

Introduction

My Life as a Doll Lover

I've always loved dolls. I remember my first Barbie dolls, my Chatty Cathy, and the little souvenir dolls my father brought back from a business trip. I still mourn for the stolen dolls purchased at the 1967 Montreal World Expo. I took the elderly couple to a school show-and-tell, and foolishly left them in a locker overnight (a hard lesson for an 8-year-old).



*Christmas 1965,
doing what else,
playing with my
new dolls!*

My fashion dolls were stashed in the attic for thirty years, but I rediscovered them in my early forties. Packed away with my dolls were a few of my very early doll clothing creations. It was evident I had also tried my hand at hairstyling, and a little recolouring as well.

Ten plus years after rediscovering my childhood dolls, I am still playing with dolls (and more recently marionettes). I haven't spent the whole time working on dolls or puppets, but I try hard to squeeze in some 'play time' when I can.

I have a large stash of fabrics, notions and reference materials, which would only be of value to someone like me. Probably one-third of my house and garage is devoted to dolls and marionettes (more if you include the very large doll house being relocated to my guest room, and the even larger marionette theatre that sits in my backyard awaiting a safe and dry space in my overstuffed garage).

I promise my husband the dolls won't creep into our main floor living space, but somehow they do. The dining table is just so darn large and well lit, not to mention conveniently located!

We all have our favorite type of dolls, and I guess mine would be character dolls. When it comes to making or remaking a doll, four times out of five, I prefer to work on portrait dolls. In addition to making and making over dolls, I enjoy making doll displays (dollhouses, furniture, and puppet theatres), drafting my own patterns, and then writing about all of it.

My interest in dolls has grown into an interest in puppets and other figures and so my Makeover pages have also grown. Many of the terms and techniques included in the following pages apply not only to fashion dolls but other types of dolls and puppets too.

As you might have already noticed, Canadian English spelling peppers these pages. Look for lots of colour and a few bits of jewellery too!

Lynn Kershaw-Smith
January 2011



My 'Living Barbie' now lives with a mouse chewed chin!

Making a Doll vs. Doing a Doll Makeover

I differentiate between making handmade, one-of-a-kind marionettes and dolls, for which I hand sculpt each head individually, use my own original cloth body or wood patterns, my own original techniques, my own original costumes, etc. – in this case I am a ‘doll artist’, and...

Remaking, redoing, redesigning, or customizing a doll that someone else has sculpted, manufactured, and sold. No matter how much I change the doll, no matter how original I make it, I did not create the doll 100% from scratch, so therefore, in this case I am a ‘doll makeover artist’, or ‘doll customizer’.

Does this same distinction apply for porcelain doll artists and hobbyists? The artist who hand sculpts a doll has taken it much further than I ever have (a porcelain doll hobbyist who uses manufactured molds to create a doll of my own vision, different than the sculptor intended – painted differently, costumed differently, etc.).

And what about cloth doll makers? I see many original designs for sale online, but I also see kits and patterns being offered for sale. If I make a Raggedy Ann doll, I can't take credit for the design, but I can describe her as handmade. Would I like to make a Raggedy Ann doll? Yes, because she is a favorite character from my childhood (I still have the complete collection of books).



*Simplicity's Raggedy Ann
pattern #9447*

Without originality in a doll design, I believe it becomes a craft and not an art. If we follow step-by-step instructions with the goal of creating a doll as close as possible to the original, we are not creating anything original ourselves. I'm not knocking crafting, or craftspeople... it takes real skill to make a good copy and perhaps even more skill to do a good restoration.

I like to give things my own twist, try new techniques, test my abilities as a portrait artist, but most importantly I want to entertain myself. I take real joy in seeing my creations ‘come to life’!

Lynn Kershaw-Smith

July 2009

Tools & Terminology

as they relate to makeover dolls and marionettes

Acrylic paint – defined by About.com as “A type of paint made with synthetic resin as the medium (liquid) to bind the pigment (colour), rather than natural oils such as linseed used in oil paints. It has the advantage of drying faster than oil paint and being water soluble.” Beginners and experienced artists alike can choose from a variety of acrylic paints. Some of my favorites come from my local dollar store and others I have purchased from art stores for ten times the price.

