



Above, From Left: Jessica Manriquez, grade 11; Jacques Law, grade 10; Tara Scott, grade 10.

AMACO®

Lesson #14 Recreating Chinese Bronze Vessels

The Chinese Bronze Age lasted from the 16th Century B.C. to approximately the beginning of the modern era. During this brilliant chapter in Chinese history, the Chinese of the Shang and Early Chou Dynasties used bronze vessels as part of the burial process and ancestor worship. They believed that their deceased relatives did not suffer death as we know it, but went to another, very similar world where they lived forever. The deceased needed food, clothing, and household utensils, and so these things were buried with them. Bronze vessels were used to hold food and wine as an integral part of the funeral ceremony, because these vessels would last forever. In this lesson, high school students learn the art of recreating Chinese Bronze Vessels using clay, specialized glazes, and Rub 'n Buff®.



Courtney Lowe, Grade 10.

Lesson Goals and Objectives:

1. Students learn to make Chinese Bronze Vessels using coil or slab-built clay ceramic techniques.
2. The lesson incorporates art history, aesthetics, and criticism with a hands-on activity.
3. The lesson focuses on various ceramic techniques and important composition and design elements essential to creating a carved ceramic box in the style of the Chinese Bronze Vessels; fundamental technical skills for using specialty glazes and finishing products to create unique surfaces; and self-expression.

Background and Preparation:

1. This lesson is designed for high school students, but can be used with modification for middle school students, as well.
2. An overview of the history of Chinese Bronze Vessels should be presented with various examples shown to the student. In addition to showing students photographs, plan a trip to the local art museum to see actual examples of these vessels.
3. Explain that the students are making a vessel that is designed to hold something of value. The vessels in this lesson are based loosely on the Chinese *ting* vessels of the Shang Dynasty. The vessels were used in various ceremo-

nies, especially funerals. The designs were based on animal and geometric forms. Some designs show a symmetrical human mask. Late Shang designers used zoomorphic motifs with quadrupeds, reptiles, birds, and insects.

4. Explain that the students will be making “faux” Chinese Bronze Vessels and what techniques and materials were used to create the originals.
5. Describe the techniques and materials used in this lesson plan—coil and slab building, carving, and finishing techniques. Show students examples of pieces created using these methods.

Glossary:

Bisque—Unglazed pottery after first firing.

Bronze—An alloy of copper and tin and sometimes other elements that is very hard and strong; often used for cast sculptures.

Composition—The organization of a work of art.

Dynasty—A succession of rulers of the same line (family).



Kristine Hashimoto, Grade 10.

Fire—A term used in ceramics; to heat the clay in a kiln at a very high temperature until it is dry and hard and becomes pottery.

Glaze—A special clear or colored liquid mixture that is applied to pottery and becomes a hard glass surface when fired to the right temperature in a kiln.

Quadruped—animal on four legs.

Score—To scratch or “rough up” surfaces of clay that are to be joined together.

Scoring—A method of joining two parts of clay together that have dried to a leather-hard stage by scratching the two surfaces and spreading slip between them as a “glue.”

Slip—Clay that has been watered down to a creamy consistency.

Template—A positive pattern.

Ting—A shape or style of ancient Chinese Bronze Vessels.

Underglaze—A special type of color that is put on a ceramic piece before the glaze. It has no flux (glass former) in it so it stays where it is put when fired and is good for detail work. It is used for painting and decorating.

Vessel—Container.

Zoomorphic—Animal-like; something that is not an animal, but is made to look like one or given animal-like characteristics.

Supplies:

Clay
AMACO® Alligator Glazes
AMACO® Rub 'n Buff®
AMACO® Clay Shapers™
Carving Tools
Wooden Paddle

Additional Supplies:

Paper
Pencils
Newspaper
Plastic for Wrapping Clay
Vinegar
Slab Roller or Rolling Pin
Kiln



Chinese (Unknown). Ritual Vessel (fangding), 11th century B.C. Bronze; 9½" high with handles. Indianapolis, Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Eli Lilly. Photograph ©1990, Indianapolis, Museum of Art.

Instructions:

1. After looking at pictures of vessels and discussing the history, students should draw the shape and design of the vessel they want to create. Vessels should be approximately 10" in height. The teacher should approve design to be sure it is feasible.
2. Make patterns from newspaper for vessel. The teacher should again check the size on the patterns to be sure they are the proper size to work for this project.
3. If slab building, roll slab to approximately 3/8-inches thick. Using template or pattern, students now cut the bottom and sides of the vessel. Have them layer slabs between approxi-
4. mately 20 sheets of newspaper and then wrap slabs and paper in plastic overnight. The newspaper pulls enough moisture out of the clay so that it is firm enough to build the form. Put the pieces together by scoring the edges and using slip and/or vinegar plus a coil on the inside to seal the edges. Be sure the sealed edge is smoothed with a damp sponge.
4. If coil building, students should first cut the shape of the base. Use a small rib to smooth the coils as they go. Use a cardboard template cut to the shape of the vessel to get the correct shape. If the vessel seems too soft, stuff newspaper inside to dry it out.
5. Have students make legs and/or tops for their containers using either the slab or coil technique. Use the slip and/or vinegar technique to attach the legs or handles.
6. When not working on the vessels, students should keep them loosely covered in plastic so that they do not dry out and become hard.



Chinese (Unknown). Ritual Vessel (ding), 11th century B.C. Bronze; 9" high. Indianapolis, Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Eli Lilly. Photograph ©1990, Indianapolis, Museum of Art.

7. When the students have completed building their vessels, they should draw the design they want to carve on a piece of paper and have it approved by the teacher.
8. Provide students with examples of Japanese border designs and other design motifs. Encourage them to create complex, intricate, interesting designs and to stay away from the usual hearts, stars, rainbow, and sun designs.
9. The design should then be transferred to the sides of the vessel.
10. Carving is done with a variety of ceramic carving tools. Urge students to carve their designs carefully to different depths without cutting through the clay.
11. When the design is complete, allow pieces to dry slowly to avoid cracking.
12. When thoroughly dry, bisque fire to cone 03.



Crystal Morris, Grade 10.

13. Textured Alligator Glazes combined with Rub 'n Buff® create the "faux" ancient bronze finish. Apply three coats of glaze to the bisqued vessel. Fire to cone 04.
14. When the piece is fired and cooled, apply Rub 'n Buff® to the vessel with a soft cloth and gently buff to a metallic luster.
15. The vessels can be decorated with a variety of finishes: underglazes plus Rub 'n Buff®, acrylic paint plus Rub 'n Buff® or unglazed raku fired.

Examples of Chinese Bronze Vessels are by students at Oakmont High School, Colfax, California.
This lesson was originally developed by Barrie Burnham, Art Teacher.

This is one lesson in a series of art plans for elementary and secondary programs using American Art Clay Co., Inc. products.
Successful lessons will be considered for future publication.
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