

DRAWING FROM NATURE
Science and Art Lessons for Kids
Los Angeles Times Kids' Reading Room Page



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When your parents were young they were entertained by the cartoon antics of Mickey and Minnie Mouse. Today's kids know about Stuart Little by E.B. White and Scabbers from the Harry Potter series. What do all these characters all have in common?

They're rodents!

Tuolumne, 8; saw a [dusky-footed wood rat](#) and its nest near his mom's office in Topanga Canyon. He decided to sculpt it in modeling clay. First he learned a little about the rodent.

"They are also called 'pack rats' because they use lots of leaves, twigs and trash to make really big nests," Tuolumne explained.

When wood rats are disturbed inside their nests, their teeth chatter and their tails rattle against the vegetation. They are nocturnal, which means they are active at night.

For the background, Tuolumne made a ball out of green and brown clay. He softened the clay by kneading it with his hands, then flattened it onto a board using his fingers and a rolling pin.

Next he made a ball out of tan and gray clay. He got a cutting board and flattened out the clay. Using a plastic knife, Tuolumne carefully outlined the image of a rat in the clay, then cut it out. He used a spatula to carefully lift the rat from the cutting board and pressed it onto the background piece of clay with his fingers. He added white clay to represent its belly.

To finish off, Tuolumne made fur lines in the clay, then placed pink clay on the inside of the rat's ear and on its paws, and black clay on its nose and eye. He rolled a small coil of clay between his hands for the tail and whiskers and glued on pieces of trash, leaves and twigs for the rat's nest.

"I think rats and mice are cute!" he said. But he also knows that wild rodents are dangerous, so he doesn't touch them or play with them.

Good job, Tuolumne!