

LESSON PLAN:

María Martínez and Community Ceramics

by Katie Seastrand

Learn about incredible artist María Martínez and create your own artwork out of salt dough.

Objectives:

Student will...

- closely observe and practice Visual Thinking Strategies with an artwork
- follow along with a book about María Martínez to learn about her life and ways that knowledge can be learned and shared
- create their own artwork out of salt dough and see how it dries

Grade level:

K-3

Duration:

40–50 minutes

Materials:

- Image of Serpent Plate, UMFA1980.131.002 – found on the UMFA Website – Art – Collections
- Copy of or video read-along of *Shaped by Her Hands: Potter Maria Martinez* written by Anna Harber Freeman and Barbara Gonzales.
- Salt Dough:
 - Flour
 - Salt
 - Water

Vocabulary/Key Terms:

- Pottery: items made from baked clay.
- Clay: a stiff, sticky fine-grained earth that can be molded when wet and dried to make bricks, pottery, and ceramics.
- Pottery sherd: a fragment of a pottery vessel found on sites and in refuse deposits where pottery-making peoples have lived.

Activity**Part 1 | Artwork Observations**

- Look at *Serpent Plate* together and ask Visual Thinking Strategy Questions below.
 - What is going on in this artwork?
 - What do see that makes you say that?
 - What more can we find?
- Use the background information about the artwork as applicable to support classroom conversation.

Part 2 | Learning about artist María Martínez

- Read the book or watch a video of *Shaped by Her Hands: Potter Maria Martinez*
- Discuss the below questions:
 1. How did María learn about pottery?
 - Her surroundings, experimentation, aunt Nicolasa, etc.
 2. Who did María make art with?
 - Ex. Aunt Nicolasa, her husband Julián, her community, her children and grandchildren.
 3. What is something that you've learned to do from someone else? Have students make a list of five things they've learned from someone in their life. This can be a hobby, a skill, a fun activity, etc.

Activity cont.

Part 3 | Artmaking inspired by María

- We'll be making some artwork with salt dough! A very basic recipe is below, check resources for other recipes, more information, and links. Salt dough can be prepped before or made in front of students for further engagement.
 - Combine 2 cups flour to 1 cup salt
 - Gradually add in 1 cup water while mixing
 - Form the dough into a ball and knead for 5-7 min. It should be smooth and firm. If needed add 1 tsp water at a time until it reaches proper texture or 1tsp flour if it's too sticky.
 - Store in an airtight container, like a Ziplock bag to avoid drying out until use.
- Give each student a little less than a ¼ cup of dough
- Practice working with the dough by:
 - rolling it between their hands to make a smooth ball
 - use your hands and the table to roll it into a long rope
 - pinch the dough
- From here you have two options:
 - Have students create a mini bowl by using the techniques above.
 - Students can pick something from the list of skills/activities they learned from someone in their life and create an artwork that represents it. Ex. Snowman – my mom taught me how to make a snowman.
- Leave artworks out to dry for 2-5 days or you can put them on a greased and foil-lined sheet pan and bake in the oven at 250 degrees. Generally for each ¼" in thickness, allow a half hour of baking time or until it turns light golden brown. If an area is puffed up poke a hole in it with a pin or toothpick.
 - Cracks, breaks, or droops, happen! Ceramic artists working in clay frequently get surprised by their results, especially if they are trying something new. If students are disappointed with how it dried, remind them that all of young Maria's clay bowls cracked and crumbled. You can look at [@ceramic_casualties](#) on Instagram for some wonderful examples of ceramic mishaps.
- Optional Extensions:
 1. When fully dry, students can decorate their clay with markers.
 - For further connection to María's work have students work together to develop design ideas and / or select a color for their artwork, so it's more collaborative.
 - If students based their artwork around something that someone in their life has taught them, create a book explaining the process to continue sharing with others. See the pants book instructions in additional resources.

Methods for Assessment:

- Quality of student answers to questions
- Assessment of artwork:
 - Does the shape of the artwork visibly fit the instructions?
 - Did the student take time to get a feel for the material and experiment appropriately with the dough?
 - How is the final product?

