

Telling Stories and Making Connections Through Clay

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Unit Content

Students in my high school art classes are intelligent, curious, and so into their own worlds that they don't know much about the world beyond their own school and family life. I want to use this sense of self-importance that is essential to the psyche of the teenager to build a unit where students are telling their own stories, and using their experiences and stories to build connections to peoples of the past, and peoples from across the country. Pueblo pottery, past and present, shows symbolism and stories of life of those who create them. Handmade pottery is unique to the potter, as are the stories and designs in and on the pots.

My unit is not only to teach students to work with the clay and create hand-built pots, but to encourage students to look at the ideas and symbols contained within and around the pots and to create their own symbols and imagery. This encourages students to appreciate the art, rather than appropriating the art by copying Native Pueblo symbols. This will also be a topic of discussion to have with students, and I anticipate it being a lively and opinionated discussion.

Each lesson will begin with an observational drawing, starting at 2-3 minutes, and building up as long as students have the stamina to keep working. Students will observe and draw handmade pottery (or irregularly designed mass-produced pottery), to help alleviate the idea that pottery is supposed to be made or look a certain way (draw what you see in front of you, not what it looks like in your head.) The unit will begin with exploration of traditional Pueblo pottery, and some copying of the designs onto paper and exploring what they mean and how they tell the stories of the people who created them. Students will then begin to think about what symbols, themes, and items are important enough to them to put on a piece of pottery. Then the class will discuss appreciation vs. appropriation, prompting students to think about how they might appreciate and make their own art rather than copy and appropriate the art of others. After this discussion students will begin to sketch their designs, both for the shape of the pot they want to make and the design they want to add to it to tell their story.

Once students have their designs approved, they can begin to work in clay. The teacher will demo the coil building technique for different shaped pots and demonstrate how to

use clay tools. This unit is written for air dry clay, but can be easily adapted for clay that needs to be glazed and fired. Students will build their pots and use the clay tools to engrave into the pots, and use more clay and scoring techniques to add details to the outside of the pot. When the pots are dry, students will paint their pots using a palette of their choosing. Students will be encouraged to choose their color palettes intentionally to be a part of their design. Most Native Pueblo art is limited in color palette, but the idea of this unit is for students to express their own stories and experiences, so a rainbow pot is not out of the range of acceptable work. Students can also use clay tools to scrape paint to add more texture to their designs. When finished, students will write up a museum-like placard about their work. The placards will include standard artist information, the name of the pot, and a short paragraph about how it was made and what it means for them. The unit will conclude with a gallery walk, where students walk around and look at the pots created by the other students and make connections between the pieces and thereby between the artists who made them.

When we look at any pottery, we can often divide it into two categories: utilitarian and artistic. Pueblo pottery is no exception to this, but there is also a good deal of overlap between the two. Pueblo pottery can be traced back as far as 200 CE, and is considered to be ancestral. (Anasazi Pottery: Evolution of a Technology.) Nearly all, if not all, of the pottery identified from this early era is utilitarian either for cooking food, serving food, or carrying water. Around the year 1000 is when we begin to see more decoration on pots, more art even on the cooking and carrying pots (Stewart.) As time goes on, we begin to see more colors of clay, which is all naturally sourced from Pueblo lands. It's also important to note that these pots are hand-built, not molded or thrown on a wheel. Pots are often decorated with paints made with local minerals or plant material (Hibben.)

In terms of symbolism on the pottery, there are many many different images and symbols that Pueblo potters use. Four of the most common are as follows: The Avanyu, the water serpent that is the guardian of water, The Rain Parrot, which represents the peoples' reverence for rain and water, parallel straight lines, representing rain, moisture, and life, and Feathers, usually abstracted to symbolize the importance of prayers and being thankful for blessings (Indian Pueblo Store.)

Pottery of the Pueblo people is not just an art of the past. This is a living art, and the Pueblo people continue to make art today. Exploring the art of contemporary Native artists could easily become an extension of this unit.

