

Bas-Relief Animals in Clay

Grade Level: Early Childhood

Subjects: Visual Arts, Social Studies, Math

Media: Sculpture, Clay

Featured Artwork:



Crane, Ca. 1930, Olinalá, Guerrero, Mexico, Lacquered and painted gourd and wood, The Nelson A. Rockefeller Mexican Folk Art Collection. 85.98.664



Sea Turtle Pendant, 9 – 13th century, Panama, Coclé Culture, Gold, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Oppenheimer, In honor of Mr. and Mrs. Marshall T. Steves, 98.6



Tetradrachm of Athens, Greek, 450-410 B.C., Silver, Purchased with the W.C. Maverick Fund, 91.111.249

OBJECTIVE:

Students will learn about the geometric shapes and organic shapes found in animals and nature. Then they will explore the bas-relief clay technique to make a shallow sculpture of an animal in its habitat.

DISCUSSION:

Animals are an excellent subject for early childhood art explorations. From the ancient cave paintings of Lascaux, France and Altamira, Spain to the cultures across the globe, artists from every era have depicted animals in drawing, painting and sculpture. Animals are found throughout the San Antonio Museum of Art's encyclopedic collection.

This elegantly rendered crane is an excellent testimony to the folk artist's ability to transform a simple object, such as a gourd, into a vibrant and graceful work of art. This object has been exhibited in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, Yale Museum of Art and currently resides in the San Antonio Museum of Art.

The *Sea Turtle Pendant* in the San Antonio Museum of Art's collection was made by ancient people of the Coclé culture of Panamá. The pendant, made out of gold, was most likely used for ornamental purposes and may have been used to harness the magical and protective powers of

the sea turtle. Gold jewelry has been found in graves of the elite during the period between A.D. 600 and A.D. 1000.

The tetradrachm was a silver coin of ancient Athens. The silver used to make the coins was sourced from the nearby mines at Laurion. One side of the coin depicts the head of the goddess Athena, whom Athens is named after, beneath an olive branch. The reverse of the coin reveals an owl, sacred to Athena. The legend ΑΘΕ on the reverse gives the first three letters of Athens' name in Greek (translated as A-TH-E). The design on the Athenian tetradrachm received only minor changes for over three centuries, causing it to become one of the most recognized coins of the ancient world.

The bas-relief technique is used to create a shallow, three-dimensional sculpture on a flat surface. Details can be added or carved into the surface. For early childhood, the bas-relief allows students to depict animals which would be difficult to sculpt using the modeling method.

When working with clay, it is important to remind students that clay has a memory, like elastic. While two pieces of moist clay will stick together when damp, they will “remember” that they are two different pieces and separate when dry. To avoid this, it is necessary to trick the clay into thinking it is one unified piece by following a set of steps called The Three S's:

The Three S's (Score, Slip and Smooth): When one piece of clay is attached to another these 3 steps should be followed to ensure the clay will stick together.

1. **Scoring:** A criss-cross pattern of scratches is made in both of the clay surfaces to be joined in order to roughen them.
2. **Slip:** A thin solution of water and clay that is lightly applied like glue to the two pieces of clay which will be joined.
3. **Smooth:** Blending the seams of two connecting pieces of clay for adherence and strength. Ideally, you should not be able to tell where two pieces were joined.

MATERIALS:

- 8.5 x 11” white paper
- Pencils
- Longhorn white clay (½ lb. per student)
- Clay tools
- Popsicle sticks
- Toothpicks
- Wire clay cutter
- Sponges
- Slip (clay mixed with water) in small plastic containers
- Optional: Canvas placemats
- Optional: Glazes, watercolors or acrylics for painting bisque-fired sculptures



PROCESS:

1. Introduce the concept of animals in art by reading a selection of SAMA's Arte Kids early childhood books.
2. Pass out a piece of white bond paper to each student. With a pencil, have them draw a picture of the animal that they want to create out of clay.
3. Cut slabs of clay (approximately ½ inch thick) and distribute to students.
4. Demonstrate how to roll out a 5 x 7" rectangular slab of clay and condition it with fingers on both sides. Guide students through the process of using a rolling pin to flatten their clay, then using their fingers to smooth the clay horizontally and vertically on both sides. This minimizes the chances of the clay cracking in the center as it dries
5. Provide each student with a separate, fist-sized piece of clay. This clay will be used to build the animal relief on the slab.
 - Students will use half of the clay to make the body of their animal.
 - They will use the remaining clay to make a head for their animal, as well as other features such as legs, a beak, a tail, etc.
6. Students will attach the shapes of their clay animal to the slab using the Three S's.
7. Demonstrate how to use the clay tools to create different marks, and distribute clay tools to students. They can use these to make a variety of marks on their clay slab and animal.
 - Model how to pinch the clay to create raised texture and use fingertips to create other kinds of marks.
8. Once the animal is positioned on the clay, the students can add details such as eyes, claws, feathers and the texture of the animal's fur.
9. After the students have completed their animal, encourage them to fill in the background with the appropriate habitat; using raised elements, such as coils, and incised elements, such as carved lines.
10. Allow the finished clay slabs to dry completely before firing or painting.
11. Unfired clay slabs can be painted with acrylics. The first time clay is fired in the kiln is the bisque firing. Bisque-fired clay slabs can be painted with watercolors or acrylics; or they can be glazed and fired a second time. Longhorn white clay can be fired at cone 03 or 04.

TEKS:

§117.2. Art, Kindergarten

- (a) (2) By analyzing artistic styles and historical periods students develop respect for the traditions and contributions of diverse cultures. Students respond to and analyze artworks, thus contributing to the development of lifelong skills of making informed judgments and evaluations.
- (b) Knowledge and skills. (K.1) Perception. The student develops and organizes ideas from the environment. The student is expected to: (A) glean information from the environment, using the five senses; and (B) identify colors, textures, forms, and subjects in the environment. (K.2) Creative expression/performance. The student expresses ideas through original artworks, using a variety of media with appropriate skill. The student is expected to: (A) create artworks, using a

variety of colors, forms, and lines; (B) arrange forms intuitively to create artworks; and (C) develop manipulative skills when drawing, painting, printmaking, and constructing artworks, using a variety of materials (K.3) Historical/cultural heritage. The student demonstrates an understanding of art history and culture as records of human achievement. The student is expected to: (A) identify simple subjects expressed in artworks.

§111.12. Mathematics, Kindergarten.

(a) (1) Within a well-balanced mathematics curriculum, the primary focal points at Kindergarten are developing whole-number concepts and using patterns and sorting to explore number, data, and shape. (2) Students progress from informal to formal language to describe two- and three-dimensional geometric figures and likenesses in the physical world. Students begin to develop measurement concepts as they identify and compare attributes of objects and situations.

§113.11. Social Studies, Kindergarten

(a) (1) Students apply geographic concepts of location. (b) Knowledge and skills. (11) Culture. The student understands similarities and differences among people. Lessons are written by area educators and the San Antonio Museum of Art Education department. If you are interested in sharing your lesson ideas featuring works of art from the museum's collections with the San Antonio Museum of Art Education department, please email education@samuseum.org.