Ceramics and Clay

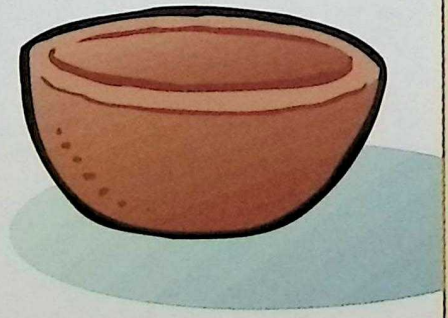
You can use clay to make beautiful art. To create objects that last a lifetime, dig in, coil up, and fire away.

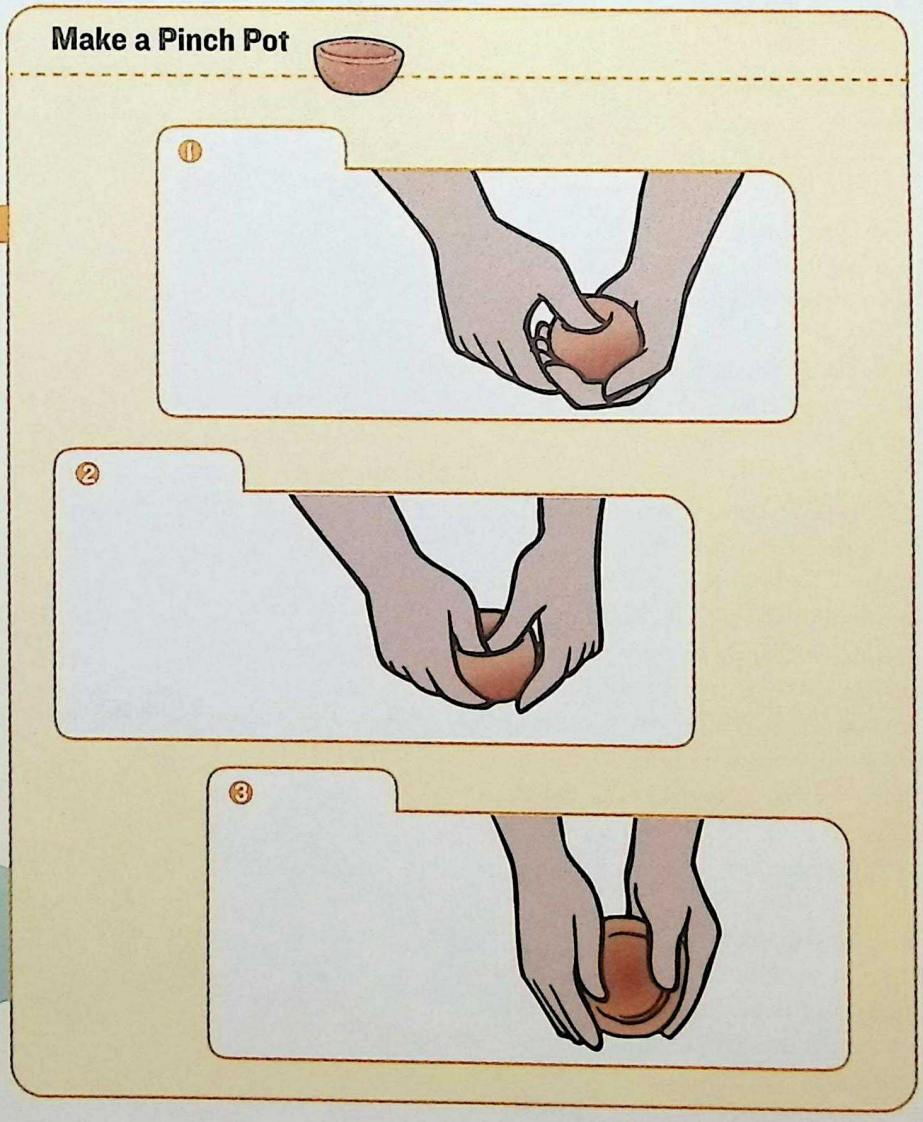


1. Make It with Clay

With the help of a skilled artist or teacher, practice two or more of the clay-building techniques below and finish at least one piece:

- **Pinch pots**
- Slab work (used for tiles, chimes, or decorations)
- Wheel thrown pieces
- Modeling/sculpting in clay (such as a figurine)





2. Coil Up!

Make a piece of pottery, using the coil method. Rub the clay between your palms into snakelike coils then layer the coils on themselves to make a cup or container. Join and smooth the coil layers.

3. Handle with Care

Learn how to handle clay with care. Show that you know how to:

- Store moist, unused clay and reclaim pieces of unfired, used clay for future use.
- Wedge clay properly to insure that your piece does not explode in the kiln.
- Store a work in progress properly.
- Use the slip and score method to attach two pieces of moist clay together.

4. Time for Tiles

With the help of illustrations, your leader, or another adult, decorate squares of clay with stamps, patterns, graffito (decorating on clay by scratching to the surface below), burnishing, filigree, carving, or modeling. If you can, visit museum collections displaying works of clay and ceramics from other cultures and countries.

5. Fuel and Fire

Visit a professional potter's studio, or invite a potter or ceramist to a group or troop meeting. Ask about her craft. Include questions about how to use a kiln, the oven used for hardening clay.

6. Grin and Glaze It!

Decorate bisqueware (fired and unglazed ceramic clay). Ask your leader, teacher, or crafts supply salesperson about the effects of underglazes, glazes, or overglazes; the colors of each glaze when they dry; and the opaqueness or shininess of the glaze. Experiment with different glazing techniques: dip, sponge, or paint. Then glaze a piece. Follow instructions so that your glaze will not stick to the kiln shelf and so that lids will not stick to pots during the glaze firing. *Note:* If you want to use your bisqueware as a serving piece for food, it must be glazed at least on the inside in order to be safe.

7. Bas-relief

Bas-relief is a form of sculpture that partially sticks out from a flat surface. Create a three-dimensional figure from a plaster block by pouring plaster onto a flat surface, such as a cookie sheet. Remove the plaster when it has hardened and carve a design into it. Then make a bas-relief plaque by rolling out a slab of clay over the plaster mold, making sure the clay goes into the parts you've carved out. Let the clay dry and separate it from the plaster. Decorate with acrylic paints if you like.

8. Dream Decorator

Look at modern examples of ceramics and pottery by visiting department or specialty stores with a friend, troop, or family members. Which of these would you use in a room or space in your dream house?

9. Pass on the Knowledge

Help a younger Girl Scout or friend make pottery using any one of the methods described above. Arrange to display the results.

10. Folk Pottery

Find two or three examples of folk sculpture or pottery at a museum, online, or in magazines. Look for examples from a variety of cultures and places in this and other countries. Observe how pieces from Africa or Asia, for example, are different from those of Central America and the United States. If possible, get pictures or reproductions of the works you are describing. Label them by their titles, dates, and places of origin.

