

# Sarcophagus (art + social studies)

Construct a clay box to resemble an Egyptian sarcophagus. Self-hardening clay is easy to use and gives students experience in clay techniques without the cost of kiln firing. Students develop visual arts application to history and cultures. Project may also be constructed in kiln-fired clay process.

## Grade Levels 5-8

*Note: instructions and materials based on a class of 25 students. Adjust as needed.*

## Objectives

- Students develop skills to transfer historical objects into an art form
- Students discover the application of basic slab formation to a specific form
- Students design and transfer objects into a repetitive pattern
- Students construct a box of clay - precise work needed!

## Preparation

1. Cover table with canvas, unprimed side up, to keep clay from sticking to the table. Self-hardening clay is a perfect consistency to work with right out of the bag - it does not have to be wedged.
2. Rulers are used on either side of the clay to help keep the slab a consistent thickness when rolling it out. Tape the two rulers 10 inches apart on top of the canvas. Keep parallel.

## Process

1. Design the Sarcophagus in traditional shape on paper. Keep the size around 8-10" long and 3-4" wide. Cut the shape to use as a pattern.
2. Create a slip (glue) by mixing an egg-size lump of clay with water to form a paste. Reserve in a jar with lid for use throughout the project.
3. Cut 2 pieces from the clay block 1/4" to 3/8" thick using a nylon clay cutter. Use modeling tools to scratch a texture on one long edge of each piece. Apply slip to the scratched area of both pieces. Join the two pieces by pressing together prepared surfaces with fingers. Spend time to make sure they are joined well. If they aren't, they will separate when dry. Use the rolling pin to gently flatten the joined piece. Move the rulers around the piece to ensure



## Materials

Amaco® Mexican® Self-Hardening Pottery Clay, (33205-3005) 5-lb block, cut to one 1/4" and one 3/8" thick piece per student

Student Clay Modeling Tools (30361-1009), 7-tool set, share three sets across classroom

Blick Plastic Ruler (55403-1012), need one per student

Wooden Rolling Pin, 10" (30345-1010), share one between four students

Nylon Clay Cutter (30357-0000), one to cut clay block

Fettling Knife (30349-1010), one to cut clay block

Blick Matte Acrylic Colors 2-oz bottles (00727), assorted colors, share at least six bottles across classroom

Blick Economy Sable Round, 36-brush assortment (05147-0369), share set across classroom

## Process, continued

consistent thickness.

Note: You can keep the clay from drying in between work sessions by covering the clay with a damp cloth and storing it in a plastic bag. This clay will dry if exposed to the air. It will not be re-usable.

- Using the pattern for the sarcophagus shape, cut a top and bottom from the rolled slab. Cut 2" strips as long as possible from the remaining rolled clay. If more strips are needed, gather leftover clay and knead together. Roll slab as before and cut another piece.
- Assemble the box. Score all edges of both top and bottom shapes as well as the edges of the 2" strips. Apply slip to the edge of the bottom shape. Gently place a 2" strip upright along the edge of the shape. This creates the wall of the box. Using a curved clay tool and a finger, blend edges together. Continue with 2" strips until all sides are attached. 2" strips can be connected in the same manner using slip and blending with tool or finger. Attach the top gently on one side, using slip and reaching in with a tool to blend seam. The last opening will have to be blended from the outside. To do so, make certain edge is coated with slip, squeeze and blend from the outside. Check the shape from the outside. Do not over work. Smooth areas gently with a little water on a finger.
- Allow completed box to air dry at least 1 week.
- During this time, work on designs for all sides of the Sarcophagus. Once dry, re-create the design on the surface of the box with a pencil.
- Acrylic paint is the best choice for finishing the surface. Watercolor and tempera do not have enough body. Blick Craft Paint has a matte finish and works as a sealer. Very little is needed because of its intensity.

## Hints

- Keep slabs as consistent in thickness as possible
- Clay must be kept damp, not dry

## National Standards

### Content Standard #4 —

Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and culture

- 5-8 Students describe and place a variety of art objects in historical and cultural contexts

**Content Standard #5 —** Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

- 5-8 Students analyze contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry

**Content Standard #6 —** Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

- 5-8 Students describe ways in which the principles and subject matter of other disciplines taught in the school are interrelated with the visual arts