

Self-Portrait CLAY BOXES



The example that I made as students were making their pieces.

Heidi Posh

As a high-school clay teacher, I constantly struggle with how to teach the basic techniques while keeping them fresh and exciting for students and for myself. Like many other clay teachers, I start with the fundamentals: pinch pots, coil pots, and slab construction. I was tired of clay dice and heart-shaped boxes and recognized the need to revamp my slab container assignment. I was inspired by the "Clay Portrait Boxes" project I found in the March 2009 issue of *SchoolArts*, but wanted to give it my own twist. So here is what I came up with.

Profile Patterns

Like the Picasso box, the container focuses on a human face, but the face on the box belongs to the young artist. An assistant and I traced each student's profile onto white paper. We then reduced them to a more manageable size of 75% on the copy machine. Each student received several copies of his or her "pattern" and also had the option of making additional copies at different sizes.


I began with a thorough introduction/review of slab construction. In all of my art classes, I stress the importance of "artisanship." The last thing I want is a beautifully designed piece that is not well constructed and falls apart during firing. (My students know "glue" is a four letter word!) After students had an understanding of the technique, I gave them the guidelines for the project. I like to give a list of "must includes," while leaving enough flexibility so students feel free to go in their own direction.

Project Criteria

- Each container must include at least one version of the profile.
- The profile must have facial features that are either built up, cut out completely, or incised into the clay.

I was tired of clay dice and heart-shaped boxes and recognized the need to revamp my slab container assignment.

- The piece must have at least four walls and a base; no two walls can be the same.
 - The piece must incorporate text that is meaningful to the student, such as a favorite saying, poem, or song lyric (not just their name, astrological sign, or BFF!).
- Every few days, I demonstrated an important step in front of the class. One day I rolled the clay slabs, traced the profile pattern onto clay, cut it out, and showed them how to store the slabs (flat and airtight). Another day I experimented with different techniques on the

eyes, nose, mouth, and ears and then showed how to use the slip-and-score technique to attach the sides of the container. This approach seems to work well and I was really pleased with the completed work. 

Heidi Posh is an art teacher at Adlai Stevenson High School in Livonia, Michigan. hposhiam@yahoo.com

NATIONAL STANDARD

Students create artworks that use organizational principles and functions to solve specific visual arts problems.

WEB LINK

www.jhpottery.com/tutorial/slab.html



Jen Szpak, grade twelve.