Pearl at Home

Art projects designed for family fun, for suggested ages of 5 and up to be completed at home with easily-accessible art materials.

NATIVE AMERICAN PINCH POT

Share your artwork with us on social media! Tag @pearlfinchermfa, and use #pearlathome

6815 Cypresswood Dr, Spring, TX 77379 | 281.376.6322 | pearlmfa.org
Shape the clay

Start with a ball of clay a little bigger than a large egg, and roll it between your palms to be sure it is stuck together.

Put your clay ball on the wax paper; your wax paper can be directly on a table, or on top of a paper plate (optional). Use one or two thumbs to make a deep hole in the center of the clay ball. Begin to make the hole wider, and the bowl walls thinner, by carefully pinching and stretching the sides. Turn the bowl as you need and try to be sure the walls are even. Level the top last.

TIP: If your clay is too dry, sprinkle it with a LITTLE bit of water, just moist enough to where you can mold it. Don’t make it soupy!

MATERIALS

• Air-dry clay: Any brand. We used white clay, but terracotta (red) will also work.
• Wax paper, baking parchment, or freezer paper  • Optional: Paper plate
• Tempera paint in black and brown  • Brushes, water container, paper towels

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Pottery is one of the oldest artforms and inventions in the world, dating back to over 30,000 years ago. Traditionally, pottery is made by forming clay into a desired shape and then heating it at high temperatures to harden it. Most pieces of pottery are utilitarian – meaning they serve a purpose, like transporting water, serving food, or carrying items – but they are often decorative as well. Cultures all around the world have their own pottery traditions, including distinctive ways of decorating them.

In this project we’ll use air-dry clay, which does not need to be fired in a kiln – it will dry on its own in 24-36 hours. Our decorative patterns take inspiration from Native American archaeological culture in the southwest United States. Read more about the history of pottery in this area in our “History” section at the end of this packet!
Paint a design

The Native American potters who lived in the Grand Canyon area based many of their designs on the natural world around them. They used the animals, plants and weather of the region to tell stories or to honor nature on their pottery.

The ancient traditional pigments are still used by today’s artists in the region. The pigments are gathered from local mineral deposits and made into ceramic “glazes” on-site. We are using only a few colors of tempera paint to emulate the colors they use.

Paint your design directly on the wet clay before it dries. Look at the examples in this packet for inspiration. Both the paint and clay will dry at the same time.

Please note: Your finished piece will not be food-safe or waterproof.

TIPS:

• To turn your pot during painting, turn the wax paper (or plate, if you used one) instead of grabbing the pot itself.

• Leave your pot on the wax paper while it dries so you don’t handle the pot again until it dries all the way.

• It will take about 24-36 hours for your pot to dry completely. The clay is a little gray when wet, but it will turn more white when it is dry.

• Turn your pot over once the edge is dry to help the bottom dry all the way through faster.
Scratching the Surface of Traditional Southwest Pottery:

**Mogollon** (pronounced mug-e-own)

“The cultural tradition archaeologists call Mogollon is named after the Mogollon Mountains of New Mexico, which are named after Don Juan Ignacio Flores Mogollón, a Spanish Governor of New Mexico (1712–1715).

The earliest examples of domestically-produced pottery in the Southwest come from the Mogollon. Inhabiting an area that includes modern southeastern Arizona, southwestern New Mexico, as well as bits of northern Mexico and west Texas, the Mogollon were likely the first farmers in the region – with archaeological evidence of their activity stretching back to 300 BCE, if not earlier. Sometime in the middle of the 3rd century CE the Mogollon fired brown ware pottery in a style that would persist for well over a thousand years. Mogollon pottery is utilitarian first and foremost, but the simple forms they pioneered provide the bedrock for everything that was to come.

**Where?**

The Mogollon cultural traditions are found in high-altitude and desert areas concentrated along rivers in the mountains and plateaus of what is now central Arizona, west-central and southern New Mexico, western Texas, and northern Sonora and Chihuahua.

**Who & When?**

There were several “branches” of Mogollon culture in different areas from approximately A.D. 200 until sometime between 1400 and 1450. The most famous of these is the **Mimbres Mogollon**. Archaeologists divide the era into three periods: Early Pithouse - A.D. 200–550; Late Pithouse - A.D. 550–1000; and Mogollon Pueblo - A.D.1000–1450. The Mogollon Pueblo period includes the Classic Mimbres era (1000–1130).
At first, the people lived by foraging, but around A.D. 900 they became more reliant on farming maize (corn), beans, and squash, becoming less mobile as a result. As their dependence on maize agriculture increased, they built extensive irrigation features. These are especially common along the Mimbres River during the tenth through twelfth centuries. In a nutshell, agriculture means people need to stay in one place to tend the plants, so they need permanent shelter and a way to organize labor. It also means that there needs to be a way to preserve/store the crops so weather, insects, and animals can’t get to what is stored easily. In the American Southwest, pottery was extensively part of the solution to that need.