Teaching Strategies

Teaching strategies are what make lessons classroom-ready. Most teachers use teaching strategies and aren't even aware they're using them. These strategies not only create effective lessons but allow connections between the students as well as between the teacher and students and the students and the material. Strategies allow students to

interact with the materials, their classmates, and the world around them. These nine strategies were selected based on how well they lend themselves to interactions between students, teachers, and all the materials involved. The nine strategies I highlight in this unit were: anonymous questioning, check in and out, conferencing, connecting to prior knowledge, cooperative learning, differentiation, graphic organizers, and sketchbooks.

Anonymous questioning is a strategy that allows students to anonymously submit questions and concerns to be addressed in class. Equity in schools, especially for students who don't have the materials they need to succeed, can be a tough subject and students don't always want their peers to know about their personal concerns. Anonymous questioning not only lets students get their concerns across but has the potential to show students that they're not isolated in their concerns.

Check In/Check Out is a teaching strategy that allows teachers to figuratively take students' emotional temperatures when they arrive and when they leave the classroom. This can be done in a variety of ways, through entrance and exit tickets, warmups and wrap ups, or even verbal or eye contact as students enter and exit the classroom. Gauging where the students are both before and after class is important not only with this course material, but with high school students in general.

Conferencing is exactly what it sounds like, both allowing students to conference with one another, and the teacher to conference with individual students or student groups. In person conferencing allows ideas to flow more openly than having written comments and allows the teacher and the students to better understand the concepts being discussed and assess the level of understanding. Conferencing is a great form of assessment that is low pressure for the student and allows the teacher to get a clear picture of what the students understand and what still needs to be ascertained. With this unit, conferencing is key as students will be creating their own pieces in materials they may have never handled before and will likely get easily frustrated without adequate individual guidance.

Connecting to prior knowledge is among the most basic of teaching and planning strategies, which involves using what students already know to build connections to the lesson at hand. This not only makes sure that students have some context before delving into a lesson but gives students a buy-in where they can feel that they have something to contribute to the lesson even before they've learned anything new. This unit looks at pots and other ceramic-ware they're already familiar with and brings in new vocabulary and ideas on top of the things they already know.

Cooperative learning has students working together in pre-planned groups to investigate materials as a team. This allows students to learn from one another and use each other's strengths to create the work that they're dreaming about and aren't sure about the technical creation process. Students will look at artifacts together, explore and observe, and make design choices about their own work in conversation with classmates.

Differentiation is one of the most important strategies used in the classroom, allowing all students to succeed to their maximum potential. Differentiation is designing lessons, work, and assessments for students to address their individual needs. Having multiple options for how students can organize themselves or complete work allows students to create work that can show what they know without being confined by restrictions that might impede their ability to get across the knowledge and information they've gained during the lessons. The assignments and assessments in this unit are open-ended, allowing students to take them in any number of directions and still be successful.

Graphic Organizers are often at the heart of my instruction, giving students a concrete place to pull their thoughts and ideas together before beginning an assignment. For students who have trouble focusing their ideas, graphic organizers are one of the best things they can do to get everything down on paper before embarking on a large project. Even for students who are skilled at organization, graphic organizers allow all group members, and the teacher, to see what students are thinking and where their assignments are headed so specific conversations can be had to address any potential concerns before any work is completed on the project. This unit will have a teacher-generated graphic organizer for students to use, as well as options for students to create their own.

Sketchbooks are going to be one of the most heavily used items in the studio during this unit, as a key strategy to taking notes and keeping track of thoughts and feelings on a daily basis. Students would be creating sketches of objects in the classroom at the beginning of each class, as well as making sketches of their work at each step of the process. This allows students to look back and reflect on their work as the unit progresses, as well as in the future.

