



Archaeology Pottery

(Grades: Best for Elementary (8-11 years), but can be modified for younger or older!)

Background

Archaeology is the study of human culture. We have some *amazing* archaeology sites here in Colorado, but the best-known is likely Mesa Verde National Park.

Mesa Verde was home to Native Americans called the Ancestral Puebloans. These amazing indigenous peoples lived there for almost 700 years! This was over 1,400 years ago from 600 to 1300 CE (common era).

<https://www.nps.gov/meve/index.htm>

Mesa Verde Park has over 5,000 archaeological sites spread across 40 miles! Thousands of artifacts have been studied - including amazing pottery! The beautiful black on white paint style is iconic from these peoples, and you can try it yourself!

Note: The Ancestral Puebloan peoples were originally called the Anasazi. Anasazi was actually a Navajo word that meant "ancient enemy" - so you can imagine that it's not very nice to use today! When looking for information about these Native Americans, you will probably still see Anasazi referring to them. Know that both terms are for these peoples, though Ancestral Pueblo/Puebloan is the proper name!

How did Native Americans Paint?

Ancient people across the globe have created incredibly detailed and beautiful pieces of art on every-day common items! Below we see a couple of bowls, cups and pitchers, and even a ladle!

Ancestral Puebloans used a method called 'coil and scrape' pottery, and it is still used today by their descendants in Arizona and New Mexico! [Here's an interesting video on the technique!](#) After creating the item, they would paint it with a thin white clay and would use paint made from crushing and mixing minerals and plants with water.

[Pottery Photo 1](#) - Photo by Yinan Chen

[Pottery Photo 2](#) - Photo from the NPS

[Pottery Photo 3](#) - Photo from the NPS

[Pottery Photo 4](#) - Photo by Brooklyn Museum/Riggs Pueblo Pottery Fund

Prep: While it's not required, a wax paper surface is great when you're playing with clay and paints! If you will be putting the paint directly onto the wax paper, it may be good to put down a layer of aluminum foil beneath the wax paper to protect your table/surface.

What You'll Need:

Air-dry White Clay (Crayola works great and it's what we use for our camps)

Small glass of water (for dipping fingers in for smoothing as needed)

Metal/plastic spoon (for smoothing the coiled sides)

Wax Paper (optional: aluminum foil)

Black Acrylic water-based paint (or whatever type of black paint you have available)

Small paintbrush (for details - larger brush works for smaller hands, however)

Directions:

1. Use the flat of the table to make a length of clay. Coil it around itself to create a base for your bowl/pot/jar!
2. Keep adding coils and smoothing with your fingers after each added coil. You can smooth it out by dipping your fingers into water, or dip the spoon into water and use the rounded back side to make a smoothness to the sides of the pottery. Watch the video again to see the process.
3. Give it at least 24-hours to dry when you're finished! Set it on the wax paper, and after the sides feel dry and sturdy, tip it over to let the bottom air dry.
4. After everything is dry, look at the pottery photos above and see if you can create your own Ancestral Puebloan designs on your pottery!
5. Share your potter designs with us on <https://www.facebook.com/DinoRidge/>



Visit <https://dinoridge.org/online-education/> for more fun activities!