

LESSON PLAN

LAYERS OF THE EARTH: CRAFTING A MINDFUL CERAMIC VESSEL

Suggested Levels: High School-Advanced

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In this lesson, students will step into the world of ceramic artist Jena Bedson, where clay becomes a canvas for nature's voice. Students will create their very own one-of-a-kind ceramic vessel inspired by the textures, layers, and organic beauty of the natural world around us.

Using hand-building techniques—like slab and coil—this lesson plan encourages students to craft a vessel in the spirit of mindfulness and allows students to explore how to bring nature into their work. The roughness of bark, the delicacy of leaves, or the flowing ripples of water can be incorporated into the surface, creating textures that feel alive.

This lesson plan features a low-fire and mid-range adaptation using Mayco Fundamentals® Underglaze Assortment Kit, making it perfect for any classroom, regardless of firing temperature.

With Fundamentals®, students can achieve dynamic surface variation with matte and glossy areas, connecting them to the natural environment.

OBJECTIVES

I CAN... create a functional or sculptural ceramic vessel inspired by nature and the concept of mindfulness.

I CAN... explore how art can be a meditative process, connecting intention with creation.

I CAN... experiment with textures and layering techniques to add depth to the vessel.

NATIONAL VISUAL ART STANDARDS

Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

- Students will develop a ceramic vessel inspired by themes of mindfulness, nature, and personal reflection, as seen in Jena Bedson's work.

Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

- Students will explore organic forms and textures, responding to the material and process without strict pre-planning, allowing creative freedom and reflection.
- Students will use natural objects (leaves, bark) for texturing clay, discussing how these elements can add meaning and connect the work to natural environments.

Refine and complete artistic work.

- Students will revise their vessel designs over multiple sessions, incorporating feedback from peers and self-assessment to refine both form and surface.

Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

- Students will explore how Jena Bedson's practice, rooted in Australian culture and the natural environment, influences their personal engagement with themes of nature, meditation, and creative expression.

MEET THE MASTER



Jena Bedson

is a ceramic artist whose work is a living dialogue with nature, shaped by the ancient lands of Wurundjeri country in Warburton, Australia. Her sculptures, from sacred totems to intricate wall art and layered clay planters, are born from her deep connection with the earth and the stories it holds. Each piece is more than art—it's a meditative offering, designed to transform spaces into sanctuaries of reflection and peace.

Jena's world is a seamless blend of home, studio, and garden, where creativity flows freely. This harmony fuels her mission to craft meaningful works that resonate with the soul. Through her online workshops, Jena invites others into this journey, guiding them to discover their own artistic voice and create "Art with Soul" that mirrors the depth and authenticity of her own practice.



"My art is an extension of the earth's quiet wisdom, a way to honor the sacredness of our surroundings. I believe that in creating with intention, we invite stillness and reflection into our lives—and that's the true soul of art." – Jena Bedson

SUPPLY LIST

CLAY

- Clay body of choice

BRUSHES AND TOOLS

- Clay tools (wire cutter, sculpting tools, wooden ribs, sponges)
- Canvas sheets
- Rolling pins and guide sticks or a slab roller
- Texturing tools or found object (leaves, fabric, stamps, bark)
- Slip containers and scoring tools

COLORS BY MAYCO

This project features Mayco's [Fundamentals® Underglaze](#) line. The specific colors used on these vases can be found in the Assortment Kit. Fundamentals® Underglaze can be applied to both greenware and bisque. Create visual interest by applying underglaze at both stages with different techniques.

Fundamentals® Underglaze will not become glossy on their own. Achieve dynamic surface variation by leaving some areas free of clear glaze.



ACTIVITY

Steps to Create a Vessel - Bedson Style

1. Introduction to Jena Bedson's Work

- Present images of Jena Bedson's ceramic vessels and sculptures, focusing on her use of organic forms, textures, and natural themes.
- Discuss how Jena's style is influenced by nature and mindfulness, and how she integrates these into functional art pieces.

