

GROUNDED IN CLAY CURRICULUM  
LESSON III:

# CONNECTIONS THROUGH TIME AND SPACE

*When Clay Comes Alive*



## GENERAL OVERVIEW

UNIT/BIG IDEA: The Spirit of Pueblo Pottery

TITLE: Connections Through Time and Space: When Clay Comes Alive

LESSON DURATION: 3 X 60-minute classes

GRADE LEVEL/AGE RANGE: K-12

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## LESSON OVERVIEW

### GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF LESSON:

Lesson III explores the questions: *How do I connect with family, friends, and community members? How does my pottery vessel reflect who I am and/or what I value?* Students will reflect on what they learned and created in previous lessons, consider how Pueblo pottery connects community members through time and space, and build and paint their own pottery using various pottery making techniques.

### BIG IDEA/ENDURING UNDERSTANDING:

“Pottery’s strength is seen through its permanence and presence through time. This permanence means that our stories will live on in these and other vessels.” – Ulysses Reid (Ts’iya/Zia Pueblo)

For millennia, pottery has been intrinsically tied to Pueblo people. People are pottery and pottery are people; both are born from the earth and will eventually return. Pueblo pottery can connect maker to descendants through the far reaches of time. The enormous jar in the corner of a room that has quenched the thirst of generations, an aunt’s distinctive painting style, the crooked edges of child’s first pot: they tell the story of the not-so-forgotten past, celebrate the vibrancy of today, and inspire the creativity of generations yet to come.

### ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S)/INQUIRY QUESTION:

1. How do I connect with family, friends, and community members?
2. How does my pottery vessel reflect who I am and/or what I value?

### SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Most Pueblo pottery, ancestral and contemporary alike, is made using the coil and scrape

method. Potters begin by patting out a base from a cone of clay. Larger pieces are started in the bowl of another pot or with the help of a *puki*, a shallow ceramic base used to support a growing pot. Potters build out their pieces by adding flattened coils to the lip of the pottery base; as they work, they use tools made from various materials to scrape the coils into smooth clay walls.

Many Pueblo potters harvest their own clay from Pueblo lands and process it themselves. The act of harvesting clay is often accompanied by a prayer or offering to Clay Mother to thank her for her gifts.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- YouTube Videos

[Robert Patricio's Acoma Pottery | NMPBS ¡COLORES!](#) (8:06)

Acoma potter Robert Patricio demonstrates his process and discusses his connection to Pueblo pottery.

[Jemez sculptor Kathleen Wall in residence at SAR](#) (29:23)

In this video, captured over numerous sessions in the artist studio at SAR, Kathleen Wall demonstrates every phase of creating her sculptures and paintings, from cleaning the native clay to forming and painting the figures representing the people featured in her pieces and the paintings that represent the significance of their native names. Kathleen also talks about her passionate concerns for native foods and the preservation of native lands.

- "How is Pueblo Pottery Made?" resource

## **GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND STANDARDS**

### **I. LEARNING GOALS/OBJECTIVES: The students will...**

- a. **Knowledge:** Learn about how Pueblo pottery connects Pueblo community members through time and space.
- b. **Skills:** Learn and employ pottery making techniques.
- c. **Creation:** Make a pottery vessel.
- d. **Value:** Value the various ways in which we all make and maintain connections through time and space.

### **2. COMMON CORE AND NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS:**

- a. VISUAL ARTS- CREATING | Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work
  - i. VA:Cr2.1 (Pre K-12)

- b. SPEAKING AND LISTENING- COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS | Anchor Standard: Comprehension and Collaboration
    - i. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
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## LESSON PLAN PREPARATION

### I. MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT\*

#### Days One and Two

- Grounded in Clay catalog entries for Lesson III
  - o Josephine Kie: Reborn
  - o Mark Mitchell: Created from the Earth
  - o Melissa Talachy Romero: Saya's Pot
- Students' previous work from Lessons I and II
- 1 clay cutter/wire (for teacher)
- Table covers to protect workspaces
- 1-2 twenty-pound bags of pottery clay
  - o Check with stores in your area that sell clay and ask if they sell bags of recycled clay
- (x20) craft sticks or popsicle sticks
- (x20) 8-10 oz plastic cups for water
- (x20) disposable paper plates to place pieces on while drying
- (x20) plastic storage bags (1 gallon or 10 x 16 bags) to prevent excessive drying between days while working on pottery

#### Day Three

- Students' previous work from Lessons I and II
- Table covers to protect workspaces
- Tempera paints
- (x20) paintbrushes

### 2. ENVIRONMENT

Prior to instruction, cover work surfaces with table covers. Use the clay cutter/wire to portion out clay to students (remember to hold clay in reserve for day 2 of this lesson).

