



Ancient Egyptian Makeup Tutorials: make your own makeup palette

Time Required: 15-30 minutes to create your palette | Approximately 12-24 hrs to dry if using air dry clay. If your palette is thicker, it may take longer to dry | Age range: 8+

Background:

The ancient Egyptians are famous for their iconic makeup looks - their dark black eyeliner, green eyeshadow and red lipstick. We know that the ancient Egyptians wore makeup because of their portraits on sarcophagi, tomb paintings and statues, like in the image below, that depict their bold eyeliner. Archaeologists and Egyptologists have also found makeup palettes used to grind makeup and 'cosmetic boxes' in tombs and burials, that contained pots to store makeup and tools to mix and apply products to the skin. But have you ever wondered how they made this makeup?

Ancient Egyptians creatively used naturally occurring materials to create their cosmetic tools and products. Geological minerals, chosen for their vibrant colours, were the main ingredient in ancient Egyptian makeup. Minerals are inorganic (non-living) material that make up Earth's rocks, sands and soils, found naturally in the environment, including malachite, hematite, gold and silver. Minerals are very important parts of nature - without minerals, there would be no rocks or mountains in the landscape, plants could not grow and humans could not survive, as we need minerals like calcium and iron to stay healthy.



Upper part of a statuette of an Egyptian woman and her husband
Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin



Egyptian stele showing a woman applying makeup

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Ancient Egyptians also used siltstone, a type of rock found naturally in the environment, to use as makeup palettes to mix their makeup on. Archaeologists and Egyptologists have found over two hundred quarries created by ancient Egyptians used for mining minerals and rocks, some of which were used to make makeup and palettes. We know that ancient Egyptians had a lot of knowledge about the rocks and minerals in their natural environment, as they drastically changed their landscapes to create so many quarries to find these materials. Many of these quarries are still being investigated today.



**Young
Archaeologists'
Club**



1

After they had been mined, transported and traded, Ancient Egyptians ground the minerals into powders using a grinding stone and makeup palette to create makeup products. Next, they mixed this powder with oils and fats to create colourful eyeshadow, eyeliner, blush and lip gloss.

These pigments were stored in 'cosmetic boxes' inside small jars or pots, along with brushes, cosmetic spoons and kohl sticks to apply makeup with, and palettes to mix the pigments on.

Did you know?

Kohl was also used to protect from eye infections, as a fly repellent and to protect people from the sun's glare. People still make and use kohl today.



Cosmetic Box of the Royal
Butler Kemeni
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Minerals and Makeup:

Galena or lead was the black mineral used to make black kohl, or eyeliner.



Grinding up malachite, a green mineral, creates a vibrant green eyeshadow.



Red ochre is an orange/red clay pigment. It is not a mineral itself, but it contains the mineral hematite. The iron in hematite gives the ochre its red colour. It was used to make a warm blush or lipstick when mixed with fat.



Did you know?

Archaeological scientists use X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF) to find the residues of pigments left on artefacts like ancient Egyptian coffins to find out what paints were used and what they were made of. They discovered that ancient Egyptians used malachite, red and yellow ochre, and calcite to create their paints, which are all naturally occurring minerals.

X-Ray Fluorescence is a scientific method used to test what elements are inside a material. This can be matched with the elements inside specific pigments. If the type and amount of elements on the object matches the type and amount found in a pigment, it shows that the material contains that pigment.

Let's get crafting!

About:

Makeup palettes were used for grinding minerals into powders to use as pigments to make makeup. Egyptologists have found makeup palettes from 5000 years ago which date to Pre-dynastic Period (3400BCE). These palettes were made of siltstone, a greyish green stone, and were mostly shaped like animals. Traces of makeup, like red pigments from ochre have been found on these palettes.



Fish-shaped palette, Naqada III
Metropolitan Museum of Art
Image in the public domain.



Naqada I-II bird-shaped palette
Image in the public domain

Ancient Egyptians would have used grinding stones, small, rounded pebbles, to grind minerals into powder against the palettes. Palettes were usually shaped like birds, fish, turtles or antelopes. Here are some examples.

Choose a bird or a fish and follow the instructions below to create your own ancient Egyptian makeup palette!

