

Lesson Plan

Grades 5 - 8

Fire Up Your Creativity™

Speedball®

Sgraffito on Bisqued Tiles

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



by Nancy Sowder

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. This particular project is a variation on the traditional process in ceramics and more closely resembles the use on plaster walls.

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 utilize fine motor skills in the scratching process and develop a series of related images, in this case landscape was the theme. Examples of woodcuts, landscape drawings and sgraffito may be helpful.

Materials

- Bisqued tiles, the ones used in this example are 2" x 2" but larger tiles can be used and will give room for more detail.
- Speedball® underglazes
- Brushes
- Speedball® pen nib or other scratching tool such as sgraffito tool, pen or pencil
- Speedball® clear earthenware covering glaze
- Slides or photos of ceramic pieces decorated with sgraffito and of woodcuts

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Step 1 – Discuss the history and method of sgraffito. Show examples of sgraffito, landscape drawings and of woodcuts if desired.

Step 2 – Draw a plan on paper for each image. Each student may do a series of images, or a group of students may each contribute one image to the final composition.

Step 3 – Have the students select an underglaze color for each tile and apply two coats in opposite directions. Avoid an excessively heavy coat as this will be more likely to chip off. It will quickly become dry enough to handle so that scratching can begin. Sgraffito should begin before it is completely dry.

Step 4 – Begin scratching the drawing onto the tile. If the tile becomes too dry, try misting with a fine spray of water. Mistakes can easily be touched up with more underglaze.

Step 5 – Once the drawing is complete and the underglaze is dry, apply 2 – 3 coats of Speedball Clear Earthenware glaze and fire to cone 05 or 06.

Step 6 – In this example the tiles were glued to a board and trimmed with pieces of wood to imitate a window.



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Variations:

Choose four underglaze colors to represent the seasons and have students draw a tree on each.

Use the format with a quilt design and various color schemes.

Paint the tiles black or dark blue and have each student draw a snowflake.

Evaluation:

Students will be evaluated on:

- Skill and mastery of the technique
- Composition
- Use of line