Consider providing students with smocks to protect their clothes from clay and paint.

### 3. SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- a. If you do not have access to clay, or if the cost of buying recycled pottery clay is prohibitive, students can make their own clay to complete the lesson. See “Make Your Own Clay” in the appendix for materials and instructions.
- b. Students may use commercial air-dry clay to complete the lesson; however, air-dry clay will dry more quickly than recycled clay, even when stored in plastic. When using air-dry clay, encourage students to complete their pieces in one day

*\*Based on a class size of twenty students. Modify number of supplies and equipment as needed.*

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## LESSON PROCEDURES

### Step-by-Step Instruction

#### Day 1

##### **(0-5 minutes): Warm up**

Take five minutes to play with the clay. Notice how it feels in your hands, how it behaves when you roll it, stretch it, knead it, etc.

##### **(5-50 minutes): Building Pottery I (pinch pot)**

Students will practice working clay, learn the basics of pottery making, and make a pinch pot to serve as the base for the coiled pot they will make in the following lesson

1. Pound the clay to get rid of any air bubbles
2. Roll clay into a large ball, making sure the clay remains moist. If it seems to be drying out (cracking), add a small amount of water.



3. Use your thumb to push down on the ball, this will create the opening of the pot. Make sure the hole is at least 1/2” deep.
4. Using your thumb and pointer finger, pinch the clay upward and outward to form the shape of the pot. Use a small amount of water to smooth out any cracks.



The craft stick may be used to smooth out the pot.



5. Teachers- students may create more than one pinch pot (try different shapes and forms) if they finish their pinch pot early.
6. Place your pinch pot in a plastic bag to keep in moisture. Write your name on a paper plate and place your bagged pot on top of your plate to keep it identifiable for the upcoming days.



**(50-60 minutes): Clean up**

- Make sure to cover any unused clay in plastic to prevent it from drying out.

**Day 2**

**(0-45 minutes): Building pottery 2 (coiled pot)**

Students will learn and practice new pottery making techniques and build upon their pinch pots from the previous day's activity to make coiled pots.

1. Teachers- using the clay cutter/wire divide up the remaining clay among students.
2. Teachers- as students get into the rhythm of working with the clay, read the catalog entries included in this lesson aloud to the class (see appendix). You may also choose to play the YouTube video(s) linked above under “Additional Resources.”
3. Take your pinch pot from the previous day’s activity out of the plastic bag and set it in front of you; it will serve as the base for today’s activity.
4. Take a small amount of additional clay and roll it out into a clay “snake” long enough to go all the way around the top of your base. This will serve at the first coil of your coil pot.



5. Flatten the coil. Attach the flattened coil to the rim of your base. If the coil is too long, pinch off the excess clay.



6. Use a craft stick and your fingers to smooth out the edges of the coil and reinforce the attachment of the coil to the base. Dip your fingers in water as you work to smooth out any cracks in the clay.
7. Continue to add coils in this fashion until you are satisfied with the height of your pot.



8. Once you are satisfied with the size of your pot you might choose to experiment by making figurines or other shapes cut from clay to attach to your piece, using a tool to carve a design into your pot, or changing its shape by widening your piece and/or adding additional height, etc.
9. Teachers- at the end of the lesson, if the class has not had enough time to complete their pieces, ask them to place their pots back in their plastic bags so that they might continue coiling the next day. If students have completed their pieces, ask them to place their pottery on their plates without the plastic bag to air dry overnight. This will prepare pieces for painting the following day.

**(45-50 minutes): Clean up**

- Clean all tools.
- Make sure to cover and seal any unused clay in plastic to prevent it from drying out.

**(50-60 minutes): Closure/Reflection with students**

Reflect on the catalog entries read aloud while you worked. As a class, discuss the ways in which pottery connects Pueblo people to family, friends, and community across time and space. Consider the importance of childhood memories, of learning from previous generations, and how traditions are passed down through families and communities.

