



Artists for Kids Clay Kit: Log Lesson Plan

Created in collaboration with artist Amelia Butcher
Grades: 4-7

Booking & PDF Lesson Plan:

The Artists for Kids Clay Kit can be booked for free by teachers in the North Vancouver School District for a two-week period. To book the kit and to find this pdf lesson plan online, visit:

www.artistsforkids.ca > Learn > AFK Learning Kits

Learn about Amelia Butcher and her art: www.ameliabutcher.ca

Activity:

Using the materials in the Artists for Kids Clay Kit students will make miniature logs, creating texture with a variety of tools and using additive and subtractive sculpting techniques. Students will learn the following skills: hand building techniques, sculpting with clay, joining clay, using press molds, planning and design process, principles of design.

Inquiry Questions & Cross Curricular Connections:

- Why do living things change over time? **(Science)**
- How do these changes affect biodiversity? **(Science)**
- How do nurse logs support forest biodiversity? **(Science)**

Materials Provided in Clay Kit:

- Set of 10 wooden dowels
- Set of 30 10" x 10" canvas squares
- Set of 30 7.5" x 5.5" tar paper templates
- Set of bamboo paddle pick skewers
- Set of 18 bark texture tiles
- Set of 8 mini sieves
- Set of 14 plastic texture rubbing plates
- Set of 15 cups with round sponges inside
- 2 buckets
- Set of watercolour paint brushes
- Adjustable clay slicer
- Assorted combs
- Toothbrushes
- Set of 4 bisque molds
- Plastic netting & doilies
- 8 Yellow sponges

Materials Provided by Teacher/School:

- Clay - 20kg box of Plainsman Buffstone, \$30.46 at Green Barn:
<https://www.greenbarn.com/store/index.php?find=buffstone&pictureflow=1&iframe=0>
- Watercolour paint sets (or tempera paint pucks)
- Kiln
- Optional: oil pastels
- Optional: gloss acrylic medium or Mod Podge

Big Ideas

- Artists experiment in a variety of ways to discover new possibilities and perspectives. **(Arts Education)**
- Works of art influence and are influenced by the world around us. **(Arts Education)**

First Peoples Principles of Learning

- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).

Curricular Competencies: What students will DO

Students will be able to use the following creative process(es):

- Create a ceramic log sculpture using ideas inspired by imagination, inquiry, experimentation and purposeful play **(Arts Education)**
- Develop and refine technical skills required to represent texture and to create 3D objects in clay **(Arts Education)**

Concepts and Content: What students will KNOW

Students will know the following concepts and content:

- Elements and principles of art and design including texture, form, balance, repetition, emphasis, and variety **(Arts Education)**
- Processes, materials, and techniques needed to create a ceramic sculpture **(Arts Education)**

Core Competencies (suggested questions for reflection)

- COMMUNICATION: What shapes, textures, and imprints did you create to represent a nurse log?
- THINKING: How do nurse logs support forest biodiversity?
- PERSONAL AND SOCIAL: What differences and similarities did you observe between the ceramic sculptures that you and your classmates created?

Suggested Descriptive Feedback

- Nora has designed a ceramic log sculpture considering the elements of line, space, balance, repetition, unity, and variety. Nora has thoughtfully selected colours when painting her sculpture, creating contrast and camouflage through her colour choices.
- Nora has used a variety of additive and subtractive sculpting techniques to create a ceramic sculpture. She has refined technical skills required to represent texture and to create 3D objects in clay, including slipping and scoring and using press molds.
- Nora demonstrates personal responsibility when creating art, contributing to a safe learning environment. Nora actively contributes to cleaning up art materials and workspace.



Suggested Summative Evaluation Rubric

Teachers are invited to adapt and edit the following evaluation rubric:

CERAMIC LOG SCULPTURE

Sculpting Techniques Sculpture integrates at least: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3 different negative (subtractive) imprints• 3 different positive (3D) shapes• 6 different textures Proper scoring/slipping has been used for all attachments.	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	PROFICIENT	EXTENDING
Colour & Painting Techniques Colours have intentionally been chosen to create contrast, emphasis, and/or camouflage. Paint is neatly applied and has been watered down and wiped to emphasize texture.	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	PROFICIENT	EXTENDING
Studio Habits Student follows project procedures; participates in keeping workspace organized; respects classmates and materials	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	PROFICIENT	EXTENDING
OVERALL:	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	PROFICIENT	EXTENDING

NAME: _____ DIV: _____ DATE: _____

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Step-by-Step Lesson Guide

CLASS DISCUSSION:

- What is a nurse log?
- How do nurse logs support forest biodiversity?
- What organisms do nurse logs provide habitat and nutrients for (i.e. fungi, insects, new plants)?

