Craft time with Susie

Build a Bug

Learn how to make bugs like these from Styrofoam balls and pipe cleaners.

All photos Dropped Pencil

Let me show you how to make your own bugs, similar to the ones we used in the story of Moses. I'm going to make a ladybug, but you can make spiders, beetles, ants, or any other type of bug you may want.

Supplies. For this project, we'll need a few small items from the craft store, including 1½" and 3" Styrofoam balls, several colors of craft paint, some pipe cleaners (also called chenille stems), and some peel-and-stick felt dots. You may also want to get a small package of plastic cartoon eyes.

The other items we'll need you may already have around the house, including white glue, toothpicks, a plastic knife, a couple of craft paintbrushes. You'll want some paper to put down on the table to keep everything clean.

Most importantly, you'll want to bring along your perseverance because we'll need to take some breaks during the project to let the paint and glue dry.

Materials list

- 1½" Styrofoam balls
- 3" Styrofoam balls
- Pipe cleaners (assorted colors)
- Felt sticky dots
- Acrylic craft paint (assorted colors)
- Plastic eyes
- Toothpicks

A note to grownups

- Approximate cost: $10 to $20 for enough materials to make 5-8 bugs
- Average project time: 2-3 hours spread over 2-3 days, depending upon glue and paint drying times
- Supervision: An adult should supervise or do all cutting tasks

Step 1: Make the body and head

Let's start by making the bug's body and head. Begin by selecting a large foam ball. This one measures 3" across. (To make smaller or larger bugs, use smaller or larger Styrofoam balls.)

We need to cut the foam balls in half to make the body for our ladybug. Craft Styrofoam is great because you can easily cut it with an ordinary plastic knife, but be sure to get a grownup's help when cutting the foam.

To cut the foam, hold the ball firmly on the table. Then, carefully cut all the way around it. This will help you make sure you get a straight cut.

Next, carefully work the plastic knife through the center of the ball to cut it in half. One ball will give you two bug bodies.

Use a pencil to mark the wing line on the bug's shell, as shown below. The foam is soft enough for the pencil to leave a clear line.

For the head we'll use a smaller foam ball. Though I said 1" on the video, it really is a 1½" ball.

To make it fit to the body, we need to remove about a third of the ball. Make the cut using the plastic knife again. This time we want the cut to form a small V, as shown in the photo. This will help the head fit closely to the bug's body.

Cut all the way around the ball first to make sure you get a straight cut.

Then cut it all the way through. You may need to shave some excess foam off of the bottom of the bug body.

The cut in the 1½" foam ball for the head needs to be slightly V shaped.

Use a pencil to mark the wing line down the center of the shell.

Step 2: Assembling the body and head

To attach the head, start by breaking a toothpick in half. We need only one half of the toothpick for this step, so save the other half for installing the legs later in **step 7**.

Place some white glue on the cut part of the head. Then, dip one end of the toothpick into the glue, and then insert the toothpick halfway into the bug's head near the center.

Next, cover the remaining end of the toothpick with glue and press the bug body and head together, as shown in the middle photo.

The glue will take a while to dry before we can paint the bug, so this is where your perseverance will come in handy. If you're making a bunch of bugs, set this one aside and make more bodies and heads. Otherwise, let's move on to **step 3** and make the legs and antenna while the glue dries.

Attach the head to the body centered on the wing line as shown.

Apply white glue to the center of the V in the head.

Insert half a toothpick and coat the exposed part with glue.

This is how the assembled head and body should look. Set it aside until the glue dries completely.

Step 3: Making the legs

Though we don't want to add the legs and antenna until after we paint the body, we can make them now. For the legs on my ladybug, I'm going to use black pipe cleaners, though you can use any color you wish.

We'll need six legs, two antennas, and one proboscis for each bug we make. While you can use scissors to cut the pipe cleaners, it's better to use a pair of wire cutters. In either case, you'll want a grownup's help for this part because tools like these need to be used carefully.

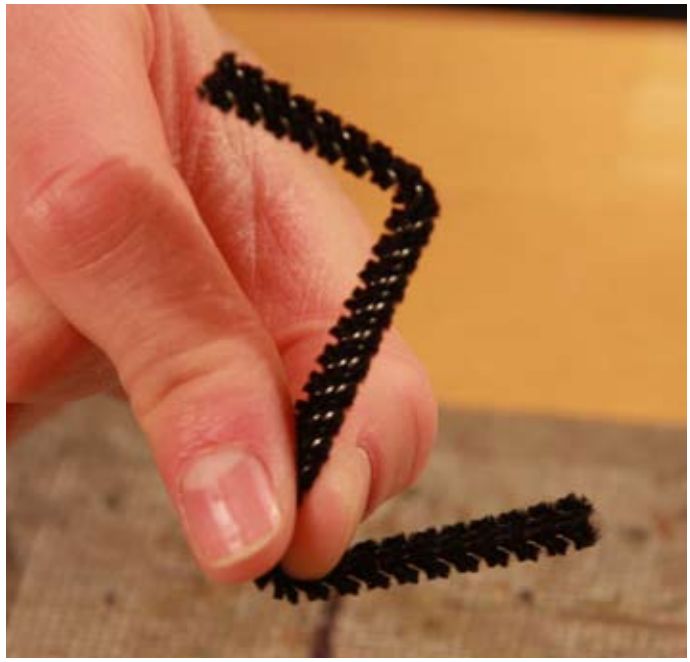
For the ladybug, make the legs 4" long and the antenna and proboscis 3" long. With the pipe cleaners I used, I got two legs and one antenna from each, so I needed three total.