**Day 3**

**(0-5 minutes): Warm up**

Review the design(s) you created in Lesson I. Think about what you learned from the *Grounded in Clay* catalog entries and from mapping your own environment in Lesson II. Is there anything you would like to change and/or add to your design?

**(5-45 minutes): Painting Pottery**

Students will paint their pottery using the designs they created in Lesson I as inspiration.

- I. Using the design you created in Lesson I, paint your piece based on what is meaningful to you.





2. Place your completed piece on your plate to dry overnight.

**(45-50 minutes): Clean up**

- Clean all tools.

**(50-60 minutes): Closure/Reflection with students.**

As a class or in small groups revisit the essential questions.

- *How do I connect with family, friends, and community members?*
- *How does my pottery vessel reflect who I am and/or what I value?*

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## ASSESSMENT

- **Formative Assessment**

Ask students to document their pottery making process. Students might take a photograph or draw a picture of each step and write a couple of sentences about what each step entails, if they have encountered any unexpected challenges, and about how they are feeling at any given point in the process.

- **Summative Assessment**

Teachers may assess student work based on grade appropriate standards.

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## MODIFICATIONS

### I. MODIFICATIONS:

- a. This lesson can be completed as a stand-alone lesson. If you have not completed Lessons I and II of this unit, allot a little extra time for students to create designs for their pottery vessels. When creating designs, encourage students to draw from their own families, communities, and experiences for inspiration.

- b.** Suggestions for younger students-
  - i. Students can practice working with clay by making coil snakes and other clay figures. Consider rolling out the clay and using cookie cutters to cut out shapes to paint.
  - ii. Ask students to share a story or memory about an older family or community member. What might they like to learn from someone older than they are? What might they like to teach to someone younger?

## LESSON III CATALOG ENTRIES

### Josephine Kie: Reborn

Clay is especially important to me because it is a beautiful gift from Mother Earth. As one of my pottery students once stated after we had hiked for clay, and then soaked, ground, and prepared it to be mixed, “This is Indian Gold.” Clay, along with the preparation that happens before we create pots, is a true labor of love. This is why I have so much respect for the clay and the people who choose to create with it.

When I first visited the SAR collection years ago, I was drawn to this piece because of its beauty and fragility. I looked at it and imagined the women who once used this vase. I also tried to imagine what was going through the potter’s mind as they carefully created and painted this pot. The curves of the pot and its unique design intrigued me because I had never seen a vessel like this. This pot spoke to me so loudly that I chose to replicate it with my own twist, while remaining true to the original vessel.

I knew that I wanted to recreate the pot after having the opportunity to handle it, study its curves, and sketch the designs. After a week and much thought and prayer, I sat at my kitchen table early one morning and asked our spirits for guidance and strength. Coil after coil, I worked with the clay, carefully building the vase. Halfway through, I received a call from my eldest daughter, saying that her waters had broken and she was in labor with my first grandchild. I wrapped up my pot and explained to the clay that I would return to complete what I started. That day my beautiful granddaughter Abigail was born.

When I returned home a few days later, I continued to work and finished creating the vase. As I began to paint it, all I could think of was how blessed I was to have a gorgeous granddaughter, and how pleased I was that my new creation was evolving with such ease. When the pot was complete and fired, I sat looking at my beautiful creation in the same way my daughter looked at her baby girl. Then, as I admired my vase, I named her *Abigail* and gifted her to my granddaughter.

**Josephine Kie | Laguna**



**Acoma vase**

c. 1880–1900

Clay and paint

14½ x 10¼ in. (36.8 x 26 cm)

IAF.2796

Courtesy of the School for Advanced Research



**Josephine Kie**  
**The Abigail Pot**  
2011  
Clay and paint  
11½ x 8 in. (29.2 x 20.3 cm)  
Courtesy of Josephine Kie

## **Mark Mitchell: Created from the Earth**

I was drawn to this pot the moment I set my eyes on it. I saw my grandmother Lorencita Pino make similar pieces, so I knew this was her work. It took me back to my childhood. My grandmother worked with this orange clay and often incorporated faces and animals into her designs. The handles on this vessel are foxes, but they have stripes on their tails like chipmunks; animals that live in our communities are a part of everyday life and prayer.

