

Make Your Own Pottery

Time: 25 minutes

Materials Needed:

- Examples of South Carolina prehistoric pottery (photos or physical examples)
- Air drying clay (1 lb per student)
- Stiff paper plates (students will built their pottery on this plate)
- Wax paper (placed on top of the paper plate to keep the clay from sticking)
- Design Paddles (cloth wrapped, cord wrapped, etc. See the “Making your own Paddle” section for more information)
- Toothpicks
- Water dishes (to help keep the clay moist)
- Tarp or trash bags (if on the ground, for the students to sit on and have a surface to roll coils; if using tables, to cover the tables and make clean-up easier)

Introduction:

In this activity students will get a brief introduction to South Carolina prehistoric pottery and how they were made. After the introduction, students will each be given a pound of clay and shown how to make a basic coil pot. Students will then smooth the coils together and paddle them with their choice of designs. The pots can then be taken home to air dry.

Activity Steps:

1. Give the students a brief introduction to Native American pottery, such as when it was first made, what it was used for, and different designs used in the past. Show them examples of pottery found in archaeological sites through pictures or physical examples.
2. Show students examples of modern Native American pottery. Be sure they understand this art form has continued through generations.
3. Tell students they will now have a chance to make a pot using the coil pot method. Give a brief demonstration of how to make a coil pot based on the instructions below.
 - a. Divide the clay in half; take one of the divided pieces and roll it into a ball
 - b. Push your thumbs into the ball of clay, making a basic pinch pot. Stretch the ball of clay out into a small, thick walled bowl
 - c. Thin out the walls by gently pinching/pulling them up and out – think of the bowl as having a “U” cross section all the way around. Don’t make the walls too thin, otherwise they will not be able to support the weight of the coils.
 - d. With the other half of the clay, begin rolling out coils about 1/2” in diameter. Try to roll the coil as evenly as possible
 - e. Making sure the top rim of the pinch pot is moist, attach the coil by winding it around the rim and gently press down to secure
 - f. Continue attaching coils to build up the walls of the pot. Angle the coils slightly inward (to create a cone shape) to give more room to work when smoothing out the walls

- g. Once all the coils have been added, smooth the coils using fingers on the outside and inside of the bowl. Gently push the coils outward while smoothing to open the inside of the vessel as desired
 - h. Once the coils have been smoothed out, choose a paddle and gently tap the outside of the vessel with the paddle, making sure to support the inside of the bowl with the other hand. You can also use a pencil or stick to incise (draw lines) onto the surface of the smooth pot.
- 4. Have students take home their pots to dry on their paper plates, or store them in the classroom to take home after they are dry.

Background Information

Native American Pottery

- Pottery is clay fired to the point at which the silica it contains goes through a conversion into a new material: a ceramic
- Native Americans in South Carolina did not use kilns, potter's wheels, or glazes. Instead, their pots were built up by hand, using a coil or slab method, decorated by smoothing the outside and using various materials to make impressions in the clay, and then fired to hardness in fire, either on the ground surface or in a pit.
- Decoration was usually added to the surface of the pot through a paddle that was carved with different designs, or wrapped with materials to make the impressions.
- Common decorations in South Carolina Pottery:
 - Cord marked – paddle wrapped with cord (rope)
 - Fabric impressed – paddle wrapped with fabric
 - Check stamped – paddle carved with a checkerboard (or waffle looking) pattern
 - Simple stamped – paddle carved with simple lines
 - Complex stamped – paddle carved with a more complicated lines and shapes
 - Incised – sharp stick or stone is used to draw lines
- Most early Native American pottery was made for everyday use - pots for boiling or cooking, storage jars, or bowls used for eating.
- Stallings Island pottery is some of the oldest pottery in North America – around 4500 years old - and can be found in South Carolina
 - Fiber tempered (which means plant fibers were mixed in with the clay to help give it strength) with no decoration
- Thoms Creek – also very old – around 3,000 to 4,000 years old.
 - Sand tempered and usually has a punctate (using a reed to make round impressions on the surface) decoration

Pottery and Archaeology

- Pottery pieces (also called “sherds” are common artifacts found at Native American archaeological sites in South Carolina. It is very rare to find an entire intact pot due to their fragile nature. That means, trying to reconstruct the pot is like trying to put together a puzzle where most of the pieces are missing!
- The decoration on the surface of the pottery can tell archaeologists a lot about the time period it was made and the culture of the people who made it.