VIEW AND DISCUSS EXAMPLES OF NURSE LOGS:

- Optionally share info about and images of nurse logs.
- Optionally take class on forest walk to observe a nurse log.

INTRO PROJECT:

- Students will create ceramic sculptures representing logs. They will use additive and subtractive sculpting techniques to represent log details, as well as living things on the log (i.e. insects, fungi, plants).

DISTRIBUTE MATERIALS:

- Each student gets a piece of canvas, a bamboo paddle pick skewer, and a brush
- Groups of 2-4 students share a cup with a sponge in it (with approximately 1cm of water added)

INTRO TO CLAY:

- Give each student a small ball of clay (see quantity in image to right)
- While students manipulate their ball of clay, ask them:
 - Think of a word to describe what the clay feels like, smells like, etc.
- Have everyone make a ball
- Have everyone make a snake
- Have everyone make a cube (first make a ball and then tap it on table to create flat sides)
- Have everyone put the ball in their palm and then squeeze it as hard as they can
 - Ask: What does this look like?
- Share with students that clay has the “superpower” to capture textures and shapes
- Share with students that if this piece of clay dries, it will get hard and lighter and it will be a new material called “ceramic”
- When fired in a kiln, clay can theoretically last forever
- The oldest clay artwork in the world is 30,000 years old
- You can carry out a “clay test” in nature when you find mud that you think might be clay. If you squeeze mud and it holds its shape, it's clay!
- Natural clay can be found in North Vancouver
- Ask the students if the clay has changed since they received it (it will have dried out and will have started cracking)
- Share with students that when creating their log sculpture project, they can trade out their dry clay for fresh clay (collect dry clay in one location, such as in a large plastic bag)



INTRO TO SLIPPING & SCORING (or slipping and "scratching"):

- Have each student make 2 snakes with their little ball of clay
- Show students how you could stick the 2 snakes together to make a cross
- Share that while it looks like the 2 snakes are joined, the clay is actually "lying." They will come apart as they dry.



- To properly join pieces of clay together, students will need to "slip and score" or "slip and scratch"
- To join the 2 snakes together, students should first add water to one side (this is "slipping"), by dabbing their finger or brush on the wet sponge. They should then apply this water to the spot where they will be joining the 2 pieces – on BOTH snakes. These spots should be damp but not dripping wet.



- Next, students should “score” or “scratch” each snake using the bamboo paddle skewer. To do this, students should scratch at the clay and make it very rough (see below).



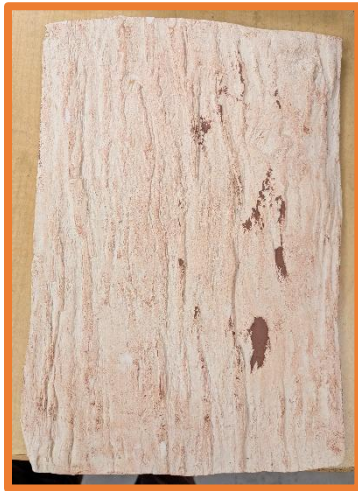
- Students can then join the two snakes together, matching up the slipped/scored spots on the clay. Students should wiggle the two sides together, gently.
- Demonstrate these steps again and have the students prompt you as you carry out each step.
- Collect the students' clay.

CERAMIC LOG CREATION - DISTRIBUTING CLAY, CREATING BARK TEXTURE, & CREATING LOG SHAPE:

- Set the clay slicer to 1 cm. Use the clay slicer to slice off slabs from the end of a brick of clay. Each slab should be approximately 5" x 7".
- Tip: You can drop the bag of clay on the floor to reshape it if it gets stretched or squished out of shape.



- Demonstrate how to capture bark texture using the ceramic texture tiles included in the kit.
- Place clay slab onto one of the ceramic texture tiles. Use a dowel roller to roll on the back of the clay slab to capture texture. Roll the dowel roller in multiple directions.
- Peel up a corner of the slab to see if the texture has been captured before gently pulling up the entire slab.



- Gently shape the textured slab into a curved log. It will be a "half log" that is open on the bottom. Encourage students to be very gentle when handling and shaping the clay.



- Poke 2-3 holes in the log from the inside. Remove a small section of the clay and gently stretch the shape of the hole.