You will need:

- Air dry modelling clay or plasticine and a flat surface
- A rolling pin that you can use for clay
- Craft board, plastic sheet, newspaper or something similar to protect your work surface.
- Pointy tool like a toothpick/fork/craft tool to make your animal's eyes and simple patterns
- Somewhere to leave the clay to dry – like a windowsill or shelf



Safety considerations:

- Make sure any tools you use are suitable for use with clay and can be cleaned afterwards like your rolling pin.
- Make sure you cover your work surface with greaseproof paper, newspaper, a craft board or a plastic sheet to keep it clean and protected.
- When using sharp objects like a craft tool, or if you need to cut a section of clay to use, you must always be supervised by a responsible adult.
- Don't use your palette to mix makeup on, clay will absorb any makeup you put on it and it cannot be cleaned because of this.
- Wash your hands before and after handling clay.

Method:



1



2



3



1a



3a

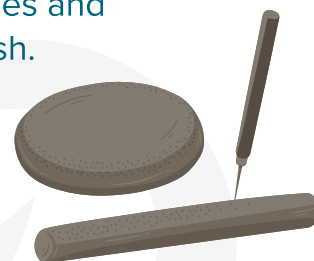
Preparation

1. Prepare your work surface, get all your tools ready, including the clay. Clay is usually packaged in a big block so you may need to ask an adult if you need to cut it into sections to use. Choose the right amount of clay—depending how big you want your palette to be.

2. Roll/knead your clay into one large and one small ball. We will use the large ball to make the animal's body, and the small one to make features like the head and tail of our animal.

3. Use a rolling pin to roll the large ball of clay into a flat circular shape. It does not have to be a perfect circle! You can use your craft tool to neaten the circle by cutting off irregular parts, as you can see in the picture. This round shape will represent the animal's body. Your clay circle should be roughly 2cm thick, as palettes were quite thin.

4. Now we have the animal's body, we can make its other features. Here are some examples and guidance on how to make a bird or a fish. If you want to make another animal, use your imagination and get creative!



Bird

1a. To make a bird shape, like this palette, take the smaller ball of clay and make it into a sausage shape by rolling it between the palms of your hands.

2a. Next, make the sausage shape into a curve, like a lower-case letter 'n', with a pointy end to represent the bird's head and curved neck, with a pointed beak at the end.

3a. Flatten the 'n' shape down by putting it onto the surface or table and patting it down until it's flat, or lightly roll it with the rolling pin until it's the same thickness as the body.

Method:



3a. Now stick the neck onto the bird's body (the big circle of clay), squish the clay together with your fingers so it all sticks together, and lightly roll over the joined clay with your rolling pin until it is smooth and you can't tell it has been stuck together.



4a. Now you have a bird shaped palette! Move onto the Decoration stage to decorate your palette.



Fish

1b. To make a fish shaped palette, take one of your small balls of clay. This will be the fish's tail.



2b. Roll it out until its flat using your rolling pin.

3b. Use your fingers to squeeze and shape the clay or use your toothpick or craft tool to cut the clay into a triangle shape.



4b. Stick the tail onto one side of the fish's body by pressing it down until the clay sticks together, or lightly roll over where the clay has been joined using the rolling pin until you can't see the join.

5b. Now you have a fishshaped palette! Move onto the next stage to decorate your palette.



Decoration

1. Use your toothpick, fork or craft tool to decorate your palette. You can use these tools to make patterns in the clay.



2. To make your animal's eye, poke a dot into your clay, or a hole all the way through.



Method:



3. To make scales, you could lightly press on the clay with your tool and draw small 'c' shapes or lines that look like scales across its body and tail.

4. You could draw a small horizontal line under the animal's eye for a mouth.

5. For the bird, you could draw a wing shape on its body.

Drying

When you are happy with the shape and decoration of your palette, you can now leave it to dry if you used air-dry clay. If you used plasticine, you don't need to dry it, you have finished making your palette – well done! Take a picture of your palette if you want to remember it, or you could squish it and try making another animal.

If you are drying your clay, this process should take 12-24 hours (but this depends on the clay you used). Follow the drying instructions on the packaging. Make sure it is fully dry before moving it.



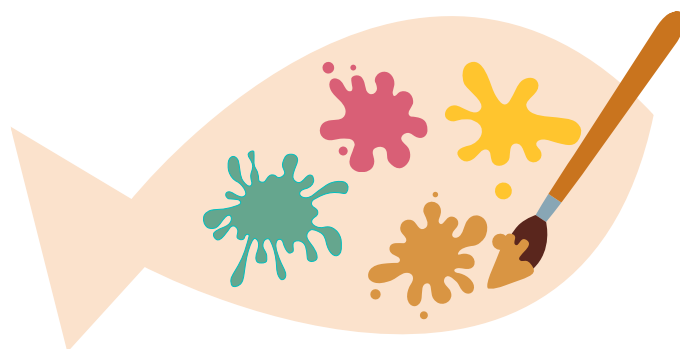
Finish

Once your clay is fully dry, you have finished. Now you have your own ancient Egyptian palette! You can keep this as a decoration, or you could use it to mix paint on next time you paint a picture.



