a bit like this, or completely different!



## Step 2: Gather your materials

You'll need:

- Modelling material e.g. plasticine, modelling clay or fimo, in a few different colours. (The example sculpture was made with Newplast plasticine.)
- Clay tools, or something you can carve or make marks with (cutlery works well if you don't have tools)
- A wooden skewer or coffee stirrer, to be the central pole of your sculpture
- A board, tablecloth or large piece of paper to work on (to protect your table from stains)

If you're using clay, you can add colours using paint once your sculpture has dried.

You could experiment with other materials or objects - anything you can stack up on a stick could become part of your sculpture!

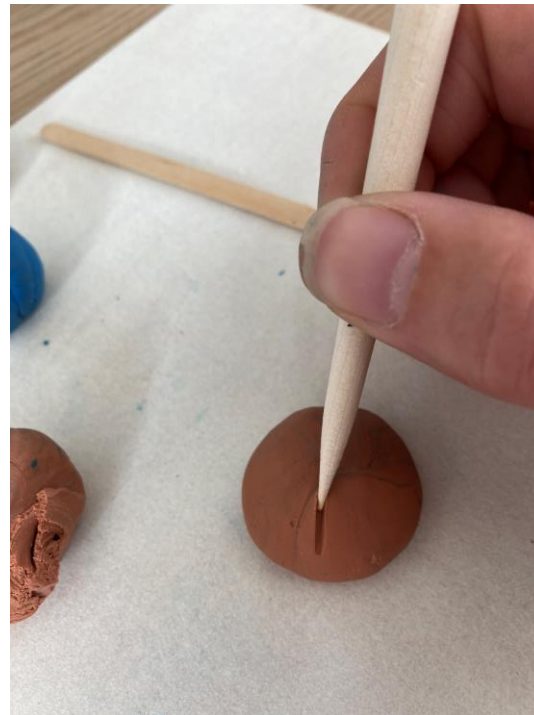


To create your sculpture you need to make a series of shapes, then stack them up on your wooden skewer, a bit like making a kebab! The shapes will have different forms and textures.

**Step 3:** Think about the person you are making your sculpture about. What shapes represent them? Some shapes could be 'abstract' (not look like anything real) or some could be inspired by real objects or activities the person likes.

**Step 4:** Make your first shape. This will be the base of your sculpture so it needs to be big enough to hold the stick up. Once you've made the shape, push your stick into it firmly so it stands upright.

My Gran loved baking and always bought us nice things from the bakery. I made this shape to look similar to a hot cross bun, which we always ate with her at Easter.



**Step 5:** Make more shapes to add to your sculpture. Make some big and some small, some flat and some tall. Use the tools and your hands to make different shapes – roll out and cut to make flat shapes, or squidge it in your hands to make bigger, more curvy shapes.

Carve into your shapes to make patterns or textures.

Look back at the images of Bourgeois sculpture, and the totem poles on page 1 to inspire you. Keep thinking about the person the sculpture represents when making your shapes.

**Step 6:** Add the shapes to the stick to build you sculpture. You can make a little hole first with a tool, or just carefully push the shape on to the stick.



I made some abstract shapes for my sculpture, like a round disc and a square (it reminds me of fudge, which my Gran loved.) I added a pattern to the large blue shape to look a bit like knitting, as my Gran loved knitting!

**Step 7:** Add more shapes and stack them up to complete your sculpture!

Experiment with your modelling clay and try different ways of making shapes to represent the person your sculpture is about. Try rolling out long sausages and curling them up, or use the tools to make more detailed carvings.

Remember, this is an abstract sculpture, so it doesn't need to look like a person, and the shapes don't need to look like anything real either! In abstract art, we can use colours and shapes to represent feelings and memories, rather than making things that we can see in the real world.