I have been around pottery for as long as I can remember. My grandmother did not have a vehicle to get to the place where we gathered clay, so we would hike there with a Radio Flyer wagon and pieces of cloth to carry our tools. We talked and walked, and returned with a wagon and fabric full of raw material. Gathering clay was a learning process for us kids.

My grandmother was a great multitasker. As we gathered clay, she would also gather plants and other materials used to polish or to make slips and paints. She would gather as much clay as she could carry, but she was very picky. If there were too many rocks or too much silt, she would not use it. It was a process that involved the whole family. After my grandmother built the pottery and let it dry for a few days, she would sit at the table with my mother and aunts, and they would talk as they sanded and burnished their pots together.

Nothing went to waste. As the women sanded their clay, the dust collected in their long aprons and would then be put into a bucket to be reused. If a vessel had cracks, my grandmother would give it to my uncles so they could save it. Those pieces were ground up to use as temper for another day. From the raw material to the end product, I saw it and I lived it.

Sometimes my grandmother would give us kids leftover material and tell us to make something. We would try to make little dogs, wolves, or other critters. She would show us how to sand our pieces, slip them, and help us come up with a design. When she was ready to fire her big pots, she would leave enough wood to fire our little pieces, and when they were finished firing she would say, "Those pieces are now done. Come see how they look." She was teaching us to be potters.

**Mark Mitchell | Tesuque**



**Lorencita Pino** | Tesuque

**Bean pot with lid**

1963

Clay and mica

12½ x 13½ in. (31.8 x 34.3 cm)

IAF.2937

Courtesy of the School for Advanced Research

## Melissa Talachy Romero: Saya's Pot

This pot is by my great-grandmother Luteria Atencio<sup>1</sup>. I was ecstatic to find one of her pieces in the SAR collection. It is hard to describe the feeling you get when you are able to hold, touch, smell, and breathe in something that was created by a family member who is no longer here but to whom you were very close. The best description I can give is that it is a feeling of home.

One of my earliest childhood memories is of my dad and great-grandmother sitting around the kitchen table, working on pottery. I was sitting on Saya's<sup>2</sup> lap, watching my daddy at work. I remember her breaking off little pieces of clay and putting them in my tiny hands. She then placed her hands over mine and patiently rolled the clay into different shapes. At the time, she was in her early eighties and was losing her eyesight. I remember her using her sense of touch to feel the shape and thickness of a pot, rather than relying on her vision. She then handed me a toothpick to scratch designs into the soft clay. When I told this story to my daughter, Jo Povi Romero, she remarked that, when I make pottery, I am often watching TV or talking to people, and that I too use my sense of touch to feel the shape and thickness of my pots. To this day, the smell of the wet clay or of rain hitting the earth reminds me of Saya.

For a time, my family and I were fortunate to live in my father's childhood home on the plaza in Ohkay Owingeh. When my children were little, they enjoyed going outside and searching around the property for pottery sherds that would reveal themselves after the rain. I love that my children have the same connection to potsherds as had their great-great grandmother. This connection has permeated each generation.

In the 1930s, Saya, along with seven other Ohkay Owingeh tribal members, took similar potsherds and used them for a tribal revitalization of historical Ohkay Owingeh pottery designs and techniques. They used sherds of Potsuwi'i incised-ware (1450–1500) as their inspiration. The pot I chose has the same Potsuwi'i incised designs that Luteria came to be known for during her lifetime. I look at her pieces, take inspiration from them, and incorporate them—their shapes, designs, textures, materials—into my own contemporary pottery. It is often said that the clay is alive, and you must listen to it; listen to what it wants to become and learn from it. I truly believe this, but I also believe that our ancestors are with us, guiding us while we are working. I hope that my children and in turn their children will look to their relatives on both sides of our family for inspiration when it comes to their artwork.

**Melissa Talachay Romero | Pojoaque**

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<sup>1</sup> Luteria Atencio was a renowned pottery revivalist from Ohkay Owingeh.

<sup>2</sup> Saya is Tewa for "grandmother."





**Luteria Atencio | Ohkay Owingeh**

**Jar**

c. 1900–10

Clay and mica

6 ¼ x 7 ½ in. (15.9 x 19.1 cm)

IAF.2325

Courtesy of the School for Advanced Research

## Lesson II/III: How is Pueblo Pottery Made?

At every point in the process of making Pueblo pottery, at least one of the four natural elements is at work: fire, earth, water, and air.

