

Talking Rocks (art + history)

Native Americans in the Southwest left messages on stones that still speak to us today. Through the use of Word Pictures, they communicated stories of special events, warned of dangers, gave directions through rugged terrain, and kept records that passed from generation to generation.

Some of these pictures were actually carvings called "petroglyphs". Early Native Americans used smaller stones to chip away the dark, weathered surface of large stones and reveal a lighter color beneath. These were usually simple and abstract images. Later people developed tools, much like a hammer and chisel, to create much more detailed word pictures.

This lesson can be linked with Southwest culture studies and the students can imitate the symbols used by those tribes or students can be challenged to come up with their own word pictures that communicate information or reveal something about themselves

Grade Levels K-4

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

Preparation

1. Unwrap the block of clay. Mark approximately 1/4" guide dots on top (smaller side). Use nylon cutting tool to slice a small slab of clay, cut that slice into fourths. Set aside. Keep a damp cloth over the clay until it's ready to be used

Procedure

1. Roll each piece of clay into an oblong, oval or circle shape, then flatten to resemble the shape of a worn, weathered stone (see examples above)
2. Using the Camel Hair brush, paint the front and sides of the stone with Burnt Umber. Take the stiff Stencil Brush and firmly stipple the surface of the stone. Use enough force to reveal small specks of the white clay beneath and create a rough textured surface on the stone.
3. Using the Modeling Tools, carve an image on the surface of the stone so that the white shows through.
4. Turn the stone over, paint and stipple the back side

Notes

- Remember, the image is supposed to look primitive, so don't try to make it look perfect. If mistakes are made that absolutely must be corrected, smooth the area over and repaint.

Options

- Pierce a hanging hole with the Modeling Tools or a pencil, string with raffia, hemp or cord.



Materials

Amaco® Stonex® White Clay, (33247-1005) share one 5-lb box between 20 students

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

Blickrylic Student Acrylics, (00711-8057) Burnt Umber, share one quart across classroom

Blick Economy Camel Hair Round, size 8 (05153-1008), need one per student

Blick Economy White Bristle Stencil Brush, size 1/2" (05167-4012), need one per student

Optional

Hemp Twine (61511-8542)

Raffia (60908-1375)

National Standards

Content Standard #1 — Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes

K-4 Students use different media, techniques and processes to communicate ideas, experiences and stories

Content Standard #3 — Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols and ideas

K-4 Students select and use subject matter, symbols and ideas to communicate meaning

Content Standard #4 — Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

K-4 Students know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationships to various cultures

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

K-4 Students understand there are various purposes for creating works of art