Classroom Activities

Lesson 1: Introduction to Pottery and Pottery Design

Time: 1 90-minute class period

Objectives:

Students will be able to identify Native Pueblo designs on pottery in order to interpret stories or ideas being shared.

Students will identify the purpose of pottery, in order to connect relevance to their own lives.

Students will be able to identify safety concerns around clay and clay-shaping tools, in order to process and work with clay procedures and practices.

Students will be able to identify at least two ways to create pottery, in order to understand how different vessels are created.

Standards Addressed:

VA:Cr1.1.Ia, VA:Cr1.1.IIa, VA:Cr1.2.Ia, VA:Cr2.2.Ia, VA:Cr.3.1.Ia, VA:Pr.6.1.Ia, VA:Re.7.1.IIa, VA:Re.7.2.IIa, VA:Cn10.1.Ia

Instructional Strategies:

Graphic organizers, sketchbooks, differentiation, connecting to prior knowledge, and anonymous conferencing

Materials:

Physical pottery, slide deck with images of historical/museum pots, graphic organizer for notetaking, images of Pueblo symbols and signs, anchor chart with clay and paint safety and procedures

New Vocabulary:

Pottery, Pueblo, symbol, sign, clay, slip, sgraffito, carve, etch, composition, vessel, clay trap

Lesson Introduction:

Teacher will have students explore the online catalog of pottery in the Penn Museum catalog (in small groups or alone) and have them compile a list of questions and observations (wonders and notices). This can take between 5 and 20 minutes depending on the students.

Collaborative Exploration:

The teacher will organize the small groups to share with the class, each group picking someone to share their observations and questions. Either a designated student, or the teacher, will collect those observations in a document that will be shared with all the students as a reference for later. Once all groups have shared, the teacher will collect ideas for further inquiry, to be conducted in a future lesson.

The teacher will show a collection of selected works to show some of the more common symbols in the pottery, and give students 5-10 minutes to decide, sketch, and share with a partner what symbols and ideas they think would be prevalent in pottery if it were made here and today, in our community and our time.

At this point, if any time remains in the lesson, the students will work in small groups to come up with what they think rules of working with clay should be.

Closure:

Students will submit one main takeaway and one question they still have after class on a sticky note, and hand it to the teacher before leaving the classroom. This is the exit ticket and will count as an informal assessment of the lesson.

Lesson 2: Building Stories while Building Pottery

Time: 1-2 90-minute lessons

Objectives:

Students will be able to safely use clay and clay tools, in order to create art in a safe environment.

Students will be able to hand-build a vessel using a coil method (or other similar method), in order to understand the hand-building process employed by Native peoples across the country and around the world.

Students will be able to use appropriate tools to etch into their clay, in order to understand the value and process in creating designs while the clay is still wet.

Students will be able to use appropriate storage methods and locations for their wet clay, in order to understand the clay procedures and routines.

Standards Addressed:

VA:Cr1.1.Ia, VA:Cr1.2.Ia, VA:Cr1.2.IIa, VA:Cr2.1.IIa, VA:Cr2.2.Ia, VA:Cr2.3.Ia, VA:Cr3.1.IIa, VA:Pr5.1.IIa, VA:Pr.6.1.Ia, VA:Cn10.1.Ia, VA:Cn10.1.IIa, VA:Cn11.1.IIa

Instructional Strategies:

Sketchbooks, graphic organizers, cooperative learning, check in and out, connecting to prior knowledge, differentiation

Materials:

Clay, assorted clay tools, laminated symbol sheets, water buckets, clay trap for sink

New Vocabulary:

Coil, slip, score, smooth (with water), rib tool, wedge tool, pin tool, clay trap

Lesson Introduction:

The teacher will ask students to revisit their proposed list of clay rules, and compile a class list of what the rules and procedures of working with clay are.

Direct Instruction:

The teacher will then provide a demonstration on hand-building pottery using both coil and pinch pot methods. Included in the demonstration are slip and score techniques, as well as the careful and judicious use of water to smooth the clay.

