

Pottery Refit

Time: 45 minutes

SE Education Standards:

- Social Studies: 2-4.1-2-4.3; 3-2.1; 4-2.1

Materials Needed:

- 1 mini terracotta clay pot per student
- Markers
- Plastic grocery bag (to break the pot)
- Elmer's glue
- Small Dixie cups (to hold the glue)
- Paint brushes (for glue)
- Wax paper (to put on top of the paper plate to keep glue from sticking)
- Stiff paper plates (students will re-built their pot on this plate)

This activity is designed to help students learn about techniques used by archaeologists in the lab. Students decorate small ceramic pots and then break them into pieces. Using glue and the students' puzzle power they reassemble their pots.

Introduction:

Archaeologists rarely find pottery (prehistoric or historic) in one unbroken piece when excavating. Due to its fragile nature, ceramics are usually broken into multiple pieces (if we're lucky, they're all in one place!). A lot of archaeological work is done outside of the field and in the lab. One of these steps is refitting ceramics. Putting the pieces back together allows archaeologists gather more information from the vessel than they would be able to from just a single piece.

Activity Steps:

1. Give each student a clay pot. Pass out markers and tell students to decorate in any way they desire. Let them know the pots will be broken after decoration is complete (so it doesn't come as an unpleasant surprise).
2. Give students time to complete their designs. As they finish, allow them to come up, put their pot in a plastic garbage bag, and drop them from above their heads. Let them know that throwing the bag down with force will result in many smaller pieces and will be harder to put back together. Just dropping the bag results in better re-fitting pieces.
3. Once a sufficient number of pieces are created, send the student back to their seats with a paper plate, Dixie cup of glue, and paintbrush. (Have small groups of students share a Dixie cup of glue – each student does not need their own).
4. Make sure students write their names on their paper plates.
5. Now students must try to re-construct their pot from the pieces they've created. Tell students to use plenty of glue (it will dry clear) and hold pieces together for about 30 seconds to help ensure the pieces stay together.

Do students have all the pieces? Why or why not? Do they think archaeologists always have all the pieces? What challenges did they face?

This activity can be used in connection with learning about the ceramics made by different prehistoric or historic cultures. Use the images below or find examples of pottery online and have your students decorate their pots in the style of the culture you are currently studying.

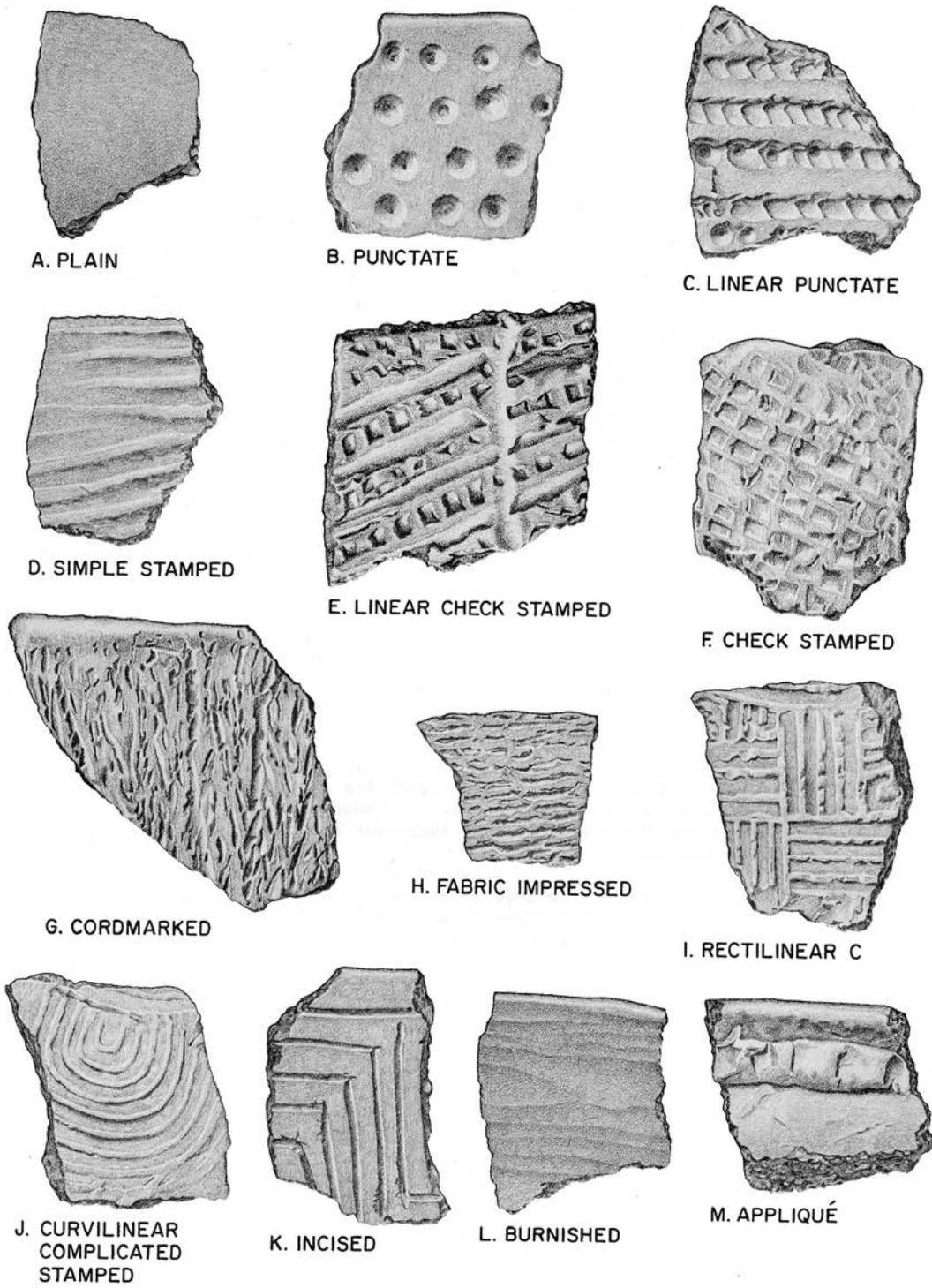


Figure 12: Ceramic surface treatments.

- Common Historic Ceramic Types found in SC
https://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/histarch/gallery_types/type_list.asp - Florida Museum of Natural History Historic Ceramics digital collection
- Traditional and Modern African Ceramics
<http://www.veniceclayartists.com/african-pottery-arts-traditional-contemporary/>