



## Children of Early Appalachia

# Making Toys

Grades 4-6

Homemade toys were limited by the supplies and skill available to Appalachian children. Imagination and creativity were the answer to making fun toys. Traditional toys might be made by parents or older siblings. Here are two simple craft projects students can make in the classroom, button spinner and cucumber doll. These two illustrate the simplicity of toys and the creative nature of children living under hard conditions.

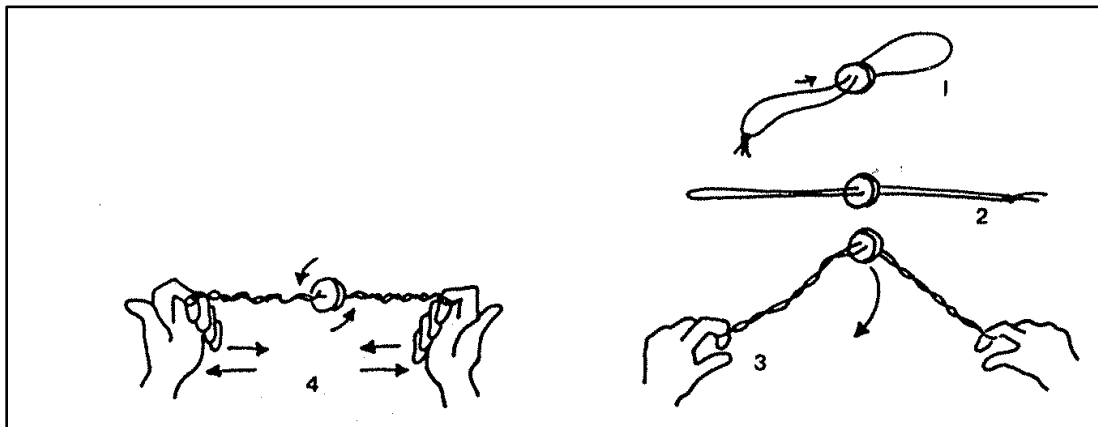
### Button Spinner

#### Materials

- 32 inch piece of string or heavy duty thread
- 1 large two-hole button (1 inch diameter or greater)

#### Procedure

1. Put the string through the button holes and knot ends together.
2. Position button in the middle of the strong.
3. Hook loops of the strong onto the index fingers and swing in a circular motion to twist.
4. Pull twisted string taut and relax alternately to get the button twirling. See how long you can keep it spinning!



## Cucumber Doll

### Materials

Article "Making a Cucumber Doll" from Foxfire, Winter 1975 (next page).

Any cucumber, though ten inches or longer is best

Knife

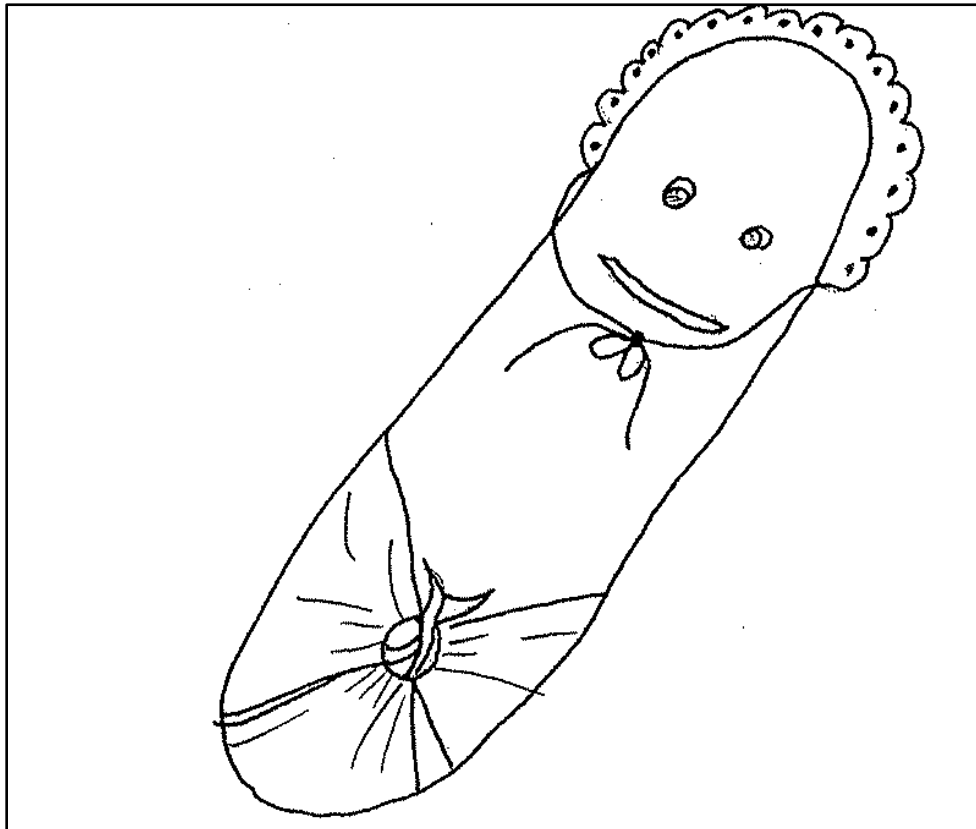
Pebbles (for eyes and nose)

Handkerchief (for the doll's clothes or diaper)

Safety pin

### Procedure

1. Cut an inch off of the bottom end of the cucumber.
2. Scrape out seeds and pulp to the point where you plan to cut the mouth.
3. Cut a notch for the mouth. Make sure not to cut through to the hollowed-out center.
4. Using the point of the knife, cut out eyes and nose, and stick small pebbles in eyeholes and nose.
5. Wrap the handkerchief around the body.



## Making a Cucumber Doll

From Foxfire, Winter 1975, Vol. 9, No.4

*I'd never heard of a cucumber doll, but I'd heard my mother and daddy talk about the homemade toys they played with. We didn't have homemade toys as such. We did have store-bought ones, but most of the time, we didn't play with them- we'd play with anything we could find around the house and yard. Our favorite "toys" were brooms used as horses, mud for mud pies, swinging grapevines, and climbing trees. Just because store-bought toys are often more realistic and more precisely made than homemade ones, it doesn't mean the child will prefer the bought toy.*

*When Florence Brooks was growing up, children where she lived didn't have any store-bought things to play with. They or their parents had to make toys out of the materials they had on hand- in this case, cucumbers.*

*-Brenda Carpenter*

I'm going to make a cucumber doll like me an' my sister, Beulah, used t'play with. You need a knife, a needle, and a safety pin. We'd pin a diaper on them, and make a "dress" out of a square of cloth, fold a hem, gather it (with a needle and thread), and tie it around its neck. We used t'have a lotta fun playin' with those things. We used t'make'em and feed'em (the doll was hollowed out, so the "food" goes right through). We made clay mud with water, poured it in'em, and then the diaper was in a mess. We'd take it off and change it. We never fed it anything else. Milk would have gone down it, but we was in a depression- we didn't have enough of that. We'd get mountain moss off a log, make'em a bed, put'em in th'bed. We didn't put hair on it, but you know if we'd thought of it, we could a'got corn silks and made'em some hair. The doll wouldn't last more than a day or two because drunkards (fruit flies) would get after it.

I don't know of anybody every doing that but me and my sister, Beulah. She was four years older than me but she had to play with me or else.

*-Florence Brooks*