Group Work:

Students will begin working in clay at their tables, working with their tablemates to discuss the symbols they plan to add to their pottery as they go. These symbols can be added as a positive-space 3D element to their pot, as a carved element into the clay, or in a later stage either painted on or carved into the paint sgraffito-style.

The teacher will circulate as necessary assisting students with technique and safety. While circulating, the teacher should give informal grades based on technique performance as well as behavior in terms of neatness and safety. Clean-up should be included in this grade as well.

Closure:

The teacher will quickly explain clean-up procedures and instruct students on where in-progress projects can be stored. These projects will ideally dry before the next lesson.

Lesson 3: Decorating and Designing Pottery

Time: 2 90-minute lessons

Objectives:

Students will be able to create appropriate designs for their pottery, in order to differentiate between appropriation and appreciation.

Students will be able to have a constructive and respectful conversation, in order to master discussing important ideas in a calm and ordered way.

Students will be able to apply their designs to their pottery using appropriate materials and tools, in order to understand the material science behind the clay body and the wet media that will cover it.

Students will be able to use various methods to design and seal their pottery, in order to understand methods of preservation and presentation.

Students will begin to curate and sort work for exhibition, in order to understand the preparation and analysis that goes into creating an art gallery.

Standards Addressed:

VA:Cr1.1.Ia, VA:Cr1.2.Ia, VA:Cr1.2.IIa, VA:Cr2.1.IIa, VA:Cr2.2.Ia, VA:Cr2.3.Ia, VA:Cr3.1.IIa, VA:Pr5.1.IIa, VA:Pr.6.1.Ia, VA:Cn10.1.Ia, VA:Cn10.1.IIa, VA:Cn11.1.IIa

Instructional Strategies:

Sketchbooks, differentiation, cooperative learning, conferencing, check in and out

Lesson Introduction:

Students will begin the lesson by sketching the piece they've created, and adding a few ideas of what modern-day designs and symbols they want to add to their piece. They should include color in these sketches, and the teacher should encourage students to be intentional with their color choices.

Independent work:

Students will begin to paint their work, using their sketches to guide them. The teacher will, once again, circulate the room to provide technical assistance and guidance to students. The teacher will also conference with students individually about their designs and symbol ideas as well as their color choices.

Students will clean up the paint, their workspaces, and put their work in an appropriate place.

Closure:

Students will fill out an exit ticket slip listing 3 ideas, 2 symbols, and 1 color they used in the creation of their pottery design (a 3-2-1 exit slip)

Lesson 4: Wrap Up and Celebration of Work

Time: 1 90-minute lesson

Objectives:

Students will continue and complete to curate their art gallery, in order to understand the work and analysis that goes into creating an art exhibit.

Students will identify similarities and differences between class artworks, in order to interpret the art made by others as a reflection of the world around them.

Students will create a museum card for their artwork, in order to briefly document their process from beginning to end.

Students will prepare and present a short statement about their art, in order to reflect on the art-making process and the history that inspired it.

Standards Addressed:

VA:Cr2.2.IIa, VA:Cr2.3.Ia, VA:Pr4.1.Ia, VA:Pr5.1.IIa, VA:Pr.6.1.Ia, VA:Pr.6.1.IIa, VA:Re.7.1.IIa, VA:Re.7.2.IIa, VA:Re9.1.Ia, VA:Cn11.1.IIa

Instructional Strategies:

Graphic organizers, connecting to prior knowledge, differentiation, conferencing, check in and out

Materials:

Student art pieces, sketchbook, pencil, 5”x7” cardstock, pen, ruler

New Vocabulary:

Museum placard, artist statement

Lesson Introduction:

Teacher will show students museum placards from various assorted pieces of art, and explain the components of a placard.

Group Work:

Students will first individually compose a placard for their work, then switch with other students to review and revise the writing about their pieces. This will include a short biography about the artists as well as a statement about how the art was made and what it symbolizes.

