

AFRICAN ART  
WORKSHOP  
WEDNESDAYS

[online]

# Elegant Amulets



Smithsonian

*National Museum of African Art*

# INTRODUCTION

Amulets are decorated pouches or charms, worn throughout the world since prehistoric times, that hold something that may bring good fortune or protect its owner. An important aspect of the cycle of life in parts of Africa, amulets are worn at various stages of one's life. Considered sacred, they deflect evil and bring good luck to their owners.

An amulet's supernatural powers can be naturally imbued or given special powers by a spiritual leader. Made of numerous materials, including wood, stone, leather, clay, metal, plants, bones, and claws, they hang around a person's neck or any part of the body or clothing, helping the wearers to overcome the adversities and calamities that may befall them in their journey through life.

# GET READY!

Today, we will create a personal amulet in the shape of a pouch. Once completed, you will place a meaningful object, such as a keepsake, photograph, or special item, inside the pouch.

Visit the museum's website at [africa.si.edu](http://africa.si.edu), click on Browse the Collection under Collections and look at the following objects. Can you identify the materials used and the part of the amulet that carries the object(s) meant to protect the owner from harm?

*Object name:* **object number**

*Somalian necklace with amulet:* **76-16-2**

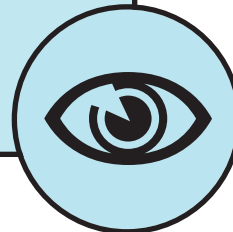
*Necklace with amulet case:* **76-16-1**

*Armband with leather amulets:* **2012-18-198**

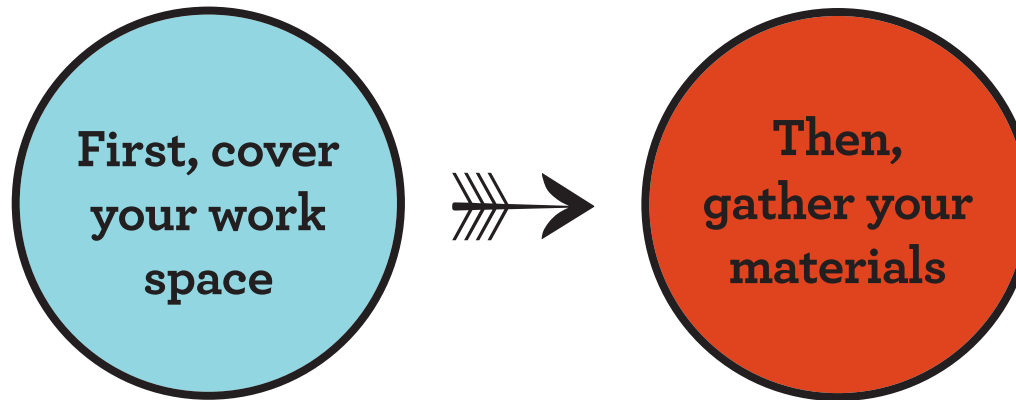
*Fon hat with amulets:* **73-1-2**

*Limba amulet:* **2003-13-2**

Click here  
to browse the  
collection



# LET'S GET STARTED



- Ruler
- Scissors
- Pencil
- Eraser
- Elmer's glue (extra strength)
- Hole punch
- Empty paper towel roll
- 9 x 12 inch black or dark construction paper
- Scrap colored paper, lightweight cardboard, or tagboard
- Heavy duty aluminum foil
- Scrap gold/silver gift wrapping or metallic paper
- Beads, cowrie shells, yarn, string or ribbon
- Permanent metallic and colored markers
- Drawing paper
- Small plastic container for loose small items



