

Imagination Pots

Social studies, language arts, art

SKILLS.....Knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis

STRATEGIES.....Discussion, research, creative exploration, drawing

DURATION.....2 class periods

CLASS SIZE.....Any

OBJECTIVES

In their study of pottery, students will use the trunk of replica artifacts to:

1. Observe and identify different pottery styles.
2. Compare the styles and determine the time periods for pottery sherds.
3. Reconstruct and illustrate an entire vessel using a selected sherd.

MATERIALS

- Pottery sherds from the Aztec Ruins trunk of replica artifacts (or borrow sherds with no provenience from nearby college or museum collections – do not use sherds collected by the children or their families)
- White art paper
- Coloring media: black, red, gray, and white paints, crayons, chalk, or colored pencils
- Sketching pencils
- “Imagination Pots” HANDOUT or reference books that illustrate pottery styles

VOCABULARY

black-on-white: pottery with an overall white, or sometimes gray, surface on which a black painted design has been applied.

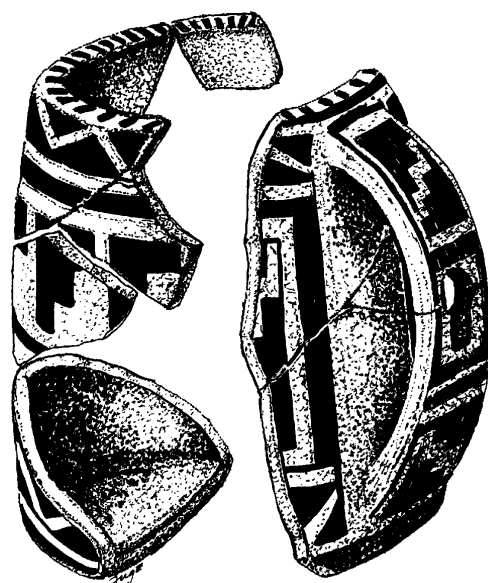
corrugated: unpainted pottery that has coils still visible on its exterior surface.

polychrome: a vessel with two or more colors.

tradeware: pottery not native to a given area.

sherd: a piece of broken pottery.

vessel: a hollow or concave utensil for holding something.



BACKGROUND

Archeologists are often compared to detectives, because they must piece together the past from only a fraction of the original evidence that remains. Often they cannot find enough to give them the "whole picture." For example, archeologists very rarely find whole pots, but frequently find their pieces. One way to help students understand this frustration is to show them pottery fragments, or *sherds*.

Even small pottery sherds can provide archeologists with information. Styles of pottery – the color, design, shape, surface treatment, and its constituents – changed relatively quickly through time, much as styles of clothes and cars change through time for us today. Differing styles of pottery were also made in specific geographic areas throughout the Southwest. By examining styles of pottery sherds and their frequency at a site, an archeologist may be able to determine occupation dates, the presence and extent of trade, relationships with other sites, population, and hints of environmental conditions. These fragments help enable archeologists to piece together a fuller picture.

Pottery sherds and vessels found at Aztec Ruins include both unpainted and painted wares. The unpainted pottery includes plain gray pots, some with their exteriors roughened, and many blackened with soot from long use over a fire. Also unpainted are corrugated vessels, whose exterior surface has a corrugated appearance due to the potter not having obliterated the coils. Sometimes the coils are smoothed, incised, or indented. Corrugated pottery's gray

and black colors come from contact with smoke from the firing process and cooking over a fire. Corrugated pottery is commonly found at Aztec Ruins and was constructed throughout the Southwest after approximately AD 950.

The most common painted vessels found at Aztec are called "black-on-white" – named for the black designs over the white surface. The black paint is made from either a mineral or vegetable substance, depending on who made the vessels and when. Black-on-white pottery vessels found at Aztec Ruins include mugs, bowls, short-necked pitchers, bulbous water jars, dippers, small jars, and miniatures. Black-on-white pottery was made beginning about AD 600 throughout the Southwest.

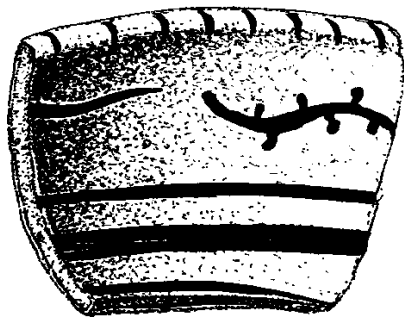
Plain and corrugated vessels are utility wares, mostly used for cooking and storage. The black-on-white and other painted vessels are known as service wares, used for serving and other uses, but not for cooking. We also have our utility and service wares – specific vessels for cooking and storing food and others for serving and everyday use.

Another category of pottery found at Aztec Ruins is tradeware – vessels that did not originate at Aztec Ruins but were acquired through trade. Most of those found at Aztec Ruins are painted, and are recognized by their multiple colors (polychrome) or a distinctive black-on-red design. Inhabitants at Aztec Ruins traded for these wares from the south.

Archeologists seldom try to reconstruct a vessel design on the basis of only one or two sherds. Usually a large number of sherds are needed. However, rim sherds can be used to reconstruct vessel shape or approximate vessel size.

Nonetheless, potsherds capture everyone's curiosity. There is an unsettling feeling about finding only a part of a whole, and curiosity and imagination begin to conjure up the complete picture.

