

Teaching Clay

Time:

Allow plenty of lead time for clay projects, especially if they are being produced for a special occasion. Give yourself at least 3-4 weeks from start to your estimated completion date.

Class Time on Projects:

Work time on clay projects should be limited. Primary children in particular, tend to overwork their clay and ruin their projects as a result.

Grades K-2	Projects should be done in one sitting, ranging from 15-40 minutes of work time. Take their projects as the finish without allowing time for further refinement to prevent overworking the clay. Provide water sparingly, if at all.
Grades 3-5	Can work for extended periods or days. Carefully cover clay overnight to prevent drying.

Drying Time:

As children completed their projects, set them aside to dry gradually under plastic sheets or bags.

- Slower drying time will result in less cracking and breakage.
- Clay projects with attachments should be wrapped tightly for 24 hours, and then dried out gradually to minimize cracking and breakage.
- Make sure that no clay project is more than three quarters to one inch thick in any one place.

Since unfired clay (greenware) is very fragile before firing, store projects for drying directly on the cart used to wheel them to the kiln in an area where they will not be disturbed. The less handling greenware undergoes, the more likely it will stay in tact and unbroken before firing.

Glazing:

When projects are finished, they should be 'bisque-fired' in the kiln before glazing. This will help prepare the clay surface to accept the glaze and minimize further explosions/breakage during glaze firing. Glaze is most easily applied by children with small sponges/pieces of sponge. Take care that glaze is kept off the bottom of the pot or any surface that will contact the kiln. Glaze that touches the kiln or kiln shelves will fuse to them during firing.

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Sequencing Experiences with Clay in the Elementary Classroom

Suggested Grade Level	Pinch/Modeling and Sculptural Constructions	Slab Constructions	Coil Constructions	Skills/Techniques
Kindergarten	Animal sculptures – emphasis on simple forms such as turtles, bears, birds, pigs, etc. Pinch pots.	Cookie cutter projects: Wind Chimes/Pendants with stamped textural designs.	Rolling coil ‘snakes’ creating coasters, spook rests or flowers.	Basic manipulations: rolling slabs and balls, pinching, poking, rolling, pulling and pressing. Texturing clay by stamping, drawing, poking, etc.
1st Grade	Same as above. Group sculptures – farms, zoos, etc.	Tiles with textured or painted decorations (leaves/shells). Wall hung pockets.	Small bowl with one or two stacked coils. Making textured beads	Texturing, blending and making clay additions to form. Cutting out clay shapes with a tool. Controlling coil shape and size.
2nd Grade	Animal sculptures with more extended forms and using additive features. Combining slab and coil techniques in sculpture.	Slab vases – rolled around a cardboard tube. Slab constructed animal forms.	Attaching handles to coiled constructions. Simple coiled animals molded over paper tubes.	Rolling a slab between two flat sticks. Using water to smooth sides and edges. Making attachments, varying coil shapes.
3rd Grade	Additive sculpture using a variety of construction methods. Joining pinch post to make sculptural forms.	Hump/drape molded slab bowls with applied textures and added foot attached.	Coiled forms created in a mold/bowl.	Adding features and attachments with slurry/slip. Controlling moisture in the clay.
4th Grade	Subtractive sculpture – relief projects.	Clay masks, fish or figures based on slab vase form, attachments made with slurry and slip.	Coil pot made by blending coils together – up to 4” in height.	Blending coils, making attachment with slip./slurry. Planning constructions and construction methods. Controlling moisture.
5th Grade	Using additive and subtractive methods. Smoothing and finishing surfaces, incorporating a variety of textures.	Clay boxes/containers	Adding coil attachments of twisted or braided clay.	Planned construction of complex forms using a variety of methods. Controlling moisture.

Recommended Tools and Tips

Tool	Types	Uses
Low-fire Clay	Terra Cotta (fires brown) Wolf Creek (first white)	
Washable Desk Cover	Canvas Sheeting Laminated paper	Keeps desk clean.
Clay Modeling Tools	Can also use: Craft sticks Pencils Safe kitchen cutlery Old Combs	Scoring Texturing Piercing Smoothing Making attachments.
Sponge	Small pieces of sponge Large Sponges for Clean-up	Applying glaze or slurry
Other found Objects	Some examples: Legos Forks Feathers Pieces of Rubber sole form a shoe	Adding texture
Rolling Pins	Can also use: Plastic Pipe Wooden Curtain Rods	Rolling
String or Wire		Cutting clay from the block
Sinks or Buckets		Washing and Cleaning-up
Glaze	Low-fire glazes labeled for cone range 06-04 for brighter colors	