2. Demonstration: Slab Construction and Texturing

- Demonstrate how to roll out a slab of clay using a rolling pin and slats for even thickness, or use a slab roller.
- Show how to create organic textures using natural materials like leaves, bark or fabric, pressing them into the surface of the clay.
- Discuss the concept of "layers," as seen in Jena's work, and how different textures can be built up on a vessel.

3. Student Work: Creating the Body of the Vessel

- Students begin by sketching ideas for their vessel, incorporating natural forms and textures.
- Guide students as they roll out clay slabs, cut shapes and form the walls of their vessels using slab or coil techniques.
- Encourage students to focus on creating a meditative process, working slowly and mindfully as they form and shape the vessel.

4. Adding Layers and Surface Design

- Review the work from the previous session and discuss how adding layers to a vessel can enhance the texture and meaning of the piece.
- Demonstrate how to add additional slabs, coils or organic details onto the vessel's surface.

5. Surface Design with Slip and Texture

- Introduce slip as a tool for joining additional elements or creating a textured surface.
- Encourage students to experiment with different tools and materials to create surface interest on their vessels, applying slip for added depth.

6. Building Layers and Texture

- Guide students as they continue building up the layers of their vessel, focusing on texture and form.
- Encourage reflection on the process, reminding students that each addition should be intentional, as in Jena Bedson's work.

7. Refine and Dry

- Carefully refine the details of your vessel, smoothing any rough edges or cracks. Make sure there are no weak spots in the structure. Let the vessel dry slowly and evenly to avoid cracking, covering it lightly with plastic if needed.

8. Bisque Fire the Vessel

- Once completely dry, the vessel is ready for its first (bisque) firing in the kiln.

9. Introduction to Glazing Techniques

- Present examples of glazing in Jena Bedson's style, focusing on natural, earthy tones and finishes.
- Demonstrate how to apply underglazes and glazes to enhance the textures and layers of the vessel.

10. Final Firing

- Fire the glazed piece in the kiln for one final time, completing your ceramic vessel.

LOW FIRE DIRECTIONS

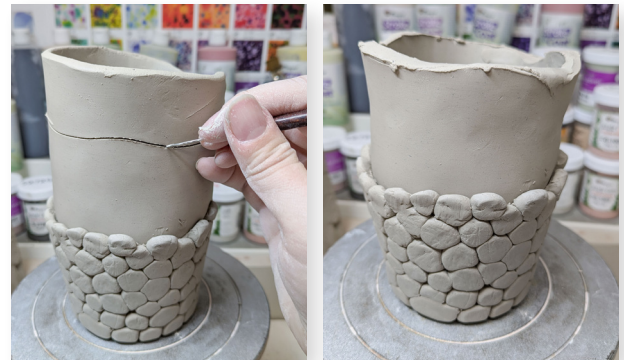
1. Begin by lining the plastic bowl with plastic wrap. Using 1/3 of the clay, roll small balls of clay and line the bottom and sides of the bowl with the clay balls. Compress and smooth the balls of clay together. Carefully remove the clay lining the bowl and set aside to let the clay set up.



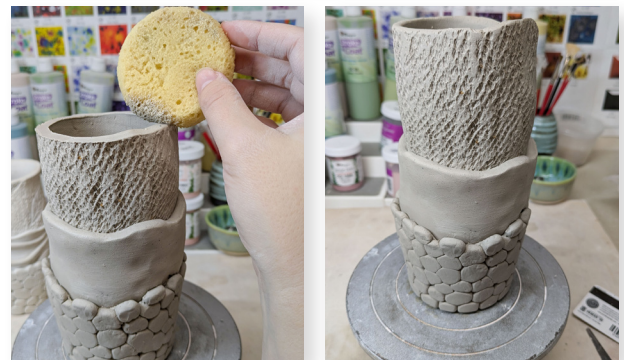
2. Roll out 1/3 of the clay into a long slab. Compress the clay slab with a plastic card or rib. Wrap the slab on the inside of the pebble bowl, with the pebbles overlapping the slab about 1/4 inch. Scratch and attach the ends of the slab together,



and where the edge of the slab meets the pebble bowl. If the slab is too tall, take the needle tool or toothpick and cut a wavy top off of the slab. Smooth cut edge with a damp sponge. Smooth out the inside of the vessel with a finger.



