

Clay Wall Pocket Bird Mask

Wall pockets have a long history as decorative and functional items. They have been used for years to hold flowers, perfumes and light sources. Early automobiles were equipped with one on each interior side wall. Wall pockets must have a flat back, flared on top and tapered on the bottom.

This lesson is an experimentation in hand-building ceramic wall pockets. Students will design a piece using a head with a mask as the subject. They will work the clay with slab construction, add-ons, texturizing and cutting away. Painted finish will enhance the sculpture.

Grade Levels 5-12

Note: instructions and materials based on a class of 25 students. Adjust as 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 the canvas. Keep parallel.

Process

1. Unwrap the block of clay and cut 2 slabs from the top to the bottom of the clay. Use the nylon clay cutter. Try to keep thickness 1/4" to 3/8". Keep an egg-size lump of clay to make slip. Slip is a "glue" for clay. Put the lump in a small jar or plastic container and add water to make a paste. Use the modeling tools to scratch a texture one side of each slab. Apply slip to both and join them by pressing together with fingers. Use the rolling pin to even the joint and stretch out the slab. This large piece is the main structure of the wall pocket. Consider the final weight in choosing the size.
2. The balloons are support for the wall pocket. Inflate one just enough to wrap the clay around. They must be flexible and narrower at the bottom. Place on top of the clay slab. Bring the sides of the slab up and overlap on the top of the balloon. Flare the top and connect the bottom together. This shape resembles a wrapped ice cream cone. When satisfied with the shape, use the clay tools to scratch or score the edges to be joined.



Materials

Amaco® Mexican® Self-Hardening Pottery Clay, (33205-3005) 5-lb block, cut to six pieces, need one 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

Bag of 10" balloons

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

Do both sides, apply slip and gently work the areas together. Keep the back of the mask flat to allow for wall mounting.

- NOTE: at this point, if time is a problem, cover the form with a damp cloth and place it in a plastic bag to keep air out until next use. Any clay exposed to the air will harden and not be usable.

3. Decorate with additional clay, using slip as a “glue” with each piece. Use tools to draw into the clay, adding texture and designs. Use a pencil or pen to poke two holes in the back to hang. The mask should be firm enough now to remove the balloon. Support the inside with one hand or stuff with newspapers and cut out clay in desired areas with the fettling knife - it is long and the blade is slim to cut into the clay without pulling at the main structure.
4. Store the finished wall pocket mask in a safe place for about a week or more to make sure all areas are dry and hard.
5. Paint as desired. Blick Craft Paint is intense, matte-finish color and works well on the clay surface. Very little is needed to decorate.

HINTS

- Keep the basic structure simple
- The flat back is important to make sure the mask hangs well. Also keep holes about two to three inches apart
- Hang with soft, thick wire or string. The artwork may be heavy depending on size. The hanging device may be visible or not.
- Self hardening clay is sturdy but will not hold water
- [Unprimed Canvas \(07309-1363\)](#), makes a great table cover for working clay

National Standards

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

• **9-12** Students apply media, techniques and processes with sufficient skill, confidence and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks

Content Standard #2 — Using knowledge of structures and functions

• **9-12** Students create artworks that use organizational principles and functions to solve specific visual problems

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

• **9-12** Students apply subjects, symbols and ideas in their artworks and use the skills gained to solve problems in daily life

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

• **9-12** Students identify intentions of those creating artworks, explore the implications of various purposes and justify their analysis of purposes in particular works