## STEP 2

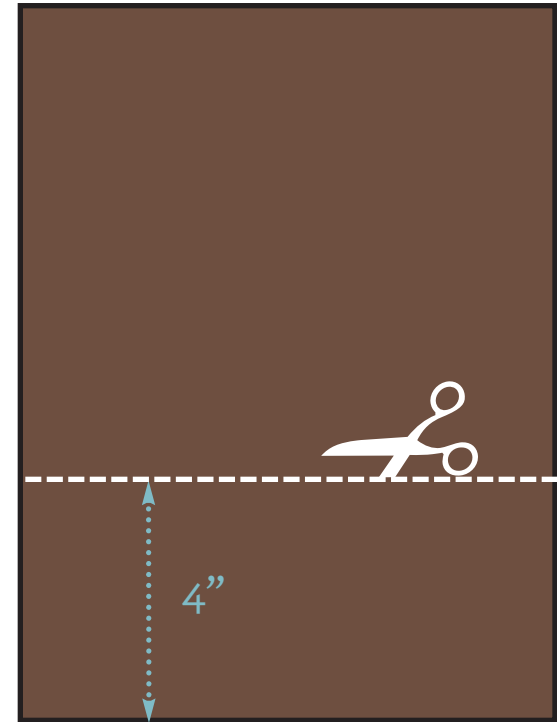
Cover your pouch

① Place the black or dark 9 x 12 inch construction paper in a vertical position. Measure and place dots 4 inches from the bottom of the paper. Draw a straight line to join the dots. Cut along the line.

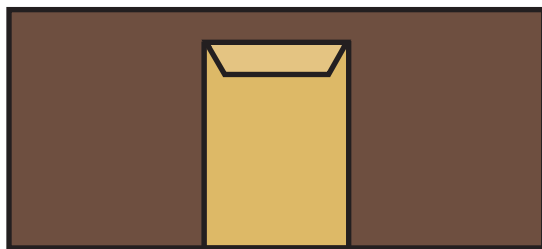
② Place the strip lengthwise in a horizontal position. Align the bottom of your pouch (keeping the opening at the top) with the bottom of the strip. Fold the strip around the pouch and crease the side edges. Place glue on the strip's sides and press around your pouch.

③ The paper will be longer than your pouch at the top opening. Clip the edges of the paper on a diagonal. Push the paper inside the opening and crease. Add a little glue to ensure the paper won't move.

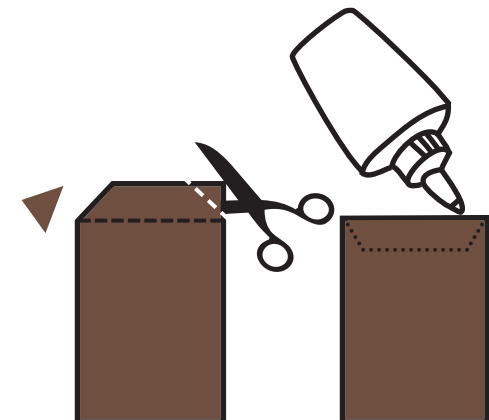
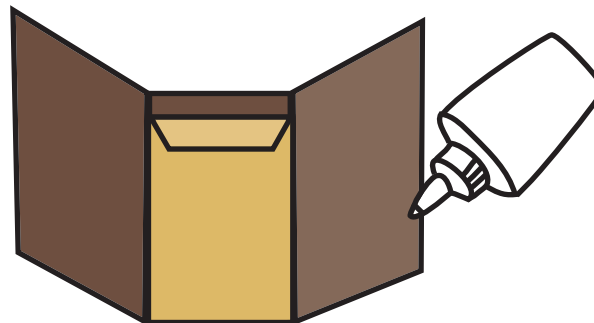
Put aside to dry.



①



②

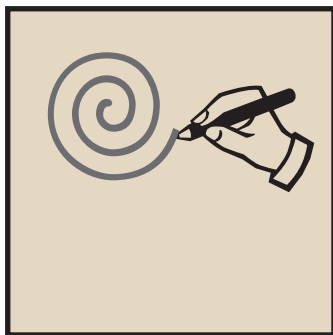


③

### STEP 3

Decorate your pouch

- 1 Sketch some designs to decorate your pouch. Consider the materials you are working with; let the materials dictate your design.
- 2 Put a hole or holes in your pouch for a string attachment and begin decorating. Be creative and experiment!



