

NATIVE AMERICAN EDUCATION FOR ALL RESOURCES

Partnership of IllumiNative and the National Indian Education Association



ILLUMINATIVE



Grade Level

3-5

Subject

Art & Culture

Lesson Title

**Make Pottery like Pueblo Artist
Maria Montoya Martinez**

Activity Description: From prehistoric pots made for holding food or water to the modern creations of decorative pottery, the Southwest is famous for artists who fashion beautiful clay pots with cultural and symbolic designs. This region is also known for its red clay earth. This activity shares some traditional methods for making pottery, spotlights Pueblo artist Maria Montoya Martinez, and includes a recipe to make and bake homemade clay pottery.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- WiFi access (optional)
- Ingredients for the clay: Flour, salt, warm water, (food coloring is optional)
- Paints for decorating the pottery (if desired)
- [YouTube video about Maria Martinez](#) by New Mexico PBS
- YouTube video of traditional [Native American Pottery Making c1920-1949](#)
- Print or digital version of [Baking clay recipe](#)

STEPS

While many people enjoy pottery as works of art, since ancient tribal history, pottery was a tool for daily life from gathering and cooking to gift-giving and ceremonies. Many Southwest tribes are well-known for pottery made from the red clay of the land. One of the most famous Southwest potters is a Tewa Pueblo woman, Maria Montoya Martinez (1887-1980). Learn more about Martinez and her traditional methods. Then, make your own clay pottery.

Pre-activity Steps:

1. Start this activity by learning about Maria Montoya Martinez in this video [Notable New Mexicans- Maria Martinez](#).
2. Next, watch this [early 1900s film footage of Maria Martinez](#) making a piece of pottery the traditional way. Notice how she starts by digging the red clay herself.
 - a. What are some of the techniques that Martinez uses?
 - b. Why do you think a piece of pottery made by Maria Martinez would cost much more than pottery made in a shop or factory?

Pottery Activity:

Let's mix clay to make our own pottery. Ask for help and gather the ingredients and measuring cups. You will need:

1 cup salt

1 and a 1/2 cups warm water

4 cups all purpose flour

1. First, stir the salt into the warm water and let it cool. (optional) If you want to color your clay, add a few drops of food coloring to the water and salt mix BEFORE you add the flour.
2. Then, add the 4 cups of flour and knead the clay by hand for 8-10 minutes. You may want help with this part.
3. Now, use the clay to create your pottery (bowls, cups, plates) that you want.
4. Heat the oven to 325° and bake your creation for 30 minutes to one hour until it is dry.
5. Once your pottery is cool, you can paint it or decorate it.
6. (optional) To make your painted pottery waterproof, you can coat it with a non-toxic water based sealer. Ask an adult to help with this step.

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HELPFUL TIPS

Parents and caregivers: This activity is very simple as it uses items that you typically have in your home kitchen. This can also bring hours of creative fun that even younger family members can enjoy. Please be sure to assist your children while doing these activities. There are other recipes for clay that can be stored for continued use. For example, follow the second recipe on the [Baking Clay page](#) by KinderArt. While you are doing this activity with your child, share some of the following:

- If you would like to watch other examples of pottery made by other tribes, share this YouTube video [Catawba Pottery Tradition Withstands the Test of Time](#) with your child.
- This is also an opportunity to share that the value of traditional methods for pottery and other forms of art are valuable to a culture and that putting a price on pieces of art is difficult. Many times people, especially non-Natives, want to buy Native art to decorate their homes but do not want to pay high prices. Sometimes companies will make fake or cheaply-produced Native art to sell which hurts local artists. Encourage your child to value traditional art forms and understand the cost for these items after seeing how much work and care goes into making such art.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Families and educators: Pottery serves not only as a traditional art form but it also carries rich history and customs. For more information on pottery culture and technique, visit these sites:

- This informational page shares a fact sheet: [Art from Earth and Fire](#) by Archeology Southwest. This provides additional facts about ancient pottery, red clay, and potter techniques. This may be challenging for some students, so guidance is recommended.
- For more in-depth information about Native American Women Potters, visit this page [Pottery by American Indian Women](#) from The National Museum of Women in the Arts

Activity Resources:

- "Notable New Mexicans- Maria Martinez New Mexico PBS" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oAFPAUVowE4>
- "Native American Pottery Making c1920-1949" from *Palace of the Governors Photo Archives* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVF1QtzPHYg>
- "Baking Clay" recipes from *KinderArt* <https://kinderart.com/art-lessons/crafts/baking-clay-recipes/>

Additional Resources:

- "Art from Earth and Fire" by *Archeology Southwest* https://www.archaeologysouthwest.org/pdf/pottery_fact_sheet.pdf
- "Catawba Pottery Tradition Withstands the Test of Time" by *SouthCarolinaETV* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pvvmf4zmjuQ>
- "Pottery by American Indian Women" from the *National Museum of Women in the Arts* <https://cia.purdue.edu/academic/rueffschool/waaw/peterson/Petersonessay2.html>