In the first villages around A.D. 550 (Early Pithouse period), people made brown pottery using the coil-and-scrape method, sometimes covering vessels with a red slip. “Late Pithouse villages (A.D. 550-1000) were large, with dozens of pit structures clustered together around a larger, more elaborate ceremonial pit structure. In this era, people also developed red-on-brown painted pottery, followed by white-on-red, which was in turn followed by black-on-white.”

Around A.D. 1000, people in these regions began living in above-ground stone pueblos. Later a great deal of diversity in the region developed, including masonry or adobe construction above ground, and in pottery, displaying a variety of painted black-on-white and polychrome traditions. Villages were still usually located on valley floors near good agricultural land. From A.D. 1200-1300 cliff dwellings, such as those at southwestern New Mexico’s Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument, became more common. Other large adobe pueblos were developed along the Upper Gila River and its tributaries (1200s–1400s). Masonry pueblos appeared in the Mogollon Rim area of Arizona (A.D. 1200s–1300s), with some of the last in the Mogollon region’s areas with large populations. Although much of the area where we find Mogollon culture was eventually claimed by more mobile groups, like the Apache, many modern Pueblo people believe the Mogollon traditions are part of their heritage.
Mimbres: (pronounced mim-brays)

Who & Where?

“Archaeologists often use the term ‘Mimbres culture’ to refer generally to groups who lived in the region and produced Mimbres Black-on-White Pottery.” The culture was centered in the mountains and plateaus of the South Central Southwest of the US (SW New Mexico - SE Arizona) extending into Northern Mexico. “The name Mimbres — Spanish for “little willow”— is also the name of the river running through the center of the region.” Unfortunately, like in other important archaeological areas all over the world, the beautiful ceramics have been indiscriminately taken from Mimbres cultural sites, destroying important information about how the people of that era and culture lived. These days, scientists work with landowners and land managers to help investigate new sites and rebuild others as best they can.

When?

The roots of Mimbres culture can be seen among the first pottery-makers in the region, the Mogollon, from around A.D. 200. The classic Mimbres period is marked by the exceptional & distinctive black-on-white pottery and large village complexes found by modern archaeologists that lasted between A.D. 1000 and 1130.

Beginning around A.D. 900 organized agriculture allowed thousands of people to live in the area. “The inhabitants of the Mimbres region farmed the floodplain along the Mimbres River and other major drainages as well as the upland hill slopes. Crops included corn, beans, and squash, as well as cotton. People hunted wild game, including rabbits, deer, antelope, and birds, and they gathered wild plants, such as juniper berries, cacti, mesquite, and various greens. Classic Mimbres black-on-white vessels often display complex geometric designs or naturalistic scenes depicting people and animals. Some depict daily life, and others provide information about ritual activities.”
Today?
Over time things in the area changed enough that the people started living differently. Culture eventually evolved into the separate Puebloan tribal groups we see today. Pottery was still an important part of the people’s lives but the decoration of the pottery developed in several different directions, with styles now named after the various pueblos in the Southwest.

Broken Pots! Why?
Many examples we have of Mimbres culture pottery were found at burial sites. Pottery and the art created on the clay surfaces was an integral part of the entire culture, making the object more important to each of these people than a plate or bowl is to us today. It is thought that because of this great importance the people may have believed the pottery carried some of the spirit of the owner or had a spirit of its own. Archaeologists and cultural anthropologists think that at the time of a person’s death or burial, the holes in the bottom of the ancient bowls were put there on purpose as part of the Native Americans’ spiritual belief that the hole would release the spirit of the bowl, in turn helping to release the deceased person’s spirit so that they could pass into the afterlife.

Who or What is Mogollon? Archeology Southwest-Fact Sheet Series-2013, www.archeologysouthwest.org
Who or What is Mimbres?, Archeology Southwest-Fact Sheet Series-2013, www.archeologysouthwest.org
Treasures From The Basement: Pottery Of The Greater Ancient Southwest, Nate King, 02.01, 2017