

GROUNDED IN CLAY CURRICULUM  
LESSON IV:

# ANCESTORS

*Pottery That Remembers Forward*



## GENERAL OVERVIEW

UNIT/BIG IDEA: The Spirit of Pueblo Pottery

TITLE: Ancestors: Pottery that Remembers Forward

LESSON DURATION: 2 X 60-minute classes

GRADE LEVEL/AGE RANGE: K-12

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## LESSON OVERVIEW

### GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF LESSON:

In lesson IV, students will reflect on what they've learned about Pueblo pottery and think carefully about their own work. Students will explore the questions: *What does pottery have to say about the people who made it? How does Pueblo pottery connect Pueblo people to their ancestors and their descendants? How do objects tell stories?* They will be asked to write their own catalog entries imagining a future for their pottery.

### BIG IDEA/ENDURING UNDERSTANDING:

“For generations, our grandparents and all those who came before us made offerings and said prayers as they walked on worn paths, guided by previous knowledge, wisdom, and understanding of the clay, ash, and pigments. This knowledge was passed down from one generation to the next, sharing with those who wanted to learn.” – Jerry Dunbar (Tigua/Ysleta del Sur Pueblo)

It is essential to acknowledge our ancestors, those that came before us, sacrificed, and blazed those early paths. Without them, we would not exist. Their works in clay, made for families and communities, represent a legacy of creativity, innovation, utility, and loving generosity. We may not know their individual names, but our ancestors are not forgotten. Their creativity stands the test of time and their gifts everlasting as they continue to provide purpose and place for us today.

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

1. What does pottery have to say about the people who made it? About the land that it comes from? About the traditions it embodies?
2. How does Pueblo pottery connect Pueblo people to their ancestors and their descendants?

### 3. How do objects tell stories?

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

*Grounded in Clay: The Spirit of Pueblo Pottery* is a community curated exhibition. Over 60 writers, artists, and leaders from the 19 Rio Grande Pueblos, Ysleta del Sur, and Hopi communities came together to select and write about the pieces featured in the exhibition. Community curated exhibitions prioritize community voices and perspectives and recognize community authority.

In this lesson, students will be asked to consider several entries from the *Grounded in Clay* exhibition catalog written by community curators and to write their own entries for the pottery pieces they made in Lesson III.

### **Q: What is an exhibition catalog?**

**A: An exhibition catalog** is a work published to document an exhibition; catalogs often include an inventory of the works in the exhibition and additional information about the featured art and artists. Many exhibition catalogs include **catalog entries** that provide further insight into individual works of art and/or exhibition themes. The content and format of catalog entries vary from exhibition to exhibition.

Community curators for the *Grounded in Clay* exhibition were given free rein to write about their chosen piece(s) in whichever way they felt best communicated what they wanted to share about Pueblo pottery. As a result, the *Grounded in Clay* exhibition catalog is a collection of unique voices coming together to celebrate an essential practice and art form shared across Pueblos. In the spirit of the *Grounded in Clay* catalog, we encourage students to draw from their own life experiences and histories when writing about their artwork.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Early, Max. *Ears of Corn: Listen*. Denver: 3: A Taos Press, 2014.

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## GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND STANDARDS

### 1. LEARNING GOALS/OBJECTIVES: The students will...

- a. **Knowledge:** Learn about how Pueblo pottery connects Pueblo people across generations
- b. **Skills:** Engage in self-reflection and practice writing about art
- c. **Creation:** Synthesize thoughts and feelings about pottery into exhibition writing
- d. **Value:** Value the connection between Pueblo pottery and Pueblo ancestors and the ways in which objects carry meaning.