Legs. After cutting the pipe cleaners to size, take the six 4" pieces and make the legs. Working with three pieces at a time (so they all match), start by bending the feet, as shown in the middle photo. Next, bend the legs in the middle to make the knees (third photo).

FUN TIP:
For something different, try using striped pipe cleaners or other colors to give your bugs unique legs and antennas!

Six legs, two antennas, and one proboscis

Bend the feet first.



Then bend the knee.

Step 4: Making the antennas and proboscis

Antennas and proboscis. We can add curls to the antenna by wrapping one end around a stick, such as a pencil. Wrap each antenna around twice. If you work carefully, you can make the antennas curl in opposite directions, as shown in the top photo.

The proboscis loops around the pencil three times, as shown in the bottom photo.

Antennas loop around twice.

The proboscis is looped around three times.

Step 5: Painting the bug

After the glue on the body and head are dry, it's time to paint the bug. Use an acrylic craft paint for this step. I used red and black for my ladybug, but you can use whatever colors you'd like.

Start by painting the bug's body red. Take your time with this step, as it is easy to put too much paint on, which will drip. And, because of the rough surface of the foam, you may need to apply two coats.

Since the head of the bug is going to be a different color than the body, you can use that as a handle. However, you can make a painting handle for your bug by using and extra paintbrush or a pencil. Carefully insert the handle into the bottom of the bug body, but be careful not to push it all the way through the top.

Use acrylic craft paint to paint your bug. A 1" paintbrush works well for this step.

(Painting continued)

Once the red is dry to the touch, you can paint the head black. I finish the painting part by adding a narrow black line down the back of the bug. To make the line I used a much smaller paintbrush than the one I used to apply the paint to the head and body. If you don't have a small paintbrush, you could also use a black marker for this step.

OK, you've now got to let the paint dry completely before you can continue with the next step.

Once the red paint has dried, you can then paint the head and wing line.

Step 6: Spots

To add the spots to my ladybug, I used peel-and-stick felt dots. You can get these at most any craft or hardware store. They're used for picture frames, cabinet doors, or anything you want to keep from scratching something.

The spots on a ladybug usually match on both sides of the body, so place the dots in pairs. As shown in the bottom left photo, I've made some bugs with four spots, or like the one in the bottom right photo, just two spots.

Peel-and-stick felt dots are available at most hardware stores.

Four spots

Two spots

Step 7: Installing the legs

The next step is to install the legs. Before we glue them on, we first need to mark where they should go. You'll want the spacing to be even, so flip over the bug and mark the leg locations with a marker. Put three on each side, and start by marking where the center legs will go. Then evenly space the front and back legs.

Next, use the leftover half of the toothpick from **step 2** and make small holes in the foam body for the legs. You want to insert the toothpick at an angle, as shown in the top photo, so the legs won't stick through the top of the bug. You don't need to push the toothpick very far, just enough to start the leg holes.

Flip the bug over and mark and then poke the holes for the legs.

With the holes made in the body, it's time to add the legs. Dip each one in some white glue and then press it into the holes about ½".

Even before the glue dries, you can bend the legs to pose them on your bug.

To install the legs, first dip the end in glue.

Be sure to insert the legs at an angle, so that you avoid pushing them through the top of the bug body.

After installing all six legs, pose them so your bug sits level.

Step 8: Adding the antennas and proboscis

To install the proboscis (feeding tube), dip the end of it in white glue and press it into the head where you think the bug's mouth should be.

For the antennas, dip them in glue and poke them into the top of the head. You may want to line them up with the spots on the bug's shell, like I did in the photo.

Bug with proboscis (feeding tube) and antennas in place on the head.

Step 9: Eyes

There are a couple of ways to make the eyes for your bug. First, you can paint them with white paint and then use small felt dots to finish them. Or, you can use plastic eyes, like the ones shown here.

To attach the eyes, place a big drop of white glue on the back of them and press them in place. You'll need to hold them for a bit until the glue starts to set. It will help if you can prop your bug with its head pointed straight up until the glue dries.

Use a thick blob of glue to hold the eyes on.

Bugs like these are a lot of fun to make. If you want to try something other than ladybugs, spiders, and beetles, try using colored craft foam or paper to make wings. And best of all, you can use your imagination to create bugs that no one has ever seen before!

Susie

Once you've made one bug, have fun coming up with your own ideas for others!