Airbrush – Liquid paint is sprayed onto a surface. The result is a smooth painted surface free of streaks... if you have the right tools and the skill to use them.

Artist doll or artist makeover doll – as it pertains to vinyl fashion dolls... a doll that has been redesigned. This often, but not always, includes restyled hair, repainted face, handmade outfit, accessories and jewellery.

Ball jointed dolls (BDJs) – Originated in Japan.

From About.com - “For modern dolls... Ball joints are joints using a round ball-like mechanism that allows the dolls a full range of movement. The first dolls considered ball-jointed dolls were very realistic with an anime look and feel, although today there are also child dolls and other styles of dolls that are considered ball-jointed dolls. The vast majority of ball-jointed dolls are made of resin, although some are made in vinyl. Nearly all are highly customizable by their owners (eyes, limbs, wigs and more can be customized; in fact many might argue that a doll that is not easily and highly customizable is not a ball-jointed doll).”



Body type – this describes the type of torso on a particular fashion doll. It can also include a description of the type of arms and legs used. Used more generally it can refer to the material used to create a doll or puppet.

Boil perm – most types of synthetic doll hair can be permanently set in curls using boiling or near boiling water. Small curlers are created from straws or other items. After the hair cools (from a dunk in cold water or cooling at room temperature) the curls are permanently set.

Certificate of Authenticity (COA) – fashion doll makeover artists often include a certificate stating that they have redesigned a vinyl doll as either a one-of-a-kind or a limited edition doll. Other doll artists and doll manufacturers might also include a COA with their dolls. A few things commonly appear on a COA. They are: the artist's name and business name, the artist's signature, a description of the doll, and the date of completion, issue, or first sale.

Cloth doll or rag doll – a doll made entirely of cloth or fabric. Marionettes and other puppets can be made in part or entirely of cloth.

Crimping pliers – a jewellery making tool. These pliers used in conjunction with crimping beads to seal a beading cord or wire.

Colour wheel – Lots of confusing definitions out there. This definition from WordIQ.com seems as simple as any – “Traditionally colours are represented on a wheel of 12 colours: three **primary colours**, three **secondary colours** (created by mixing primary colours) and six **tertiary colours** (created by mixing the primary and secondary colours).



Artists use a traditional colour wheel based on the Red/Yellow/Blue model with secondary colours of orange, green and purple.”

Customize – to create a unique artist doll from a mass-produced doll.

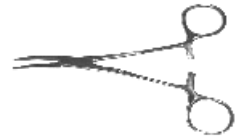
Fabric medium – mix it with latex paint and use to apply paint permanently to a fabric surface. Great for colouring cloth doll bodies and embellishing garments.

Face mold – refers to the different molds used for fashion doll faces. Face molds are most often named for their debut appearance (i.e.: the Teresa face mold, the Steffie face mold, the Superstar face mold, etc.)

Flocking – short cut fibers glued on a surface to create a fuzzy, hair-like texture.

Glued lashes – individual or strip lashes are permanently applied to a doll in much the same way a woman would apply temporary false eyelashes to her own eyelids (with adhesive).

Hemostats – borrowed from the medical profession, this tool is like a combination of scissors, vise grips and tweezers.



Limited-edition (Ltd. Ed. or LE) – only a specified number of a particular item (doll) will be produced. The number in a LE can vary greatly. With dolls, we could see anything from a single digit edition to an edition in the thousands. The number of dolls in a LE must be determined when the dolls are produced (you can't later decide to do more of the same). Other dolls can be made similar to a limited-edition doll, but there should be several points of difference. Limited-edition dolls should be numbered on the documentation or on the dolls themselves (for example '1 of 4' or '33 of 250'), preferably both.

Makeover – see 'customize'.

Molded hair or sculpted hair – 'plastic' hair created from a modeling compound applied to the vinyl head, or hair that has been created as part of the original head mold.

