

The Architecture of the Shack

Jodi Bricely

In honor of Black History Month, I wanted to introduce a contemporary African-American sculptor, Beverly Buchanan, to students in my fourth-grade classes. Buchanan is known for her drawings and sculptures depicting shacks of the South. Fourth-graders were given the task of creating their own unique clay-slab shacks in the style of Buchanan.

Learning About Beverly Buchanan

I began the introduction to the lesson with a biographical video about Beverly Buchanan. I obtained the video from Annenberg Media's website, www.learner.org, a free resource for teachers. Students viewed the video online and saw firsthand where Beverly gets the inspiration for her shacks: the rural areas of Georgia. They were inspired as they watched her at work on her drawings and sculptures, and found it amusing that she talks to her artwork.

Building Elements

When students discovered they would be creating their own shack sculptures out of clay, they began brainstorming as to how they wanted their shacks to look. I demonstrated the simple handbuilding technique of slab construction in forming the house and base (the yard), emphasizing the importance of slip, score,

and merging the corners together. I also showed them how to use additive and subtractive techniques to create details such as siding, shutters, shingles, windows, etc.

Creating Shacks

Students began brainstorming with a 9 x 12" piece of paper divided into four sections. Each section illustrated a different angle of the house (front, back, sides). They used their approved idea to begin the slab construction. When all shacks were complete, they were allowed to air-dry, and then fired in the kiln. All bisqueware was painted with tempera paint and glazed with a clear gloss. Found objects were used to add details to the shacks.

The fourth-graders took pride in their work, and the finished products were evidence of their diligence. They were evaluated based on their effort, understanding of concepts, and self-control. The end-of-year art show displayed the shacks as small villages at each table. When students were surveyed, this was voted as the favorite project of the year. 📧

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Ashlee Parsons, grade four.



Taylor Balmut, grade four.



WEB LINKS

www.learner.org/resources/series64.html

www.beverlybuchanan.com

NATIONAL STANDARD

Students demonstrate how history, culture, and the visual arts can influence each other in making and studying works of art.

Materials

- access to Internet for Beverly Buchanan video
- 9 x 12" (22.5 x 30 cm) paper
- pencils
- Indian red clay
- kiln
- carving tools
- water
- table placemats
- plastic bags for storage
- tempera paint
- clear acrylic gloss
- found objects
- hot glue gun