Closure:

Students will share their work and their placards with the entire class in the form of a gallery walk around the studio.

At this time, students can also plan a school-wide exhibition of their work, as well as a time for family, friends, and the wider community to view their work.

Resources

"Anasazi Pottery: Evolution of a Technology". *Expedition Magazine*. Vol. 35 no. 1. 1993

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Quotsquyva, Dextra Nampeyo, 2005 *Honoring the Clay*, in Objects of Everlasting Esteem: Native American Voices on Identity, Art and Culture, Lucy Fowler Williams editor, Penn Museum.

Hibben, Frank C. (1975). *Kiva Art of the Anasazi at Pottery Mound*. Las Vegas Nevada: K.C. Publishers

Hucko, Bruce, *Where There Is No Name for Art: The Art of Tewa Pueblo Children*, 1996

Plog, S. (2003). Exploring the ubiquitous through the unusual: Color symbolism in Pueblo black-on-white pottery. *American Antiquity*, 68(4), 665–695.

Peckham, Stewart (1990). *From This Earth: The Ancient Art of Pueblo Pottery*. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press.

Trimble, Stephen *Talking with the Clay: The Art of Pueblo Pottery in the 21st Century*, 2007

Wardle, Barbra L. (1990) Native American Symbolism in the Classroom, *Art Education*, 43:5, 12-24.

Williamson, Ray A, (1983). Sky Symbolism in a Navajo Rock Art Site, Chaco Canyon. *Archaeoastronomy; College Park, Md*, 59-66.

<https://www.indianpueblostore.com/blogs/native-art-artists/pueblo-pottery-meaning-and-symbolism>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkUGm87DE0k>

<https://www.penn.museum/collections/list.php?id=11097>

<https://www.penn.museum/collections/list.php?id=11066>

<https://vimeo.com/289318745>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsNwUvA3muc>

Watch List for Students:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0SDQA0mhZZg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ga5Fc6cBHI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5j1Vt1impIE>

Appendix

National Core Art Standards

Creating

Anchor Standard #1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work

Understanding: Creativity and innovative thinking are essential life skills that can be developed.

- VA:Cr1.1.Ia: Use multiple approaches to begin creative endeavors
- VA:Cr1.1.IIa: Individually or collaboratively formulate new creative problems based on student's existing network

Understanding: Artists and designers shape artistic investigation, following or breaking with traditions in pursuit of creative artmaking goals

- VA:Cr1.2.Ia: Shape an artistic investigation of an aspect of present day life using a contemporary practice of art or design
- VA:Cr1.2.IIa: Choose from a range of materials and methods of traditional and contemporary artistic practices to plan works of art and design

Anchor Standard #2: Organize and Develop artistic ideas and work

Understanding: Artists and designers experiment with forms, structures, materials, concepts, media, and art-making approaches

- VA:Cr2.1.Ia: Engage in making a work of art or design without having a preconceived plan
- VA:Cr2.1.IIa: Through experimentation, practice, and persistence, demonstrate acquisition of skills and knowledge in a chosen art form

Understanding: Artists and designers balance experimentation and safety, freedom and responsibility while developing and creating artworks.

- VA:Cr2.2.Ia: Explain how traditional and non-traditional materials may impact human health and the environment and demonstrate safe handling of materials, tools, and equipment
- VA:Cr2.2.IIa: Demonstrate awareness of ethical implications of making and distributing creative work.

Understanding: People create and interact with objects, places, and design that define, shape, enhance, and empower their lives

- VA:Cr2.3.Ia: Collaboratively develop a proposal for an installation, artwork, or space design that transforms the perception and experience of a particular place.
- VA:Cr2.3.IIa: Redesign an object, system, place, or design in response to contemporary issues.

Anchor #3: Redefine and complete artistic work

Understanding: Artists and designers develop excellence through practice and constructive critique, reflecting on, and refining work over time.

