

Teachers' Notes: Using Slabs of Clay

by Gemma Mc Girr

Materials: *Terracotta or natural clay*

1 wooden board or piece of cardboard per child

1 plastic bucket with tight fitting lid (for storing the clay)

Cling film

The children can make slabs by pressing out the clay, by pounding the clay or by rolling it out using a rolling pin. (Rolling pins can be made cheaply by cutting a broom/brush handle in sections.)

By pushing their fingers into the clay the children can make interesting patterns, lines of prints, circular patterns, repeat patterns of squares, etc.

By pinching the surface of the clay between thumb and index finger, the children can make linear patterns. These can be repeated all over the slab. The children can 'draw' on the clay using this method to make faces, animals real or imaginary. Other textures can be added to these using found objects.

The children can make patterns on the slab using the **coil and pellet** method. For this they roll out fine coils of clay and place them on the surface of the slab. If the slab is moistened first the coil will stick to the surface. The coils may also be pressed on giving a 'flattened' look to the work. The pellets are little beads of clay which can be added in the same way to create interesting textures and to add detail to the work. Try some Celtic designs using this method.

When the children are using slabs to make structures, ensure that they are joined properly or they will part company when the clay dries out. Lots of practise at joining will prevent this from happening. They can create very interesting shapes with the slabs by curving them, cutting shapes from the slabs, adding texture.

By pressing found objects into the clay the children can create their own 'fake fossils'. They could have lots of fun deciding on which objects to use to create their own imaginary fossil remains. Feathers, twigs, stones, shells, bits of fabric, wire etc. could be some of the items used.

The children can write onto the slab using hieroglyphics to tell their own story. This could also be done using ogham.

When the clay is dry the children can paint their designs to add more detail, if they wish.