

# Teachers Notes: Making clay masks and models

by Gemma Mc Girr

**Materials:** *Terracotta or natural clay*  
*1 wooden board or piece of cardboard per child*  
*Clay tools, lollipop sticks*  
*Found objects to create textures*  
*Flour sieve or tea strainer (makes great hair!)*  
*Kitchen paper or newspaper*  
*1 plastic bucket with tight fitting lid (for storing the clay)*  
*Cling film*

When the children have had lots of practise working with clay, pinching, poking, pulling, squeezing, adding to and subtracting pieces, they will be very familiar with how clay behaves. They need lots of this practise as it will give them a more satisfying outcome.

Encourage the children to look at the samples of masks and to talk about what they were used for. Are they ceremonial? Are they frightening? Are they decorative? Why do we use masks today? In Venice people wore masks to hide blemishes and were an everyday sight. Now they are very decorative and worn at Carnival time.

The children can decide what type of mask they wish to make after they have looked at the samples.

Scrunch up a piece of kitchen paper or newspaper to act as a mould. Roll out the slab of clay and place it over the paper. Now the children decide on what features they wish to give their mask. By pushing a small bit of clay through the sieve they can create great hair. They can add to, or subtract pieces from the slab to create features. They can texture the slab using their found objects. When adding features ensure they are properly joined or they will fall off when the clay dries. The masks can also be painted when dry to add more detail.

When modelling animals and sturdy figures, the children will learn a lot about weight distribution. It is easier for them to pull shapes from the clay than to add them on. Again they will need lots of practise at joining or the bits will fall off when the clay dries. They can make characters from stories, fantastical creatures or their pets. This will encourage them to look closely at animals to see their shapes, features and movements.

For modelling heads, encourage the children to feel their own heads and their friends' heads. Where is the biggest part of their head? Where are the features in relation to each other? Eyebrows/top of their ear, mouth/lobe of their ear. Where does the nose begin? Feel the shape of their chin. Let them use mirrors to look closely at themselves, also look at profiles. Look at their hair, how far down their forehead does it come, how far down the back of their neck does it come?

Keep the models covered in cling film from session to session to prevent them drying out, or cover them with damp cloths.