1



2



# WITH CAREFUL OBSERVATION YOU HAVE DISCOVERED...

many cultures utilize  
similar art forms

creating personal  
objects encourages  
one to be reflective

scrap items can be  
given a new life  
through art

different materials  
can create different  
textures and feelings

the possibilities are  
limitless



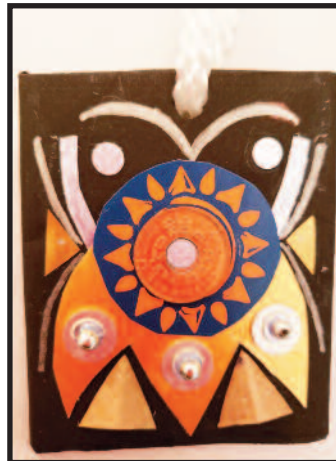
# OUR WORKSHOP

Share your creations!

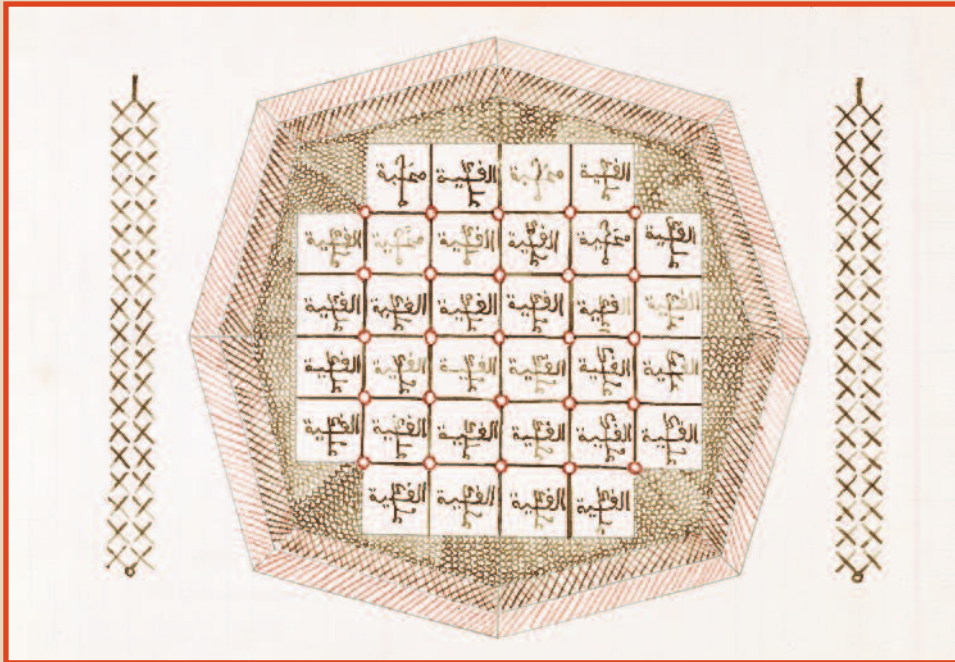


Send your creations to  
[NMAFA-Workshops@si.edu](mailto:NMAFA-Workshops@si.edu)  
to post on the museum's website

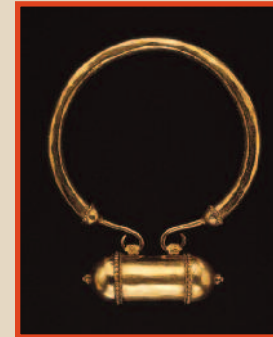
NOTE: We will make every effort, but cannot guarantee, to include your artwork.



*Thank you!*



*Alfa Sori Sawaneh  
Sierra Leone  
Amulet  
c. 1978–80  
Colored inks on graph paper  
21 x 27 cm (8 1/4 x 10 5/8 in.)  
Gift of Simon Ottenberg, 2003-13-2*



*Somali artist  
Somalia  
Armlet with amulet case  
Early to mid-20th century  
Gold alloy  
2.0 x 7.9 x 10.0 cm  
(13/16 x 3 1/8 x 3 15/16 in.)  
Gift of the Loughrans, 76-16-11*

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For more workshops, visit [africa.si.edu/education/at-home/](http://africa.si.edu/education/at-home/)