

LESSON PLAN

TOY AS SELF-PORTRAIT



Suggested Levels: Grades 6 - 12

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Students sculpt a 3D ceramic version of a childhood toy and intentionally transform it to function as a metaphorical self-portrait. Rather than creating a perfect replica, students can exaggerate, alter or reimagine the toy to communicate personal qualities such as resilience, curiosity, complexity, growth, or ambition.

OBJECTIVES

I CAN... use a familiar object as a metaphor to express personal identity.

I CAN... transform a form to visually communicate meaning.

I CAN... apply ceramic techniques to create a structurally sound sculpture.

I CAN... explain my artistic choices through an artist statement.

NATIONAL VISUAL ART STANDARDS

Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

- Artists shape materials and ideas to convey meaning.
- Students alter toy forms to symbolize personal traits.

Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experience.

- Art reflects life experiences.
- Students connect childhood memories to present identity.

Perceive and analyze artistic work.

- Meaning is interpreted through context and intention.
- Students articulate metaphor through writing and critique.



SUPPLY LIST

CLAY

- Clay body of choice

BRUSHES & TOOLS

- Clay tools (needles, ribbons)
- Assorted brushes and sponges
- Ribs
- Carving/modeling tools
- Slip and water containers.



COLORS BY MAYCO

These glazes allow students to reinforce meaning through color choice, bright for energy or joy, muted for memory or introspection, and contrasting finishes to symbolize different aspects of life. It's a perfect way to use up all those half empty glaze bottles at the end of the school year as these glazes perform well together.

MISCELLANEOUS

- Plastic wrap of wet box
- Details to complete your project (cord, spring, etc.)
- Glazes of choice

MAYCO GLAZES

- Stroke & Coat
- Fundamentals Underglazes
- Elements
- Jungle Gems



Accomodations

- Provide reference photos and examples.
- Offer pre-rolled slabs or armatures.
- Break into stages.
- Assist students in choosing the type of toy and the level of transformation.
- Provide guided prompts and sentence starters.



Teacher Tips

- Encourage metaphor over realism.
- Ask "What does this change *say*?"
- Remind students imperfections can carry meaning.
- Encourage students to justify glaze choices as part of the metaphor.

Art History Connection

Claes Oldenburg (1929-2022) was an American Pop artist best known for transforming ordinary objects (like toys or food) into playful, exaggerated sculptures. Oldenburg changed the scale, material and form of everyday items to explore how familiar things can carry new meaning. His work invited viewers to look at common objects in unexpected ways and consider what they might represent beyond their original function.

Oldenburg believed objects could express ideas, emotions, and even identity when they were altered or reimagined.

"We don't copy the objects we use, we try to transform them..."
- Claes Oldenburg

Teacher Script

"Think about a toy you loved as a child, not because it was perfect, but because it mattered. Today, you'll transform that toy into a self-portrait. Your sculpture should show us who you are *now*, using the toy as a metaphor rather than a replica."

DIRECTIONS - CLAY BUILDING PROCESS

Pull-Along Dog (Step-by-Step)

1. Cut out the paper template of a dog. Keep the outer edges smooth so the slabs will attach easily.
2. Roll out clay slabs about 1/4 - 1/2 inch thick. Compress the slab with a rib or a plastic card to strengthen the clay and help prevent cracking.
3. Place the paper templates on the slab and cut out the front and back shapes of the dog. Also cut long rectangular strips about 3-4 inches wide that will wrap around the out edge of the dog's body. Cut additional pieces for details such as ears, eyes, or a tail.
4. Roll another slab about 1 inch thick for the wheels. Cut circle shapes and add simple tire-like texture around the edges.
5. Wrap the slabs in plastic and place them in a damp box so the clay can firm up slightly before building.
6. When the slabs are strong enough to hold their shape, begin attaching the outer strip around the body using the score and slip method.
7. Once the edges are secure, attach the second side of the dog body. Allow the clay a little time to stiffen before handling too much to avoid warping and sinking.
8. Use a damp sponge to smooth seams and round the edges of the form.
9. Attach the eyes and ears using score and slip. Blend the seams with a sponge or finger.
10. Use a hold cutter near the back of the dog to create an opening for the spring that will hold the tail.
11. Add textures or details to give the dog personality. Slightly bend the ears to suggest movement, as if the dog is walking.
12. Use the hold cutter again to create holes for the axles that will hold the wheels.
13. Line up the holes in the dog's body with the holes in the wheels to make sure everything fits and rolls properly.
14. Allow the piece to dry slowly and evenly before firing.
15. Bisque fire to Cone 04.