Additional Resources

- Blog Post - Broken Pots: More than the Sum of their Parts -
 - https://nmnh.typepad.com/rogers_archaeology_lab/2015/04/broken-pots-more-than-the-sum-of-their-parts.html
- 3D Models of Pottery Reconstruction from RLA Archaeology
 - <https://sketchfab.com/rla-archaeology/collections/haw-river-series-pottery>
 - <https://sketchfab.com/rla-archaeology/collections/catawba-project>

- Guide to Native American Pottery in South Carolina (a lot of technical terms, but great resource for photos)- <http://www.scpottery.com/>
- Catawba Pottery: Our Cultural Legacy - <https://catawbaindian.net/the-nation/catawba-pottery.php>
- SCETV Youtube Video- Catawba Pottery Tradition Withstands the Test of Time - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pvvmf4zmjuQ>
- Video on How to Make a Coil Pot - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62-7qHckMMM>

Common Pottery Decorations Found in South Carolina

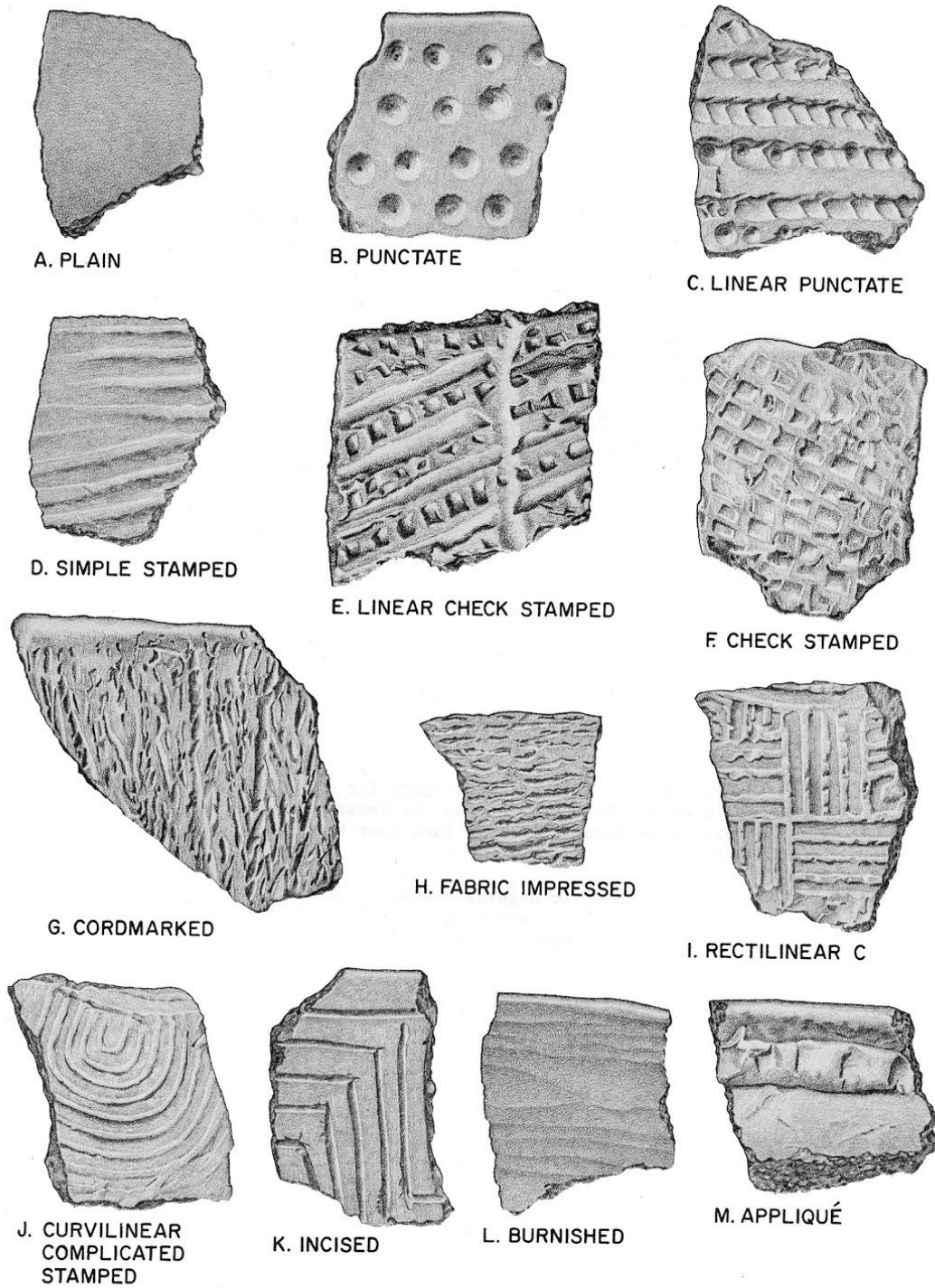


Figure 12: Ceramic surface treatments.

How to Make a Coil Pot