Bonus Activity

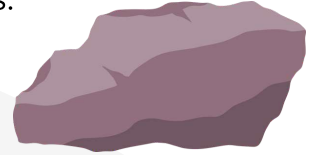
When you're out and about, see if you can find a rounded smooth pebble you could use as a grinding pebble to crush pigments onto your palette! Make sure you don't take any stones off the beach or from coastal areas to help protect our coastline from erosion.



Glossary:

Makeup palette – A piece of siltstone (a type of grey stone) made into different shapes, sometimes animals. Ancient Egyptians used these as a surface to grind down minerals to make their makeup on and mix it with oils to make products.

Siltstone – A grey or greenish sedimentary rock (formed by layers of sediment or sand being squashed by pressure over time).



Predynastic Period – Egyptologists give different time periods in ancient Egypt names, so that they can compare them and see how life changed over time. The Predynastic Period is a section of time in ancient Egypt that lasted from 5500BCE-3100BCE, so from around 7000 years ago to 5000 years ago.



Sarcophagi – Sarcophagi means more than one sarcophagus, which is the name of the decorated coffins made of rock or metal that protected the mummified remains of ancient Egyptian rich and powerful people, like pharaohs.

Cosmetic – A cosmetic can include makeup or skincare products used to clean, change or improve your appearance.

Galena – is the naturally occurring mineral of lead sulphide, or an ore of lead, meaning you can extract lead from it. Ancient Egyptians would crush galena to make kohl or eyeliner.

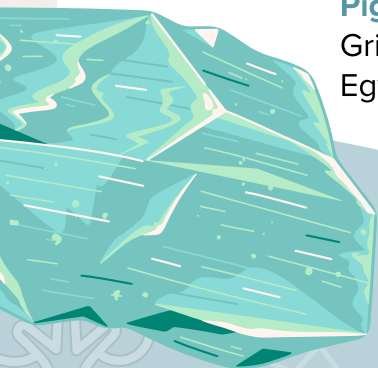
Ochre – is a natural pigment made when iron oxide changes the colour of clay and sand to make it orange-red or brown/yellow. It has been used since prehistory for painting and ceremonies. Ancient Egyptians ground up ochre to make orange-red makeup.



Malachite - is a copper ore, made of copper carbonite. It is a vibrant green colour with swirling light and dark green shapes. Malachite has been used as a green pigment for thousands of years. Ancient Egyptians ground up malachite to make green pigments for eyeshadow.

Mineral – is an inorganic (non-living) material that makes up Earth's rocks, sands and soils. Minerals include quartz, gold, silver, copper and diamond.

Pigment – a material that is used to make colour, for example for makeup. Grinding up the mineral malachite creates a green pigment to colour ancient Egyptian eyeshadow.



If you are interested in ancient Egyptian makeup...

Younger children:

Watch this video - [Weird Historical Beauty Trends compilation](#) – Horrible Histories: learn about what makeup was made of and how they applied it:

Read this article - [Cleopatra's Eye Makeup Warded Off Infections?](#) National Geographic Article to learn more about how kohl was used to protect from infections:



Older Children

If you want to know more specific and detailed information about palettes and makeup, read this [blog post](#). [Predynastic Palettes: A Workshop Produced Elite Status Symbol](#) by Matt Szafran.

This blog post looks at the different possible uses for palettes, not just for makeup, what they were made of and how they were made.

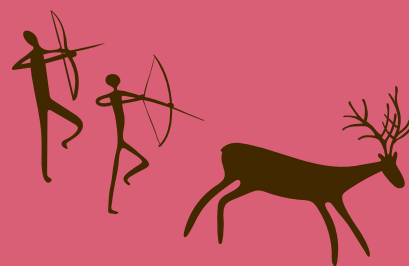


Bonus Activities

If you enjoyed this activity, why not try some other activities on the YAC website?

Mineral pigments

This activity explores how to use natural pigments from stone to [make your own cave painting!](#)



Dyeing textiles with natural pigments

[Dye Spy](#): In this textile dyeing activity, you can explore how different plants deposit colours onto cloth through experimentation. Forage for natural materials like leaves, berries and flowers and use the hammering method to dye cloth using natural materials.

[Make your own dyes!](#) For this activity you can use natural materials like onion skins and turmeric mixed with hot water to make natural dyes, using food items from your kitchen cupboard.

