

Cordage

Cordage, or natural rope, is created by twisting two bundles of fiber in a specific way called a reverse wrap. Recent evidence shows that early humans were creating cordage at least 40,000 years ago, making this one of the most ancient technologies of our ancestors. Cordage helped them make fishing nets, lash wood and stone together for tools, sew clothing, make baskets, secure shelters, and so much more. The cordage you make today can be for any of these purposes, or for everyday uses like shoe laces or necklace string.

Materials:

- Raffia: a natural palm fiber, sold online or at your local craft store

Alternate options include: yarn, string, strips of fabric, artificial sinew, or with practice, most any kind of plant or animal based fiber.

How to Make Cordage:

Note: This can be tricky to understand through written directions. We suggest you also watch our instructional video on YouTube or InstagramTV.

- Fold your strand of raffia in half so the two ends do not quite match. They should be offset by a couple of inches.
- Use a clothespin, safety pin, or another string to secure the folded point of your raffia to a backpack full of books, or another stable object within reach.
- Pick up both strands, one with each hand. Pinch each strand a couple inches away from the folded point.
- Twist the fibers of both strands clockwise by rolling them between the thumb and index finger of each hand. Don't change the position of the strands yet, just twist them both individually. Make sure the sections of strands between your fingers and the folded point are twisted tightly before continuing.
- Pass the right side strand up and over the left side strand so they switch positions. The string that was on the right side should now be in your left hand, and vice versa. You have rotated the two strands counter clockwise.
- Repeat this process until one strand is about to run out, but has a couple inches of fiber remaining.
- If more length is desired, lay a new strand of fibers right on top of the old one and continue on as if nothing changed. Allow the ends to stick out by an inch or two. Repeat each time you need to replace a strand.
- When you have reached your desired length, tie off the cordage.
- Trim or singe off any ends that are sticking out of your cordage. *Remember, always ask an adult for permission and help if you wish to use fire.*

Discussion:

- Why do we need string and rope today? What do you use it for in your life?
- How do you imagine our ancestors could have taught themselves to make cordage? What animals or plants might have inspired them to try it?
- Cordage is much stronger than the fibers used to make it. Tug on your cordage to feel this. Why do you think it's so strong?

Challenge:

- Make a piece of cordage and add some beads to create a necklace, bracelet, or keychain for someone you care about.

