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(54) **ACCESSORY DECORATING SYSTEM AND METHOD OF USING THE SAME**

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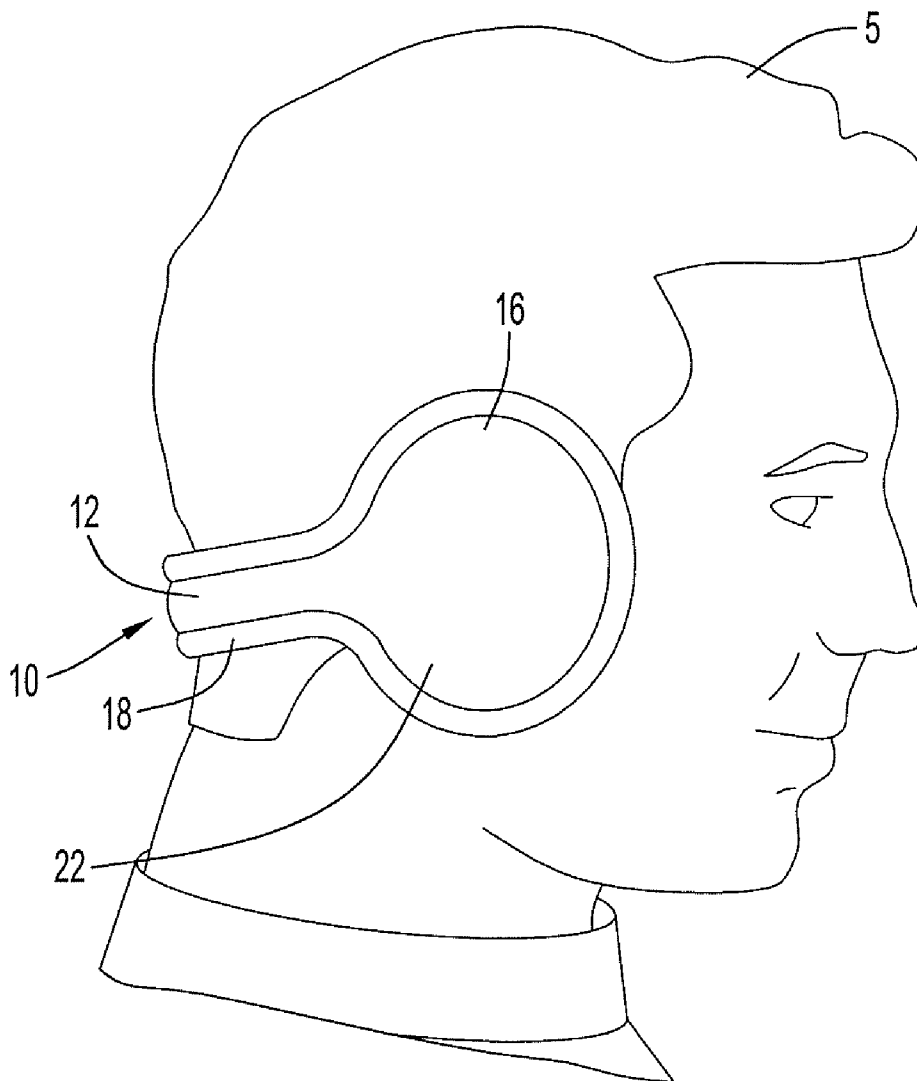
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

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An ear covering device that includes a surface that can be drawn on, written on, colored on, and/or decorated by a user is disclosed. In one embodiment, the surface corresponds to the outer surface of the ear covering device. Accordingly, a user can draw or create an object on a portion of the ear covering device that is visible to other people. In another embodiment, the ear covering device can include more than one area that can be decorated by a user.

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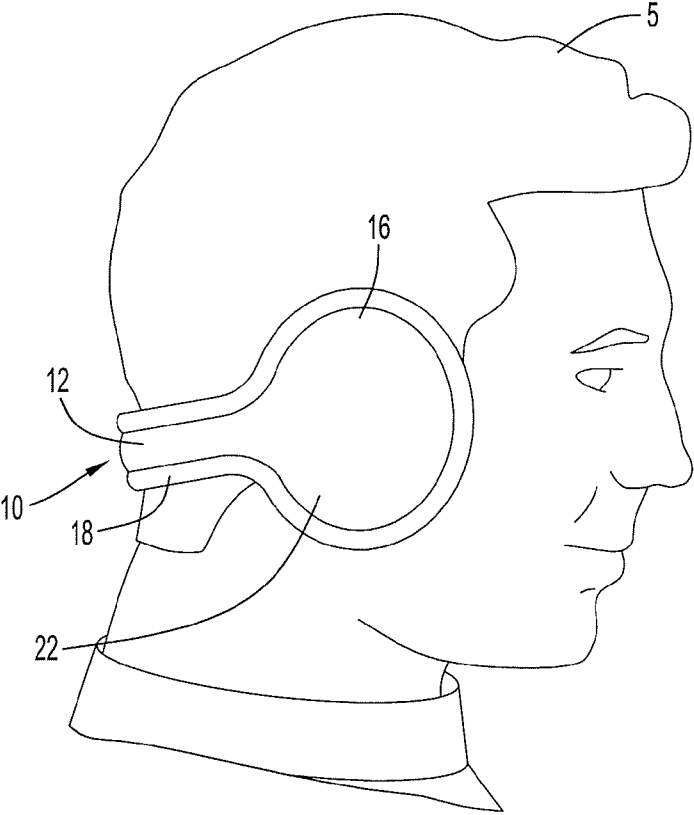


