

Adhere text UPSIDE DOWN on the backs of the three largest dolls. This way when the dolls are lifted, the text will face the proper direction to read. Adhere the text for the smallest doll on the base.

Matryoshka dolls (Russian nesting dolls or babushka dolls) are hollow wooden dolls, each decreasing in size, and placed one inside the other. The idea originated in 1890 by Sergei Maliutin, a folk crafts painter at Abramtsevo, a colony north of Moscow comprised of artists.

Maliutin worked in a “Children’s Education” workshop, owned by Savva Mamontov. The idea is believed to have been inspired when

Maliutin saw a souvenir Japanese doll that had seven nesting dolls representing the “seven gods of fortune.” With a desire to represent Russian culture, Maliutin designed an 8-doll version, with the outermost doll a girl in an apron and holding a rooster, and dolls inside dressed in traditional garb, mostly girls and one boy, ending with a baby.

They were carved by Vasily Zvyozdochkin, another member at Abramtsevo and given the name *matryoshka*, meaning “little matron.” The dolls were turned on a lathe out of soft linden wood and hollowed out, leaving a thin shell. An opening at the middle allowed you to pull the doll apart, exposing the next doll. This continued until the final doll was revealed. Only the smallest doll was carved from a solid piece of wood.

The dolls were presented at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1900 by Maliutin’s wife, winning a bronze medal. This spurred others to create the doll sets.

Generally, most nesting dolls contain at least five dolls, but have been made to contain several dozen. A brightly colored set of dolls of common peasant girls in traditional dress became widely recognized and a popular choice for souvenirs. As time progressed, various themes developed for the dolls, such as animals or characters from fairy tales.

In fact, during the time of Perestroika, the focus was Soviet leaders through history, with the outer doll being Mikhail Gorbachev, and Vladimir Lenin as the smallest.