

Working with Clay at Horace Mann Elementary

2010/2011 Kiln Coordinators

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Getting Started

- Ann Glassey in the main office has the key to the kiln cage. Be careful not to take it home.
- Choosing a project
 - Look at samples and idea books, ask the teacher what the students have done before, the Ceramics Notebook has projects in it, talk to a kiln coordinator or other docent
- Clay techniques:
 - Slab – add texture, cutouts, form cylinders, press into bowl shapes
 - Coil – join and smooth
 - Pinch Pot – hand form, add decorations and or handles
 - Wheel – not an option for us
- Select a month to create your project and notify a kiln coordinator, even if the date is tentative.

Creating a Project

Determine the amount of clay needed per student by doing a sample and then weighing it, i.e. 1 lb per student. A little extra is better than not enough.

Clay sticks to non-porous surfaces. Put paper on the table or use the canvas mats for the white clay only. Use paper towels or newspaper to line plastic bowls if used for forming.

Most important thing is to join everything properly. Use a tooth brush and water. Rough up the surfaces to join together, wet them and squish them together.

Excess water not necessary, our clay is ready to go. Only give the students the amount of water they need to make connections/slip or it may become a big slimy mess and is actually harder to work with.

Maximum thickness of clay that can be fired safely is less than 1 inch. Make everything hollow or poke holes with a clay needles. Example -- elephant legs. Avoid long skinny things like tails that stick out – join them to the body.

Opportunity while the clay is still wet to fix things

- holes for hanging
- name or initials on back
- smooth rough parts
- make sure all attachments are secure

Toss excess small blobs of clay in the trash. Could do a small extra project if you like with extra clay—shoe print pendants. Save larger unused pieces in a well sealed plastic bag. Excess clay must be wedged properly to be used again but is possible to use.

- Cover or seal in plastic “works in progress” so you can return to them later if necessary.
- Use the front sink, closest to the door for cleaning up after clay. Don’t put any unnecessary clay down the drain. Use a bucket to rinse tools. Throw the dirty water outside—clay is organic and will be absorbed into the ground.

- Place items on shelf to dry. Put them close together to save space for other classes. Space gets tight in the kiln cage when it gets busy.
- Label your items with your name and class so that we can find them on the shelf, we have templates available for you.
- Can dry slowly in plastic to be sure no cracking
- If an item breaks at this stage try Magic Mender or fire both pieces and use epoxy to glue it back together when done.
- Can cover flat items with drywall to prevent curling
- When dry, last chance to smooth rough parts or bumps that will be sharp after fired. Use sand paper or file. Do this over a trash can. Can wear a dust mask. Very fragile at this stage—be careful.
- Let items dry 1 – 2 weeks, sometimes more. Ready to fire when bone dry = not cold to the touch. 1st fire = bisque fire
- Can only fire paper filled items on Fridays

Glazing (after bisque fired)

- Rinse items off to remove dust particles
- Select your glaze colors and shake them up really well before using
- Pour out the amount needed into small cups. Do not dip brushes directly into the main container to avoid contaminating the whole batch. Make sure your brushes are clean before getting started.
- If the container is getting low, let us know and we will order more (actually, this goes for anything back there—leave us a note or send email).
- Glaze color before firing is different from after firing. Explain to students (especially the younger classes) that the color is different before and after because it is transformed from the heat of the kiln. We have glaze sample tiles to help you choose colors.
- Use two coats. You want enough to cover the surface, but not so much it drips onto the kiln shelf when firing.
- Wipe off all glaze from the bottom of the item so that it can be placed on the kiln shelf. Make sure holes are clear of glaze.
- Clean the brushes well to avoid contaminating other students' projects.
- Glazed items can be fired the next day, but they stay in the kiln longer because of the higher heat. Also, we can't fit as many items in the kiln for a glaze fire because they can't touch each other or they will fuse together. (translation – it can take a while!)

Glaze Options

- Pre-mixed, lead free glazes. Possible to use more than one color per item (ie. inside and out)
- Stroke and Coat, colorful and predictable (expensive – use carefully).

- Some under glaze colors to paint multi colors on items and clear glaze over. A good choice for colorful details.
- Still have some stain and glaze powders that can mixed.

Project Log

- Make sure your project is filled in on the project log with the date it was created, the class/teacher, your name and a description of your project. We'll fill out the rest as the steps are completed. New this year, sign up in advance for a month – max 4 projects per month. Tentative dates are OK, too.
- We assign a Kiln Coordinator to each project. One of us will help move your project along and be your contact person if you have any questions
- Projects are processed in the order that they are created (generally). Exceptions are things that dry faster or that tie in with a teaching unit. Usually it takes 2 months from start to finish.

Final Comments

- It helps to have several parent volunteers the day you are creating the project with the class. Pick something simple to start and work your way up to more complex projects. Even simple clay projects are fun for all students. Do a tester or think through each step.
- Please – keep the kiln area clean. Janitors rarely come back there. Wipe down shelves, clean tools and sweep if necessary.
- Seal all usable clay well in plastic.
- Avoid blocking access to the kiln cage with other items from the art room.
- Everyone loves clay – have fun!