



NEW MEXICO HISTORIC SITES

Group Learning Activity: Creating a Safe Space (Grades 5-8)

SWBATD synthesis of the purpose of the historic La Placita (Lincoln) torreón by creating a small replica torreón using natural and man-made materials.

Materials Needed:

- plastic to cover work tables, desks or chairs
- ruler (1 per student)
- pencil (1 per student)
- large straws - such as a Slurpie or milkshake straw (1 per student or several may be shared by class)
- paper towels (1 per student)
- air-drying clay (approximately 2 fistfuls per student)
- small bowls with a small amount of water (1 per student)
- cardboard (one 4x4" square per student)
- glue

Teacher Preparation:

- cut 4"x4" squares of cardboard
- pre-measure or cut approximately 2 fistfuls of clay per student and wrap in Saran Wrap to keep the clay from drying out
- using a soup can as a guide, trace the bottom of the can with a Sharpie
- fill small bowls with small amount of water

Anticipatory Set Questions:

- "Did anyone's house get invaded by aliens last night?"
- "If your house had been invaded by aliens, where would you have gone to hide?"
- "Now imagine that you didn't have a house, in fact, there were no houses or buildings around. Are there any natural features in your environment where you could have hidden from the aliens?"

Discussion:

- Discuss the difference between natural and man-made features in the environment. Use specific examples nearby (e.g. school building, playground equipment, bridges or overpasses, trees, caves, etc.)
- Ask students to imagine that there was no Lowe's, Home Depot or WalMart. Without a place to buy building supplies, what might new settlers in the southwest use instead?
- Discuss adobe as a building material. Explain how it has been used by southwest people for centuries because it takes only 3 ingredients (dirt containing clay, water and straw). It can be used as mortar or be formed into bricks and baked naturally in the sun. Adobe stays cool in the summer and retains heat from a fireplace or stove in the winter.

Activity – Making a Model Torreon using Coil Pot & Pinch Pot techniques:

Before beginning the activity, explain that the class will be making a miniature model of the torreon incorporating aspects of two cultures. The class will learn techniques used by Native Americans to create pottery (known as coil pot and pinch pot). Their completed pot will represent the torreons that were common to early Hispanic communities.

1. Instruct students to have their rulers and pencils on their desks.
2. Distribute small water bowls and a paper towel to each student.
3. Distribute squares of cardboard and instruct students to write their name on the square, then flip it over.
4. Give each student approximately 2 fistfuls of clay. Then instruct the class to:
 - a. Roll out or form a coil. The width of the coil should be about $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Students should use their ruler to make sure the coil is not too thick or thin.
 - b. Place the first coil on the circle in the center of the cardboard square.
 - c. Use their pencils to LIGHTLY create crosshatch marks in the top of the coil. (These cross-hatch marks combined with "slip" will help adhere one coil to the next).
 - d. Dip one finger into the water and run finger along the top edge of the clay coil to create "slip" (a thin, watery clay substance that will help the next coil stick to the first.)
 - e. Create another ring and place it on top of the first ring. Remind students that they want their coils to be consistent in size, so they should measure each coil before placement.
 - f. Repeat until the "tower" is 8-10 coils tall.
 - g. Instruct students to lightly place fingers inside and outside the clay tower and lightly press all the way around so that coils are less pronounced.
 - h. Using a small amount of water, lightly rub "slip" along the coils to smooth out the surface of the coils.
 - i. Push the straw through the clay 5-7 times in strategic places that would give the inhabitants on the inside a view from every side. Remind students to use their non-dominant hand to support the structure from the inside as they push the straw through so that the coils are not displaced.
 - j. Allow clay torreons to dry overnight.
 - k. The next day, instruct students to squeeze a line of glue on the bottom coil of the torreon and place on the cardboard. Add an additional line of glue around the outer, bottom coil of the torreon to help it adhere to the base.
 - l. Natural objects such as small rocks, twigs, grasses or small plants may be glued to the cardboard to look like the landscape around the torreon, if desired.
 - m. Once dry, a tealight candle may be placed inside to represent the fire that inhabitants would have used for warmth (with parental permission).

Closure/Exit Questions:

List 3 complete sentences that explain how a torreon would have worked well as a defensive structure.

(Possible Answers: 2-story height, made of rock, thick walls, 360 degree view, round walls deflected arrows and bullets, ladders could be retracted inside a high entrance.)