FIG.1

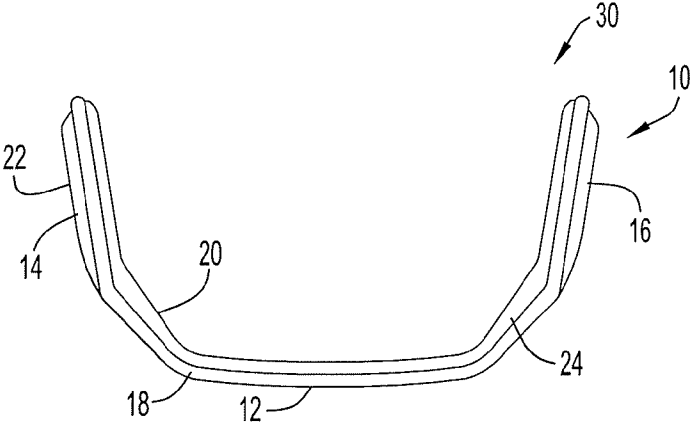
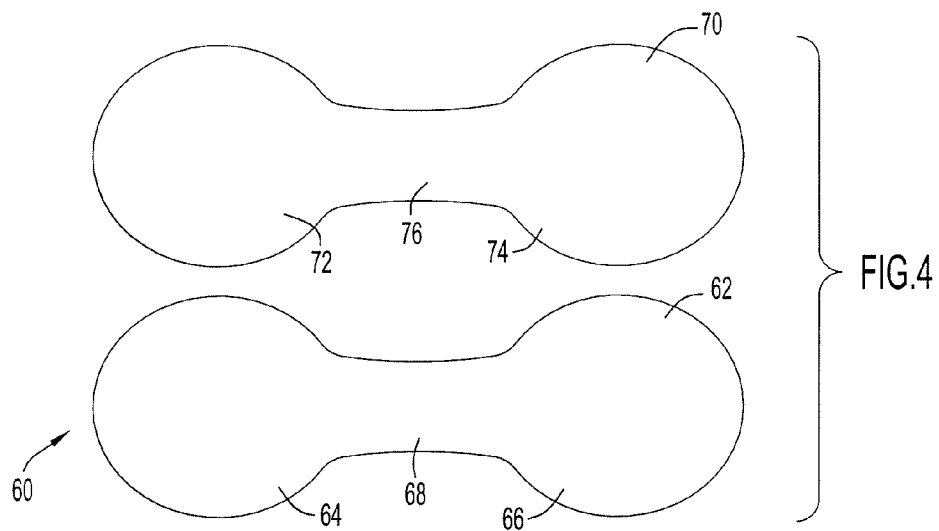
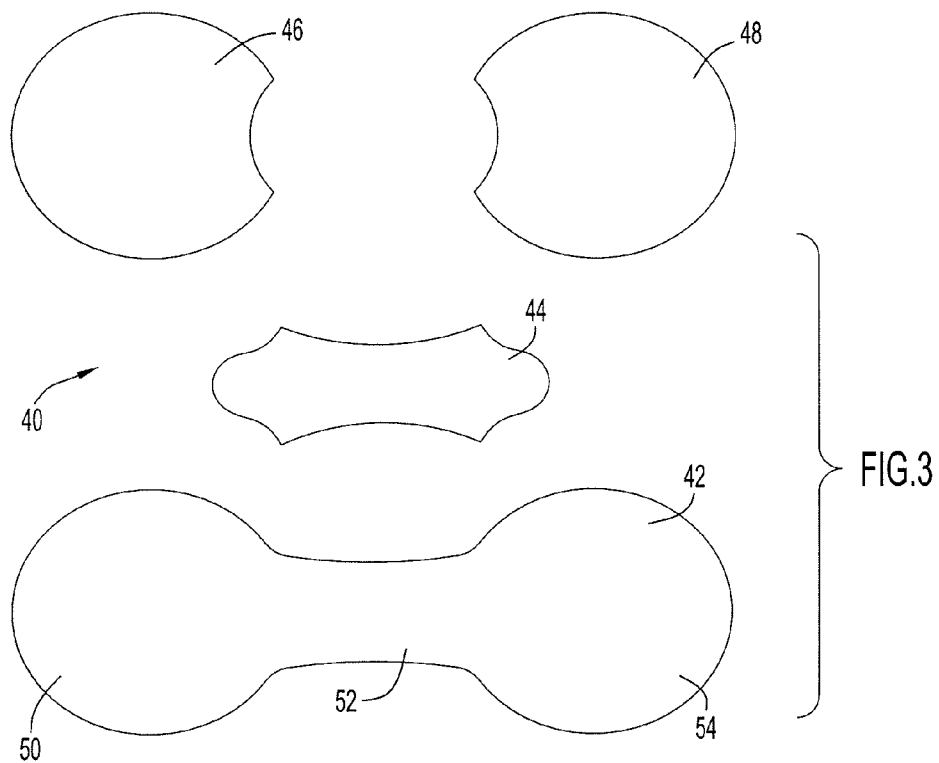


