

The Secret Canyon

Activity 1: Grades 5-8

Making Fremont-Style Pottery

This activity page will offer:

- An introduction to the history of the Fremont people
- An opportunity to consider how cultures and peoples can change over time
- A hands-on experience in making a coil pot

Materials

- Clay
- Paper towels
- Paper Cups
- Water

Background for Teachers

Although a few Fremont sites are found in the surrounding states, Utah was the homeland of the Fremont people. The Fremont lived in Utah from 1,600 to 750 years ago and inhabited the area of Utah north of the Colorado River.

The Fremont adapted to many different locations in Utah. They lived near, and depended on, the marshes in Utah river valleys, in farming communities, and for part of the year in caves near the Great Salt Lake. Although the Fremont lived in different locations they all shared similar ways of life. All seem to have made and used gray pottery, built pithouses and either grew or traded for corn.

The Fremont people made sturdy gray pottery in the shape of bowls and narrow-necked jars, some with loop handles. About 1,300 years ago, their pottery began to change and the people started to make pottery painted with beautiful black geometric designs on a white or gray background. Fremont pottery is similar to Anasazi types in decoration; however, each group added a

different kind of material (such as sand or crushed rocks) to the clay to make it stronger.

Pithouse villages were common among the Fremont people. Usually villages were small, consisting of only four or five houses at a time. Pithouses were difficult to build; they were semi-subterranean and constructed of mud and plant materials. Most of these dwellings had only one or two rooms with a central hearth and a hole in the ceiling that acted as ventilation and a light source.

Although the Fremont grew corn, beans, and squash, archaeological evidence shows that many of them were still hunters and gathers of wild foods. The bones of deer, mountain sheep, bison, antelope and rabbits as well as charred wild seeds and plant parts are often found at Fremont sites. Insects, especially grasshoppers and crickets, were also eaten since they were nutritious and easy to gather and store.

Archaeologists do not find Fremont artifacts more recent than 750 years of age. The fate of the Fremont people is one of the major questions that archaeologists are trying to answer. Did the Fremont move from the area due to a widespread drought that made it impossible to farm? Did they leave because other groups moved into the area and forced them out? Or did the Fremont and these new arrivals marry and mix cultures, becoming unrecognizable in the archaeological record?

Procedure

Basic Prototype

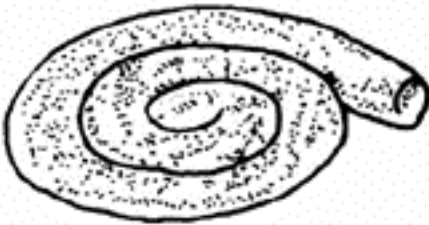
- Read the [Background Information for Teachers](#) to the students.
- Have the class hypothesize about why the Fremont people vanished. (Further background for this discussion is presented at the web link below, The Anasazi Collapse.)
- Have students make their own Fremont-style pottery to bring to life this ancient culture.

Questions

1. The directions are for making what's called a coil pot, an ancient and widespread way of hand-forming pottery. What are some other hand-forming methods?
2. What are wheel-throwing and slipcasting? Who invented these pot-making techniques, and when?
3. Why do settled people make pottery, and why do hunter-gatherers usually not? Why is pottery useful? What are its uses?



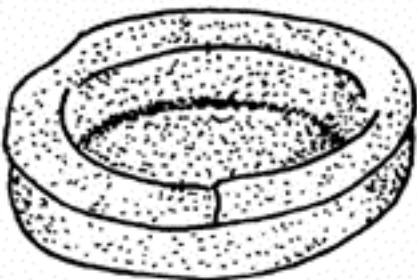
Roll a piece of clay into a long coil about 12 inches long and as thick as your finger. Make ten or so of these coils and cover them with a damp paper towel.



Using one coil, create the bottom of your pottery vessel by spiraling it around itself on a flat surface. Join the clay strips by pressing firmly and smoothing with your fingers. Turn the clay spiral over and repeat the joining process on the opposite side.



Build up the sides of your vessel by placing a coil along the outer edge of the base. Press it into place and smooth with your fingers on both the inside and the outside. When you have made a complete circle of clay around the base of the vessel, cut off the excess clay and join the two ends.



Repeat this process with the other coils until your vessel is the size you want it to be. To make a curve in your vessel's profile, you will need to vary the size of your circles. If the circles are larger, the vessel will spread out; if they are smaller, it will become narrow.



Finish your vessel by smoothing it inside and outside. Add decoration to personalize if desired.

Web Connection

Other Ancient Technologies

<http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/prehistory/ancienttech/>

Offers descriptions of a wide variety of ancient and traditional technologies worldwide.

Pottery Techniques

<http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Pottery>

Comprehensive overview of materials and methods of pottery making..

The Anasazi Collapse

http://www.cpluhna.nau.edu/People/anasazi_collapse.htm/

New York Times article exploring archeologists' theories on the causes of the collapse of the ancestral pueblo builders of the Southwest, which happened at about the same time as the disappearance of the Fremont culture.

The Fremont

http://www.thefurtrapper.com/fremont_indians.htm

Description of the key elements of Fremont culture, including an article about their rock art.

This guide is adapted from a lesson plan developed by The Utah Museum of Natural History Education Department, University of Utah.