a natural state

Making a Diorama

For help in deciding the theme of the scene in your diorama:

- Look in your backyard. Is there a fallen tree, a stand of bushes or some tall trees?
- Do you sometimes see animals in your yard?
- Do you have a pond or lake nearby?
- Are there mountains in the background?
- Is there an imaginary place that you would like to create?

Before you begin:

- Find a cardboard box, shoebox, or old empty drawer to encase your scene.
- Determine the scale to use. (One foot to one inch works well.)
- Collect materials to be used in building your model.
- Pick a container to house the diorama.
- Make a background for your scene.

* Keep in mind that selection of materials will depend upon the theme of your diorama and what you have in your backyard.

Suggestions for materials:

- Cotton balls
- Toothpicks
- Dry Deer Moss
- Twigs with lichen
- Driftwood
- Glass clippings
- Thatch from oak tree

- Cuttings from shrubbery or trees to simulate trees and bushes
- Small and large rocks
- Small personal treasures
- Plastic drop cloth
- A ruler for making measurements
- Plastic spoon
- Small disposable pan for mixing paints
- Paper towels for clean-up
- Cotton swabs for small fixes
- Paint brushes, large (2-inch) for painting backgrounds, and small for doing detail work and dabbing paint ("glue") on objects to be placed in the diorama
- Acrylic modeling paste
- Acrylic matte medium
- Red, blue, green, yellow and white acrylic paint Modeling clay
- The Liquitex acrylics can be purchased at an Art Store or Hobby Shop.

Further suggestions for alternative materials:

- Use white household glue to anchor clouds.
- Tint white glue, then blend with sawdust to make textured ground. This takes a while to dry, but you can build terrain using this method.
- A glue gun works well to hold the background trees in place, also, for holding rocks and stones. Be careful if you choose to use a glue gun because they can be dangerous. Use glue guns only with adult supervision.

When building your diorama, remember:

- Start with the background and work forward, first determining how you want the sky or ceiling, and the ground or floor to look.
- Arrange materials according to your design plan. Place the larger objects in the background and the smaller objects closer to the front.
- After you have arranged the scene, reassemble the diorama using glue or putty to hold items in place.

Suggestions for the background and ceiling:

- Paint the background and ceiling to look like sky.
- Paste bits of cotton in the sky to show clouds.
- If there is a backdrop of trees in your yard, paint toothpicks dark brown and arrange in a grove in the background. Make some "v" shaped pieces, by breaking toothpicks in half, for top branches. Let these poke, here and there, into the clouds. Glue into place.

Suggestions for the foundation:

- Paint the ground, or "floor", with acrylic paint (as opposed to oil-based paint). You can also use acrylic modeling paste to create slopes and hills. Sprinkle added texture on top of the paint, such as sawdust, bits of leaves or chopped up moss. The paint will hold the materials in place by acting as a "glue".
- Small mirrors glued to the floor of the diorama can represent ponds or small lakes.
- After gluing the lake into place, glue bits of twig, bark, moss and pebbles to the water's edge to make the area look more realistic. Build up the areas so that they slope down to the "water."

Suggestions for the landscape:

- Bits of moss can be used to represent bushes.
- Small twigs can be used for the trunks of trees. Try putting some of the moss on the branches to represent leaves.
- Bring in small stones to use as boulders.

For finishing touches, consider:

- Small figures of birds, squirrels, rabbits or other animals can be added to the foreground to further add realism. Remember to keep the figures in scale with the rest of the features of your diorama if you want it to look more realistic.