FIG.2



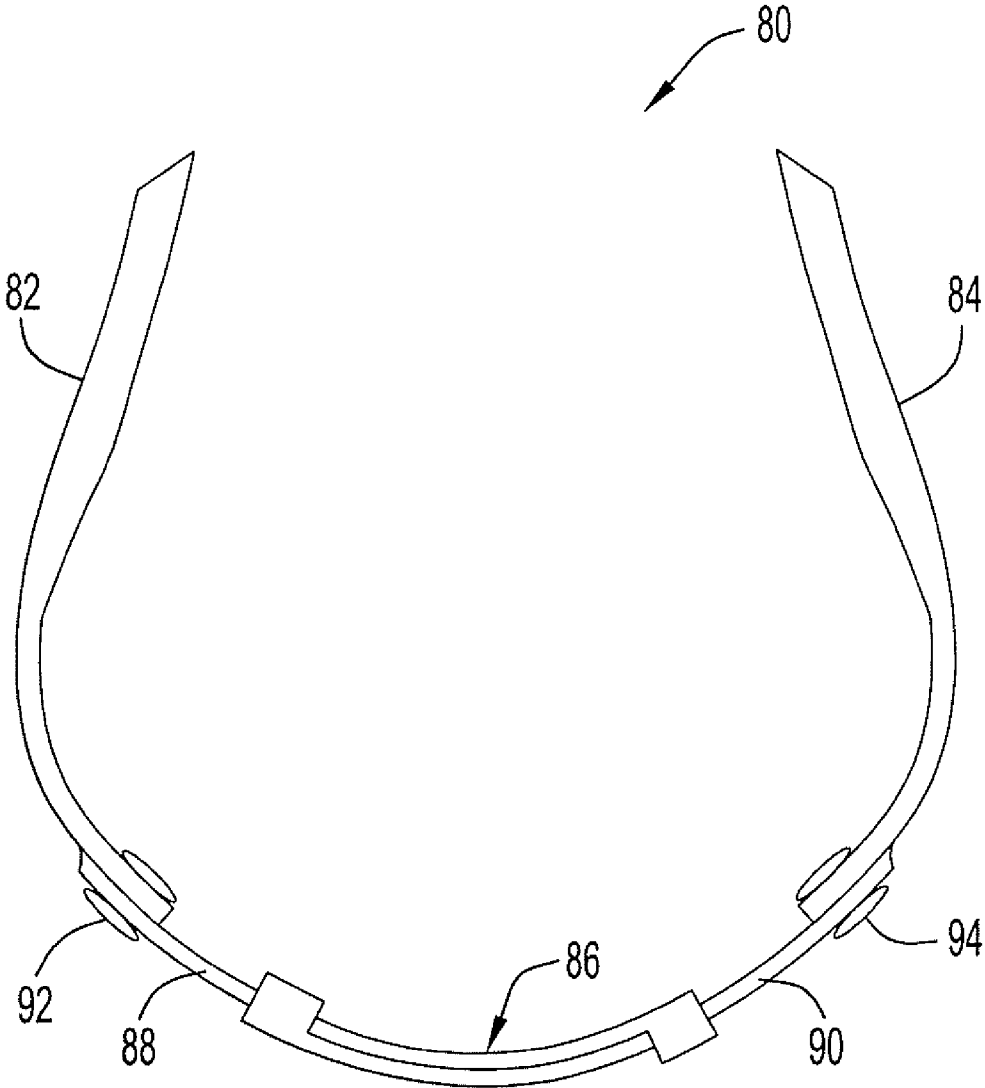
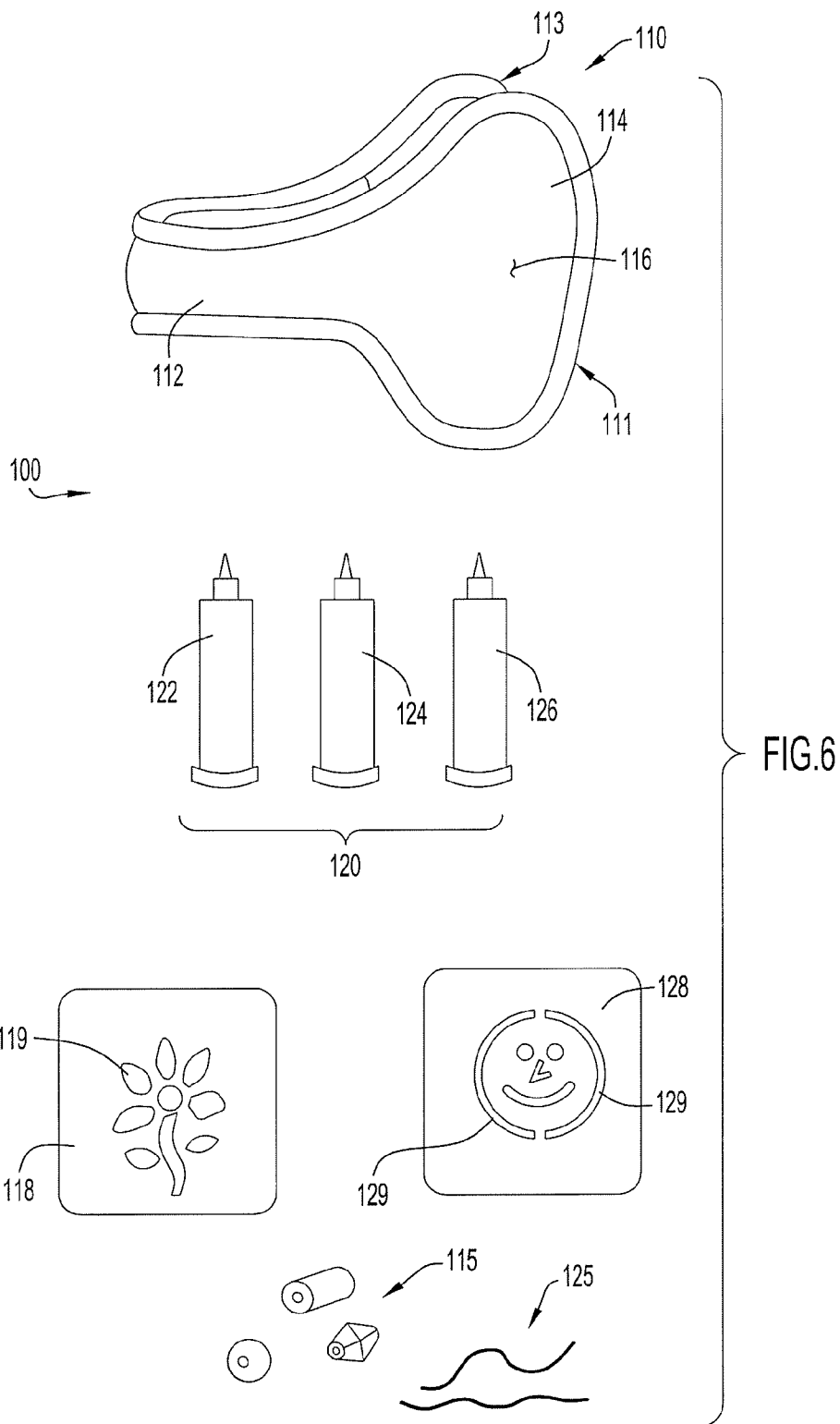