- Distribute the clay slabs to the students on tar paper templates.
- Have students take turns using the ceramic texture tiles to create bark texture on their slabs, then create their curved log shape, adding 2-3 holes



CERAMIC LOG CREATION - CREATING & ATTACHING POSITIVE (3D) SHAPES:

- Ask students:
 - What are things you might find growing on a nurse log (i.e. moss, lichen, mushrooms)?
 - What creatures might be on or inside of a nurse log (i.e. worms, slugs, beetles)?
 - What might these creatures be doing?
- Optionally share with students printed reference images of living things that could be found on or inside nurse logs.
- Demonstrate how to model positive shapes with small pieces of clay
- Ask students to create and attach at least 3 positive or 3D shapes
- Very important:
 - Emphasize that the positive or 3D shapes should be no bigger than a grape
 - If objects are bigger, poke a hole through them using a skewer
 - Encourage students to consider scale and to keep objects small
 - Share with students that when fired, the tiles will crack if they are very uneven in thickness
 - If students model or sculpt their own objects, ask them to add texture to these objects using the tools in the kit
- Demonstrate how to “collage” or “glue” ALL 3D shapes onto the tiles using slipping and scoring
- Demonstrate how to use your finger as a “magic eraser” to remove details and textures that you don’t like



- Demonstrate how to use the bisque molds to create positive shapes:
 - Take a small piece of clay and press it into the bisque mold
 - Remove the clay from the mold by gently pressing another piece of clay onto the clay in the mold (like a "handle")
 - Students can use just one part of a bisque mold (ex. just the head of a bug)



- The excess clay around the molded shape can be smoothed into the tile and then textured using a tool such as a toothbrush (see below)



- Demonstrate how to create worms and grubs using combs of different sizes:
 - First roll out a small snake of clay
 - Roll this snake down the teeth of a comb
 - A thin snake of clay and a fine comb will create a worm-like object
 - A thick snake of clay and a hair pick will create grub-like object



- Demonstrate how to create mushrooms:
 - First, make a mushroom cap by sculpting a mini pinch pot. Start with a ball of clay. Push your finger into the middle of the ball, pinch, and then turn the shape to hollow it out.
 - The mushroom cap can be shaped to be pointed, rounded, flat, etc. A clay tool can be used to create gills inside and to create texture on the top of the cap.
 - Next, create the mushroom stalk by stretching and compressing out a small piece of clay (Note: clay objects that are compressed are stronger than objects that are rolled).



- Demonstrate how to create moss:
 - Take a small ball of clay and push it through a mini sieve to create clay moss.
 - Use slipping and scoring to attach it to the log.



- Demonstrate how to create fungi:
 - Take a small ball of clay and pinch it to create the flattened shape of fungi.
 - Create more than one layer of fungi and then use slipping and scoring to attach the layers to the log.
- Demonstrate how to create “bug tunnels”:
 - Use the clay loop tool and pull it along gently in spots on the clay log where there is less detail



- Once students have attached their 3 (or more) 3D objects to their logs, they should use a bamboo paddle skewer to carve their names into the bottom edge of their logs (it is helpful to have all students include their full name and for each student to carve their name in the same place)
- The sculptures can be left to dry on the tar paper templates and then bisque fired in a kiln

CERAMIC LOG CREATION - ADDING COLOUR:

- Share examples of painted log sculptures with students to give them an idea of what their sculptures will look like when painted (see images at the end of the document)
- Tip: Ask students to consider their colour scheme before painting. Have students choose 2-3 colours to paint the details on their log (i.e. worms, mushrooms, fungi, moss). Encourage students to consider whether they want their 3D elements to contrast with the log or camouflage with the log.
- Share with students that they can create contrast and emphasis within their composition by carefully selecting warm and cool colours (cool colours will appear to recede and warm colours will appear to come forward)
- Optionally have students create a pencil sketch of their log sculpture and practice adding colour to it using crayons or pencil crayons
- Demonstrate how to add colour to the log sculptures using watercolour paints (or tempera)
- The goal is to paint in a way that will highlight the texture in the tiles



- The bisque fired clay will suck up the watercolour paint like watercolour paper does
- Students should first cover a section of their sculpture with dark watercolour pigment
- They should then remove some of the paint using wet dense yellow sponges (provided in kit)



- Once students have painted their sculptures, they can then use gloss acrylic medium (or Mod Podge) to selectively glaze parts of their tiles that they would like to be shiny (ex. a worm, a beetle, or a section where there is water)
- Set up the classroom for painting and glazing as follows:
 - Distribute watercolour sets (or tempera paint pucks), watercolour brushes, and water cups to students (groups of 3-4 students can share paints and water cups)
 - Create a washing station where students can go to use water and sponges to remove a layer of watercolour paint
 - Create a glazing station with gloss medium dispensed in small yogurt cups and old paint brushes
 - Tip: put dirty brushes used to apply acrylic medium immediately into soapy water and wash thoroughly so that brushes are not ruined (dried acrylic medium will cause bristles to harden)







We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to Amelia Butcher for her generous support in developing this lesson plan. We would also like to thank the teachers who took part in the Artists for Kids professional development workshops with Amelia Butcher in October 2025 whose sculptures are featured in this lesson plan!