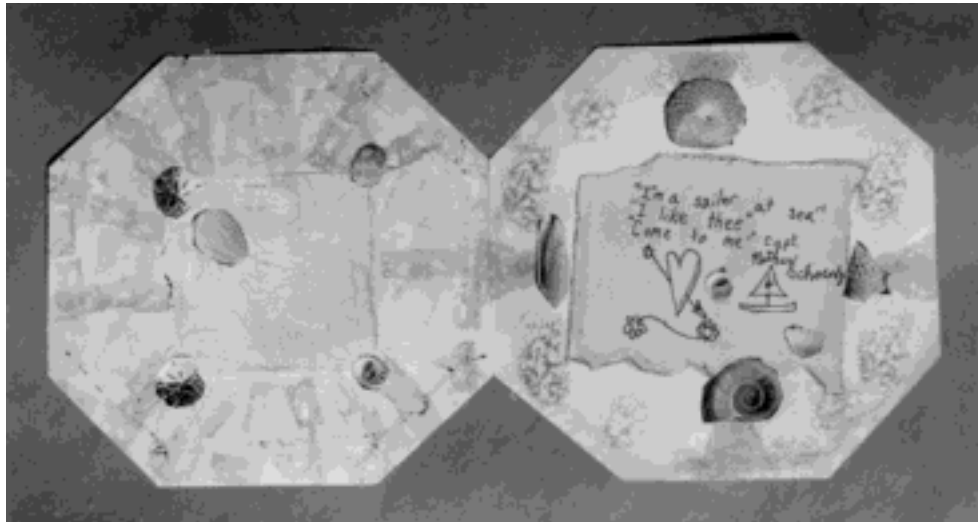




## A SAILOR'S VALENTINE!

The antique nautical craft of inlaid and applied shellwork appeared in Caribbean history with the advent of European sailing ships and their long navigations to and fro. English sailors would return home after lengthy sea voyages bearing beautiful gifts intended mostly for wives and sweethearts. The messages inside would speak sweetly of sentiments, likely to melt hearts.

Interesting to note is that the romantic image of a homesick mariner carefully crafting tiny shells while sailing lonely waters is not quite accurate; the exquisite octagonal boxes with decorated mosaic shell lids and interiors were usually produced by island artisans! It is not only the modern age of cruise ships that launched Caribbean ingenuity—early European visitors established the market for exports. Island talent responded with fine hand-crafted items. Often, valentine shell boxes were commissioned by seafarers. Messages and designs could be “made to order” . . . you have to wonder who may have received the credit once the valentines found their way to England! In any case, these are heartfelt, one-of-a-kind treasures. For your own version of this antique craft, you will need:



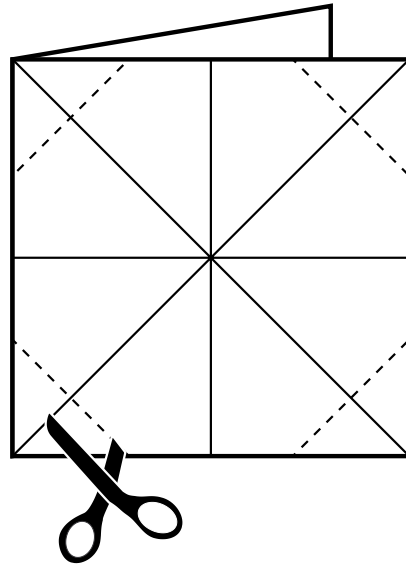
▲ Figure 6-18. Continuation of the hub-and-spoke design is revealed through sponge printing repetitions and well-placed shell “inlay.” This valentine contains a map and message from “Capt. Matt.” So much more artistic than a bottle with a message washed ashore—and no less welcome!

- 11" × 18" white paper
- nontoxic black permanent markers
- squares of manila paper
- thick yarn
- white glue
- rubber stamps of sea life (optional)
- scissors
- rulers
- map “scraps” (gift wrap, road maps, copies of maps, etc.)
- cut-up sponges
- watercolors
- pencils



Access to a photocopier will allow you to reduce, if desired, the computer-scanned page of “Living” Sea Life (see the full-page illustration on page 200. **Note:** This reproducible was generated by directly scanning the arranged three-dimensional sea group of shells and creatures directly through the computer’s own printing process.) Rubber stamp prints, if available, would add a nice touch, too.

Students will fold the white paper in half. To create an octagon, measure a square and cut. Then draw an X from the corners, and draw a cross through the middle of the X. (See the illustration.) Using the ruler, draw the “cut in” corner and then “cut them away”; an octagonal card should be the result!



Note that traditional sailor valentine boxes open from a top fold. However, students should feel free to use a familiar “open-like-a-book” fold for their octagonal “box” cards, with the fold at the left.

Begin the cover design in pencil. A central circle (see Figure 6-19) will establish the “hub” composition and will also respect the octagonal shape. Radiating “spokes” lend a nautical feel and allow for easy-to-design sections.

Now distribute the other materials: watercolor paints, thick yarn, rubber stamps (if desired), and so forth.

Students will determine the subject worthy of central interest in their boxes. Mermaids, sailing ships, and sea life all work well. Why not a portrait of a generous woman, such as “Bahama Mama”?

Students encircle their completed images in yarn. Then they paint, print, cut, and apply “shell work” (see Figure 6-19) as they wish. **Note:** The teacher may want to reduce the “Living” Sea Life page on a photocopier to help shells fit the spaces.

When the cover is finished, students open the card to decorate both sides. Map scraps and poetic messages on manila notes fit well into the interior octagonals (see figure on page 198). Sponge printing seems to resemble sea foam, so students may want to include this technique as well. Students can tint or “colorize” shells in shades that suit their fancy.

This activity has enough charm to bring a salty old pirate to his knees! *Ahoy!*

Figure 6-19. A mermaid and an octopus—surrounded by fish and topped with a sand dollar—make a fine sailor’s valentine. Mythologically speaking, European mermaids are prone to sit on a rock with a comb and a hand mirror. Their songs are irresistible to lonely sailors. Comes the sea foam, alas, and the mermaids are gone. ►