FIG.5



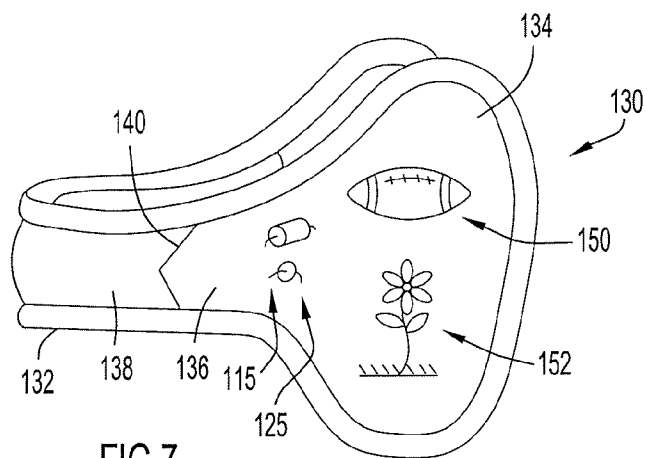


FIG. 7

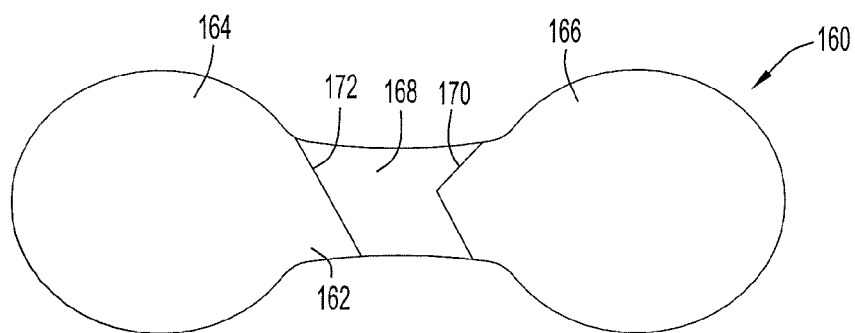


FIG. 8

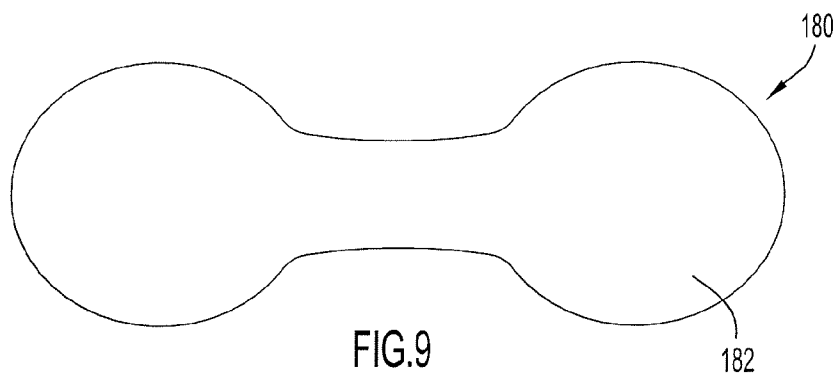
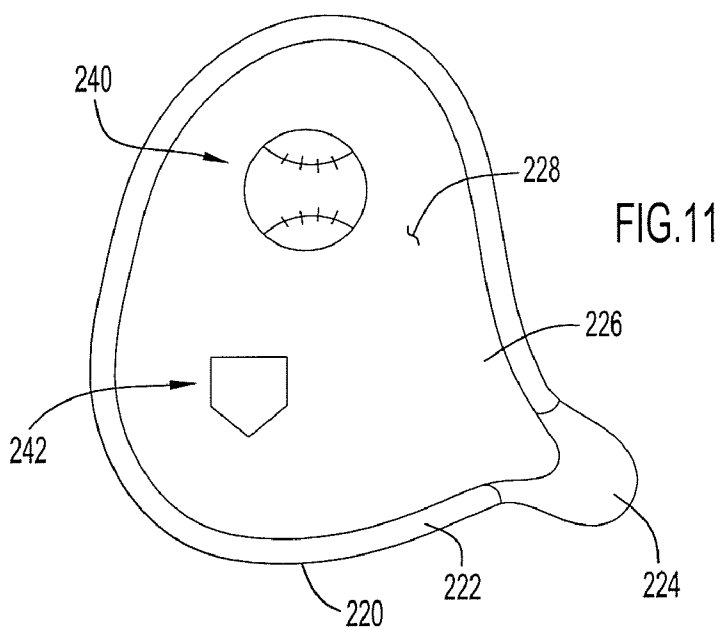
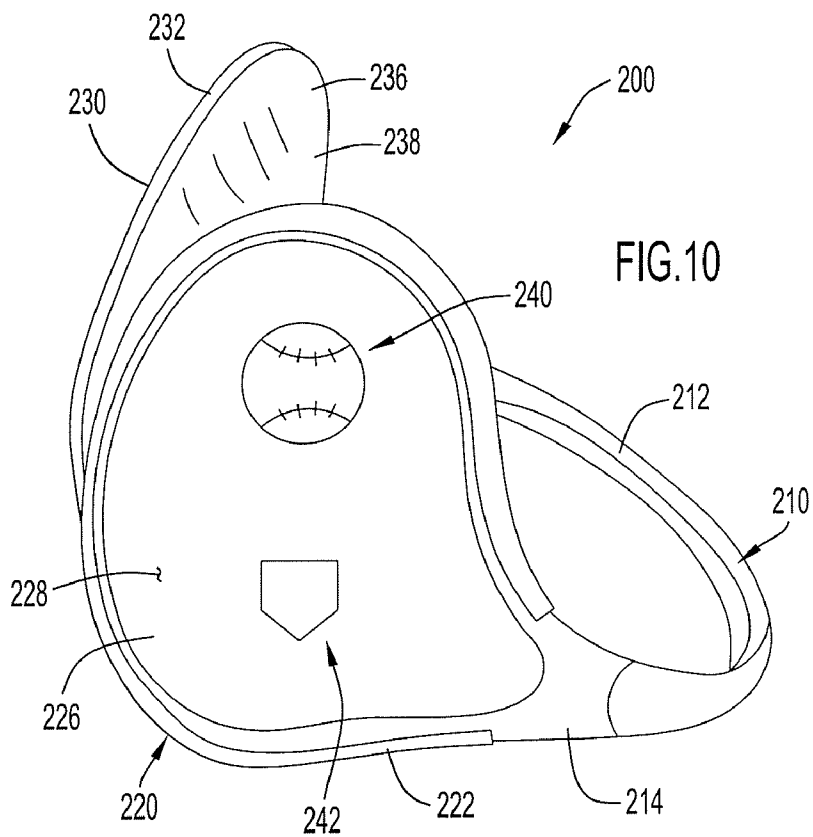


