

MIMBRES BOWLS

Coil Build and Decorate

by Tracy P. Gamble



Celebrate ancient Mimbres artistry using today's clay and glaze materials in a cross curriculum adventure studying history, culture, clay coil building and glaze decorating techniques. The Mimbres people painted images in black on a white background, mostly on earthenware bowls. Very little beyond pottery has been recovered to learn more about these people, so making an interpretation of the Mimbres culture based on archaeological finds remains highly speculative. What is agreed upon, however, is that between 550 and 1150 C.E. they lived in a 46-mile-long valley in a southwest corner of New Mexico. These peaceful village dwellers farmed, hunted and foraged. They painted on pottery creating images of human figures, rabbits, lizards, fish, antelopes and even bugs from their landscape.

A few years ago, I created a line of pottery celebrating the ancient art of the Mimbres people using their 900-year-old decorative motifs. This body of work was originally created for display and sale at the Eiteljorg Museum Store in Indianapolis. The Eiteljorg is dedicated to appreciating and understanding the art, history and culture of the American West, and the indigenous peoples of North America. There are many images in traditional Mimbres decoration and some of those appeared in that line of pottery. In my more recent work, this decorative style progressed into more silhouette-type images from contemporary themes. For example, animal silhouettes—from dogs to chickens—were used as the main image on vessels with Mimbres traditional rim designs. Students can celebrate Mimbres artistry by making it new again on today's clay.

Lesson Plan Goals and Objectives

- Students will create bowls using coil building techniques
- Students will learn the ancient decoration techniques and imagery design of the Mimbres people
- This lesson integrates cultural history, art and design
- This lesson is suitable for 1st graders to adult

National Visual Arts Standards

- Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures.
- Students describe and place a variety of art objects in historical and cultural contexts.
- Students describe the function and explore the meaning of specific art objects within varied cultures, times and places.
- Students analyze relationships of works of art to one another in terms of history, aesthetics, and culture, justifying conclusions made in the analysis and using such conclusions to inform their own art making.

Planning

- 2-3 pounds of clay per student
- Discuss Mimbres decoration and make silhouette drawings



Drawing of silhouette and pottery with image by Tracy P. Gamble

Tools & Materials

- Low Fire (Cone 05) Clay (choose one)
 - AMACO® Sedona Red Clay No. 67 (45131A)
 - AMACO® White Art Clay No. 25 (45015Y)
- AMACO® Liquid Underglaze (LUG) Decorating Colors
 - LUG-1 Black (41171H)
 - and LUG-10 White (41172W)
- AMACO® Low Fire (Cone 05) Glaze
 - LM-10 Transparent Matt pint Liquid (39232N)
- Optional: brent® Manual Clay Extruder (22627H)
- AMACO® Wire Clay Cutter (11017N)
- Scoring Tool (11199R)
- Assorted Brushes
- Vinegar
- Sketch Book and Paper
- Pencils



1. Roll coils of clay and shape a medallion of clay for the base and begin to attach coils.



2. Continue making coils and attaching them by scoring and gluing with vinegar.



3. Continue scoring and using vinegar as glue with each added coil.



4. Smooth coils to attach and to create surface to decorate.



5. Add coils until the bowl is approximately 5 inches across by 3 inches high.



6. Smooth coils on inside.



7. Smooth coils on the outside.



8. Smooth and compress rim.



9. Paint white underglaze on outside and inside of red clay bowl and let dry. This step is not needed if using white clay.



10. Cut out sketched design and trace using a pencil (pencil line will fire out).



11. Paint black underglaze using a detail brush.



12. Paint lines using a dagger/striper brush with underglaze.



13. Example of detail with underglaze.



14. Example of lines brushed on using striper brush.



15. Make sure underglaze and clay is completely dry before firing to Cone 04. Mimbres decoration bowl could be finished here. For functional, food safe bowl, brush LM-10 Transparent glaze onto bisque fired bowl and do a low fire glaze firing.



Optional:

Use a Brent® Clay Extruder for coils of clay instead of rolling coils.

Glossary

Glaze: A mixture of ceramic materials including clay, silica and fluxes that forms the protective and decorative coating on the surface of pottery when subjected to high temperatures in a kiln.

Slip and Score: Process of joining 2 pieces of clay by texturing each piece slightly with little cuts where they will be joined then applying slip (watered down clay) or vinegar and pressing together to form a strong bond.

Underglaze: A special type of color that is put on a ceramic piece before the glaze. It has no flux (glass former) in it so it stays where it is put when fired and is good for detail work. It is used for painting and decorating.



Photography by David L. Gamble

Resources:

1. Gamble, Tracy. "Black on White; A new approach to Mimbres decoration." *Pottery Making Illustrated* (September/October 2007): 19-22.
2. Brody, J. J. *Mimbres Pottery. Ancient Art of the American Southwest*. New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1983.

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