



Terra cotta warriors of the Qin Dynasty

Background

In 1974, workers in China were busy digging a new well when they made the most amazing discovery. They came upon a pit where initially, they unearthed 1,000 pieces of pottery figurines, a few bronze chariots, horses, and weapons that would have been used during the era of the Qin Dynasty. However, they soon discovered this pit was massive and the resting place of more than 6,000 full-size soldiers made from terra cotta, all standing in formation, many with their horses ready for battle.

Archaeologists were ecstatic about this find and intrigued that the horses all faced east and the soldiers each had unique facial expressions, making them appear uncanny but realistic. In 221 BC, Qin Shi Huang was the first Emperor of all China and had many enemies. The Terra Cotta Army was built as a way of creating a symbol of strength and power when the Emperor was entombed. It was believed that in the afterlife, as enemies approached, they would be overwhelmed with the powerful army supporting Emperor Qin and turn away. It took more than one million workers to create the army. In all, three pits have been discovered but diggers continue working, as there is strong evidence even more pits exist, just waiting to be discovered. The excavation site, with well over 6,000 soldiers, is massive in size. Hundreds of horses and dozens of chariots have also been discovered.



Objectives

Students will...

- Create a three-dimensional clay warrior similar in style to the clay life-like soldiers found in China
- Incorporate history, aesthetics, criticism, and personal expression into this lesson
- Utilize ceramic sculptural techniques to create a sculpture while reinforcing basic vocabulary associated with clay
- Learn good craftsmanship and work habits

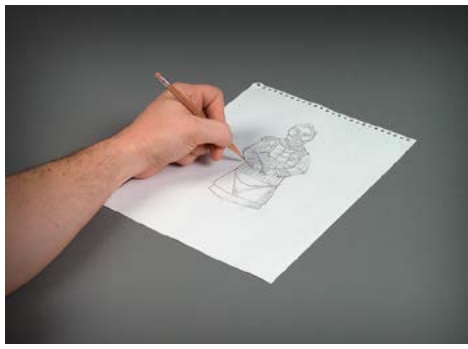
Introduction and preparation

Display reproductions of the terra cotta warriors from the Qin Dynasty. Have students research information regarding the discovery of the clay army and the excavation of the burial site. Demonstrate the procedures involved in creating the clay sculpture.

Directions

1. Research the terra cotta warriors of the Qin Dynasty. Then sketch a design of your own terra cotta warrior.
2. Cover the entire surface of a cone with plastic wrap. Remaining edges of plastic are tucked inside the cone and secured with masking tape.
*This is important because the plastic wrap allows the completed sculpture to be lifted from the cone armature.
3. Using your fingertips, begin rolling out clay coils on a table surface. Place the cone armature on a brown paper bag – this keeps the clay from sticking to the table.
4. Wrap coils snugly around the base of the cone remembering to score and slip each coil as the next coil is added. Continue this step until you reach the peak of the cone.
5. Using more clay, roll a golf-ball-sized piece of clay for the head. Press your thumb inside the ball of clay creating an indentation. Score and slip around the indentation and add it to the top coil on the cone.

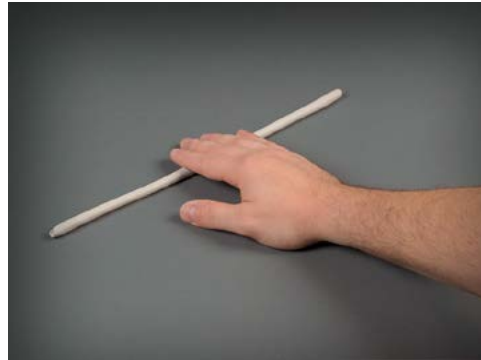
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6. Create a smooth surface on the sculpture using a flat clay tool or popsicle stick. Begin at the base of the sculpture and work upward, eliminating the coil lines in the clay.
7. Use additional clay and clay tools to decorate and sculpt your warrior. Consider your warrior's clothing and facial expression. Block out the shape by adding clay to achieve the desired form, then carve in the details and texture. Utilizing your resources, look at the pictures from the Qin Dynasty.
8. Once the constructing is complete, immediately remove the wet clay sculpture from the cone armature. Lift the sculpture with two hands. Place fingers inside the cone pulling at the masking tape to loosen the cone from the plastic. After the cone is out, gently remove the plastic from the interior of the clay sculpture.
9. Using a paper clip or needle, poke holes through the head and any other areas of thick clay. This allows airflow during firing.
10. Loosely wrap sculpture in plastic and allow to air dry slowly. Do not leave exposed; drying too quickly will crack the sculpture. When clay is bone dry, fire in a kiln to bisque ware.
11. Use acrylic paint to decorate. To give an antique terra cotta look to your sculpture, thin out acrylics and paint several coats of thin paint over the sculpture. For a permanent matte finish, decorate with Amaco® Velvet Underglazes.





No. 25
White Art Clay



No. 29
Brown Stone
Earthenware
Clay



No. 67
Sedona Red Clay



No. 77
Terra-Cotta Clay



Materials list

- Nasco Ceramic Glaze, Set of 12 ([NE20283](#))
- Nasco Ceramic Glaze, Set of 10 ([NE20284](#))
- Nasco Ceramic Glaze, Set of 6 ([NE20285](#))
- AMACO® Lead-Free Velvet Underglaze Classroom Pack #2 ([NE20282](#))
- AMACO® #25 White Art Clay, 50-lb. carton, moist ([0800242](#))
- AMACO® #77 Terra Cotta Clay, 50-lb. carton, moist ([0800230](#))
- AMACO® #67 Sedona Red Clay, 50-lb. carton, moist ([0800236](#))
- Plastic wrap or AMACO® polyethylene bags ([0300503](#))
- Fiberboard cone assortment ([9728675](#))
- AMACO® kiln (found at nascoeducation.com)
- Brown paper bag
- Clay tools
- Masking tape
- Acrylic paints

Additional suggestions

- Depending on the length of the class period, clay needs to be wrapped in paper towels and kept in plastic to keep moist until project is complete.
- Moist clay cannot be added to dry clay successfully.
- Although terra cotta was found in the burial chambers of the Emperor Qin, a white clay is ideal when using acrylic paint.
- If cone armature becomes wet, allow it to dry and reuse.

