An Exploration of Cultural Ceramics in Connection to Contemporary Experiences

Kristin Kowalski
kkowalski@mvcds.org
Maumee Valley Country Day School, Toledo, Ohio
Upper School Art Instructor

Maumee Valley Country Day

• As an independent school, Maumee Valley enjoys the flexibility to establish our own curriculum and standards. We can be innovative and bold and we can teach not to tests but to the skills content our students will need as future global leaders.
• Pre-12 grade over 500 students 200 in the Upper School
• Students from 15 different cultural backgrounds
Winterim Program

- Winterim is a three-week program that engages students outside the classroom so that they can gain a deeper knowledge of specific interests. Students often use this total immersion experience to explore future careers. In fact, Winterim has proven to be highly influential in helping students decide what they want to do with the rest of their lives -- while enlightening them on the steps to take to get there.

- Upper School students choose from an array of on-campus courses, culture-oriented travel experiences, independent study or focused study through The Network of Complementary Schools.

Overview

Theoretical Curriculum
How it was applied in an experiential learning environment
The overall outcome of the curriculum in practice
I wrote the curriculum in Graduate School and then had the opportunity to apply the theory into practice.

The curriculum was “Ceramics: A Multicultural Investigation in a Contemporary Society”

An 18 week high school beginning ceramic course
From Theory to Practice

Expressive Goals
To be introduced to various ceramic processes
To develop technical skill in ceramics
To develop personal style and express creative ideas
To be introduced to diverse cultural artists and artworks to stimulate ideas
To promote further investigation in ceramics

From Theory to Practice

Thematic Connection-Content and Context
To investigate the historical content in multicultural ceramics
To find links between topics and issues related to cultural ceramics and connect them to contemporary society and the students personal lives.
To develop and understand an appreciation for diverse cultures in understanding the context of the work.
Units

Unit 1
Women Potters and Gender Rolls in Ceramics
Women Potters and Gender Rolls in Ceramics

**Historical and Cultural Exemplars**

- Various women potters in diverse cultures
- Contemporary pottery created by both men and women

**Discussion**

- Discuss gender rolls in contemporary ceramics. Is there any? Can you see a difference? Describe the aesthetic differences and similarities.

**Create**

- Introduction to ceramic processes and terms
- Pinch Pots (for glaze testing)

---

**Unit 2**

*Family, Community, and Generations*

*Southwestern Ceramics*
Family, Community, and Generations

Historical and Cultural Exemplars
• Southwestern pottery: Maria and Julian Martinez, Hopi Pottery, Pueblo Pottery
• Ceramic traditions and processes that have been passed down for generations

Discussion
• Discuss the importance of their communities and families. How does it differ from Southwest culture?
• What types of items or knowledge have been passed down from previous generations to you? What do you treasure most? What value do these items or skills have to you?

Create
• Coil Building
• Students will create a piece that reflects family and community.
• Pit firing and sager firing

Unit 3
Ceremonies and Celebration
African Art
Ceremonies and Celebration

**Historical and Cultural Exemplars**
- African ceremonial art
- Performance videos of African ceremonies

**Discussion**
- How do you prepare for a ceremony or celebration? How does that compare to African traditions and rituals?
- Why are ceremonies important? What do we celebrate? How does this change with age? Who attends the ceremonies?

**Create**
- Slab building, texture, stamping
- Create a piece that represents an aspect of a personal ceremony

---

**Unit 4**

Poetry and Symbolism

Islamic Pottery
Poetry and Symbolism

**Historical and Cultural Exemplars**
- Historical Islamic Pottery
- Various artworks that address symbolism within imagery
- Contemporary poetry examples to analyze

**Discussion**
- What do you consider as contemporary poetry? How does it affect our society? What is some symbolism that lies in poetry?
- What are some of the similarities between contemporary poetry and historical?

**Create**
- Tile making and design, relief carving
- Make a personal statement, poem, or lyric that represents yourself

---

**Unit 5**

Animals in our Society

Chinese Culture and Ceramics
Animals in our Society

**Historical and Cultural Exemplars**
- Animal Sculptures that have symbolism (Historical and Contemporary)
- Chinese animal symbolism handout
- Thai ceramics included

**Discussion**
- How do animals affect advertising? Why are they used? How is this different for Chinese or Thai ceramics?
- How are animals part of your life? How are animals part of our society? What is your personal connection with them?

**Create**
- Create a piece that incorporates animal symbolism? Using the Chinese symbolism to help guide the content.
- Mixed processes

---

**Unit 6**

Imaginative Creative Figures

Oaxaca Ceramics
Imaginative Creative Figures

Historical and Cultural Exemplars
• Historical and Contemporary Oaxaca Sculptures
• Contemporary figurative sculptures

Discussion
• How has ceramics Oaxaca changed over time because of society?
• What does the human figure represent in this culture? How is it represented in different contexts? How does this compare to Oaxaca?

Create
• Create a figurative sculpture that depicts a personal interest or feeling.
• Understanding figurative proportions

Unit 7
Narrative and Storytelling
Italian Renaissance Ceramics
Narrative and Storytelling

Historical and Cultural Exemplars

- Italian Renaissance Ceramics, focusing on the maiolica designs
- Contemporary ceramic artists that use narratives as content

Discussion

- How do the allegoric stories depicted in Italian Renaissance ceramics relate to contemporary forms of storytelling?
- What is the role of contemporary narratives and storytelling in our society?
- How does the decorative surface design affect the overall visual impact of the pieces?

Create

- Use maiolica glazing techniques to add a narrative element to a project
- Understand how to create a design on a three-dimensional form

Unit 8

Spontaneous Process

Japanese Ceramics
Spontaneous Process

Historical and Cultural Exemplars

• Contemporary and Historical wood fired pottery
• This history and the process of firing an Anagama kiln

Discussion

• How does the spontaneous firing process affect the aesthetic of Japanese ceramics?
• What are some examples of spontaneous experiences in life? Why are they important?

Create

• Participate in a community firing of works

Unit 9

Production

Polish Pottery
Production

Historical and Cultural Exemplars
- Polish Pottery examples
- Video of how Polish pottery pieces are made in a production factory

Discussion
- What is the difference of production pieces and the pieces you make?
- What are some of the items that you own that are production made? What are some one of a kind pieces that you own?

Create
- Create a series of wheel thrown pieces
- Develop pottery throwing and trimming skills.

From Theory to Practice
An Investigation into Cultural Ceramics

• We will investigate the historical content in multicultural ceramics, and relate those issues to our contemporary lives and experiences. Looking at various historical cultural ceramic artworks, we will develop an understanding for the diversity that makes up the world.
• We will be learning wheel throwing, mold making, and various forms of hand building, combined with traditional and non-traditional firing methods.

An Investigation into Cultural Ceramics

• We will discover the firing techniques of Native American potters and other pre-Columbian cultures. The class will then investigate ideas including the symbolism of Islamic pottery and the narratives of Italian Renaissance ceramics.
• We will travel to a nearby museum to explore their cultural collections and appreciate the works up-close. The course will be completed with a our Winterim accomplishments.
• Cost $375