Needle nose pliers – pliers with a long narrow nose.



One-of-a-kind (OOAK) – when referring to a customized doll or puppet, one-of-a-kind guarantees that the artist has not, or will not, make another doll or puppet exactly the same. That doesn't mean, however, that the artist will not create a similar doll or puppet (perhaps with a different colour of outfit, different accessories and different eye colour). Most artists will make more than one

change to preserve the uniqueness of their one-of-a-kind creations, but there is no general rule or set of guidelines.

Recolour – to follow the existing shapes and paint over some or all of the doll's face paint with different colours. Many new customizers will recolour until they are confident enough to try a full repaint. Others prefer the original shape and style of the features, but not the colour(s) used.

Repaint – to remove the existing paint and repaint the doll with different colours and features.



Rooted lashes – strands of synthetic hair (or other fibrous strands) are sewn into the dolls vinyl head.

Many terms used in doll collecting are also used in relation to customizing. This is particularly true in regards to the terms and abbreviations used to describe the various head molds, body types and arms on popular vinyl dolls.

As a fashion doll makeover artist the doll is your canvas. It helps if you take a bit of time to learn about the various head molds and body types available. Look for a good fashion doll identification book or web sites that offer this type of information. Working with Barbie dolls? Try a Google search for 'Barbie body types' or 'Barbie face molds' for starters.

Planning & Procuring

Doll Designs

Do you have a plan for your doll, or an idea in mind? Sometimes the image can be clear in your mind, long before you even buy your supplies. Other times ideas are inspired by a doll, a fashion style, a fabric, an event, or a celebrity. Draw inspiration from all around you.

If you are doing a celebrity or portrait doll, a big part of the challenge involves scaling the design to doll size and recreating the total look.

Decide what doll best suites your customizing project — the right face mold and the right ‘skin tone’ being the two most important characteristics (they are the elements that you are least likely to change).

Doll artists will often make detailed notes and do a design sketch, indicating design elements such as hair, costume, and accessories.

On the next four pages, I offer examples of my design forms. I created them (many years ago) using photographs of actual dolls. You can print these images and use them to help plan your own designs, but please reproduce these images for your personal use only.

Decide on a colour scheme, and construction methods. Think about how all the elements will work together – big hair and a tight fitting hat... hmmm.

Use your sketch and notes to make a shopping list. Add swatches of fabric, hair, beads, etc. to your sketch.

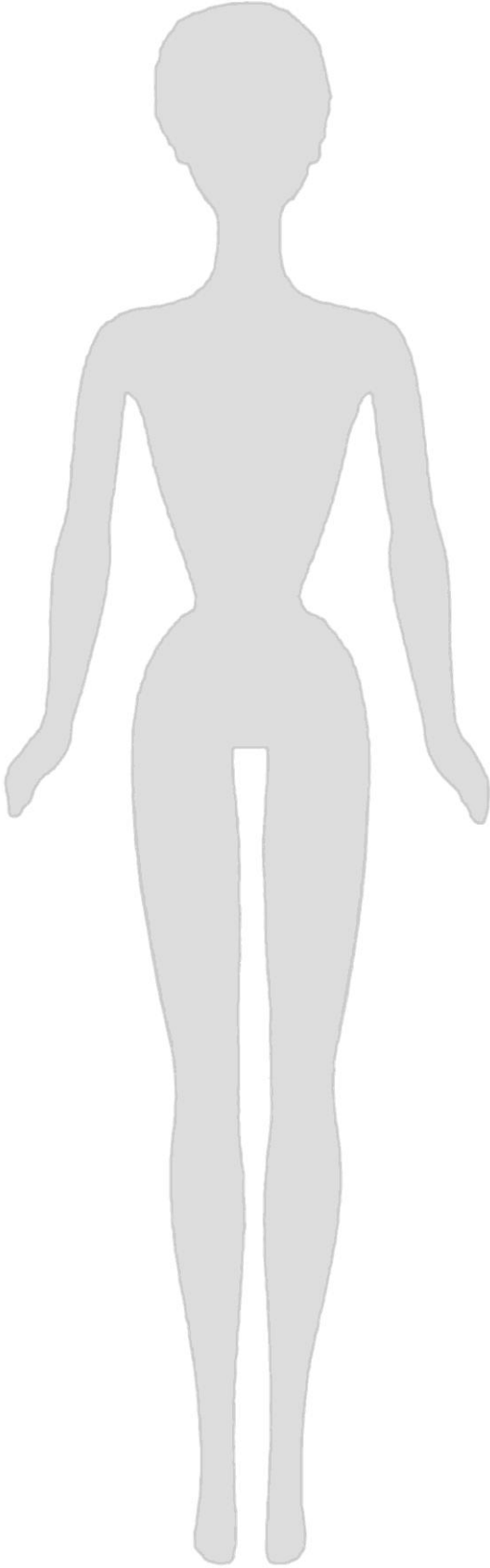
Does your project suit your level of skill and your work habits?