### *Harvesting Clay*

EARTH

The first step in the process is “picking” clay from the earth. For many Pueblo potters, this is a revered and sacred step as clay is viewed as a gift from Mother Earth. Often times, the idea of reciprocity is practiced as potters will offer a prayer, blessing or gift in return for the clay that they take. Some potters use the same clay pit that their ancestors used; others, scout for new sources.

### *Drying and Cleaning Clay*

AIR | WATER

The raw clay is left to air dry. Once dry, it is soaked in water— allowing the now slurry-like clay to be sifted and sieved for impurities.

A temper, which is a blend of sand, ground rock, volcanic ash or potsherds, may be added to help stabilize the clay. By adding temper to clay, the vessel will dry more slowly and, thus, more evenly.

### *Forming and Shaping Clay*

EARTH

Clay is coiled by hand utilizing a base called a *puki* to support coils as they grow upward. A *puki* is typically shallow, resembling a small bowl in shape, and can be made from various materials: an older, broken pottery base or shard, a plate, a tin, or whatever can be fashioned to do the job and is to the artist’s liking.

As the form comes to life, coil-by-coil, the artists kneads out any air bubbles and refines the overall shape.

### *Drying and Scraping Pottery*

AIR | WATER

The pottery vessel air dries to leather hardness — some slowly by the sun and others in an oven. At this stage, the shape can be refined by sanding and scraping until it achieves its final form. Traditionally, artists have used materials like corncobs and chunks of rock to sand clay but other contemporary materials, such as metal tools and commercial sandpaper, are also used today.

If any cracks or imperfections occur, then the potter can use wet clay to rub them away.

### *Polishing*

*EARTH | AIR | WATER*

A thin solution of clay and water, called a *slip*, is painted over the vessel. The slip can achieve multiple things: it adds color, helps to smooth the surface, and provides a base layer for *polishing*.

Potters use polishing stones or rags to hand rub a pot while the slip is still damp. This results in a glossy, glazed finish on the pottery's surface.

### *Painting*

*EARTH | AIR | WATER*

A potter may choose to decorate the surface of their pot with paint. Often, many artists create their own paint and brushes from natural materials from the surrounding environment. For example, paint is mixed from water and minerals or plants and brushes can be made from dried yucca or even strands of the artist's own hair. Painted designs are unique to each pueblo and artists depict them in unique, diverse ways.

### *Firing*

*FIRE | AIR*

The final step in the process occurs when potters fire their clay works. The ground-fire pit is built from wood or, at times, manure. Any sudden change in wind can influence the temperature of the pottery in the fire, sometimes causing them to crack or explode, even affecting the formation of fire "clouds" on their surface.

## Lesson III: Make Your Own Clay

### Materials and Equipment (per student)

- 2 cups flour
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup salt
- 4 tablespoons cooking oil
- 1 cup water
- Food coloring (optional)
- Mixing bowl
- Implement for stirring (spoon, craft stick, wooden paint stirrer, etc.)
- Measuring cups/spoons
- Plastic wrap
- Airtight container/Ziploc bag

### Step-by-Step Instruction (30 minutes)

1. Mix 2 cups of flour and  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of salt together in a bowl.
2. Add 4 Tbsp of cooking oil and 1 cup of water and mix with a mixing implement until dough starts to form.
3. Once the dough comes together in the bowl, knead with your hands. Push, press, and squish the dough until everything holds together like baking dough.
4. Add additional water or flour if the mixture is too dry or too wet.
5. At this point the dough can be divided up into small sections. To create colored dough, mix in a couple of drops of food coloring (note: food coloring will stain hands and clothes). Otherwise, dough can be left uncolored and be painted once dry.
6. Roll clay into ball(s) and wrap it in saran wrap. Place the wrapped ball(s) of clay in an airtight container or Ziploc bag to keep it from drying out.

### Accommodations and Modifications

#### For students with wheat or gluten sensitivities-

Replace wheat flour with a gluten free flour, which can be bought at most grocery stores. When dealing with wheat or gluten allergies, you may want to consult with the student's parents/guardians to determine sensitivity. Please note that highly allergic student(s) may need to sit in a separate space from the rest of the class while clay is being mixed due to airborne flour.