FIG. 9



ACCESSORY DECORATING SYSTEM AND METHOD OF USING THE SAME

REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] This application claims priority to and the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/949,190, filed Jul. 11, 2007, Attorney Docket No. 0100.0092P, the entire disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates to an accessory decorating system. In particular, the present invention relates to a system that includes an accessory that can be decorated by a user and articles that can be used to decorate the accessory. More specifically, the accessory is a device that can be worn on the head of an individual to keep the user's ears warm. Such an accessory can be referred to as an ear covering device or ear warmer.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The accessory decorating system includes an accessory that can be worn on a user's head. In one embodiment, the accessory is an ear covering device that is configured to cover a user's ears. The ear covering device can include a shell and a frame. The shell can be formed by several fabric membranes that are coupled together to form an interior region into which the frame can be inserted. The frame can have either an adjustable length or a fixed length. In another embodiment, the ear covering device includes a frame and several shell portions that cover a portion of the frame and that are removably coupleable to the frame.

[0004] In the present invention, an ear covering device includes a surface that can be drawn on, written on, colored on, and/or decorated by a user. In one embodiment, the surface corresponds to the outer surface of the ear covering device. Accordingly, a user can draw or create an object on a portion of the ear covering device that is visible to other people. In another embodiment, the ear covering device can include more than one area that can be decorated by a user.

[0005] In one embodiment, the decorating system includes a set of writing instruments. The decorating system can also include drawing utensils, including stencils and other pattern making devices. In other embodiments, the decorating system can include items, such as beads and other small objects, that can be connected to a portion of the ear covering device.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0006] FIG. 1 illustrates a side view of an ear covering device as worn by an individual.

[0007] FIG. 2 illustrates a top view of the ear covering device illustrated in FIG. 1.

[0008] FIG. 3 illustrates a set of membranes or membrane portions that can be coupled together to form a shell for an ear covering device.

[0009] FIG. 4 illustrates another set of membranes or membrane portions that can be coupled together to form a shell for an ear covering device.

[0010] FIG. 5 illustrates a top view of an embodiment of a frame of the ear covering device illustrated in FIGS. 1 and 2.

[0011] FIG. 6 illustrates a kit or system that includes an ear covering device, writing implements, and drawing guides according to the present invention.

[0012] FIG. 7 illustrates a side perspective view of an embodiment of an ear covering device according to the present invention.

[0013] FIG. 8 illustrates a plan view of an embodiment of an outer membrane of an ear covering device according to the present invention.

[0014] FIG. 9 illustrates a plan view of an alternative embodiment of an outer membrane of an ear covering device according to the present invention.

[0015] FIG. 10 illustrates an alternative embodiment of an ear covering device according to the present invention.

[0016] FIG. 11 illustrates a side view of an embodiment of a shell portion for use with the ear covering device of FIG. 10.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0017] Like reference numerals have been used to identify like elements throughout this disclosure. The terms "drawn on," "written on," "colored," "created," "decorated" and other terms similar thereto are used interchangeably herein to represent any actions taken by a user to create a line, image, object, picture, sketch, text, or the like on an article, which in this invention is an accessory. The terms "accessory," "ear covering device," "ear protection device," and "ear warmer" may be used interchangeably herein to refer to a device or structure that is configured to be worn by an individual to cover the ears of the individual. The terms "writing instrument" and "writing implement" may be used interchangeably herein to refer to a device that can be manipulated by a user to create a line, image, etc. as identified above.

[0018] An embodiment of an accessory or an ear covering device is illustrated in FIGS. 1 and 2. The ear covering device 10 is adapted to be worn over the ears of an individual 5. When it is worn, the ear covering device 10 extends around the back of the head and/or neck of the wearer.

