

Clay Lesson with Infants (1)

'Strange Creatures'

Gemma Mc Girr

Curriculum Strand: Clay (Visual Arts Curriculum p.21)

Objective: *Explore and discover the possibilities of clay as a medium for imaginative expression (p.21)*
Make a clay form and manipulate it with fingers to suggest a subject (p.21)

Linkage: **Paint and Colour** > *Use colour to express vividly recalled feelings, experiences and imaginings (p.19)*
Drawing > *Make drawings based on vividly recalled feelings, real and imaginative experiences and stories (p.18)*

Integration Possibilities:

Oral Language: Focus on descriptive detail and begin to be explicit in relation to people, places, times, processes, events, colour, shape, size, position (p.20)

Developing this Activity in Class:

Getting Started: Before I start an art lesson I find it very helpful to do a little exercise with the children to unlock their imaginations and to create a safe environment in the classroom for them to show and discuss their work without fear of ridicule. "When I was a child it took up to six weeks to send a photograph to my cousins in Australia. We can send photographs in minutes now with our mobile phones! This is because people used their imaginations and made this happen. Anything can happen in our imagination if we only let it! Close your eyes and imagine a big door. It can be any colour you like. Written across the door in big capital letters is the word IMAGINATION. Now reach out and slowly open the door, let your imagination out! Open your eyes and let me see the sparkle! Now we can do anything, our imaginations are at work and we are all different!"

Materials Needed: Potter's clay
 Wooden boards or strong card (to work on)
 Clay tools or lollipop sticks
 Plastic bucket with tight fitting lid, or plastic bags for storing the clay.

Stimulus: Give each child a ball of clay that fits comfortably in their hand. Ask them to describe what the clay feels like - "cold, sticky, mucky, slippery, gooey" are some of the usual responses. "Can you pinch the clay? What happens when you pinch it? What does it look like? Does it remind you of anything? Give it lots of pinches, now what does it look like? Roll it back into a ball and let's poke the clay with our fingers. Try that all over the clay. Does it remind you of anything? Describe it. What happens when we squeeze the clay? Give it a really big squeeze! Try squeezing it with both hands. What does it look like now? If we twist the clay what happens? Describe what it looks like. Give it a big twist! If it breaks can we put it back together again? Try small twists all over the clay. What does it look like? Have you ever seen anything like that before? Let's try squeezing, pinching, pulling, poking and twisting the clay? Can you describe what it looks like? Have you ever seen anything like that before? What could you call it?"

Activity: Hold a ball of clay up to your ear and tell the children you can hear a sound. You can be as dramatic as you like doing this, the children love it!

Ask them to 'listen' to their ball of clay. "Can you hear anything? Is there something hiding in the clay trying to get out? What does it sound like? Is it something big or small?" Explain that they can help by pinching, poking, squeezing, pulling and twisting the clay. When forms emerge from the clay, ask the children to describe them. "Have you ever seen one before? Does it remind you of anything you have ever seen before? Could you give it a name? How does it move? How many legs does it have? How does it eat? What does it like to eat? Does it have a family? Does it have any friends? Does it go to school? What games does it like to play?" The children are manipulating the clay as they describe their 'creatures', using the clay tools to add texture to the clay. At the end of the lesson, explain to the children that the little creature is tired and wants to go home, but it will come back another day. If it cannot come, perhaps one of its friends will come instead! At a later stage the children might want to 'keep' their creatures, they can be left to dry and painted, if the children wish.

Evaluation/Looking and Responding:

This will be happening as the children work. The children can then take turns describing what they have done and question each other about the creatures they found hiding in the clay. Encourage the children to look at and respond to the work of Antony Gormley, particularly 'Field for the British Isles'. Can they describe how he might have made all the clay figures that make up the piece?

Extension Activities:

When the children have been given time to explore clay like this they can find all kinds of real and imaginary creatures in the clay, animals, characters from stories and poems.

ICT Possibilities:

http://www.handsoncrafts.org/studio_frame.htm

This is an interactive site which allows the children to create a face jug online. (You need Shockwave on your computer.)

Using the I Am An Artist DVD:

The *Clay* programmes on the DVD offer opportunities to see and hear the children using clay as a medium for imaginative expression.

Note:

I found that using a plant spray was best for keeping the clay moist as the children were working. Leaving containers of water on the tables in Infant Classes can lead to rivers of clay flowing in all directions!

Relevant Artists:

Antony Gormley

Relevant Websites:

Field for the British Isles

http://www.antonygormley.com/full_list/280x1_field_for_british.htm

Antony Gormley's official website

<http://www.antonygormley.com>

Scoilnet, which is a portal to lots of sites useful in the classroom

<http://www.scoilnet.ie>