

# Creating Character

## the Wahl Way

By Annie Wahl



NIADA Perspective

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Whenever I sit with a lump of clay in my hands, I never really know who or what I am going to end up with.

I may have all the intention in the world of making a man, and it just goes in another direction. Someone else pops out on me, just as if a little spirit is in the clay and wants to come out.

That's the joy of making a character face.

For me, sculpting is fast and fun. The little guy will show up eventually, so I just go with the flow.

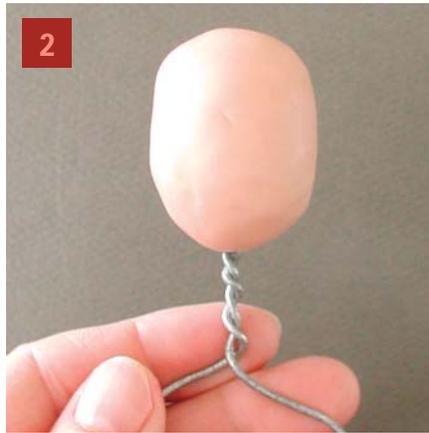
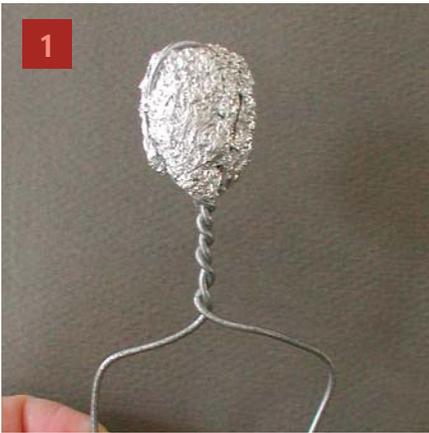
Anyone who has sculpted for a short while can

Gossips by Annie Wahl. Photograph by Jerry Anthony

come up with a good basic face. We know where the eyes go and where the nose and the mouth should be, but when making a character face, you have to go one step beyond just another pretty face.

Realize that the placement of the eyes, nose, ears, space under the nose before the lips, etcetera, will determine how cute or ugly a face will be. You have to turn on your sense of humor and exaggerate some of the spacing and placements.

Expressions will come with experience. You make someone's eyes laugh by pushing up on



the lower eyelid. Lines across the forehead and in the corners of the eyes add different expressions. Rounding the cheeks turns on a smile and raises the corners of the mouth.

Look at your own face and observe where things go when you frown, grin or act surprised.

Early in the proces of sculpting the face, I build the armature with different shapes of clay that I will refer to as "little pea" or "tiny cigar" shapes. I use only

one tool, a wooden orange stick, and 5-mm black glass rounds (beads) for eyes.

1. Twist a wire around a walnut-size ball of aluminum foil. Twist many times, until you have about an inch of twist. The twist will serve as the neck. This will be the head armature. I shape the rest of the wire to hold comfortably in my hand. Use the wire as a handle. You can hold the clay as you work, but hold it as if it were a robin's egg. Don't squeeze!

2. Wrap a ¼-inch layer of clay over the foil ball.

3. Add a flattened ball of clay to the front of the foil-covered ball and press in.

4. Smooth the added clay to the ball. The piece is now egg-shaped, like a head.

5. With the orange stick, dent where the eyes will be and roll upward to flatten the forehead.

6. Add the following small pieces of rolled clay to the face. Place one long



cigar for the nose, two long thin cigars for the sides of the cheeks, two round peas for the apples of the cheeks, two cigar pieces laid sideways for the mouth, and one small pea for the chin.

7. Gently blend all the pieces together to achieve the face structure.

8. Make a dent for each eye and set a bead halfway into each. Eyes placed close together is cute. Set eyes far apart for “beautiful” faces. (Yuck!)

9. Place tiny cigar shapes above and below each eye to set the eye into the

head. Blend the clay to soften the eye.

10. At this point, you have a pretty good face, but it is also pretty boring. Look at the face upside down to make sure it is symmetrical before adding detail. Gently move things around, adding a tiny bit of clay here and there to balance things.

11. Put a donut around the base of the head and add two long cigars to the front to begin forming the neck. An elder woman has two “things” that hang from her jowls and a man has one

“thing” in the middle where the Adam’s apple goes (or pops up). Blend the clay together.

12. This is the time to have fun and use your imagination. Open the mouth with the orange stick—real wide.

13. With your thumb, push up and close the mouth. This makes a cute old-people’s mouth.

14. Shape the nose—long is better for old people, short for elves. Stick the pointed end of the orange stick under the nose and pull slightly outward to the side to make the nostrils.

15. Round the cheeks a bit more and open the eyes wider. Push up under the lower eyelids to make the eyes smile.

16. Add character lines with the orange stick, sliding it along the forehead, under the nose, around the cheeks and at the outside corners of the eyes. Press lightly to produce soft wrinkles.

17. To add ears, take a small pea-size

ball of clay and pinch it gently to the side of the head. Ears placed high on the head are cute but lower is funnier. Blend the clay lightly in the front and back.

18. Press the curved end of the stick into the clay at the top part of the ear to make a round ridge.

19. Stick the curved end of the stick into the ear and gently lift. Pinch and shape the earlobe. You can stick the ears out a bit for added character. My dad had big ears; I love them.

20. This last step is the most fun. Your head will come alive when you color the cheeks pink and use a brown permanent marker to add some age spots. Staining the whole face with a brown watercolor wash will bring out the wrinkles. Rub the wash off right away; a little patina will remain.

Add hair, but remember, less is more for old folks. And please, give every lady a hat. ↪

*Annie Wahl is an artist member of NIADA. More of her work can be seen online at [www.anniewahl.com](http://www.anniewahl.com).*

*NIADA is a worldwide organization of doll artists, supportive patrons and friends whose purpose is to promote the art of the original handmade doll. For more information about NIADA, write to Antonette Cely at 3592 Cherokee Road, Atlanta, GA 30340-2749; e-mail [noni@cely.com](mailto:noni@cely.com); or visit [www.niada.org](http://www.niada.org).*



Parade Day by Annie Wahl