[0019] The ear covering device 10 includes a middle or band portion 12 and two ear portions 14 and 16. Only one side of the ear covering device 10 is illustrated in FIG. 1. The opposite side of ear covering device 10 is illustrated in FIG. 2. As shown, the band portion 12 is relatively narrower than the ear portions 14 and 16. In alternative embodiments, the relative dimensions of the band portion 12 and the ear portions 14 and 16 can vary relative to each other.

[0020] Referring to FIG. 2, a top view of the ear covering device 10 is illustrated. The ear covering device 10 is illustrated in its deployed configuration 30 in which the ear portions 14 and 16 are spaced apart from each other. This spacing is achieved due to the flexing of the band portion 12 and the ear portions 14 and 16. With the ear portions 14 and 16 spaced apart, the ear covering device 10 can be placed on the head of an individual. The spring force created by the band portion 12 of the ear covering device 10 causes the ear portions 14 and 16 to engage against the side of the head of the individual 5. The spring force of the band is contemplated to be sufficient to engage the user's head so that the ear covering device 10 does not fall off. However, the spring force is desired to be limited so that the ear covering device 10 is not uncomfortable to wear.

[0021] The ear covering device 10 includes a fabric shell 24 in which a frame is disposed. In one embodiment, the shell 24 includes a binding 18 around the perimeter of the shell 24 and ear covering device 10. Referring to FIG. 2, the shell 24 includes an inner surface 20 and an outer surface 22. When the ear covering device 10 is worn by an individual, the inner surface 20 is disposed proximate to the individual's head, neck and/or ears. The outer surface 22 is disposed on the outer side of the device 10 and exposed away from the individual. In an alternative embodiment, the ear covering device 10 does

not include any binding around the perimeter and the membranes are coupled together. In that embodiment, the coupling portion of the membranes is disposed within the interior region of the shell 24.

[0022] Referring to FIGS. 3 and 4, embodiments of shells for use in the construction of an ear covering device are illustrated. In the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 3, the shell includes an inner membrane 40 and an outer membrane 42. The inner membrane 40 comprises a middle membrane 44 and two ear membranes 46 and 48. The middle membrane 44 and ear membranes 46 and 48 collectively form and function as an inner membrane. The outer membrane 42 is a one-piece membrane that has a middle portion 52 and ear portions 50 and 54. The portions of the inner membrane 40 and the outer membrane 42 may be coupled together using any technology, including but not limited to, sewing, bonding, adhesives, or welding. When the inner membrane 40 and the outer membrane 42 are coupled together, they form the shell and an interior region therebetween.

[0023] Referring to FIG. 4, in this embodiment, the shell 60 includes an outer membrane 62 and an inner membrane 70. In this embodiment, the outer membrane 62 is a one-piece member that includes ear portions 64 and 66 and a middle portion 68. Similarly, the inner membrane 70 is a one-piece member that includes ear portions 72 and 74 and a middle portion 76. The outer membrane 60 and the inner membrane 70 may be coupled using any technology, similar to the membranes illustrated in FIG. 3. When coupled together, the outer membrane 60 and the inner membrane 70 form an interior region therebetween.

[0024] An embodiment of a frame that can be used in an ear covering device is illustrated in FIG. 5. The frame 80 is configured to be disposed and retained within the shell of ear covering device 10. In this embodiment, the frame 80 includes a band 86 that is adjustable in length. The band 86 includes two slidably coupled band portions 88 and 90 that can be adjusted by a user to change the length of the band 86. The frame 80 includes ear frame members 82 and 84 that are coupled to opposite ends of the band portion 86 by conventional connectors 92 and 94, such as rivets. Each of the connectors 92 and 94 is configured to enable the corresponding ear frame member 82 or 84 to pivot about the connector relative to the band 86. The components of the frame 80 are manufactured from a molded plastic material, such as CRAS-TIN.

[0025] In an alternative embodiment, the ear frame members can be fixedly coupled or integrally formed with the band portion. In another embodiment, the length of the band may be fixed and not adjustable. For example, the band may be formed by a single member or by several pieces that do not move relative to each other. Additionally, the frame used with a shell of the ear covering device can have any configuration and is not limited to the frame illustrated in FIG. 5.

[0026] Exemplary ear covering devices, including frames, shells, membranes, and other components of such devices are set forth in U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,835,609; 6,499,146; 6,502,248; and 6,735,784, and the disclosures of each of those four patents is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety for all purposes.

[0027] An embodiment of a kit or system according to the present invention is illustrated in FIG. 6. The decorating kit or system 100 includes an accessory or ear covering device 110. The system 100 can also include a set 120 of writing implements that can be used to color, drawn on, or decorate the ear covering device 110. The system 100 can also include drawing aids, such as stencils 118 and 128, that can be used to decorate the ear covering device 110.

[0028] In this embodiment, the ear covering device 110 includes a shell 112 that has an outer surface 114 that extends from proximate to shell end 111 to a location proximate to shell end 113. A portion of the outer surface 114 forms a decorating or drawing region or area 116. In alternative embodiments, the size, shape, color or configuration of the ear covering device 110 can vary.

[0029] The implement set 120 includes several writing implements 122, 124 and 126, which can be provided and sold with the ear covering device 110. Each of the implements 122, 124 and 126 can be used to create an object or image in region 116 of the ear covering device 110. Each of the implements 122, 124, and 126 can be a different color. In one embodiment, the implements are washable non-toxic fabric pens or markers. For example, the implements can be water-based fabric pens or markers. In alternative embodiments, the quantity of implements as well as the colors of the implements can change in different embodiments.

[0030] As mentioned above, the decorating system 100 can include several drawing aids 118 and 128 that can be provided and/or sold with the ear covering device 110 and the implement set 120. In this embodiment, the drawing aids 118 and 128 are stencils that have openings 119 and 129, respectively, in a particular pattern. The openings 119 in stencil 118 form the image of a flower. The openings 129 in stencil 128 form the image of a face. A user can use the aids 118 and 128 with the implements to draw on the decorating region or area of the ear covering device 110. The quantity, size, configuration, and pattern of the drawing aids provided as part as or for use with the decorating system 100 can vary in different embodiments.