- VA:Cr.3.1.Ia: Apply relevant criteria from traditional and contemporary cultural contexts to examine, reflect on, and plan revisions for works of art and design in progress.
- VA:Cr3.1.IIa: Engage in constructive critique with peers, then reflect on, re-engage, revise, and refine works of art and design in response to personal artistic vision.

Presenting

Anchor Standard #4: Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation

Understanding: Artists and other presenters consider various techniques, methods, venues, and criteria when analyzing, selecting, and curating objects, artifacts, and artworks for preservation and presentation.

- VA:Pr4.1.Ia: Analyze, select, and curate artifacts and/or artworks for presentation and preservation

- VR:Pr4.1.IIa: Analyze, select, and critique personal artwork for a collection or portfolio presentation.

Anchor Standard #5: Develop and Refine Artistic Techniques and work for presentation

Understanding: Artists, curators, and others consider a variety of factors and methods including evolving technologies when preparing and refining artwork for display or deciding if and how to preserve and protect it.

- VA:Pr5.1.Ia: Analyze and evaluate the reason and ways an exhibition is presented.
- VA:Pr5.1.IIa: Evaluate, select, or apply methods of processes appropriate to display artwork in a specific place

Anchor Standard #6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work

Understanding: Objects, artifacts, and artworks collected, preserved, or presented by either artists, museums, or other venues communicate meaning and a record of social, cultural, and political experiences resulting in the cultivating of appreciation and understanding

- VA:Pr.6.1.Ia: Analyze and describe the impact that exhibition or collection has on personal awareness of social, cultural, or political beliefs and understandings.
- VA:Pr.6.1.IIa: Make, explain, and justify connections between artists or artwork and social, cultural, and political history

Responding

Anchor Standard #7: Perceive and analyze artistic work

Understanding: Individual aesthetic and empathetic awareness developed through engagement with art can lead to understanding and appreciation of self, others, the natural world, and constructed environments.

- VA:Re.7.1.Ia: Hypothesize ways in which art influences perception and understanding of human experiences
- VA:Re.7.1.IIa: Recognize and describe personal aesthetic and empathetic responses to the natural world and constructed environments

Understanding: Visual Imagery influences understanding of and responses to the world

- VA:Re.7.2.Ia: Analyze how one's understanding of the world is affected by experiencing visual imagery
- VA:Re.7.2.IIa: Evaluate the effectiveness of an image or images to influence ideas, feelings, behaviors, or specific audiences

Anchor Standard #8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work

Understanding: People gain insights into meanings of artwork by engaging in the process of criticism.

- VA:Re8.1.Ia: Interpret an artwork or collection of works, supported by relevant and sufficient evidence found in the work and its various contexts
- VA:Re8.1.IIa: Identify types of contextual information useful in the process of constructing interpretations of an artwork or collection of works.

Anchor Standard #9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work

Understanding: People evaluate art based on various criteria

- VA:Re9.1.Ia: Establish relevant criteria in order to evaluate a work of art or collection of works.
- VA:Re9.1.IIa: Determine the relevance of criteria used by others to evaluate a work of art or collection of works.

Connecting

Anchor Standard #10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art

Understanding: Through art-making, people make meaning by investigating and developing awareness of perceptions, knowledge, and experiences.

- VA:Cn10.1.Ia: Document the process of developing ideas from early stages to fully elaborated ideas
- VA:Cn10.1.IIa: Utilize inquiry methods of observation, research, and experimentation to explore unfamiliar subjects through art-making.

Anchor standard #11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical contexts to deepen understanding

Understanding: People develop ideas and understandings of society, culture, and history through their interactions with analysis of art

- VA:Cn11.1.Ia: Describe how knowledge of culture, traditions, and history may influence personal responses to art.
- VA:Cn11.1.IIa: Compare uses of art in a variety of social, cultural, and historical contexts and make connections to uses of art in contemporary and local contexts.