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

- a. VISUAL ARTS- PERFORMING/PRESENTING/PRODUCING | Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work
    - i. VA:Re.7.1 (4a-IIIa)
    - ii. VA:Re.7.2 (3a-6a)
  - b. READING- COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS | Anchor Standard: Craft and Structure
    - i. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4
    - ii. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6
  - c. WRITING- COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS | Anchor Standard: Text Types and Purposes
    - i. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3
  - d. WRITING- COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS | Anchor Standard: Production and Distribution of Writing
    - i. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4
    - ii. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.5
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## LESSON PLAN PREPARATION

### I. MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT\*

- *Grounded in Clay* catalog entries for Lesson IV
  - o Max Early: Rarest Form of Pottery
  - o Evone “Snowflake” Martinez: *Navi Poeh*
  - o Bernard Mora: Water Jar: A Pueblo of Tesuque Ancestor
- Students’ completed pottery vessels from Lesson III
- (x40) sheets of paper
- (x20) writing utensils
- (x20) Graphic organizers, “Lesson IV: Catalog Entry Graphic Organizer”

## LESSON PROCEDURES

### Step-by-Step Instruction

#### Day I

#### (0-10 minutes): Warm up

Begin this lesson by reading the provided catalog entries with students. Either as a class or in small groups, ask students to consider the following questions:

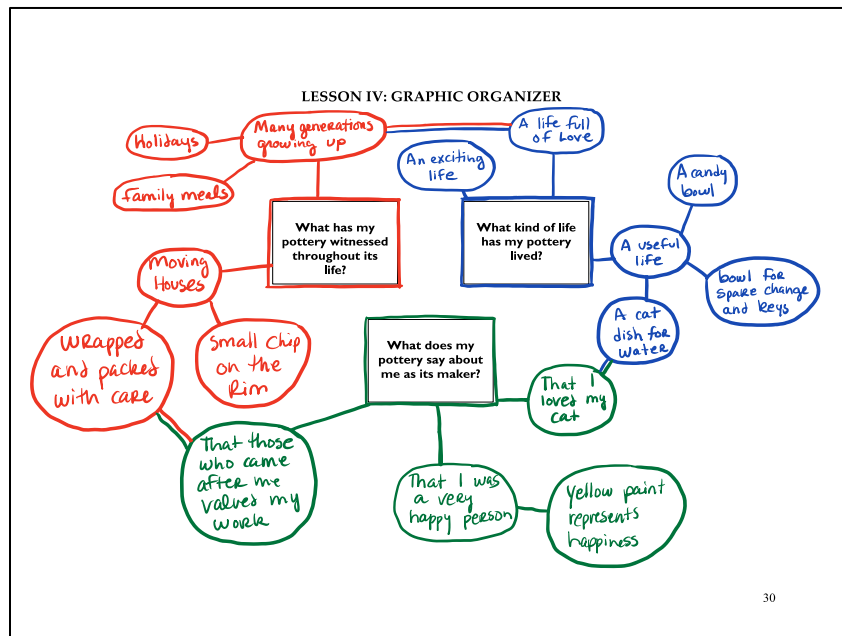
- *How does each entry explore the life of Pueblo pottery?*
- *How do the authors express their connections to the pieces they’ve chosen?*
- *How do these entries explore the larger theme of ‘Ancestors’?*

### (10-20 minutes): Creating a mind map

Using the entries from the *Grounded in Clay* exhibition catalog as inspiration, students will create a mind map to help guide them in writing catalog entries for the pieces they created in Lesson III.

Teacher should provide students with the following prompt:

- Imagine your pottery will be shown in an exhibition 100 years from now. Write a catalog entry to accompany your piece that explores the life your pottery might live and the ways in which it will connect you to future generations. Ask yourself the following questions: What kind of life has my pottery lived? What has it witnessed? What will it say about me as its maker?
- Using the graphic organizer included with this lesson, create a mind map to help you answer the questions posed in the prompt.



### (20-50 minutes): Writing a catalog entry

- Using your completed graphic organizer as a guide, write a catalog entry for your piece. Write about your piece in a way that expresses how you feel about your work. You may choose to write a poem about your piece like Max Early, write your entry from the point of view of your pottery vessel like Evone Martinez, or write a loving physical description of your piece like Bernard Mora. You may also choose to write about your pottery in a different way entirely. No matter how you choose to write about your piece, take the time to think about it from your own perspective and consider your own experiences.