[0031] In one embodiment, the decorating system 100 can include objects that can be mounted or coupled to the ear covering device 110. For example, the system 100 can include beads or bead-like objects 115 through which a string 125 can be inserted and subsequently attached to the ear covering device 110.

[0032] Referring to FIG. 7, another embodiment of an ear covering device according to the present invention is illustrated. The ear covering device 130 includes a shell 132 that has an outer surface 134. As shown, the outer surface 134 includes a first material portion 136 and a second material portion 138. The first material portion 136 can have an end 140 that forms a transition edge between the first material portion 136 and the second material portion 138. The material portions 136 and 138 can be coupled together using any conventional technique to form the outer membrane of the ear covering device 130.

[0033] In one embodiment, the first material portion 136 and the second material portion 138 are two different materials. The first material portion 136 can be formed of a material that allows a user to write or draw on the portion 136 using one of the implements. An exemplary material that can be used for portion 136 is a canvas or a stretchable canvas material. In other embodiments, different materials can be used so long as a user can write or draw on the material. The second material portion 138 can be a different material that has some stretching functionality to allow for adjustments to the length of the frame within the ear covering device 130. An exemplary material is a knitted fleece material.

[0034] As shown in FIG. 7, items or objects 150 and 152 can be drawn or created in the decorating area on the outer surface 134 of the first material portion 138 of the ear covering device 130. Any number of objects can be drawn on the first material portion and each can have any shape, color or form. If a washable implement is used to create an item or object, the user can hand wash the item or object off of the

decorating area. Alternatively, the ear covering device 130 can be placed in a washing machine to remove the item or object. Also shown in FIG. 7 are some decorating objects 115 that have been attached to the ear covering device 110 via string 125. Any number and configuration of objects 115 can be attached to the ear covering device 110. The objects 115 can be attached at any location on the device 110 and are not limited to the first material portion 138.

[0035] An embodiment of an outer membrane according to the present invention is illustrated in FIG. 8. Outer membrane 160 is exemplary of an outer membrane that can be used as part of the ear covering device 130. Outer membrane 160 includes an outer surface 162 that has several different material portions. In particular, the outer membrane 160 includes a first material portion 164 that forms one ear portion of the membrane 160, a second material portion 166 that forms a second ear portion of the membrane 160, and a third material portion 168 that is disposed between portions 164 and 166.

[0036] The portions 164, 166, and 168 are coupled together as using conventional techniques to form the outer membrane 160. For example, the ends of adjacent portions can be sewn or adhered to each other. The first portion 164 includes an end 172 and the second portion 166 includes an end 170. While the ends 170 and 172 are illustrated as having different shapes, in alternative embodiments, the ends can be similarly shaped or configured.

[0037] The first portion 164 and the second portion 166 can be formed of the same material. In this embodiment, the first and second portions 164 and 166 can be formed of material that can be colored or drawn upon, such as a canvas material. Accordingly, a user could draw on the first portion 164 and/or the second portion 166 using one of the writing implements. The third portion 168 can be formed of a knitted material, such as fleece. The colors of the material portions can vary. For example, the first portion 164 and the second portion 166 can be formed of a white canvas material and the third portion 168 can be formed of a fleece of a dark color, such as a black.

[0038] In an alternative embodiment, the outer membrane can be formed by placing the first and second material portions 164 and 166 on top of a third material portion 168 that extends the full length of the outer membrane 160. The first and second material portions 164 and 166 can be coupled along their perimeters to the third material portion 168 using any conventional technique or process, such as sewing.

[0039] An alternative embodiment of an outer membrane according to the present invention is illustrated in FIG. 9. Outer membrane 180 has an outer surface 182 that is formed by a single piece of material that extends the full length of the outer membrane 180. In this embodiment, the entire outer surface 182 is a decorating area or region that can be used to write or draw thereon.

[0040] An alternative embodiment of an ear covering device according to the present invention is illustrated in FIGS. 10-11. Ear covering device 200 includes a frame 210 with a band portion 212 and two ear portions (only frame ear portion 214 being shown), each of which is coupled to an end of the band portion 212. Each of the ear portions is pivotally coupled to of the band portion 212. Exemplary ear covering devices, frames and method of making and using the same are disclosed in U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2005/0034216A1 (which is the publication of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/638,476) and U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2005/0034218A1 (which is the publication of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/693,607), and the entire disclosure of each of these two Patent Application Publications is incorporated by reference in its entirety for all purposes.

[0041] As shown, a large portion of the frame 210 is exposed and not covered by a shell or any fabric material. The ear covering device 200 includes two shell portions 220 and 230, each of which is coupled to the one of the ear portions of the frame. The shell portions 220 and 230 can be removed from the frame 210 and washed, either by hand or by machine.

[0042] Referring to FIG. 11, shell portion 220 is illustrated as having been removed from the frame 210. Shell portion 220 includes a coupling structure 222 around its perimeter and an end 224 that can be grasped by a user. Coupling structure 222 is a molded elastomeric material that is used to couple the shell portion 220 to the frame ear portion 214. The majority of the shell portion 220 is a fabric portion 226, which is formed with the coupling structure 222. The fabric portion 226 includes an outer surface 228 and is formed of a material, such as stretchable canvas, that facilitates the drawing on the outer surface 228. The outer surface 228 forms a decorating area or region on which a user can draw or write. Exemplary objects 240 and 242 that can be drawn on surface 228 are illustrated in FIGS. 10 and 11.