I still haven't made a decent sword for one of my marionettes because I can't decide how to best approach the task. It's a project that is a bit out of my comfort zone, and although I know I will eventually get around to it, I am avoiding it because I expect it to be very challenging and time consuming.

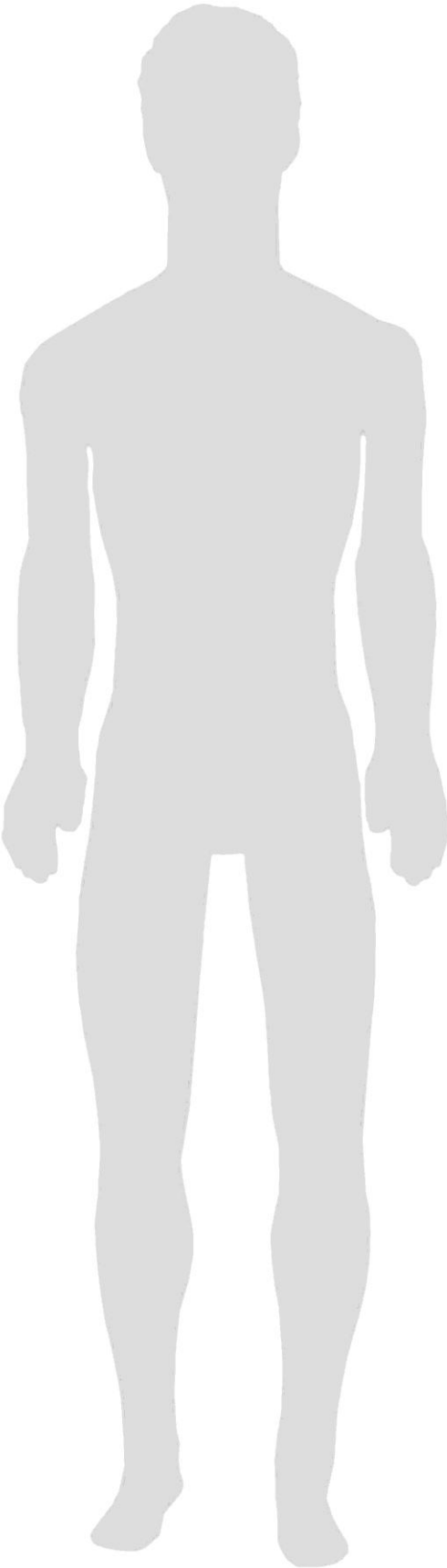
On the other hand, if a project poses no challenge, I get bored and distracted.

I feel more confident in my skills if I can visualize myself completing the various stages of construction, before I even start the project.