DIRECTIONS - HUMPTY DUMPTY

Humpty Dumpty (Step-by-Step)

1. Start with two clay balls that are roughly the same size.
2. Form pinch pots by pressing your thumb into each ball and gently pinching the walls. Try to keep both pinch pots similar in size and thickness.
3. Check the openings to make sure both edges are close in size so they will join easily.
4. Score and slip the rims of both pinch pots, then press them together to form a hollow egg-shaped form.
5. Smooth the seam using your fingers or a flexible rib. Add a small coil of clay if needed to strengthen and hide the joint.
6. Allow the form to rest and firm up. Wrap loosely in plastic and let it sit overnight to strengthen the clay before adding details.
7. Add facial features such as a nose, eyelids, cheekbones, or lips using small pieces of clay. Attach using score and slip, then soften the edges with a damp sponge.
8. Make the feet by rolling two equal-length coils. Leave the ends slightly larger to suggest simple shoes.
9. Form the arms by rolling matching coils and shaping small hands at the ends.
10. Attach the arms and feet using score and slip. Support the attachments if needed and wrap them loosely in plastic so they dry slowly.
11. Add textures, clothing details, or patterns to give your Humpty Dumpty character and personality.
12. Allow the piece to dry slowly and evenly before firing.
13. Bisque fire to Cone 04.



DIRECTIONS - DECORATING PROCESS



Perfect for wrapping up the school year, students use a variety of leftover glazes by layering, mixing, and experimenting to create special effects.



EXTEND THE LEARNING *using Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory*

LINGUISTIC
(Word Smart)

Write an artists statements or explain symbolic storytelling.

SPATIAL
(Picture Smart)

3D Form development.

INTERPERSONAL
(People Smart)

Engage in the peer critique process.

**BODY
KINESTHETIC**
(Body Smart)

Hands-on sculpting.

NATURALIST
(Nature Smart)

Understand materials and wear over time.

**LOGICAL/
MATHEMATICAL**
(Number Smart)

Structural planning and proportion.

INTRAPERSONAL
(Self Smart)

Reflect on your identity.

MUSIC
(Music Smart)

Make a soundtrack representing the toy.

RUBRIC

	ADVANCED (5 PTS)	STRONG (4 PTS)	DEVELOPING (3 PTS)	LIMITED (1-2 PTS)
CONCEPT & METAPHOR	Metaphor is clear, meaningful, and strongly connected to personal identity.	Metaphor is clear with a good identity connection.	Metaphor is present but unclear or literal.	Weak or minimal metaphor. No clear concept.
CRAFTSMANSHIP & STRUCTURE	Well-built, stable, and intentional.	Mostly well-built with minor issues.	Some structural or craftsmanship problems.	Poor construction affects work. Incomplete or unstable.
TRANSFORM & CREATE	Toy is boldly transformed in creative ways.	Clear transformation with some creativity.	Limited or predictable transformation.	Minimal change from original toy. No transformation.
ARTIST STATEMENT	Clearly explains metaphor and identity.	Explains idea with some details.	Basic explanation.	Vague, incomplete, or missing.

Total Score: _____/25

PERFORMANCE LEVELS
5 POINTS (A): EXCEPTIONAL
4 POINTS (B): STRONG
3 POINTS (C): DEVELOPING
2 POINTS (D): LIMITED
1 POINTS (F): INCOMPLETE