Additional Resources

Artwork examples:



Additional Resources cont.

Resource Links:

- Link to read aloud of Shaped by Her Hands: Potter Maria Martinez from Portland Public Library.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zDaxzLwlbQ&t=300s>
- Salt Dough Recipes:
 - <https://unsophisticook.com/salt-dough-recipe/>
 - <https://umfa.utah.edu/third-saturday-salt-dough>
- Resources:
 - <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-ceramic-artists-good-dealing-failure>
 - <https://americanart.si.edu/artist/maria-martinez-3142>
 - Video of Pottery Techniques by Maria Martinez:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nyAZYXrIL3w>
 - Video of Shaped by Her Hands co-author: Barbara Gonzales (great grand-daughter or Martinez) for New Mexico's Great Read 2022
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3JUxfUMEsNY>
- Pants Book Instructions from Marriott Library:
<https://lib.utah.edu/collections/book-arts/community/Pants%20Book%20LP.pdf>

State Core Links

- Kindergarten:
 1. English Language Arts:
 - Speaking and Listening (K.SL)
 - Reading (K.R)
 2. Visual Arts:
 - Create (K.V.CR)
 - Respond (K.V.R)
 - Connect (K.V.CO)
- First Grade:
 1. English Language Arts:
 - Speaking and Listening (1.SL)
 - Reading (1.R)
 2. Visual Arts:
 - Create (1.V.CR)
 - Respond (1.V.R)
 - Connect (1.V.CO)

Additional Resources cont.

- Second Grade:
 1. English Language Arts:
 - Speaking and Listening (2.SL)
 - Reading (2.R)
 2. Social Studies:
 - Standard 1: Students will recognize and describe how people within their community, state, and nation are both similar and different.
 3. Visual Arts:
 - Create (2.V.CR)
 - Respond (2.V.R)
 - Connect (2.V.CO)
- Third Grade:
 1. English Language Arts:
 - Speaking and Listening (3.SL)
 - Reading (3.R)
 2. Social Studies:
 - Standard 2: Students will understand cultural factors that shape a community.
 3. Visual Arts:
 - Create (3.V.CR)
 - Respond (3.V.R)
 - Connect (3.V.CO)



Artwork Spotlight:

María MARTINEZ (1887–1980), Popovi DA (1923–1971), *Serpent plate*, circa 1939, earthenware. Gift of Dr. & Mrs. Jefferson B. Fordham, UMFA1980.131.002

- María Martínez and her husband, Julián Martínez, developed a black-on-black pottery technique after the prehistoric pottery shards discovered at Frijoles Canyon in central New Mexico. Ancient motifs such as avanyu (a horned water serpent) adorn the modern wares.
- Martínez received early recognition, particularly among Euro-American patrons, for her skills as a potter. Monetary success bred resentment among her neighbors within San Ildefonso Pueblo, where she lived.
- The artist devised a clever production solution that also shared wealth with her pueblo. Members of her community collaborated on the creation of pots, and family members, including her son Popovi Da, painted them. This plate bears the signature of mother and son.
- Pottery and clay can be a very temperamental art medium. “Issues can arise at the earliest stages, from the moistness of the material to the way it’s kneaded and stored. If clay is too wet or too dry, it can collapse or crumble; if its parts are improperly attached, it can break; if it’s not ‘bone dry’ when it’s fired, the piece may crack or explode in the kiln.” – artsy.net

Contributer Bio:

Katie Seastrand has worked at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts since September 2019. She studied Art History and Museum Education and is very passionate about arts education and integration. Katie grew up in Utah with many educator family members and loves to support educators in any way possible. In her spare time she loves to knit, bake, and read!

This Lesson Plan was created for the October 25, 2023 UMFA Evening For Educators: Symbols of Family. The evening was inspired by the special exhibition *Tatau: Marks of Polynesia*, on view from August 12, 2023 to December 30, 2023.

Heading image | Oceania, Samoa, (1st half of the 20th century), detail of *Siapo (tapa cloth)*, dye, paper mulberry bark, resin. Gift of Richard E. Brown in memory of Ellis O. and Sarah N. Brown, UMFA2006.3.4



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