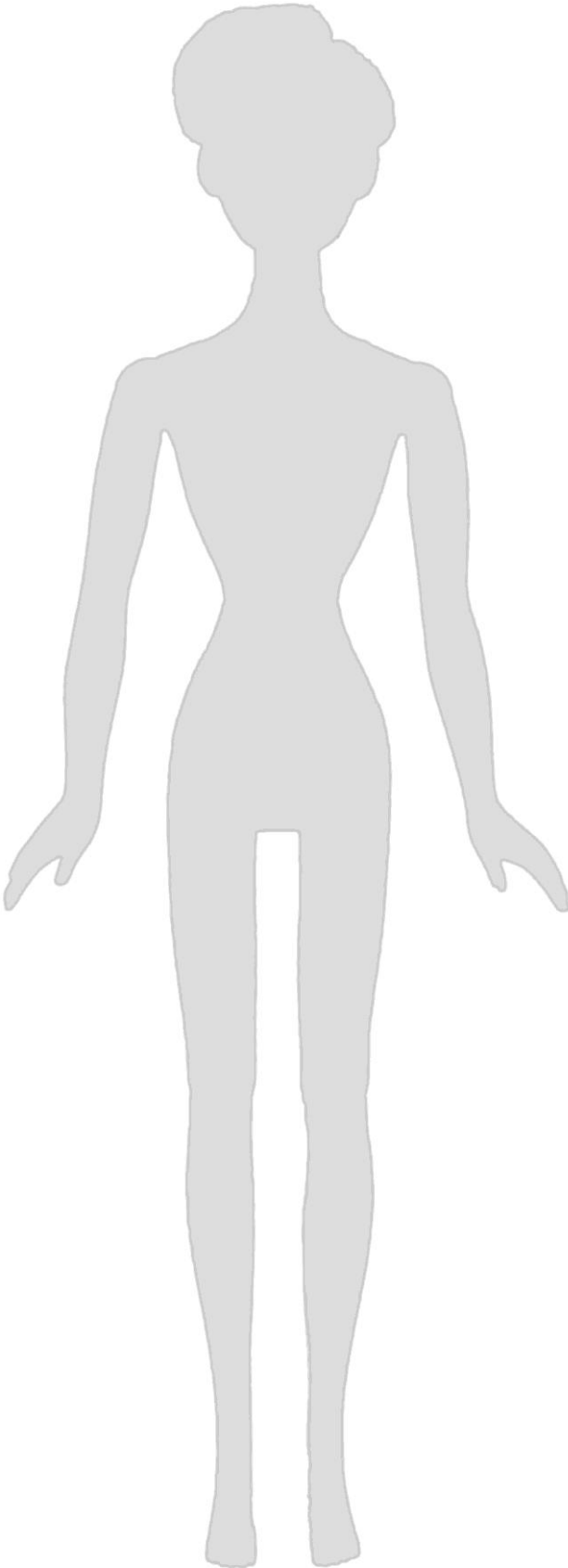
Barbie



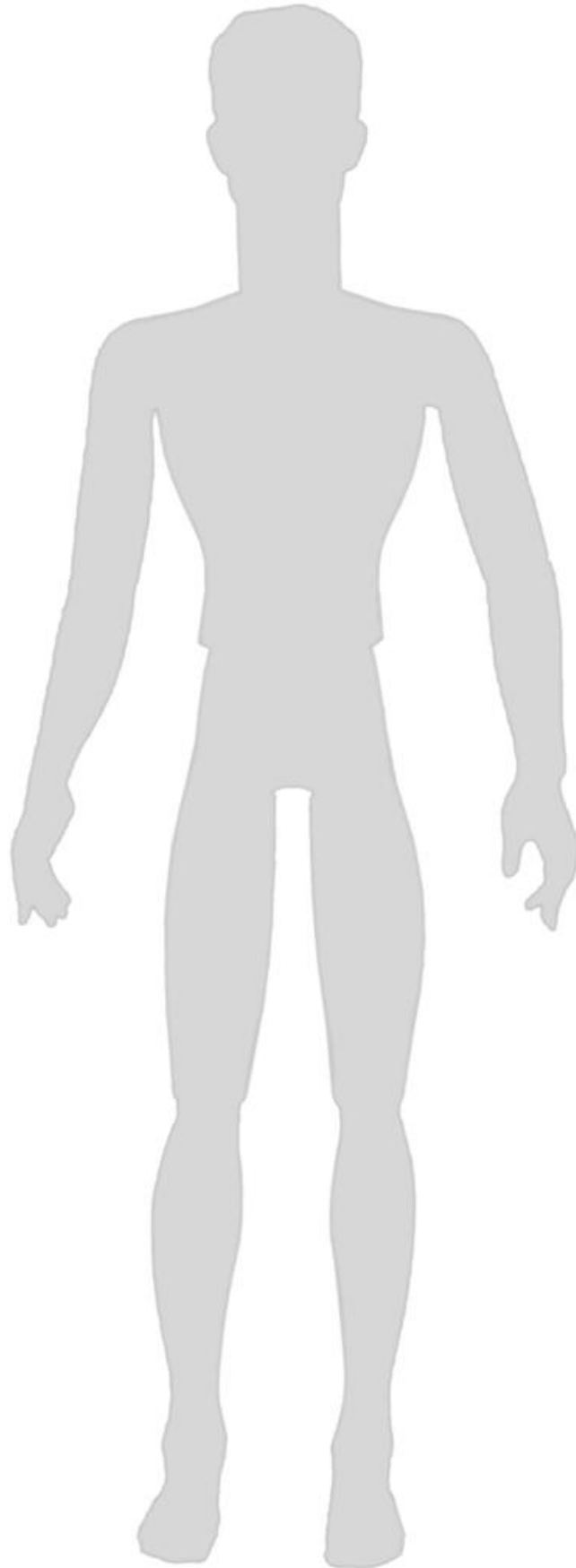
Ken



Gene



Trent



Order-of-Operations

When you are first learning to do fashion doll makeovers, or if you are experimenting with a new technique, it helps to make a list of all the changes you will be making to complete your doll. Number the list according to the order you will complete each task. Not every makeover artist does it the same.

1. Remove any existing face paint, clothing, and accessories, then send doll to the 'spa' to clean off any dirt, paint remover residue, or hair 'product'.
This seems to be a very common first step.
2. Behead doll and place the head on a stand (a dowel or a spare doll body with a loose neck knob). Move body to the sewing area.
3. Start the hairstyle. Do any boil perms, cutting, or rerooting.
I expect that the hair will get a bit messed up while I am painting the face and rooting the lashes, so on the rare occasion that I want a style that can't get messed up, I'll leave the hair until the end.
4. Paint the whites of the eyes (and white teeth if there are any).
5. Continue to paint the whole face, except for the eyebrows.
The brows get easily smudged while rooting the lashes.
6. Root eyelashes.
7. Add eyebrows and seal.
8. Make outfit, followed by accessories.
9. Put it all together.
10. Finish hair (comb and set in place).

This is my usual order-of-operations, but other makeover artists like to do the outfit before any face paint or hair. There is no right or wrong way to order your list. Do whatever makes sense and feels right to you.

