

CITY OF JERUSALEM in Sculpey clay

Here are some general directions about how I made a City of Jerusalem material from Sculpey clay.

The advantages of a COJ in Sculpey are 1) it has a very pleasing heft and warm tactile quality 2) you can make mistakes while you're creating and correct them easily 3) if a piece should get broken, it is easy to repair with epoxy or to simply remake.

This COJ is flat, and does not show an upper and lower city. My original plan was to make a model showing the topography better, but at the time I didn't have the courage to tackle an engineering project, with all those slopes and angles of walls.

I worked from the patterns in the Level 1 materials manual for a wood COJ.

Materials:

Regular white Sculpey for the base and for the buildings
Super Sculpey for the walls, it is a nice terra cotta color
clay tools
x-acto knife
miniature green aquarium gravel
white glue or wood glue
acrylic craft paints and acrylic varnish

First, I planned the size of the COJ and where it would go in our atrium. At the time, we did not have dedicated space for a COJ so I scaled the pattern down a bit and constructed a same-size wood platform on casters that is easy for a 3-year-old to push under the shelf where it belongs. I think a dedicated space would be better. A yard-sale coffee table would work.

With a photocopier, I scaled down the pattern in the materials manual to fit the platform. I simplified a couple places where the wall patterns were complicated or where the walls didn't "connect right" to satisfy an alert 4-year-old's sense of order. Make sure your wall sections are all straight, not curved! If there are any additions or changes you want to make—for example, the location of the Cenacle, or the shape of the Fortress of Antonia—make them now. For Level 1, I omitted all the other houses in the city. Cut out from the paper pattern all the building and wall footprints.

I cut out footprints for both the cross and the tomb, since they are geographical features, but planned to only paint a tiny red dot next to them for the red candle base—it's not a geographical feature.

Roll out the white Sculpey to a thickness of about 1/4 inch and about the same size as your wood base. Roll it out on your baking sheet—I used two flat cookie sheets that just barely overlapped and that just barely fit in my oven, but if your COJ is large you may need to create the base in several sections. Lay the paper pattern on top. Use the x-acto knife to cut out the footprints of the walls and buildings, making your cuts vertical. You may wish to experiment with outlining the paths out of the city walls with the green aquarium gravel embedded in the clay *before* baking. I only thought to add the gravel after baking by gluing it down with white glue, but it chips off easily. Glue the baked clay base to the wood platform.

Now, cut out the paper wall and building patterns. Make the buildings out of Sculpey to fit their paper footprint patterns. They should look different from each other, not interchangeable. Make the wall sections out of Super Sculpey in the right thickness to fit the footprints you cut in the base. Again, lay the patterns on the clay and use the x-acto knife to cut them out. The clay tools will help you smooth out any overcuts or rough edges. I rolled out the walls on a plastic cutting board that has a "pebbled" surface, which gave the same interesting texture to the wall surfaces. Bake the walls lying flat, not standing up.

My tomb is a little cave of Sculpey with a round Sculpey door held by a glued-in tiny brass brad; make holes for the brad in the door and in the tomb *before* baking. For the tiny red candle holder, I found that a donut of Sculpey alone kept breaking under tension, so I formed some Sculpey around a thick stainless steel nut that was the right size for a red birthday cake candle.

Once the walls and buildings have cooled, you can fit them into their footprints on the clay base. If things don't fit easily, use the x-acto knife to carefully shave the footprints, or use fine sandpaper to sand down the buildings or walls. Everything should fit together without forcing. If you have two pieces of identical shape—say, two towers in the walls—they should fit in each other's spaces.

Now you paint everything—clay base and puzzle pieces—with the acrylic paint. Your Temple could be dazzling gold and white, just as Josephus said it was. On the walls, I only painted outlines around windows and gates, since I liked the terra cotta color of the clay. Varnish with at least 2 thin coats.

The last step, suggested by former Montessori teacher Rosemary Knight, is a dot of different color on the bottom of many, but not all, of the wall pieces, with corresponding dots on their footprints. These colored-dot "hints" allow even very young children to put the puzzle together independently but still have a challenge.

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