



Native American Clay Pots

Grades: 3-5

Subject: Science, Creativity, Social Studies

Time: 50 minutes



*** Standards:** Students will...

Visual Arts Standard 1: Understand and apply media, techniques, and processes related to the visual arts.

Benchmark #3: Know how different media (e.g., oil, watercolor, stone, metal), techniques, and processes are used to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories.

Visual Arts Standard 3: Know the range of subject matter, symbols and potential ideas in the visual arts.
Benchmark #2: Know how subject matter, symbols, and ideas are used to communicate meaning.

Visual Arts Standard 4: Understand the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.

Benchmark #1: Know that the visual arts have both a history and a specific relationship to various cultures.

Visual Arts Standard 5: Understand the characteristics and merits of one's own artwork and the artwork of others.

Benchmark #1: Know various purposes for creating works of visual art.

History Standard 1: Understand family life now and in the past and family life in various places long ago.

Benchmark #1: Know the ways that families long ago expressed and transmitted their beliefs and values through oral tradition, literature, songs, art, religion, community celebrations, mementos, food, and language (e.g., celebration of national holidays, religious observances, and ethnic and national traditions; visual arts and crafts; hymns, proverbs, and songs)

History Standard 6: Understand the folklore and other cultural contributions from various regions of the United States and how they helped to form a national heritage.

Benchmark #2: Understand how stories, legends, songs, ballads, games, and tall tales describe the environment, lifestyles, beliefs, and struggles of people in various regions of the country

Objectives: Students will be able to...

- Examine Native American stories, art, and cultural connections.
- Utilize symbols in order to communicate an idea.
- Explore painting a 3-D object.
- Evaluate the intentions and meanings of his or her work.

Materials:

- Clay Pot
- Black and White Tempera or Acrylic Paint
- One Small Paint Brush
- One Pencil with an Eraser
- Container of Clean Water
- Plastic Container Lid (to be used as a paint palette)
- Newspaper for Covering Tables
- A copy or multiple copies of "When Clay Sings" by Byrd Baylor

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Overview: After reading "When Clay Sings" by Byrd Baylor, students will participate in class discussion about the importance of clay in Native American cultures. Students will decorate their own clay pots in the style of Southwest Native American designs and evaluate the purpose and meaning of their creation. Native Americans were one of the first groups of people to "go-green." They believed in treating nature with respect and never creating waste. Even the dirt they walked on was used in an earth friendly manner to create things like clay pots.

In present time gardeners still use clay flowerpots in many gardens to grow flowers and plants and display them in interesting and creative ways. Flowerpots or containers of all sorts are often decorative and can enhance a home or garden. Although pots are often made of clay, many gardeners also use pots made of cement and metal.

Kidspeak: Symbols are found throughout many cultures and nations. They often represent objects, animals, and ideas of the time. They are a great way to learn about a culture and even to express your own ideas.

Eco-Fact: Each individual tosses away about four pounds of garbage every day.

Procedure:

Introduction:

1. Show the students the cover of "When Clay Sings." Ask the students where they think the story takes place, and what it's about.
2. Read "When Clay Sings."
3. After finishing the story, ask students why they think so many pieces of clay pots were found in the ground? Also ask what they think Native Americans used their clay pots for?
4. Open to one of the pages in the story, and ask the students to describe the Native American designs. What sort of symbols did they use? Make a list of descriptive words on the board.
5. Explain that today we will be decorating our own clay pots using Native American designs for inspiration.

Clay Pot Activity:

1. Set up a demonstration table with the clay pot, newspaper covering the table, a water container, one paintbrush, a plastic container lid with a quarter sized drop of black and white paint.
2. Dust the clay pot off to remove any dirt and debris.
3. Using a pencil, demonstrate how to draw the design on the clay pot. It can look like something like the man with the flute in the story, or it can be a simple design with lines and dots.
4. Demonstrate how to fill in the design using the paintbrush and black and white paint. Spots can remain unpainted, revealing the clay color, or it can be painted entirely black and white.
5. Remind the students to wash the paintbrush in the water container when switching colors, and to wait until a color is dry to paint on top of it.
6. Have students help pass out materials and remember to have fun!

Closing Activity:

1. Have students sit in a circle and show their clay pots.
2. Students can describe their clay pot design, what symbols they used and what they will use their clay pot for. (If they are using it to grow plants: what plants will they grow in it and why?)
3. As a class, discuss how clay pots are earth friendly.

**Adaptations:**

- **Vegetable Stamp Designs:** For younger students, cut vegetables in half to create stamps. Suggested vegetables are: apples, brussel sprouts, potatoes and celery. Pour the desired colored paint in the plastic cover “palette” and gently stamp the vegetable in the paint. Blot the vegetable on a scrap piece of paper, and then stamp onto the clay pot. Students can vary the color and pattern of their stamps to create an interesting design.

- **Make your own clay pot:** Older or more advanced students can use air-dry clay to make the clay pot itself by hand. Begin by rolling a ball of clay in the palms of your hands. Poke your thumb down the middle of the ball of clay. Using your thumb on the outside, and point and middle finger in the center whole, pinch the sides of the clay to shape the walls. Turn the clay as you pinch to make even sides. Smooth out any cracks using your index finger and a moist cloth. Use just a little water, too much will make the clay too soft. Continue pinch the sides to make the pot bigger, and smoothing the sides until you get the desired size and thickness. Use scissors to cut the edges of the clay pot to make them even and smooth. Leave the clay pot to dry for a week before painting.

Extensions:

- Students can take a trip to their local art museum to see Native American Pottery first hand.
- Students can write about their clay pot. If someone found their pot in a hundred years, what pieces would they find? What would they think the symbols means? Writings can be as short as a paragraph or as long as a story. Students could even write their own folktale about their clay pot.
- Students can learn about the plant life cycle and create their own class garden using their newly decorated pots.

GEF Community: Join the GEF Community online. Students can share pictures of their flowerpots with the GEF Community. In addition, students can discuss how they will use their flowerpots and where they will place them.

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