

# Slab Vase

Clay vessels have forever been examples of a culture's ability to combine art and function. Students in the lower grades must start to learn the most crude and basic coil pots, pinch pots and slab bowls. Students progress to hand-built and constructed vessels with more sophisticated design. Grades 9-12 can focus on clay vessels extending basic techniques into art. Hand-built work has become very experimental today. Artists combine wheelwork with hand-built techniques. The focus in this lesson is to experiment with slab construction, using self-hardening clays.

## Grade Levels 9-12

*Note: instructions and materials based on a class of 25 students. Adjust as needed.*

## Objectives

- Students gather together knowledge of a entire span of history, emphasizing cultural symbols and development of technology.
- Students interpret and solve challenges regarding lack of materials and knowledge as opposed to creating artwork from basic function.

## Preparation

1. Cover table with canvas, unprimed side up, to keep clay from sticking to the table. Tape the two rulers 10" apart on top the canvas. Keep parallel. Self-hardening clay is a perfect consistency to work with right out of the bag - it does not have to be wedged.
2. Unwrap the block of clay and cut 2 slabs from the top to the bottom of the clay. Use the nylon clay cutter. Try to keep thickness 1/4" to 3/8". Keep and egg-size lump of clay to make slip. Slip is a "glue" for clay. Put the lump in a small jar or plastic container and add water to make a paste. Set aside. Cover if not in use. Keep a damp cloth available to cover clay not in use.

## Process

1. With a free-form slab vase, use all clay (may be cut into slab pieces for a rectangle). Rough edges and fold clay over. Textures add interest and richness to the artwork. Use the clay tools to scratch areas to be joined. Scratch the edges of two long sides,



## Materials

[Amaco® Mexican® Self-Hardening Pottery Clay](#), (33205-3005) 5-lb block, share one block between three students

[Student Clay Modeling Tools](#) (30361-1009), 7-tool set, share three sets across classroom

[Blick Plastic Ruler](#) (55403-1012), need one per student

[Wooden Rolling Pin](#), 10" (30345-1010), share one between four students

[Nylon Clay Cutter](#) (30357-0000), one to cut clay block

[Fettling Knife](#) (30349-1010), one to cut clay block  
Bag of 10" balloons

[Blick Matte Acrylic Colors](#) 2-oz bottles (00727), assorted colors, share at least six bottles across classroom

[Blick Economy Sable Round](#), 36-brush assortment (05147-0369), share set across classroom

## Process, continued

apply slip to both sides, overlap and press together. Clay can be enlarged by this technique. Roll the clay with the rolling pin until it is stretched to size and the thickness is even.

2. The balloons are blown up and used to support the clay when it is wrapped around. Do not make the balloons completely inflated. Balloons can be squeezed to change shape. Use more than one taped together to add interest to the shape. Wrap the clay slabs around the balloons - overlap the slabs. Scratch each side to be joined and slip. Gently press together.
3. Leave the top of the vase open. Tap the bottom on the table - add a little more clay on the bottom of the base, if necessary. Pull, push, fold and stretch the body of the vase to adjust shape. Cut out areas or add more pieces of clay for decoration. Always scrape areas to be joined and add slip. If this is not done, the clay will pull apart as it dries or pieces will fall off.
  - NOTE: Clay must be kept damp when exposed to the air. Dampen a cloth and drape over the clay. If it will be stored, place it in a plastic bag. Once this clay dries, it cannot be reused.
4. The completed artwork can be put aside in a dry area. It will be completely dry in about a week.
5. The Amaco red clay is handsome left without paint. It resembles terra cotta bisqueware. It can also be painted.

## Hints

- This clay is hard, but remains porous and will not hold water
- These techniques can be adapted for use in the lower grades.
- [Unprimed Canvas \(07309-1363\)](#), makes a great table cover for working clay

## National Standards

**Content Standard #1** — Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes

- **9-12** Students apply media, techniques and processes with sufficient skill, confidence and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks

**Content Standard #4** — Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and culture

- **9-12** Students analyze relationships of works of art to one another in terms of history, aesthetics and culture, justifying conclusions made in the analysis and using such conclusions to inform their own art making

**Content Standard #5** — Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

- **9-12** Students describe meanings of artworks by analyzing how specific works are created and how they relate to historical and cultural contexts

**Content Standard #6** — Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

- **9-12** Students compare characteristics of visual arts within a particular historical period or style with ideas, issues or themes in the humanities or sciences