3. Roll out the last 1/3 into a long slab. Compress slab with plastic card or rib. Roll the seed stem of the broadleaf plantain over the slab to leave behind the seed texture. Wrap the slab the same way as step 2, leaving about 1/4 inch of overlap from the previous slab section. Scratch and attach with the toothpick or needle tool. Smooth the layers together on the inside. Slightly squeeze around the top slab to collar in the clay and give the vessel more shape.



LOW FIRE DIRECTIONS

4. Carve details (like leaves) into the textured slab section. Roll out a few thin coils long enough to wrap around the center slab a few times. Scratch and attach the coils to the center slab. Smooth down the bottom of the coils into the slab. Allow vessel to dry and bisque fire to cone 04.



5. Using the fan brush, apply two coats of UG208 Dragon Red to the pebble section of the vessel. Wipe back the color on the surface with a damp sponge, allowing the dark red to stay in the deep crevasses.



6. Using the fan brush, lightly apply two coats of UG206 to the top of the wiped off pebble areas, taking care to avoid filling in the areas that have the UG 208 color.



7. In the middle slab section, apply three coats of UG046 Bright yellow with a fan brush to the whole section. Using a sponge, apply a sponged coat of UG204 Orange to the bottom 2/3 of the

slab. The coils will stop the glaze from hitting certain areas when sponged straight up and down. Sponge a layer of UG068 Apple Green to the top 1/3 of the slab.



8. Using the fan brush, apply three coats of UG068 Apple Green to the entirety of the top slab. Using the script liner brush, carefully apply two coats of UG 021 Leaf green to the leaves (or carved out shapes) being careful not to get color down into the recessed areas. Apply three coats of UG021 Leaf Green to the inside of the vessel.



9. Apply two coats of S2101 Crystal Clear Brushing Glaze to the raised sections of the pebble layer, being careful not to puddle into the recessed areas. Using the script liner brush, apply two layers of clear over the coils and carved leaf sections of the second and third layers of the vessel. Apply two coats of clear to the inside of the vessel. Allow to dry and fire to cone 06.



MID-RANGE DIRECTIONS

1. Sketch the silhouette of the intended form onto a piece of cardboard and cut it out to create a guide for coil building.



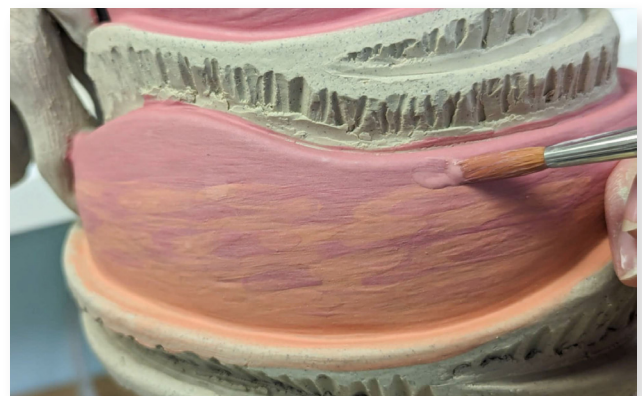
2. Roll or extrude coils of clay about 1 1/4" in diameter and build a coil pot by slipping and scoring stacks of coils onto a compressed slab. Firmly compress the surface with a rib. Cutting a cardboard silhouette of the intended form and periodically holding it to the pot may be helpful in guiding construction.



3. Mark and carve the design with a loop tool. Allow the pot to become leatherhard and use a wooden modeling tool to create texture.



4. Apply underglaze to the leatherhard pot, blending colors together for seamless transitions. Fundamentals Underglaze is fully intermixable.



