

Activity Idea

Potato Seal Stamps

Chinese Potato Seal Stamps

Recommended age level: 12 – 18

Many East Asian and Southeast Asian countries once used seals or stamps with an individual's name carved in it in lieu of signatures on important documentation such as contracts, government papers, personal documents, etc. In addition, they were and still are used by artists on Chinese calligraphy works and Chinese paintings. These seals can be made of wood, stone, metal, or any number of materials, and typically stamped in red ink or cinnabar paste. Although some countries have stopped, these seals are still in use in countries such as Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and China. This activity sheet will show you how to carve your very own seal. Watch this video from The Met for reference: <https://tinyurl.com/ybgvg7rk>

What you need:

- Potato
- Paper clips
- Knife
- Paint (preferably red)
- Ruler (optional)
- Paintbrush (optional)



What to do:

1. Go to this Chinese Dictionary site (<https://tinyurl.com/y6rbp4jt>) and pick a word.
2. Click on the word you have chosen and highlight the enlarged word. Copy it onto a blank word document, resize it as necessary, make it **bold**, and print it out. Try to make the word slightly smaller than the potato you're using so when centered on the potato, there is a two centimeter border around the word. A ruler may be helpful.
3. Cut your potato in half. You can also cut your potato into a rectangular shape, if you want to, but it's fine to leave it as is.
4. Place your printed-out word in the center of your potato and use the paper clip to poke holes around the outline of your word. Be sure to poke the holes close together so you can see the word in the potato when the paper is removed.
5. Remove the paper. Decide on what kind of seal you want:
 - If you want a seal of the word, take the paper clip and carve into the potato, going around it, leaving a thin border at the edge. Then use the paper clip to carve around the word.
 - If you want a seal of the outline of the word, use the paper clip to carve out the word.



6. Squeeze paint out and dip your seal into it or use a paintbrush and apply the paint to your seal.
7. Stamp your seal on whatever you like: paper, fabric, etc. Have fun!

For further information on the history of Chinese seals check out these sites:

- History of Chinese Chops/Chinese Seals at the Chinese Online Museum <https://tinyurl.com/y9v8mocm>
- Chinese Chops or Seals on ThoughtCo <https://tinyurl.com/y7lfwzs7>
- The art of Chinese seal engraving on UNESCO Youtube <https://tinyurl.com/y9axg2l6>