

**Illinois State Museum – MuseumLink Art**  
**Heartfelt/Handmade Activity: Hand-Molded Pottery**

**Purpose:** to help the students understand how pottery was hand-molded and decorated before the age of electric equipment.

**Illinois State Museum Web site used:**

[http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/art/htmls/hh\\_3d.html#](http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/art/htmls/hh_3d.html#)

**Objective:** After viewing the Anna Pottery section of Folk Art and seeing other pottery examples in books or online, the student will show his/her understanding of hand-made pottery by forming a vessel shape of clay and decorating it with figurative clay motifs.



**Grade Levels: K-12** (adapting tools and processes)

**Time Required:** two class periods

**Materials:** (adapted to skill levels)

clay (pottery clay, self-hardening clay, or oil-based clay)

basic clay tools, like wire, wooden sticks, spoons

water in small containers (for pottery clay)

(premixed slip and access to a kiln if using clay that gets fired)

ceramic glazes or acrylic paint and brushes

**Motivation:** Discuss with students that pottery has always been made by hand. Larger commercial potteries used steam-powered molds, while smaller potteries still worked clay by hand, including Anna Pottery. Working by hand is necessary for one-of-a-kind pieces. Look at the snake jug. What other figures or creatures or forms could a potter apply to a pot? What shapes do pots have? Draw some sample shapes on the board for reference. Demonstrate how hand-molded pottery was made — coiled and smoothed, slabs joined together, or pressed into a mold such as a glass bowl. Show how figures or motifs are formed by hand and attached (by scoring the surface of the pot and the motif, touching a few drops of water or a thin clay mixture (slip) to it, and pressing them together). Answer questions about procedure.

**Procedure:** Students will

- take a ball of clay, roll and shape it into a pot form of their choice (see Native American module activities for instructions on forming pots).
- form figures, animals, plant forms, etc from small amounts of clay and attach them as demonstrated.
- (If more than one session is needed to complete it, wrap in damp paper towels and plastic wrap or bag overnight.)
- allow the clay to harden (then, if applicable, fired in a kiln).

- apply glaze to the pot and fire again, or paint the piece.

**Publication and Closure:** Students will display their pots and talk about the process they chose and the meaning of the decoration.

**Assessment:** Pottery will have a vessel shape and applied motifs. Students should be able to briefly discuss how they made the pot and the meaning of their design. Include a question or two about pottery if the lesson is part of a history unit.

**Illinois Goals and Standards addressed:**

**Art: 26.A:** Understand processes and traditional tools used in the arts.

**26.B:** Apply skills and knowledge necessary to create in one for the arts.