

## Tips for Teaching Young Turners

The major difference between teaching youth and adults is that young turners have little or no experience with power tools and little knowledge of how dangerous power tools can be. They also have no fear and can be very aggressive and just stick their tools into the work piece not realizing how dangerous that can be. On the bright side they present a clean slate and come to lathe with few prior bad habits. On the plus side, they possess a good deal of passion and enthusiasm, that when properly channeled can lead to a very rewarding experience for the student and the teacher. Minimum time can be spent on teaching skills, as a young student's attention span, tends to be short and they enjoy making the chips fly. The instructor needs to take the time to choose and prepare projects that are simple, fun and of interest to the student. The projects can then progress through more and more difficult projects that build on skills and still keep the students interested. One of the reasons that this manual is such an effective teaching tool is the variety of projects that can be selected and adapted to teach and aid in the learning of the many skills needed to become a good turner. I have found that a few young turners are interested and will spend a short amount of time on skill building exercises. For the most part it is the finishing of a project in a short time period that attracts youth to woodturning. The amount of time that a younger student has to spend in the classroom or at the lathe is somewhat restricted, so a great deal of time and effort needs to be spent by the instructor to provide a well organized and flowing session that enables the student to complete a project that interests them, gives them a feeling of success and helps to build their self esteem. Give them a feel for how much fun woodturning can be and that it is a rewarding hobby. When looking for fun projects be sure to check the resource guide in the appendix or develop some of your own interesting projects. Better yet encourage the students to develop their own ideas and designs. Encourage them to go off in another direction if they choose to do so, do not force them to create an exact copy of the project selected. After all most of their time in the classroom is spent regurgitating what they are taught and they are given few opportunities to be creative. The lathe should be an opportunity for them to have fun, be creative and explore shapes and forms. Most of all try to keep the session fast passed, fun, interesting and productive. The following tips may aid your teaching experience;

- Keep an eye on the students for safety concerns and be alert to any lack of understanding or just as importantly signs of boredom or loss of interest.
- All electronic devices i.e. cell phones, smart phones, tablets etc. should be turned off and kept out of sight and reach as they may be a dangerous distraction.
- Be ready to adjust the pace of the class to better match the needs and desires of the students.
- Remember that not all students learn at the same rate and that some learn by watching, some by reading and most by hands on experience, so be prepared to use a variety of media and methods to help your students learn in the manner most comfortable for them.

- If a student does not understand what you are teaching try another approach to get your point across. Always be alert to signs of incomprehension and provide alternative explanations
- Height of the lathe- Young turners are generally shorter than adults, therefore the height of the lathe may need to be lowered or a stand or platform can be provided to raise the young turner to the proper height for comfortable turning.
- Use examples- Examples of turnings can enhance a young turners' interest in woodturning and may spark some new ideas.
- Balance helpfulness- Young and older turners appreciate being allowed to do most of the turning themselves, so that they feel ownership of the work.
- Build on Experience- Teach in incremental steps that allow the young turner to begin with simple skill building exercises and projects and to progress to more complicated skills as confidence grows.
- Insure success- Help students master each step before tackling the more difficult steps.
- Use of Mini Lathes- Small lathes are less threatening and the height is easier to adjust than full size lathes.
- Belt driven- By using belt driven lathes, the instructor can more easily establish the lathe speed and insure that it remains set, also the belt can be adjusted, such that aggressive tool use will cause the blank to stop, thus minimizing potential injuries.
- Use of Dead Centers (sometimes referred to as Cup Centers or Safety Centers): Tighten the centers firmly but not to tight so that any aggressive tool use or a catch will stop the blank. It sometimes helps to loosen the drive belt a tad so that it will slip under aggressive or unsafe use.
- Choice of Wood- Use wood such as maple or poplar which is easy to turn and is in good condition, that is free of cracks, knots or other defects.
- Ancillary Equipment- Do not allow young turners to use drills, drill presses, band saws, chain saws etc. unless they have been trained in their proper and safe use or have documented proficiency in their use.
- Try to keep the ratio of adults or spotters as close to one on one per student as possible, preferably no more than 2 students per helper.
- Have students put all electronic devices away so that they will not be distracted by them while turning!
- *Enjoyment- The emphasis of instruction should be on the enjoyment of turning fun projects and having a good rewarding time on the lathe spinning wood. Try not to over emphasize tool technique as young students will quickly loose interest, if too much time is spent on demonstrations or on working to develop good tool control and technique. Try to select projects that will through the making of the project help teach or improve tool skills and knowledge, above all keep the pace lively and fun.*