

Hand It Over!

Combine a hand traced onto clay with a proverb to create a dish imbued with old-fashioned wisdom.

(art + literature)

A proverb, or “saying,” is a short, pithy expression that generally contains advice or wisdom. Sayings are often repeated year after year down through generations, and are most often based on common sense experience. Through the passing of time, however, the meaning of many sayings has been lost. For example, the meaning of “a bird in the hand is worth more than two in the bush” means it’s better to have a lesser but certain advantage than the possibility of a greater one that may come to nothing. This proverb refers back to medieval falconry where a bird in the hand (the falcon) was a valuable asset and was worth more than two in the bush (the prey). This expression was first seen in print more than 300 years ago in John Ray’s “A Hand-book of Proverbs,” written in 1670.

There are hundreds of old sayings that involve the hand. Some examples are “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world,” “Don’t bite the hand that feeds you,” and “You have him in the palm of your hand.”

Do a little research and find a “hand” saying that is significant to you. The original meaning of the saying often turns out to be distinctly different than what we might think

GRADES 3-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Cover tables with canvas, and gather rolling pins.
2. Provide each student with about 2 lbs of clay.

Process

1. Start by rolling out a slab of clay on a canvas-covered surface. Try to roll an even slab approximately 1/2” thick.
2. Make a tracing of a closed hand on paper to create a pattern, or trace directly around a hand onto the clay. The hand may be positioned palm up or palm down. Trace slightly outside the perimeter of the hand (1/2”) to allow for shrinkage of the final piece. Using a fettling knife, cut the hand out of the slab, being careful not to distort it. Carefully move it to a ware board or piece of cardboard. Tip: If possible, cut the hand out while on a ware board as this may result in less distortion than if moved.
3. Using the alphabet tooling set, impress the letters of each word of the chosen saying onto the clay, leaving room for imagery in the palm.



Materials (required)

[Blick Stoneware Clay](#), 50 lb (30517-1050); share one across class

[Creativity Street Wonderfoam Sheets](#), Package of 10 sheets (60947-1023); share one package across class

[Amaco Lead-Free Designer Velvet Underglazes](#), 2 oz (30411-); share five colors across class

[Kemper Wire Loop Sgraffito Tool](#) (30317-1063); share five across class

[Kemper Fettling Knife, Soft](#) (30349-1010); share five across class

[Rolling Pin](#), (30345-); share five across class

[Amaco Lead-Free Clear Transparent Glaze](#), Pint (30406-1026); share one across class

OPTIONAL MATERIALS

[Amaco Stonex White Clay](#) (33247-)

[Leather Tooling Sets, Alphabet and Numbers](#) (63008-1009); share one across class

[Blick Studio Acrylics](#) (01637-)



Process - continued

Another option for applying wording is to lay a piece of plastic film, such as that from a sandwich bag, over the clay, and use a pen to write the phrase by impressing into the clay. The plastic keeps burrs from rising on the clay and results in a smoother impression.

4. Now decide on imagery that will be a good companion to the saying that has been chosen. For example, for the saying, "A bird in the hand is worth more than two in the bush," an image of a bird might be appropriate. To make a stamp, cut a piece of Wonderfoam that will fit into the space on the hand that's available for imagery. Draw just the outline of the image onto the Wonderfoam, then cut it out with scissors. On this stamp, brush underglaze color(s). This stamp may be used to stamp a single image, or repeated. At this point, allow the hand to become leather-hard.
5. At the leather-hard stage, incise or carve into the stamped areas with a pencil tip or a loop tool to add detail to the imagery. Perhaps add an eye to the bird, as well as details such as feathers or a wing. Now, bend the hand slightly up at the edges to form a dish. Smooth any edges with a moistened finger or damp sponge. Tip: If the dish is not stable, or rocks slightly, make a ring out of a coil of clay to create a foot ring. Attach to the underside of the piece by slipping and scoring.
6. After bisque firing to Cone 04, glaze with a clear glaze. Tip: To make the phrase stand out, brush underglaze into the letters and then sponge off the surface before glazing. This dish is now completely functional!



Options

1. Attach two hands together to form a larger dish that looks like a pair of hands that could hold an object. With this option, both the left and right hands need to be traced with palms facing up. Score and slip to attach the two hands together firmly along the pinky fingers.
2. Make a version out of air dry clay and use acrylic paints on the Wonderfoam stamp to create imagery. Again, allow room for shrinkage by tracing outside the hand.
3. Make a three-dimensional object to accompany the saying on the hand. Fire it separately and rest it in the hand to create a sculptural piece.



Step 1: Trace slightly outside a closed hand onto a slab of clay. Cut out.



Step 2: Impress a proverb or saying onto the hand, leaving room on the palm for imagery.



Step 3: Create a stamp, brush with underglaze, and carve details. Finally, bend hand up at the edges to form a shallow dish.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1:

Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.