

Gilded Pinch Pots

The most basic means of hand-forming pottery takes a dazzling new direction.

The application of gold as a decorative element is known as "gilding" and has been practiced using a variety of techniques since ancient times. Artists in China developed a means of firing gold with molten glass onto porcelain to create gilded pottery pieces that were highly prized by collectors in many nations. Later during the same century, as gilding techniques spread westward to Europe, the Baroque and Rococo decorative styles of the 18th century saw high demand for gilded porcelain tableware and figures.

In modern times, the combination of ceramics and gold is still highly desirable. Ceramic artist Jennifer McCurdy creates nature-inspired sculptures from delicate formations of porcelain, then applies gold leaf to the inside. The gilding creates the illusion that the pieces are glowing from within.

The most basic technique for forming a three-dimensional piece of pottery is a pinch pot. It's usually the first method a potter learns. In this lesson, students will use air-dry clay to form a small vessel, then gild a portion of it with imitation gold leaf. The result is a dramatic and rich-looking container that can be useful in many ways.

GRADES K-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Cut block of clay into pieces and store in zip-lock bags until ready to use. Plan on approximately 18-20 pieces per 2.2 lb block of clay, or approximately 2 oz per student. Kiln-fire clay may also be used.

Process for Grades 5-12

1. Create a pinch pot. Roll clay between hands to form a ball. Press thumb into the center of the ball and push down hard to create a hole deep into the ball, but not all the way to the bottom.
2. Keeping your thumb inside the clay ball, "pinch" outward by squeezing your thumb and remaining fingers together. This action should push the clay away from the center and enlarge the opening.
3. Rotate the clay ball and repeat. Continue a process of rotating and pinching until the clay takes on the desired shape.

For best results, open the pot up slowly, pinching from the bottom and gradually moving up. Try to use even pressure to keep the walls a consistent width.



Materials (required)

Mona Lisa Composition Gold Leaf Kit (27001-4059); share one kit across class. Contains:

- 25 sheets of leaf
- 2 oz jar of adhesive
- 2 oz jar of sealer

Activa Plus Clay, 2.2 lb Black (33275-2051); share two blocks across class

Blick Economy White Bristle Gesso Brush, 1/2" (05160-4012); need one per student

Blick Scholastic Wonder White, Bright size 12 (05377-1012); need one per student

Materials (optional)

Blick Matte Acrylic, Black 237 ml (00727-2025)

Amaco No. 58 Stoneware Clay, 50 lb (30527-1050)



Process, continued

If the pinch pot doesn't turn out as expected, it can be pushed back into a ball and the process started again. Remember, pinch pots can be a variety of sizes and shapes: spherical, oval, tall, short, etc. They can also have multiple openings or flatten out to form a dish.

4. Store any remaining clay in a zip-lock bag or airtight container. Allow pots to dry overnight until they are no longer cool to the touch and are a medium gray color.
5. Brush the inside of the pinch pot with adhesive. This is a special type of glue that holds the gold leaf in place and will not cause it to tarnish. Caution: follow label instructions, do not ingest, and wash hands after using. Wash the brush thoroughly after use.
6. Carefully tear off pieces of composition gold leaf and gently press them against the adhesive with a dry nylon brush. Gold leaf tears very easily. Wherever it overlaps, it won't stick, so brush the excess away with the brush and then reapply it.
7. While the adhesive is drying, paint the outside of the pot with black acrylic paint, if desired, to create a dramatic look.
8. To keep the composition gold bright, and protect the finished piece, seal it with metal leaf sealer. Read and follow all directions carefully and keep children away when using. Do not store the sealer near heat sources, as it is flammable.
9. The finished pinch pots are not intended to hold soil or water, but are perfect for displaying air plants, storing small pieces of jewelry, catching coins, or for simply enjoying the gilded glow they create.



Step 1: Create a pinch pot from air-hardening or kiln fire clay. Allow pot to dry.



Step 2: Brush the inside of the pinch pot with adhesive, then place pieces of imitation gold leaf onto the adhesive.



Step 3: If desired, paint the clay and protect finished pieces with sealer.

Process for Grades 5-8 (quick process)

1. Create a pinch pot, following steps 1-4, above.
2. Keep clay moist. If necessary, apply a small amount of water with fingers to keep it from cracking.
3. Tear off pieces of composition gold leaf and gently apply it to the inside of the pinch pot, pressing it into the moist clay with your fingers. The leaf will separate into smaller pieces, so the effect will be more of a crackle finish than a solid gold covering.
4. Allow to dry, then seal with metal leaf sealer.

Options

- White, terra cotta, or gray air-drying clay may also be used.
- If kiln-fire clay is used, allow it to dry completely, making sure it's bone dry before a slow bisque firing to cone 04. Apply leaf after firing.

National Core Arts Standards Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

