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Teaching Tips For Clay

FYI:

This newsletter is an accompaniment to the I Am Clay DVD to provide viewers with concrete information about working with clay. Future newsletters will be posted regularly. To order the I Am Clay DVD, please visit www.k-play.com or call 888-266-3094.

Hints:

- Don't be afraid to give the children more clay if needed. Have some extra clay balls ready!
- A wooden clay board makes an ideal work surface.
- Natural clay can be used as an open-ended material and be reused over and over again.

K-play/ 888-266-3094

Using Clay Is Easy

Clay is one of the easiest art materials to use with young children. All you need is clay, a work surface and a wire cutter.

Clay can be used directly from its original bag from the manufacturer. Make sure you have at least one pound of clay per child.

Simply take the clay out of the bag, place it on a clay board or other hard surface. Using a wire cutter slice through the clay block and cut off the needed amount. Each cut slice is called a slab.

You can create balls of clay from the

cut slabs by tearing the slab in half and forming it into a ball. One half of a slab is plenty for a child to begin to work with.

The larger the amount, the more the child will want to pound it. If you give a child a small ball that fits in his/her hand a different type of interaction will occur with the clay. The child might roll the ball, model it in the hand or squeeze it between the hands. Experiment with different sizes of balls and shapes and amounts of clay with the children. Notice how the shape and/or size influences the child's work.

What happens if you offer a group of children a whole block of clay?

Why Clay Boards?

Working with clay on a board helps define the child's workspace and makes clean-up easy.

When a child works on a defined surface, the edges of this surface give the child boundaries. These boundaries are helpful for young children. A defined work surface helps focus attention and limit distractions.

A wooden board has the capacity to absorb excess water, can be cleaned with a wet sponge or paper towel, and is made from a natural material. Using clay on a plastic mat seems contradictory to the essence of clay and also causes clay to either slip around and/or stick to it. Masonite boards may also be used or a canvas cloth. Some clay studios staple or tack the canvas right to the table so it doesn't slip around while the children are working. If you choose to use canvas or masonite, there is no need to clean with

water. Simply have the students scrape off any clay left on the work surface with a popsicle stick. Once the clay has dried, the excess bits can be dusted off in the garbage. Be careful though to not inhale the clay dust.

Boards can then be stacked away until their next use.

Sometimes it is beneficial not to work on individual boards, especially when the children want to engage in group-work or want to explore clay with their bodies. In this case, provide a large canvas cloth or a large piece of cardboard for the children to work collaboratively.

If you want the children to explore clay with their bodies, place the clay on the floor on a piece of canvas. The cloth will determine where the exploration occurs.

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Water- Less Is More

Natural clay needs water. As the children use the clay, the air and the children's hands absorb the water from the clay. Within approximately 30 to 40 minutes or less in dry climates, the clay will start becoming hard and brittle. Before the clay becomes too dry, the children should be taught how to add water to the clay.

If the children are young, they should use a defined amount of water through the wet paper towel method or the wet paper towel pad method.

For the wet paper towel method, give each child a wet paper towel and teach

how to squeeze out the water onto the hands. The hands can then add water to the clay.

To make a paper towel pad, wet a folded wad of paper towels and place in a dish. The children can then pat the wet pad with their hands to add water to the clay.

If the children are older and more mature, you can teach them how to dip their fingers into a shallow dish of water to remoisten the clay.

All methods focus on having the hands wet the clay and offering a defined amount of water.

You Can Reuse Natural Clay

Natural clay can be used as an open-ended material and be reused over and over again. One teacher has reported on using the same block of clay for two years by following the method below.

Purchase or find a bucket that has a close fitting lid and line the bucket with a plastic kitchen garbage bag. This liner is essential and will help to keep the clay moist.

After working with the clay and before returning it to the bucket, add water to the clay. One way to do this

is to have the children make a clay ball from their remaining clay on their boards and poke a hole with their thumb into the clay ball. Add water into the hole and close it by pinching it together. The dry ball will "drink" the water overnight and will be soft and supple by morning.

Observe the next day if there is any water left in the clay balls and adjust accordingly.

Was there excess water in the ball?
Was the ball soft enough?
How much water is the right amount?



About Our Organization...

K-play was founded in 1999 as an art educational resource for teachers, parents and children.

Please call us or e-mail any questions you might have about clay.