

Lesson Plan

Grades K - 5

Fire Up Your Creativity™

Speedball®

Handmade tiles with Sgraffito

This lesson plan uses an Italian technique from the 15th century, and for older children could be incorporated into a lesson on Italian art, history or culture.



Sgraffito tile by Luke, age 7

Definition- The word sgraffito comes from the Italian *graffiare* which means to scratch. Typically in ceramics it refers to the technique of scratching through one or more layers of colored slip or underglaze to reveal the contrasting color of the clay body beneath.

History – Sgraffito was used on pottery in Italy as early as the 15th century. The technique was also used on plaster walls in the interior of churches and other buildings. It can produce images reminiscent of woodcuts and some of the artists who produced sgraffito works also made woodcut illustrations.

Goals:

To learn this historical technique, to utilize fine motor skills in the sgraffito process and encourage close observation by drawing from nature. This technique relies on the use of line and on high-contrast colors, both of which could be introduced as concepts. Examples of woodcuts and sgraffito may be helpful. Because this technique offers more resistance than pencil on paper, it is sometimes recommended to help children learn to write their letters.

Materials

- Leather hard clay tile
- Speedball® underglazes
- Brushes
- Scratching tool such as sgraffito tool, pen, pencil
- Speedball® clear earthenware covering glaze
- Still life
- Slides or photos of ceramic pieces decorated with sgraffito and of woodcuts

Handmade tiles with Sgraffito K-5

Step 1 - Discuss the history and method of sgraffito. Show examples of sgraffito and of woodcuts if desired.

Step 2 - Roll out clay to desired thickness, cut into square (or other desired shape). Allow to dry to leather hard. **Tip:** If you are using a rolling pin instead of a slab roller, be sure to roll on both sides of the clay to help prevent warping. Use strips of thin wood as a thickness guide. While older children may be able to accomplish this with little assistance, you may want to provide younger children with already cut and leather-hard tiles. Make an extra slab which will be used for the students to try different tools.

Step 3 - When the clay is leather hard, apply 2 – 3 coats of underglaze allowing each layer to become touch-dry before proceeding. You may use three coats of the same color, or, older children may want to alternate dark and light colors. Just be sure to end with a color which will offer contrast with the clay body.

Step 4 - Allow the students to try different tools on the extra slab. A wire loop sgraffito tool produces a wider, bolder line. A pen or other finer tool produces a very fine line. While they are practicing, let them know that you do not need to cut deeply into the clay, only enough to scratch the surface to reveal the clay color beneath the underglaze. If more than one color of underglaze was used let them practice holding the tool at an angle to reveal the various layers of color.



Step 5 - When the underglaze is touch dry it is ready for drawing. Arrange the still life. Have the students draw into the clay with the chosen tool. They may want to use a variety of tools to incorporate more than one line width. They may produce a line drawing following the outline of the objects, or they may include more details with highlights as their skill level allows. If the drawing is not too deep, “mistakes” can be smoothed away and underglaze re-applied.

Step 6 - Allow to dry completely. **Drying tip:** to prevent warping, dry slowly, turning occasionally so the tile dries evenly. If you make tiles often you may want to purchase some drywall and cut it to the size of your tiles or slightly larger. Drywall is easy to cut by scoring with a box cutter and snapping along the score line. Sandwich the pieces of drywall and tiles for drying. If your tiles still warp it is probably due to uneven pressure when rolling the slabs. When completely dry, bisque fire to cone 04.

Step 7 - Cover with Speedball Earthenware clear glaze and fire to cone 05 or 06.

Evaluation:

Students will be evaluated on their:

- skill with sgraffito technique
- level of detail and observation
- use of line to define and develop areas
- use of color for older children



Sgraffito tile by Luke, age 7

Idea – Use a different color of underglaze on each tile and have the children all draw from the same still life, then mount on a board for display in your school.



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