[Author's note: This lesson was inspired after a trip to Aztec Ruins National Monument, during which our Project Archeology class visited the East Ruin, a site closed to the general public. Members of the class "oooohed and ahhhed" every time someone discovered a sherd lying on the ground. We held them in the palms of our hands, and could only wonder about their makers. We returned them to their exact locations. The feeling we all experienced that day was indescribable. I found a sherd that has had somewhat of a haunting effect on me that has not left. The sherd looked like this:



I wanted to know more . Did the pattern represent corn, a plant, or a geometric design, or did I not have enough information to complete the picture of what its maker had intended? This lesson will encourage students to use what they have before them to imagine and create the larger picture.]

SETTING THE STAGE

Students examine the various replica pottery samples. (If using actual artifacts borrowed from a university, tell the students that these have lost information that they might have contained because they are lacking provenience – and that they should NEVER pick up sherds for this very reason.) How does it feel to have just a part of a bigger thing? What questions does it arouse that you cannot answer? Archeologists must try to piece together a bigger picture from fragments. This is often frustrating work.

PROCEDURE

1. Share the BACKGROUND information regarding the value of pottery sherds and the kinds of information they can give. Using tradeware sherds, explain that their presence at places like Aztec Ruins shows that the people traded. Share information on styles of pottery: black-on-white, corrugated, and polychrome.
2. Students examine pictures of different pottery styles from the "Imagination Pots" HANDOUT or reference books, and compare these to the styles on the sherds. Use these references to determine the time periods of the sherds.
3. If using replicas or sherd samples, each student selects a sherd that particularly intrigues him/her. If sherds are not available, cut copies of pictured pots into pieces and give one to each student.
4. Students sketch the sherd they have chosen. Each student then sketches (using art paper) what they think the entire pot may have looked like, based on the sherd's pattern.

5. After completing the sketch, students use watercolors, crayons, chalk, or colored pencils to paint their imaginative pot or bowl. They are limited to the four colors of white, black, red, and gray, because these are authentic colors found on prehistoric pottery from this area.
6. Allow sketches to dry overnight and display!

CLOSURE

Summarize the importance and value of each individual's interpretation of the past through this example. Emphasize that there is no right or wrong interpretation, but simply that different people may interpret things differently. Review the idea that archeologists must solve the past "like a puzzle with a lot of the pieces missing."

EVALUATION

Check that each student produced one finished product – a complete vessel re-created from the design inspired by one sherd – and have them show that sherd from the collection or pictures of pots.

REFERENCES

Peckham, Stewart, *From This Earth: The Ancient Art of Pueblo Pottery*, Museum of New Mexico Press, Santa Fe, NM ISBN 0-89013-204-6, 1990.

Trimble, Stephen, *Talking with the Clay*, School of American Research Press, New Mexico, 1987.

Breternitz, David, Rohn, A., and Morris, E., *Prehistoric Ceramics of the Mesa Verde Region*, Museum of Northern Arizona Ceramic Series #5, Interpark, Cortez, CO, 1974.

Colton, Harold S., *Potsherds: An Introduction to the Study of Prehistoric Southwestern Ceramics and Their Use in Historic Reconstruction*, Museum of Northern Arizona Bulletin #25, Northern Arizona Society of Science and Art, Flagstaff, 1953.

Hayes, Allen & Blom, John, *Southwestern Pottery: Anasazi to Zuni*, Northland Publishing, Arizona, 1997.

Swentzell, Rina, *Children of Clay: A Family of Potters*, Lerner Publications, Minneapolis, 1992.

BLACK-ON-WHITE PATTERN STYLES



Chaco



Mesa Verde



Kayenta

IMAGINATION POTS



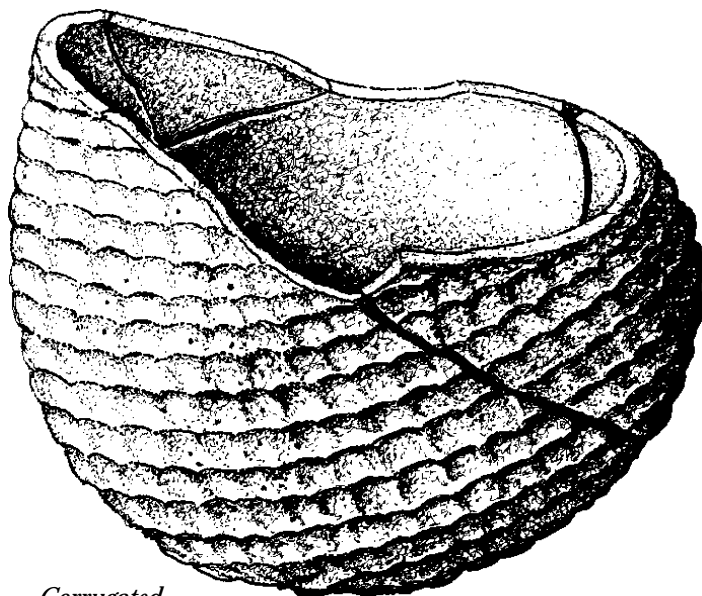
*Polychrome inside view
(shown above);
outside view (below)*



Polychrome



Black-on-white



Corrugated



PHOTO BY JIM FUGE

“The clay is very selfish... The clay says ‘I want to be this, not what you want me to be.’”

Rose Naranjo

“The clay knows when you are interested.”

Rena Kavena

“You are never lonesome as long as you have clay.”

Evelyn Vigil

Quotes from *Talking With the Clay*