

Introduction to Balloon Sculpture

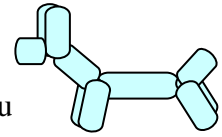
By Timothy Brown

Balloon Sculptures

Why Use Balloon Sculptures?

A balloon sculpture is a tool to help you communicate important truths to those you are teaching. While you are sculpting the balloon there is an element of mystery at work, especially if you haven't told ahead of time what you are making. But even if they know, watching something come together like that has a certain attraction of its own.

Sculpting a balloon helps hold the audience's attention and gives them something to see during the learning process and in turn truths are more readily communicated.



Where Can You Use Balloon Sculptures?

You can use them as a stand-alone object lesson to reinforce your main teaching truth or to help share the gospel. They make great introductions to Bible lessons, memory verses, songs, etc. You can use them as rewards or incentives for good behavior, bringing friends, memorizing verses, etc. Use them before and after class as a way of mixing with and getting to know the children. If a child helps in class, you can give them one as a way of saying thanks.

Balloon sculptures can be used in Sunday School classes, Children's Church, Vacation Bible School, and many other times when sharing a lesson. If you use your imagination, you can probably come up with more uses that apply to your specific circumstances.

Making a Balloon Sculpture

The Type of Balloons to Use:

Normal party balloons won't work for making sculptures. You need to use balloons specifically made for sculpting that are thicker and made to withstand twisting, stretching, and turning. When you buy balloons, be sure they are made for making sculptures. We purchase ours online from Puppets from One Way Street. You can find them at http://www.onewaystreet.com/category/balloon_supplies.

How to Blow Up the Balloons:

Balloons made for sculptures are thicker than normal balloons and are difficult to blow up. The easiest way is to purchase a balloon pump. You can find them in some department stores or online at Puppets from One Way Street.

Insert the nozzle on the end of the pump and inflate it with slow, even pumps. Don't inflate them all the way to the end. Make sure to leave room for the air to expand as you make the sculpture. Take it off the pump and let just a bit of air out to make it easier to tie the balloon.

You can blow up balloons yourself, but you need to do it the proper way:

- First, stretch the balloon several times.
- Fill your cheeks with air and use the cheek muscles to push it in the balloon making a small bubble.
- Pinch the balloon so the bubble stays in place and take a deep breath.

- Start to blow into the balloon, un-pinch it and let the air flow into the balloon. Don't let that initial bubble deflate or you'll need to start again.
- As you blow up the balloon, hold on to the end with one hand and slowly pull it away from you while inflating the balloon. Try to blow the balloon up with one breath. That way, the balloon is stretched in a uniform way and reduces the chances of popping while being manipulated.
- Don't inflate the balloon all the way because as you twist the balloon, it forces air toward the end. Make sure to leave at least an inch or two at the end un-inflated.
- Once you've blown it up as far as needed, let just a little bit of air out of the nozzle and tie it.
- NOTE: It takes a lot of breath to blow up one of these balloons. If you a lot of balloons to inflate and don't have a pump, leave plenty of time to do it. If you start getting dizzy, hold off for a while.

Basic Balloon Twists

At the end of this article I've included instructions on how to make a dog sculpture. The basic twists are explained there.

Presenting a Balloon Sculpture

Introduce the sculpture in a way that will capture the attention of the group. You can use a question, brief story, a description of the animal without telling what it is, etc. To help with the anticipation, you may want to wait until after the sculpture is made to reveal what it is. You can even ask the children if they can tell you what it is.

As you're making the sculpture, describe various aspects of the animal/thing you are creating. Once the balloon is finished, briefly share the application with them. (The climax in making a sculpture is the finished product. Interest will wane quickly, so keep your application brief.)

Storing Balloons

Exposure to air over a period of time dries out and weakens balloons. The best way to store them is in a sandwich type bag with a zipper closure. Squeeze as much air out of the bag as you can before sealing. If they are going to be stored for a long time, add a little bit of powder to the bag. If you buy balloons in lots of 100 or 144, you may want to sort them by color and place each color in a separate storage bag.

Highlighting Balloons

Once the sculpture is completed, you can use markers to add highlights to make it more realistic. Some permanent ink markers will pop balloons, so make sure you test your marker before using it in a teaching setting.

What If a Balloon Pops While Making a Sculpture?

