

CREATIVE CERAMICS

Inspired by Roman Sculpture

Clay Busts based on characters in Julius Caesar A project suitable for KS2



Roman Art and Julius Caesar

The wealth of art created by the Romans provides an obvious and rich starting point for exploring creative responses to Shakespeare's play. This project allows children to develop their 3D and sculpture skills, using clay as the main medium for examining character in portraiture. This project is most suitable for KS2 children or younger children with confident fine motor skills.

Art History and Context

The arts were of huge importance to the Romans, and while Roman mosaics are arguably the most famous and well-documented of Roman art forms, Roman sculpture is just as compelling for its many different forms and purposes. It includes the vast range of ceramic pottery made for dining, the carved stone reliefs found on walls, depicting victorious battles, and the beautiful statues and busts found in homes, parks and gardens, which celebrated revered figures from Roman life.

Roman Pottery

As this project uses clay, it can be interesting to look closer at examples of Roman earthenware, which were made for everyday use. These ceramic objects, bowls, plates and vessels can be divided into two categories: Fine Ware and Course Ware. Fine Ware was used on the tables of wealthier households for formal occasions. It was delicately made and often highly glazed or decorated. Course Ware, as the name suggests, was a thicker and more roughly constructed type of utensil.



Images L-R: Course Ware, Terra Sigilata Fine Ware



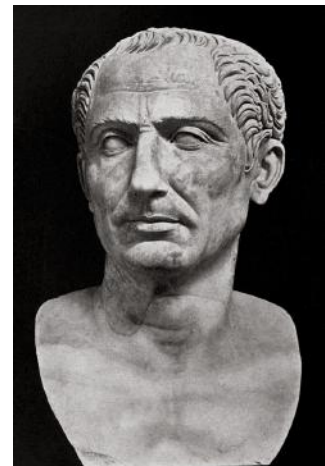
Roman Amphorae
Image Credits: Wikipedia

The Romans also made *amphorae*, a type of handled jug used for holding liquids.

Roman pottery was generally not painted, unlike Greek pottery. Instead the Romans preferred engraved carving as a form of decoration.

Introducing Roman Busts

For our project, the children will use clay to make a small-scale example of a bust. A Roman bust is a sculpted portrait featuring only the head (and sometimes the shoulders). They were often chiseled from marble, and required incredible care and expertise to make. It was common for wealthy Romans to display a bust of an important ancestor in the atrium of their homes, to show off their heritage and lineage. Some busts also celebrated famous generals or philosophers. But while Greek statues were concerned with ideals of beauty, the Romans preferred their sculpture to emphasise character, experience and strength.



L-R: Tiberius, Caligula, Julius Caesar. (Images: British Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Naples Archeological Museum)

Lesson 1 – Drawing Portraits with Character

It is always useful to draw before attempting to sculpt a three dimensional shape. Portrait drawing gives the children time to look closely at the human head, and to consider the features they will want to bring out in the clay.



Image: Elena Ciuprina

- In pairs, let the children take turns to draw each other, both face on and in profile. Introduce simple concepts of proportion, by drawing attention to the position of the key features of the face – for example, the way the eyes are found approximately half the distance between the top of the head and the bottom of the chin.
- Roman sculpture aimed to celebrate strength and character, so encourage the children to draw different expressions and to notice unique details such as the line of a brow, the curve of a nose, patterns of freckles, moles or lines.
- Allow about 45mins- 1 hour for drawing. To extend the lesson and link back to the play, ask the children to include accessories that would transform their portrait into that of a Roman – for example a laurel crown, facial hair or soldier's headdress.

Lesson 2 – Sculpting Clay Busts

Allow approximately 1.5 hours uninterrupted time (clay will harden and become difficult to use if left for long periods).

RESOURCES

You will need:

- Class pack Air Drying Clay (in Stone or Terra Cotta)
- Boards for each child to work on
- Wire for cutting clay
- Modeling tools if available. If not, scissors and pencils are adequate.
- Matchsticks
- Images of Roman characters can be useful on whiteboard for inspiration.

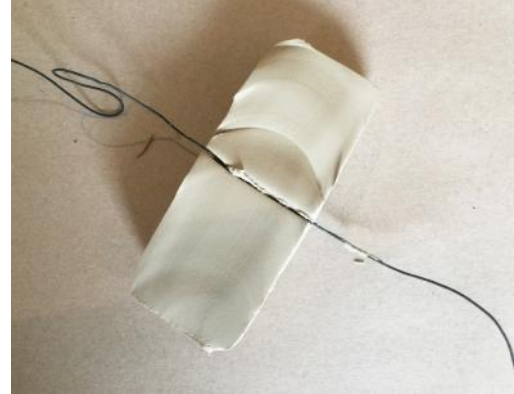


The Process

Your children will probably have a range of experiences of using clay and correspondingly different levels of confidence. The stages described here assume no experience at all, and can be adapted according to your class's needs.

Making the neck and shoulders:

- The best way to cut clay is with wire. Give each child a small slab of clay to roll into a ball. The size of your finished bust is up to you but the project shown here works with balls of clay roughly the size of a tangerine.
- Rolling a ball is best done between the palms of the hands, but children can also move the clay around on a table top to get a spherical shape.



- When the clay is in a smooth ball, gently pinch the ball so that the neck shape starts to emerge. Smooth the clay with your fingers.
- Place the ball down onto the board, and start to shape the clay into the shape of the shoulders.



- When you are happy with the shape of the neck and shoulders, smooth with a finger so that the clay is smooth with no cracks showing. Place a matchstick into the neck (this will help the head to join later).



NB: If the children are not happy with the shape of their sculpture, they can of course start again by rolling the clay back into a ball. However doing this too many times will dry the clay out and cause it to crack.

Making the head of your bust:



- Start again in exactly the same way as before – by rolling a ball.
- Gently press the sides of the ball to create a more oval shape.
- With the end of a pencil or a blunt modeling tool, make two indents in the oval, at the place where the eyes would be.
- Gently pinch between the two holes to pull out a rough nose shape.



- The nose can now be more carefully sculpted, adding holes for nostrils. Also, give more shape to the eyes and create eyebrows by pinching at the top of the eyeholes. Remind the children to think about character and the expression they want to create.



- The mouth can be created by making a small slice with a flat knife or the end of a pair of scissors.



- Details can now be added to the head. For example, pinch out ears, use a tool to create texture for hair, beards or moustaches. Small fingers may find it easier to create jewellery or hair accessories.



Joining the head to the neck and shoulders:

To make sure the head remains attached to the neck and shoulders, show the children how to use a technique called 'Score and slip'.

- First score into the base of the head and the neck by making cross hatched marks with a craft knife or scissors.
- Next apply some 'slip' (clay suspension in water) to act as a glue.



- Lastly, when the head is on the neck, smooth the clay with your fingers so that the two parts seem to be joined seamlessly.



- Leave the bust to dry. This should take around 48 hours in a warm, dry environment.

Lesson 3 – Glazing and finishing your bust

Allow approximately 20-30 minutes

- In the last lesson, the children can create a 'marble' effect, by mixing PVA glue with white acrylic paint in equal amounts. They should very carefully paint their busts in this, using a fine paintbrush for all the detailed areas. At this point, the clay will be dry but very brittle and could break if handled roughly.

NB: A glue such as Araldite can be used to fix the sculptures if necessary, but this should only be used by an adult.



The busts are now finished!

- If your busts are of a small size, you might want to consider taking inspiration from Roman architecture to display them.

'Plinths' can be made by creating a rectangular prism from card and decorating these with oil pastel, pen or ink.

