

# *sleeping* **Beauties**

*exploring historical Asian ceramic pillows*

Lesson Plan #70    Level: 5-12



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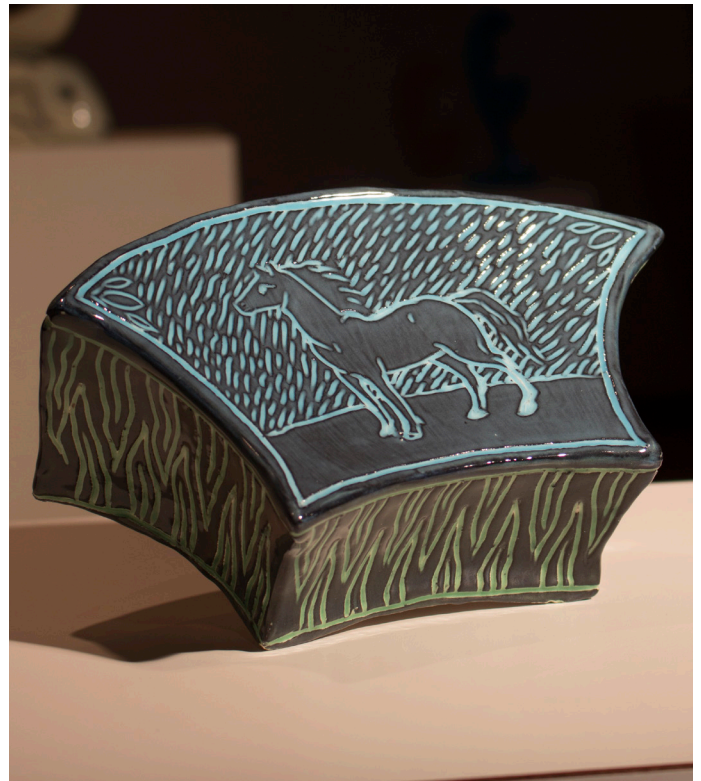




## — Ceramic Pillow Lesson Plan —

Today, the word "pillow" conjures up something soft. But in ancient cultures from Mesopotamia to Asia, rigid headrests were common and even treasured. Ancient Egyptians slept on stone pillows in an effort to keep bugs from crawling into their ears, mouths, and noses. Early Asian cultures believed that soft pillows stole energy from your body while you slept. In Africa, headrests were commonly made of wood. Several pillows, discovered in King Tut'ankhamun's tomb, were made of both wood and ivory.

In China, small ceramic pillows were produced in great numbers and variety of styles. Most of these pillows were simple clay boxes. Often in the shape of a stylized cloud, and with slip decoration, some were elaborately sculpted. Reclining figures, temples, tigers, and rabbits were sometimes used as the bases of pillows, as they related to the concepts of sleep, darkness, and night time. According to scholars, some cultures believed that a pillow could affect sleep and therefore, decorative imagery was very important.



### Visual Art Standards

- Create ceramic pillow with sgraffito imagery.
- Research and interpret historical ceramic art.
- Relate personal stories to ancient art concepts.

### Objectives and Goals

- Learn the history of functional art in different cultures.
- Learn slab hand-building technique.
- Learn sgraffito decoration.
- Explore personal narratives with the use of symbols and images

### Tools & Materials

- 20 M clay or 25 M clay, 3-5 pounds per student
- SE-702 Natural Black Engobe or other color
- Paper or tar paper for stencils
- Clay modeling tools
- Brush for applying engobe and glaze
- Scoring tool
- Stylus or sgraffito tool
- Rubber or metal rib
- LG or F series glazes with T designation

# Steps



**RESEARCH AND SKETCH:** Have students research rigid pillows from various cultures including East Asia, Africa, Ancient Egypt, and Polynesia. Have students plan and draw their own pillow. Imagery may be based on a dream, memory, wish, or a scene from life. It can also be symbolic of dreams or night. The shape can be simple or complex.



**TEMPLATES:** If there are pieces that need to be cut from slabs, have students sketch and cut out their own templates on paper to make sure they cut the correct shapes!



**CUT OUT SLABS:** Using a rolling pin or slab roller, create slabs and smooth with a rib. Use paper templates to cut out the appropriate shapes.



**BUILD:** Once the pieces have been cut, slip and score the pieces to assemble the pillows. Make sure to cut a hole to vent the inside of the pillow. The hole can be on the bottom, or it can be in the side as a design element. Use a rib to smooth the surfaces of the pillow in preparation for applying engobe. Set aside until pillow has reached leather-hard consistency.



**APPLY ENGOBES:** Mix the dry engobe with water according to the directions on the package. The engobe should be about the consistency of thick cream. Once mixed, apply the engobe to leather-hard pillow with a brush and allow engobe to dry to leather-hard.





Using a sgraffito tool, loop tool, or stylus, carve through the engobe to reveal the clay underneath. Once carving is done, let dry. Crumbs left from the sgraffito will brush away easily once the piece is bone dry.



**FIRE AND GLAZE:** Bisque the bone-dry pillow to Cone 04. Once bisqued, apply F-Series or LG-Series glazes, choosing glazes which are rated T for transparent, and fire piece to Cone 05.

## Optional



The pillow can also be a sculptural form. Slab, pinch, or coil methods can be used. The example shown above is in the shape of a rabbit which is associated with the Moon Goddess in Chinese mythology. The crescent moon on the back serves as a cradle for the head.

## About the Artwork

### HORSE PILLOW

SE-702 Jet Black

LG-45 Emerald Green

LG-24 Light Blue

### RABBIT PILLOW

SE-702 Jet Black

LG-42 Light Green

## Glossary

**Template:** a pattern guide for cutting slabs.

**Sgraffito:** a ceramic technique where a colored slip or engobe is applied to clay, then carved through to reveal the clay body beneath.

**Engobe:** Liquid clay which has had colorant added to it. Also known as colored slip. Used for a wide variety of ceramic decorating techniques such as sgraffito, Mishima (inlay), and resist. Unlike underglazes, engobes and colored slips usually must be applied to unfired clay.



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