Teachers- Consider including writing parameters specific to students' grade level.

### (50-60 minutes): Sharing catalog entries with peers.

Share your artwork and entries with the class or in small groups.

## **Homework**

Choose an object, or a picture of an object (photograph or sketch), that holds personal significance to you, your family, or your community that you can bring into class the following day. Think carefully about why you chose your object. Come to class prepared to discuss your chosen object with your peers.

**Note to teacher:** Consider organizing a class exhibition. Display student work and accompanying entries in an accessible space (classroom, library, etc.). Invite students and their families to view the work.

## **Day 2**

### **(0-10 minutes): Warm up**

In small groups (3 to 4), swap your objects (or pictures of your objects) with your peers. Look closely at your classmate's object. Without any background information, consider what the object might be used for, what it might mean to your classmate, what stories it might hold, and why it was chosen for this exercise.

### **(10-30 minutes): Sharing/reflecting with classmates (students remain in small groups)**

1. One at a time, go around your group and share about the object that you brought to class. What is it? Why did you choose it to share with your classmates? What does it mean to you?
2. Share a story/memory about your chosen object (or a story that your object reminds you of). How is your object connected to the story/memory you chose to share? Is it in how it was made? How it was/is used? The way it looks? What it meant to someone else? Etc.

Limit sharing to 5 minutes per person.

### **(30-50 minutes): Making connections to larger themes**

Pueblo pottery plays a special role in Pueblo culture by connecting creators to their descendants through shared stories, experiences, and art.

1. Write a short reflection (2 to 3 paragraphs) on how you connect to those who came before you and how you wish to connect to those who will come after you. Consider the following questions:
  - *What stories have you heard from people in your family/community who are older than you?*

- *What stories would you want your great-great grandchildren to know?*
- *How do you imagine those stories would be passed down?*
- *What objects would you use to tell those stories?*

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

As a class, reflect on the lesson’s activities by considering the following questions:

- *How did it make you feel to consider a future 100 years from now?*
- *How do you want to be remembered?*
- *How can objects tell stories?*
- *What did you learn about the role of Pueblo pottery in the lives of Pueblo people?*
- *Do you feel differently about Pueblo pottery after completing this unit?*

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## ASSESSMENT

- **Formative Assessment**

After completing both activities, revisit the catalog entry you wrote for your pottery piece. Revise your entry based on everything you’ve learned from your peers and further self-reflection.

*What changes did you make and why?*

- **Summative Assessment**

Educator may assess student writing based on grade appropriate expectations.

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## MODIFICATIONS

### I. MODIFICATIONS:

- a. This lesson may be completed as a stand-alone lesson. If students have not completed the previous lessons in this unit, they may choose to write about another piece of student-made artwork in lieu of pottery.

## SUPPLEMENTARY CONNECTIONS

(6-12)

- a. READING- COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS | Anchor Standard: Craft and Structure
  - iii. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4
  - iv. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5
  - v. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6

- b. WRITING- COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS | Anchor Standard:  
Production and Distribution of Writing
  - i. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4

Read the anaphora poem that Max Early wrote for his catalog entry. Discuss the characteristics of an anaphora poem and why you think Early chose to write one to express his feelings about Pueblo pottery. Use Early's entry as inspiration to write your own anaphora poem about the pottery piece you made in Lesson III.

**Q: What is an anaphora poem?**

**A: An anaphora** is a literary and rhetorical device in which a word or phrase is repeated at the beginning of successive sentences. Anaphora is used to add emphasis to specific words or phrases that are of particular significance to a given work and/or provide a literary rhythm.



## LESSON IV CATALOG ENTRIES

### **Max Early: Rarest Form of Pueblo Pottery**

A necessity for every Pueblo home was a large bowl for mixing dough to bake loaves in the outside bread house, or *ba-kadrutyu*. Imagine the wear these vessels endured as water was poured into them, battered stirred, and dough mixed. Earthenware is more vulnerable to breakage than stoneware and porcelain. This type of earthenware dough bowl would have been expendable during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and would have worn out after a few generations. A bowl was placed aside if it cracked, then ground into temper for additional pottery clay. Or the matriarch of a family could requested that her dough bowl, as a cherished heirloom, be buried with her when she departed.

