When a clay object is ready to dry, the student places it on a near-by shelf where scraps of paper and a sharpie marker are available. Students write their name and class on the scrap of paper, and place the paper under their clay piece. Later in the day, or whenever I have a moment, I turn the piece over and transfer the name and class onto the clay. This way I can read the name when I unload the kiln.

as soon as a Piece is dry, i Put it right into the kiln, and just keep the lid open, loading work as it is ready until the kiln is full. I am fortunate that my kiln is right in my room, so I can do this easily. Loading as pieces dry keeps the clay shelf open to receive more pieces as they are made throughout the week and minimizes breakage.

Once the kiln is full, I fire. It could be once a week when things are moving right along, or once every two weeks when things are just starting up. Near the end of a quarter it could be twice a week to get everything done before the clay center closes.

Students learn that i don’t Put anything in the kiln until it is bone dry, or the clay might crack or even explode. They also know that I don’t start the kiln until it is full, because the load will fire more evenly and efficiently if it is full. Clay artists learn to be patient!

The fired clay is unloaded into class boxes (the lids from copier paper boxes work really well for this). At the start of the first class after the bisqueware is ready, students gather around the clay table. Various considerations for surface-treatments are described.

“Functional” pottery that will hold food or liquid must be glazed and fired a second time. Sculptures can be painted. The qualities of each type of paint are briefly highlighted: Tempera for bold, matte color, acrylic for a shiny, opaque finish, watercolor for a subtle, transparent look. Some students choose to leave their clay as is, and others explore less expected decorating techniques such as markers or colored pencils.

When the first clay pieces are ready to go home, class is halted a little early so I can show everyone how to wrap the fragile objects in crumpled newspaper, secure with masking tape, and label with a marker. Students are expected to do this for themselves next time.

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