Sometimes balloons do pop in the middle of your lesson so make sure you have extras on hand just in case. If a balloon pops you can simply grab another one and continue. You can also add a little humor if you'd like. "If that was going to be a dog, I was going to name him buster." "Now wasn't that a blast?" "I got a real bang out of that one." "He must have been troubled; he came apart at the seams."

Internet Resources

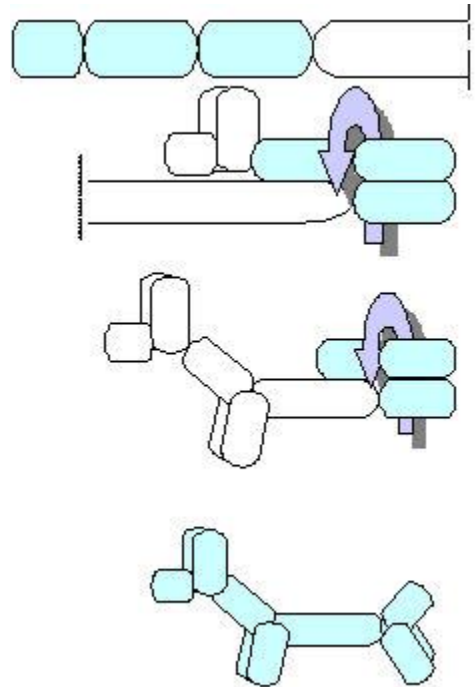
In these notes, you've received the basics in balloon sculpturing. There are Internet resources that go into more detail and teach more advanced ballooning from professionals. Rather than try to reproduce that information, here are some good web sites to check out.

- Key Balloon site <http://www.balloonhq.com/>
Comprehensive site giving background on ballooning, clipart and fonts, instruction in balloon sculpting, ballooning book and video reviews, instruction on decorating sculptures and more.
- Christian site http://www.onewaystreet.com/category/balloon_supplies
Christian source to purchase balloons, pumps, and instructional material.
- Balloon site <http://www.angelfire.com/hi3/PamsPlace/balloons/balloons.html>
Balloon sculptures and instruction on basic balloon twists.
- Christian site <http://www.professorwonder.com/>
Balloon sculptures with patten ideas, instruction on making balloon sculptures.
- Dewey's Good News Balloons – <http://www.flash.net/~balloonz/>
Christian source to purchase balloons, pumps, books, videos and other ballooning supplies.

How to Make a Balloon dog

Sculpture Steps:

- Inflate the balloon leaving about 2" uninflated at the end.
- Starting from the knotted end, twist one small and two medium size bubbles. Fold the balloon between the two medium bubbles and twist as shown. This step will complete the head and the two ears.
- Next, twist off three more medium size bubbles. Fold the balloon between the second and third bubbles and twist as shown. This will make the two front legs of the dog.
- To finish the dog, twist off three more bubbles (the last one will be the tail). Fold the balloon between the second and third bubbles and make the final twist.
- Practice with several balloons ahead of time so you can get to know the right size bubbles to make. If you make the head and ears too big, then the legs and body will be too small and the dog won't look right.



Lesson:

How many of you have a pet? (Let the children tell you what kind of pets they have while you blow up the balloon.) There are all sorts of pets, but one has become known as “man’s best friend.” Which animal is that? That’s right, the dog. What are some of the qualities in dogs that helped them earn that name? (Make the dog as you talk about the qualities such as their unconditional love, faithfulness, excitement at seeing you, protection, playfulness, etc.) Those are all great qualities to have in a pet, but did you know that dogs are not really man’s best friend?

Dogs are good friends, but not our best one. To find out who wants to be your best friend, spell dog backwards. What do you get? God, that’s right. God wants to be your best friend. Proverbs 18:24 tells us that God is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

God wants to be your best friend, but if Jesus isn’t your Savior, something is keeping you apart from him and is hindering you from being friends with God. That something is sin. (Share about sin and give the gospel. Use an invitation verse of your choice if you want this to be your gospel presentation.)

If Jesus is already your Savior, remember that God wants to be your best friend. You can talk with him, just like you do with your regular friends. Tell him about the good things that happen to you and thank him for them. Tell him about the bad things that happen and ask for his help to handle them properly. God cares about what is on your heart and when you come to him with a right heart attitude, you know he will listen and answer!