Materials

Customizing supplies fall into four main categories:

- Painting supplies
- Hair styling supplies
- Costuming supplies, and
- the doll

You also might want supplies for rooted or glued lashes, or replacement hair. Many of the basic customizing supplies listed here can be purchased at a dollar store or from Wal-Mart.

A detailed list of painting supplies can be found in *Section 2 - Face Painting*, but for a beginner it can be quite simple:

- nail polish remover and cotton swabs will remove the old face paint,
- acrylic craft paints (from the discount store, in primary colours plus white and black, or if you don't like mixing colours, but the colours you need for your project),
- acrylic paint medium and matte sealer,
- very small brushes (I use an inexpensive set for mixing colour, and a couple of better quality brushes for painting),
- wooden toothpicks, dipped in the nail polish remover, help clean up any stray lines, and
- an old plate or ice cube tray will work for a paint palate.

Basic hair styling supplies include:

- drinking straws (for perm rollers),
- paper towels cut in small pieces (for end papers),
- straight pins (to hold the rollers in place), and
- tiny elastics.

Costuming supplies can vary greatly, but most doll costumes are sewn from fabric. Other materials and methods include knitted or crocheted items, leather, or fur. You can create your doll costume using your own pattern, a purchased pattern, or you can drape the fabric on the doll and design as you go.