The vessel I chose to write about is a rare example, one that symbolizes perseverance. The first time I noticed the dough bowl was in the book *Two Hundred Years of Historic Pueblo Pottery* by Francis H. Harlow (1991). There, the vessel is identified as a Laguna polychrome dough bowl. Ever since then, I have been fascinated by the simplicity and boldness of its design, but until this project I did not have an opportunity to study the bowl in its entirety.

I have crossed paths with the dough bowl on four occasions. In the early 1990s, I often visited the bowl at a gallery in Santa Fe. It sold, changed owner, and was up for sale at another gallery, where I spotted it again. After it sold, I often wondered where it went. Then, in 2006, I walked into the Denver Public Library, and by chance I found my beloved treasure on display. At that point it was part of the Silverman Museum Collection. Fifteen years later, when I scanned through the Vilcek Foundation's catalogue, I had no idea the dough bowl had become part of the Vilcek Collection. My eyes widened as I sensed the bowl calling out to me.

This pottery bowl was a delight to examine. As the pottery gravitated toward me and I toward it, I experienced a convergence of clay with the past and the present. It felt as if I had found a long-lost relative residing in New York, and we were reacquainted. I whispered a greeting in my Keres language and asked the spirit of the bowl to tell me more about itself. To the Pueblo people, their pottery vessels have lives as individual beings of creation.

I wrote an anaphoric poem based on the encounters I have had with the dough bowl. The stanzas explore the spirit of natural beauty and tenacity. I have personified the bowl in order to commemorate its longevity, as the pottery has blessed me with its presence and legacy.

### **Convergence of Clay**

I see you in a pottery book with your maroon cactus petals.  
I long to breathe your virtuosity then hold you in my palms.

I see you at Morning Star. Your vines curl in waves of faded beauty.

If I knew where you came from, I would take you there.

I see you in a headdress. Seven red-tipped feathers of sunrise and sunset. I adore your resilient design on vintage skin.

I see you at a gallery. Your seasoned interior of vermillion and beige reveals a footprint from infinite recipe blends.

I see you at the Denver Library, sitting atop a bookshelf. The elevated stance displays your symmetry like a regal crest.

I see your reflection in a pond as bees caress your honeycomb. A flight of stairs ascends on your painted cloud blanket motif.

I see you're in another book of Pueblo treasures: the portrait captures a glimpse of your durable longevity.

I don't see you for over a decade, until I thumb through a file of photos as your image entices my potter's eye.

I know I'll see you when I request your presence in Santa Fe. Your flight from New York lands before the lockdown.

After a postponed year, I see your chafed mask of antiquity. My hands embrace your rare and vigorous shape.

I see you don't have a distinct spirit line. I'll select a place to cross your threshold of earthenware permanence.

I see your dough, rising for the adobe bread oven. Your generous tasks of stirring, mixing, and serving food for feast days and dances.

I see your matriarch blend blue corn mush for *ma-dzini*—piki bread. Her fingers slide batter from your bowl onto a flat sandstone griddle.

I see her filling your deep bowl with apples from the orchard. The last harvest you'll see prior to leaving your birthplace.

I see you were a kitchen heirloom, lonesome for your home.  
*Amuu'u dyuuni. Hitedâ shra-neesh dyáy-ya?*  
My compassion, pottery. Where have you been?

**Max Early | Laguna**



**Laguna/Acoma dough bowl**

c. 1830–50

Clay and paint

8¼ x 16½ in. (21 x 41.9 cm)

VF2014.01.01

Courtesy of the Vilcek Foundation

## Evone “Snowflake” Martinez: *Navi Poeh*<sup>1</sup>

Do you feel the light breeze? Do you hear the faint whisper? Come, stand by me, listen carefully and quietly. Close your eyes for a moment and listen, because it is only a faint whisper. This is my story of beauty, happiness, sadness, and everlasting spirits, my *poeh*, my journey.

