

Clay Desert Tiles

Day One

The workshop focuses on the desert as an inspiration for art work. We begin by brainstorming desert nouns (images) and desert adjectives (feelings or sensations). Next, we draw the desert “as we see it” (our nouns). Then, we draw the desert as it feels (our adjectives) using only lines, shapes and patterns to describe each adjective. The two drawings are compared. Do we see the desert in both? How could that be?

I show students an image of Henri Matisse’s “Beasts of the Sea.” We discuss how the artist did not represent the ocean exactly as it is, but, instead, used specific lines and shapes to create the feeling of the ocean. In other words, he represented the ocean “abstractly.” I explain that our goal is to take after Matisse and abstract the desert in clay.

Lastly, I introduce the air-dry clay and we practice pushing in and pinching out to form shapes and create texture.



Day Two

We begin by reviewing the challenges and successes of working with the clay. In small groups students brainstorm our adjectives from the previous visit to determine the five desert adjectives to be used for our project. On this day the students complete a desert inspired texture tile. Using their hands and some familiar tools, the students must push in, pinch out and create five different textures to describe their desert adjectives.



Day Three

After the tiles have had time to dry it is time to add color. On this day we use orange, green and brown to stain the clay. We discuss how artists use color in their work to not only describe but to create feelings. Students then stain their tile, a process similar to dyeing Easter eggs. The students can take their finished tiles home that day as the stain dries within minutes.

My favorite part about this workshop is the fact that students get time to use their hands to work with new materials, techniques and concepts. The process can be both engaging and introspective and allows students to explore in their work. At the end of the day, I hope the workshop can act as an inspiration for students to continue their exploration of the arts.