

Clay is a fantastic material to use with all ages from the very young to older people and I have taken clay to pre-school playgroups, primary schools, youth clubs and to care homes where the fun and excitement of working with clay has shown on everyones faces. The following projects and ideas for using air dry clay come from techniques used by Ceramicists and Potters using kiln fired clay. Glazes have been substituted with paint and inks.

The only limit is your own and the participants imagination as ideas can be combined in many ways and projects can be any scale from small take home pieces to large group Art projects.

SLAB BUILDING

As the name suggests, this is using clay rolled out into thin slabs to make sculptural or functional work. Once rolled out the clay can be used soft or left to dry a bit and used when leather hard for more precise and sharper flat sided pieces.

Slabs can be cut and joined by scoring along the join and using a small amount of water, or slip, when clay is mixed with water into a paste, and joined to make boxes, vases for dried flowers, sculptures, figures etc.

The clay can be textured or painted or have other materials impressed into it such as shells, beads etc to help decorate the piece.

Slabs can be cut into tile shapes and decorated or drawn into to make a larger group wall piece or smaller tiles can be made to create a mosaic effect. Tiles can also be made using a template of an animal or shape, drawing around it and then painting in the shape.

MODELLING

Clay is perfect for modelling as its own textures can be used for effect, especially in a face model. Allowing the clay to fold and crease and using these within the face can work very well.

3D animals can also be made using newspaper as the body and wrapping a rolled out slab of clay around it to create a hollow body. The head, legs etc can then be modelled on top of this base. This allows the clay to be used more efficiently and makes any sculpture lighter and the air dry clay can be painted, whilst still wet.

A larger wall piece can be made using low relief modelling where features on a face for example are created and many faces are put together for a more dramatic effect. Simpler modelling of shapes can also be fixed all together and painted to create a larger Artwork.

COIL BUILDING

More suitable for primary and secondary children coil building allows large pots and sculptures to be made by rolling out long lengths of clay into coils and then fixing them together by placing them on top of each other and smoothing them together. The process can be done over a period of time allowing larger pots to be made but care has to be taken to keep the top 2 inches moist by wrapping plastic over this area to allow further coils to be added.

Traditional Potters from Africa and India use this method to create beautiful full pots which can also be carved into if the coiled wall is made thick enough.

PINCH POTS

Similar to coil pots but a more instant and easier version with small pots being able to be made very quickly. Pot shapes can be joined together to make spheres or other sculptural shapes.

PRINTING

Clay can be used as a background to printing techniques and is very effective when printed on either as a wall panel or onto a 3D shape or pot. Sponge printing, stencils, mono prints and screen printing can all be done onto clay. Experiment with printing onto the clay and then stretching the clay to create a broken or textured image or doing multiple prints over a large slab of clay or coil pot.

MOULDS

Using air dry clay, moulds can be handy to produce multiple pieces of work or to allow the clay to harden in a certain shape. Rolling out a slab of clay and then draping it over a cardboard tube will give you a rounded shape. Two curved pieces can then be joined using slip and scoring, and made into a tall vase or simple body shape.

An existing bowl can also be used as a press mould to make a new clay bowl by placing the clay into the bowl shape with a layer of cling film or newspaper inbetween to stop the clay sticking.

Polystyrene shapes can also be used to keep clay in a certain shape and allowed to harden whilst being worked on.

Making a mould out of plaster by drawing into the plaster to create a press mould will enable a group to quickly make a large scale piece and allow each person to customise their own piece by stretching or adding more details or painting.

TEXTURES

Clay picks up any texture pressed into it and is limitless in the effects that can be created. The clay can be used to record textures around the room or outside by simply pressing the clay against the surface.

Cling film can be used between the clay and surface if its wet to stop the clay sticking.

A wall of textures can be made as a group work project.

Printing blocks, lace and embossed wallpaper also make good patterns when pressed into soft clay.

Textures can also be made by drawing into the clay and then filling the marks with paint. Once a bit drier, the excess paint can be scraped back leaving the infilled lines and marks. This can be done with all ages and is an alternative way to encourage drawing.

MIXED MEDIA

Adding coloured wire, plastic, printed acetate sheets, stones, ribbon etc etc to the clay sculpture, pot or tile can make it more exciting and develop awareness of different materials and how they feel and react visually when put together.

Holes can be made into clay picture or mirror frames to thread ribbon or coloured wire through to add interest or different materials can be imbedded into the clay to create exciting sculptures.

MORE IDEAS WITH OTHER MATERIALS

ANIMAL PRINT COLLAGE

Using specialist papers with animal skin prints, collages can be made of imaginary animals or aliens or fantastic sea creatures etc. This also works well in groups where the children can discuss their animal or make a group of strange and weird creatures together. Where the animal lives can also be made as the background with sugar paper as the base paper for the collage.

MONOPRINTS

A simple printing technique that can be used for any age. A formica or PVC covered board, old plastic coated banners are good, is covered thinly with rolled out printing ink. A piece of paper is placed gently on top and a pencil drawing is made on the paper. The paper is then lifted off and the drawn image has picked up the ink on the other side. Different colours can be added to the same picture by using different coloured inks.

WITHIES

Withies, or willows, are fantastic at making large scale sculptures and lanterns with older primary and secondary ages. The withies are soaked overnight to make them bendy and then manipulated into shape and held by sticking with masking tape. Withie structures can then be left as open frameworks or covered in wet strength tissue paper, covered in a mixture of PVA and water, which goes tight when dry. These can then be lit from the inside with glow sticks for a lantern parade or set for a show etc.

MARBLING

A favourite with children and sometimes forgotten about, marbling inks make instant fantastic patterns that anyone can do. Once dried the marbled paper can be used for collages, picture frames, book covers etc.

MOSAIC TILES

Another way to make longer lasting mosaic tiles is to use bought ceramic tiles as the base and tile grout and adhesive to fix mosaic pieces onto the tile. Glass beads from Au Naturale, shells, stones, plastic beads etc can all be used to create lovely unique tiles.

The same mosaic pieces can also be used straight onto an outside wall with cement as the adhesive and grout by spreading the wall with mixed cement and the arranging the beads, stones etc into the cement. Large areas can be covered and is a great group project.

Suppliers – NES Arnold Education suppliers Specialist Crafts Lochaber Plumbing for tiles
Artmedia in Inverness Au Naturale Lochaber Building Supplies