My life began with my maker. There were beautiful rituals of throwing cornmeal and praying that my spiritual journey would be filled with memories and life lessons so that perhaps, one day, someone would hear, listen, and learn my story.

I can remember the prayers offered as my clays was gathered from Mother Earth. I can still feel the weight of the rains, hail, and snow. I hear the songs of the wind as she sings, blowing over my earthly womb. My clay spirit quakes as I birth into shape. I learn the language spoken, and songs are sung around me as I am carefully molded, sanded, polished, painted, and fired.

My *poeh* was filled with happiness the day sacred water was poured into me and I sat next to a child being bathed, presented to the sun, and named. I was kept with this child as they grew, and I learned of dances, six directions, four seasons of life, sacred mountains, colors of the corn, the story of our emergence, of heaven and earth, and the importance of respect to all. I recall the laughter of children, the words of elders, and the stories told to little ones as they sat in front of the fire on a cold night.

My *poeh* spirit recalls the sadness of a broken heart when a loved one was sent off to the spirit world, a piece of me given to them so that they too could hear their life’s memories as they journeyed on.

Now I sit and rest, but every now and then a breeze will come by, pick up my voice, and carry it. You might feel that breeze, and if you stop for a moment to listen carefully and quietly, you might hear my *poeh*. my journey.

**Evone “Snowflake” Martinez** | San Ildefonso, Cochiti

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<sup>1</sup> Tewa for “my journey” or “my story”



**San Ildefonso jar**

c. 1905–10

Clay and paint

9½ x 12 in. (24.1 x 30.5 cm)

IAF.2021

Courtesy of the School for Advanced Research

## **Bernard Mora: Water Jar: A Pueblo of Tesuque Ancestor**

On this ancestral water jar, the black designs on the cream slip represent lengthy and strong cultural ties to the vessel's Tesuque community. This seemingly modest jar dates from around the end of the nineteenth century. These designs were painstakingly painted during a period when time was not defined by monetary value or profitable output.

The maker took care when crafting this pot. Slips of cream and red were applied thinly, before the black designs were added. The pot's surface was smoothed with a polishing stone plucked from the river, a stone that was itself smoothed by water.

The designs represent many things in their beautiful simplicity. Flowers and other plants bloom across the surface, given life by flowing streams of water and wind. Decorated vessels tell stories, and when they are in use their purpose becomes clear and is understood by those using them. Stories change, and designs are interpreted in multiple ways. The designs are painted to invoke blessings to all who encounter this ancestor. Intentional design does not indicate permanence, and versatility is the mark of Pueblo pottery.

Although the main function of this jar was probably to carry or store water, it is likely that it was also used for cooking and serving. The maker's intentions for this pot were entirely practical, as testified by the swirling fingerprints inside the jar. Strokes made permanent during firing are an equally important part of this water jar's story as its painted exterior. These first and final strokes of movement made during the crafting of this vessel give the jar a functional purpose rather than imbue it with the monetary value that might otherwise be placed on it.

Impressions left in jars like this are often overlooked because of the pots' aesthetically pleasing exteriors. But these flaws and imperfections are what make each vessel individual. Even if it is replicated, a water jar ancestor is as unique as its maker's fingerprints. The slips and paint cannot be made the same again; the earth has changed from when the first clay was harvested, and the water flows differently from our ancestors' time. Fire and utility are constants; they can change the function of a jar, but mostly they provide evidence of creation. The base of this Tesuque water jar has the familiar *puki* mark, which shows how the pot's life began while also leaving behind an offering in its impression.

**Bernard Mora** | Tesuque



**Tesuque water jar**

c. 1890–1900

Clay and paint

10½ x 11 in. (26.7 x 27.9 cm)

IAF.824

Courtesy of the School for Advanced Research

## Lesson IV: Catalog Entry Graphic Organizer

**What has my  
pottery witnessed  
throughout its  
life?**

**What kind of life  
has my pottery  
lived?**

**What does my  
pottery say about  
me as its maker?**