[0043] Shell portion 230 is structurally similar to shell portion 220. Shell portion 230 includes a coupling structure 232 and a fabric portion 236 which has an outer surface (not shown) and an inner surface 238 that is configured to engage a user's ear. Shell portion 230 can be removed from the frame 210 in a manner similar to that described above for shell portion 220.

[0044] In various embodiments, the materials used for the drawing or decorating regions of the outer membrane can be a material other than canvas or stretchable canvas, provided that the alternative material can be drawn or written on by a user with an implement as described above. In other embodiments, the materials of the ear covering device can be configured so that a user can draw or write on the inner surface of the shell or a shell portion.

[0045] Thus, it is intended that the present invention cover the modifications and variations of this invention. For example, it is to be understood that terms such as "left," "right," "top," "bottom," "front," "rear," "side," "height," "length," "width," "upper," "lower," "interior," "exterior," "inner," "outer," and the like as may be used herein, merely describe points of reference and do not limit the present invention to any particular orientation or configuration.

[0046] While the invention has been described in detail and with references to specific embodiments thereof, it will be apparent to one skilled in the art that various changes and modifications can be made therein without departing from the spirit and scope thereof. Thus, it is intended that the present invention covers the modifications and variations of this invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A decorating system comprising:
 - an ear covering device, the ear covering device being configured to cover a user's ears, the ear covering device comprising:
 - a fabric shell, the fabric shell defining an interior region, the fabric shell including a decorating portion that is configured so that a user can decorate thereon; and
 - a frame, the frame being inserted into the interior region; and
 - a first decorating implement, the first decorating implement being configured so that a user can use the first decorating implement to draw on the decorating portion; and
 - a second decorating implement, the second decorating implement being different than the first decorating

implement, the second decorating implement being configured so that a user can use the second decorating implement to draw on the decorating portion.

2. The decorating system of claim 1, wherein the first decorating implement is a marker.

3. The decorating system of claim 1, wherein the fabric shell includes an outer membrane, the outer membrane including a first material portion and a second material portion, the first material portion being different than the second material portion, the first material portion corresponding to the decorating portion.

4. The decorating system of claim 3, wherein the first material portion is a canvas material.

5. The decorating system of claim 4, wherein the second material portion is a stretchable material.

6. The decorating system of claim 3, wherein the outer membrane includes a first ear portion, a second ear portion, and a middle portion disposed between the first ear portion and the second ear portion, and the first material portion is located on the first ear portion.

7. The decorating system of claim 6, wherein the middle portion corresponds to the second material portion.

8. The decorating system of claim 1, wherein the fabric shell includes an outer membrane, the outer membrane including a first material portion, a second material portion, and a third material portion, the first material portion being different than the second material portion, the third material portion being different than the second material portion, the decorating portion being a first decorating portion, the fabric shell including a second decorating portion, the first material portion corresponding to the first decorating portion, and the third material portion corresponding to the second decorating portion.

9. The decorating system of claim 8, wherein the outer membrane includes a first ear portion, a second ear portion, and a middle portion, the middle portion being disposed between the first ear portion and the second ear portion, the first decorating portion corresponding to the first ear portion, and the second decorating portion corresponding to the second ear portion.

10. The decorating system of claim 9, wherein the first material portion has an end, the second material portion has an end, and the end of the second material portion has a different configuration than the end of the first material portion.

11. The decorating system of claim 8, wherein the outer membrane has a first end and a second end opposite to the first end, the third material portion extending from the first end to the second end, the first material portion being coupled to the third material portion, and the second material portion being coupled to the third material portion.

12. The decorating system of claim 11, wherein the first material portion corresponds to a first ear portion of the fabric shell and the second material portion corresponds to a second ear portion of the fabric shell.

13. The decorating system of claim 1, wherein the fabric shell includes an outer membrane, the outer membrane

extending from a first end of the fabric shell to a second end of the fabric shell, the decorating portion being disposed on the outer membrane extending from the first end of the fabric shell to the second end of the fabric shell.

14. The decorating system of claim 1, further comprising: a drawing aid, the drawing aid being configured to be used with the first decorating implement to decorate the decorating portion of the fabric shell.

15. The decorating system of claim 14, wherein the drawing aid is a stencil with at least one opening.

16. The decorating system of claim 1, further comprising: a decorating object; and a coupler, the coupler being configured to couple the decorating object to the fabric shell.

17. The decorating system of claim 16, wherein the decorating object is a bead, and the coupler is a string.

18. The decorating system of claim 1, wherein the first decorating implement has a first color, and the second decorating implement has a second color, the second color being different than the first color.

19. An accessory decorating system comprising: an ear covering device, the ear covering device being configured to cover a user's ears, the ear covering device comprising:

a fabric shell, the fabric shell defining an interior region, the fabric shell including a decorating portion that is configured so that a user can decorate thereon; and

a frame, the frame being inserted into the interior region; a decorating implement, the decorating implement being configured to be used to draw on the decorating portion of the fabric shell; and

a decorating object, the decorating object being configured to be coupled to the decorating portion of the fabric shell.

20. A combination of an ear covering devices and a kit for decorating the ear covering device, the combination comprising:

an ear covering device, the ear covering device being configured to cover a user's ears, the ear covering device comprising:

a fabric shell, the fabric shell defining an interior region, the fabric shell including a decorating portion that is configured so that a user can decorate thereon; and

a frame, the frame being inserted into the interior region; a decorating implement, the decorating implement being configured to be used to draw on the decorating portion of the fabric shell;

a drawing aid, the drawing aid being configured to be used with the decorating implement to draw on the decorating portion of the fabric shell;

a decorating object, the decorating object being configured to be coupled to the fabric shell; and

a coupler, the coupler being configured to couple the decorating object to the fabric shell.

* * * * *