

Introduction to Woodcarving: Your First Cuts

Duration: 2 Hours

Student: 18-year-old homeschool student

This lesson provides a hands-on introduction to the satisfying craft of woodcarving, focusing on safety and foundational skills.

Materials Needed

- Softwood block (Basswood recommended, approx. 1"x1"x6") - 1-2 pieces
- Beginner woodcarving knife (Whittling knife)
- Optional: Small V-gouge
- Cut-resistant carving glove (essential!)
- Thumb guard
- Safety glasses
- Pencil
- Bench hook or small C-clamp (to secure wood)
- First-aid kit (readily accessible)
- Dustpan and brush
- Optional: Strop and honing compound

Lesson Activities

1. Welcome & Safety First (15 mins)

- **Greeting:** Express excitement for starting the woodcarving journey! Briefly discuss the appeal of shaping wood by hand.
- **Goals:** Outline the lesson objectives: learning safety, tool basics, first cuts, and a simple project.
- **SAFETY BRIEFING (Crucial!):**
 - Always wear the carving glove on your non-knife hand.
 - Always wear the thumb guard on the thumb of your knife hand (if applicable/comfortable).
 - Always wear safety glasses.
 - **Rule #1: ALWAYS CUT AWAY FROM YOUR BODY AND HANDS.** Never draw the knife towards yourself. Keep your non-knife hand behind the path of the blade.
 - Work in a clear, well-lit area.
 - Know where the first-aid kit is.
 - Sharp tools are safer than dull tools (less force needed), but require respect. We won't sharpen today, but will discuss it briefly if time allows (using strop).
- **Tool Introduction:** Show the whittling knife. Identify the handle, bolster, and blade edge/tip. Explain its purpose for slicing/shaping wood. Briefly show V-gouge if using.
- **Wood Introduction:** Introduce the basswood block – explain why it's good for beginners (soft, even grain).

2. Setup & Secure the Wood (10 mins)

- Demonstrate putting on the glove and thumb guard correctly.
- Show how to secure the wood block using either a bench hook (preferred) or a C-clamp (ensure it's tight but doesn't damage the wood excessively). This keeps both hands away from the cutting edge.
- If not clamping, demonstrate a safe way to hold the wood firmly on a stable surface, ensuring

the non-knife hand is always behind the wood piece relative to the knife path.

3. Practice Cuts Demonstration & Practice (45 mins)

- **Demonstrate:** Using a practice piece of wood, demonstrate the following basic cuts slowly:
 - **Stop Cut:** A vertical cut to define an edge where another cut will stop.
 - **Push Cut/Paring Cut:** Using the thumb of the knife hand as a pivot/brace on the wood, push the blade forward to slice off thin shavings. Control is key. Cut with the grain where possible.
 - **(Optional V-Gouge/Knife V-Cut):** Show how to create simple V-shaped channels.
- **Student Practice:** Guide the student to practice these cuts on their piece of wood.
 - Emphasize: Thin shavings, control over force, keeping glove hand safe.
 - Provide constant supervision and specific feedback (e.g., "Try holding the knife at a slightly lower angle," "Remember to keep your left hand further back").
 - Encourage questions.

4. Simple Project: First Carving! (40 mins)

- **Design:** Choose a very simple design the student can draw lightly on the wood block. Ideas: Rounding off the corners of the block, carving simple initials, a basic leaf outline, or simple geometric notches along an edge.
- **Guidance:** Guide the student step-by-step.
 - "Let's start by making stop cuts along your pencil line here."
 - "Now, use the push cut to remove small chips up to that stop cut."
 - Remind about safety and technique frequently.
 - Celebrate small successes!
- **Focus:** The goal is not perfection, but applying the learned cuts safely and gaining a feel for the wood and tools.

5. Clean-up & Review (10 mins)

- **Tool Care:** Briefly explain that tools need to be kept clean and sharp. Show how to wipe the blade (carefully!) and store it safely. If using a strop, briefly demonstrate honing (optional).
- **Workspace Clean-up:** Use the dustpan and brush to sweep up all wood chips.
- **Review:**
 - What were the most important safety rules?
 - What were the basic cuts we practiced?
 - What did you enjoy? What was challenging?
- **Next Steps:** Briefly mention potential next projects (e.g., simple animal shape, comfort bird) if interest continues.
- **Admire the Work:** Congratulate the student on their first woodcarving project!