

Teachers' Notes: Introducing 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

Terracotta or natural clay is the best to use when introducing clay to children. They can explore clay through the senses and should be encouraged to respond to the feel, look and smell of the clay. Each child is given a ball of clay that fits comfortably in his/her hand. Encourage them to describe what it feels like, "it's cold, wet, sticky, squishy, soft, smooth, mucky....."

What can we do with clay? What happens when we pinch, poke, pull, squeeze, twist, bend, roll, tear or punch the clay?

Encourage the children to describe what happens when they try each of the above activities. What does the shape they have made remind them of? Have they ever seen anything like it before? Could they give it a name? Can they change the shape? How?

Ask the children to close their eyes and try the activities. Encourage them to talk about what they have done, to describe what they have made.

Try tearing pieces from the clay (subtractive method) and putting them back (additive method) on a different part of the ball of clay. Talk about the shapes they have made.

By doing the above activities the children are exploring the possibilities of clay as a medium for imaginative expression; they are learning how clay behaves and how they can use it to make their imaginings take shape and form.

When children have had several sessions exploring clay through touch, they can begin to make things from the clay. For younger children it is better to pull shapes from the clay rather than joining on bits as they are not yet adept at joining and may be disappointed if bits fall off when the clay dries. Other materials can be introduced, lollipop sticks and matchsticks as extra construction materials, found objects to create texture. The children can work from their imagination, characters from stories, poems, songs, T.V. They can work from their own experiences, family members, friends, pets.

Care of clay:

Clay of the right plasticity should be stored by wrapping tightly in plastic bags and sealing thoroughly or it will dry out. At the end of each session the children can put their clay in sandwich bags. If the clay has dried out slightly, use a plant spray to moisten it, then put it in the bags and seal tightly. They can be kept in the tightly sealed bucket until needed.

Poems to Stimulate Fingers for Working with Clay

My Creature

I made a creature
Out of clay
Just what it is
Is hard to say.
Its neck is thin,
Its legs are fat,
Its like a bear
And like a bat.

Its like a snake
And like a snail,
It has a little
Curly tail,
A shaggy mane,
A droopy beard,
Its ears are long,
Its smile is weird.

It has four horns,
One droopy eye,
Two floppy wings
(though it can't fly),
It only sits
Upon my shelf-
Just think, I made it
By myself!

Jack Prelutsky

Picking Noses

When I was young
I picked my nose.
I just said,
"Gimme one of those!"

Now I've gone off
The one I chose;
You wouldn't swap
I don't suppose?

Colin Mc Naughton

Pat-a-Cake, Pat-a-Cake

Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake,
Baker's man,
Bake me a cake
As fast as you can.
Pat it and prick it
And mark it with B
And put it in the oven
For Baby and me.

Anon

Black Dot

A black dot
A jelly tot

A water-wiggler
A tail-jiggler

A leg-kicker
A sitting slicker

A panting puffer
A fly-snuffer

A high-hopper
A belly-flopper

A catalogue
To make me
FROG

Libby Houston

Serendipity the Snail

Serendipity the snail
Can't move very fast.
I've been waiting ages for her-
Here she comes at last.
Strolling slowly on her tummy
Down the garden path.
I tried it once and I was told
To go and have a bath.

Wendy Cope

A Centipede

A centipede can run at great speed,
Because of his number of legs,
But when he hangs out his socks to dry,
It costs him a fortune in pegs.

A centipede likes to wear Wellington boots,
But because of his centipede brain,
It takes such a time to sort all the pairs,
That he's never in time for the rain.

A centipede has one hundred legs,
But I'm glad that I haven't because
When the front of a centipede gets where it's going
His back end is still where it was.

Julie Holder

The Geek-Squaw-Hide-Behind

One of the most amazing beasts
Is the Geek-Squaw-Hide-Behind,
But because it's always in back of
a tree
It's impossible to find.

Ennis Rees

My Sister Laura

My sister Laura's bigger than me
And lifts me up quite easily.
I can't lift her, I've tried and
tried;
She must have something heavy
inside.

Spike Milligan

The Slithergadee

The Slithergadee has crawled out
of the sea
He may catch all the others, but
he won't catch me.
No, you won't catch me, old
Slithergadee;
You may catch all the others, but
you wo....

Shel Silverstein

One Potato, Two Potato

One potato, two potato,
Three potato, four,
Five potato, six potato,
Seven potato, more!

Anon

Humpty Dumpty

Humpty Dumpty
Sat on the wall,
Humpty Dumpty
Had a great fall.
All the king's horses
And all the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty
Together again.

Anon

A Tortoise Called Joe

There once was
A tortoise called Joe
Whose progress
Was painfully slow.
He'd stop for a week,
Look around,
Take a peek,
Then unlike a shot,
Off he'd go.

Michael Palin