

# Buddy Bison's Creative Learning Program: Ancestral Puebloan Pinch Pots

National Park Trust is partnering with the National Park Service and local organizations to bring park experiences to your school. Visiting parks is the ideal setting to learn about indigenous peoples' way of life, but it isn't always possible. So, we have developed and compiled a distance learning program with hands-on activities so that your students can participate from the classroom. National Park Trust will supply all necessary materials at no cost.

## Learning Goals

Students will understand that the Ancestral Puebloan people have lived in and around the Grand Canyon for several thousand years and that their descendants are still here and represent vibrant and diverse communities. Students will become familiar with Ancestral Puebloan pottery.

## Activity Background

The Grand Canyon region has been home to humans for more than 13,000 years. The Ancestral Puebloan people have lived in and around the canyon for several thousand years, leaving behind dwellings, garden sites, food storage areas, and artifacts. Cultural traits common to the Ancestral Puebloan peoples include heavy dependence on cultivated foods, the construction of pueblos (multi-room and at times, multi-story, masonry structures), distinctive pottery, and the construction and use of kivas (subterranean ceremonial chambers). Ancestral Pueblo pottery was built using thin coils of clay and smoothed probably using a gourd scraper. Their pottery, shown in the image above, is called Black-on-White. The white is from the color of the clay, and the black is from the color of the paint they made. The black paint used for the designs was made from boiled plants (like beeweed or tansy mustard) or from crushed rock with iron in it (such as hematite). Paintbrushes were made from the fibers of the yucca plant.



Pueblo remains, Photo Credit: NPS/Michael Quinn



## Time Frame

Two 1 hour sessions, 2-3 days apart

## Materials Provided

- Air-dry clay
- Paints
- Paintbrushes
- Clear acrylic sealer (gloss finish) or decoupage medium (e.g. Mod Podge)
- Pixie cups for water
- Toothpicks
- Popsicle sticks

## Procedure

Session One:

- Begin by introducing students to the Ancestral Puebloan people. Read the activity background aloud to students, then have them watch [this short YouTube video](#).
  - Explain that students will be creating their own pinch pots, inspired by the style of Ancestral Puebloan pottery. Show students the [images of ancient Ancestral Puebloan pottery on this website](#).
- Hand out air dry clay and water cups to each student.
- Set aside  $\frac{1}{4}$  of your clay for decoration. Form the remaining clay into a ball. Hold the ball of clay with one hand and use your other thumb to press into the center of the ball of clay. Press until your thumb is about  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch from the bottom.
- Slowly widen the hole by pinching up the walls. Turn the piece slowly as you pinch to keep the walls even in thickness. Continue drawing the walls to gradually mold the piece into a bowl, pot, or cup. The bottom and the walls must at least be  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch thick.
- Flatten the bottom of the bowl by gently pressing on it from the inside. This will let your bowl or pot stand stable when placed on a table or flat surface. ***Make sure students use a toothpick to carve their initials into the bottom of the pot so they don't forget whose is whose.***
- As an option, you can use the clay you set aside in the first step to add a handle or create small clay details, like flowers. Simply mold the clay into the desired shape, then connect these to the main pot or bowl. Moisten and pat the clay around the new piece to fix it in place. To make a handle, mold clay into a small sausage shape then connect it to the side of the pot.
- Once you're happy with the shape of your bowl or pot, you can carve some details like lines, dots, or grooves using toothpicks or popsicle sticks.

- If you want to smooth the surface of your pot, pat the clay with slightly damp fingers or use a moist paintbrush to smooth the surface of the clay. Then place the bowl or pot in a warm dry spot. It normally takes about 2-3 days for a small piece to dry completely.

#### Session Two:

- Once the pots are completely dry, cover desks/tables with newspaper to prepare for painting.
- Students should use the paints and paintbrushes provided to paint their pots. They may choose to emulate the black and white style of the Ancestral Puebloans or give their pots a more modern take by adding color. If you'd like, you may show students [images of modern Pueblo pottery](#), in which more color is used.
- Once the paint is dry, spray the entire clay pot with a clear acrylic sealer or apply 1-2 coats of decoupage medium (e.g. Mod Podge). Let the first coat dry before applying the second one.

### **Virtual Park Programs**

Here you will find live programs that will pair well with the above activity.

- [Homeland, Grand Canyon National Park](#) - Explore food as a lens for how native people have adapted to life at Grand Canyon since time immemorial by studying artifacts and current cultural practices.  
**Length: 30-45 minutes**  
**Grade Level: 3-5**
- [Land that Shapes Us, Grand Canyon National Park](#) - Using a case study from Grand Canyon National Park, students will investigate the historically tenuous relationship between the National Park Service and Grand Canyon's 11 traditionally associated tribes. Students will be asked to consider how the past influences the present and what actions can help affect positive change in the future.  
**Length: 45 minutes**  
**Grade Level: 6-8**
- [Native American Collection, Agate Fossil Beds National Monument](#) - Take a tour of the James Cook Collection of Native American artifacts! We will look inside "A window into Lakota life" here on the Great Plains. We will also explore how the Bison was sacred to the Lakota and we will learn how the animal played an integral part of their daily lives. And talk about the friendship formed between Chief Red Cloud and a local rancher named James Cook.  
**Length: 45 minutes - 1 hour**  
**Grade Level: 3-5**