

# HERPETOLOGICAL HANDBUILDING

Using Clay to Learn about Amphibians!



There are several different classes in the animal kingdom used to identify creatures: reptiles, birds, fish, mammals, insects, and amphibians. Each of these groups consists of animals that have certain attributes in common- where they live, how they breathe, what they eat, and more! One of the most fascinating groups among these is the amphibians: creatures that live underwater AND on land! These organisms slightly resemble reptiles and take the form of frogs and toads, salamanders, caecilians.

Have your students research amphibians and their unique habitats while taking note of how they use their colors to protect themselves. Many amphibians boast bright colors to warn enemies that they are poisonous, and others have colors that mimic the environment to confuse predators and hide. When the clay amphibians have been constructed and bisque fired, encourage your students to use Crystaltex glazes to create brightly colored or camouflaged creatures!

CTL-67 Summer Mango  
LG-40 Dark Green  
LG-26 Turquoise

CTL-41 Melon  
LG-760 Pale Yellow



## Lesson Plan Goals and Objectives:

- Students will research different habitats and learn about the influence of ecosystems on individual creatures.
- Students will learn about “classes” in the animal kingdom and about how different characteristics set different groups of animals apart.
- Students will learn about defense mechanisms that animals employ to keep themselves safe in their natural habitat. Camouflage and bright colorful warning patterns are common among these forms of defense.
- Students will select colors based on research and understanding of animal color and behavior.
- Students will also learn how to research and sketch for a project and follow through in modeling that sketch into a three-dimensional creation using handbuilding techniques.

## National Visual Art and Core Standards:

- Utilize inquiry methods of observation, research, and experimentation to explore unfamiliar subjects through art-making.
- Through experimentation, build skills in various media and approaches to art-making.
- Create art that represents natural and constructed environments.
- Apply visual organizational strategies to design and produce a work of art, design, or media that clearly communicates information or ideas.



## Tools and Materials:

- Paper
- Pencil
- Pen
- Rolling Pin
- AMACO Low Fire Versa Clay No. 20
- AMACO Scoring Tool
- Hardwood Modeling Tools
- Rubber Rib
- Water
- Sponge
- Canvas Covered Board
- AMACO Crystaltex Glazes
- AMACO LG Glazes

CTL-61 Buttercup  
LG-21 Dark Blue  
LG-46 Leaf Green

## Step by Step Instructions:

- 1. Research and Sketching:** Teach your students about the different species there are in the animal kingdom. Explain to them what is unique about amphibians! Some amphibians have features like webbed toes, special colors, and gills that make it easier to survive their habitats. The students should consider where the amphibian lives and what kinds of colors and features it would need to protect itself from harm. As they learn, allow them to take notes and draw a color sketch of a particular amphibian they wish to build in clay.



- 2. Pinching:** Each student should pinch two balls of clay into bowl shapes that will be joined to form the hollow body. If the creature is a salamander, the bowls should be skinny and long, and frogs and toads will need fatter, wider bowls. Remember that a hole needs to be added to the body before firing to keep the piece from exploding in the kiln.



- 3. Joining:** To join the two bowls at the lip, score and slip each side with a fork and carefully press them together. Then, with a wooden modeling tool or their fingers, show your students how to blend the clay from either side to seal the bond between the two sides. If the pieces are not properly joined, there could be cracking and fragility later. To finish the body and make sure it won't crack at the seam, your



students should roll a thin coil out and place it over the seam, blending it into the surrounding clay.

**5. Details:** Once your students all have differently shaped bodies for their amphibians, they can slightly squeeze and mold the hollow body to start creating the shape of their amphibian. Making arms, legs, eyes and other details can be done by rolling out coils and other shapes. These appendages can be added by scoring both surfaces, applying slip, and pushing them together. Remind your students to blend and compress joined areas together to form tighter, better looking bonds.



**6. Finishing up:** Once they are completely dry, the amphibians can be bisque fired to cone 04 and returned to the students for glazing. Your students should have already picked out a color for their amphibians- one that is appropriate for its surroundings and survival method. The Crystaltex glazes should be applied by brush carefully- making sure there are 3 coats and that there is no glaze on the bottom of the piece. The students may arrange the glaze crystals (the small rocks in the glaze) with the tip of their brush or just let them appear randomly- they will be a big surprise for your students after the glaze fire!

After firing at medium speed to cone 05, the Crystaltex glazes will have morphed into vibrant, glossy surfaces that boast exciting bursts of color that will mimic the coloration of amphibians and fascinate your students. We hope your class enjoys learning about these fantastic and unique creatures and are excited to create one of their very own! **Hop to it!**