MID-RANGE DIRECTIONS

5. Instead of freehanding a sgraffito design, draw it on paper and trace it onto a piece of scrap plastic (cling wrap will be too thin). Hold the plastic to the pot and trace the shape again with a dull pencil to leave a subtle impression on the pot's surface.



6. Carve the marked impressions with a needle tool. Resist the urge to clean the clay shavings from the edges of carved lines! Wait until they have dried and sweep the crust away with a stiff bristled brush.



7. Complete the sgraffito design by using a smaller carving tool to carve the negative space from the pattern. Allow the piece to fully dry and bisque fire to cone 04.



8. Apply a thick coat of underglaze to bisqued surface and wipe it away with a damp sponge to enhance texture. Add 2-3 coats of SW004 Zinc-Free clear glaze to any areas intended to be glossy, and glaze fire to cone 6.



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

LINGUISTIC (Word Smart)

Introduce students to a variety of nature-themed vocabulary words (e.g., “verdant,” “undulating,” “earthen”). Students then can write sensory descriptions of their vessels, using the vocabulary to enhance their descriptions of textures, shapes, and forms.

Have students write a poem that reflects the themes they incorporated into their vessel. They might focus on imagery of nature—trees, rivers, mountains—or the feelings of calm and focus they experienced in creating their piece.

SPATIAL (Picture Smart)

Once the vessels are complete, students work in small groups to plan and set up an exhibit for their pieces. They experiment with different heights, angles, and groupings, considering how placement affects the viewer's experience of each vessel.

Introduce the concept of negative space by having students focus on the empty areas within and around their vessels. Encourage them to incorporate holes, grooves, or curves that invite light to pass through or create interesting shadows.

INTERPERSONAL (People Smart)

Arrange a “gallery walk” where students display their vessels and pair up to interpret each other's work. Each pair will take turns sharing how they feel the other's vessel represents nature or mindfulness, drawing on textures, shapes and colors.

Students participate in a feedback circle where they share their work-in-progress vessels and receive constructive feedback. Encourage peers to focus on specific aspects, like texture, theme, and emotional impact, asking questions like, “What story does this vessel tell?”

BODY KINESTHETIC (Body Smart)

For a few minutes, have students work with clay while closing their eyes, focusing on texture, temperature, and the feeling of the clay in their hands. Without the use of sight, they rely on touch to create basic shapes and textures, encouraging them to fully engage their sense of touch.

Take students outdoors, where they are encouraged to move like elements in nature (e.g., flowing water, growing plants, or swaying trees) to connect physically with natural forms. They then translate these movements into gestures they can use when working with the clay, like smooth, flowing motions for water or firm, grounding presses for tree roots.

NATURALIST (Nature Smart)

Each student selects a local plant or animal habitat (e.g., wetlands, forests, meadows) and researches its ecosystem, species, and ecological role. They then design their vessel to represent the textures, colors and forms found in their chosen habitat, aiming to honor that ecosystem in their work.

Students go on a nature walk to observe and collect textures in their environment. With paper and crayons, they can make rubbings of tree bark, rocks, leaves, and other natural surfaces, capturing a variety of patterns. Back in the studio, they discuss how these textures could inspire their vessel designs, or even be directly incorporated by pressing collected natural items into the clay.

LOGICAL/ MATHEMATICAL (Word Smart)

Teach students about symmetry and balance in design, challenging them to create vessels that are either symmetrical or asymmetrical in a balanced way. Students use rulers, compasses, or string to mark the clay as they build, planning how they will achieve symmetry or intentional imbalance in the form.

Ask students to plan the structure of their vessel to ensure stability, especially for taller or more complex forms. They consider the clay's thickness, the center of gravity, and support points to prevent tipping or collapsing. Throughout the building process, they troubleshoot structural issues, adapting the design as needed.

INTRAPERSONAL (Self Smart)

Throughout the project, students keep a journal to reflect on their growth and self-discovery during the creation process. Prompts might include: “What does working with clay reveal about my patience?” or “How has my connection with nature deepened?”

Begin each class with a short, guided mindfulness exercise to help students center themselves. Encourage them to pay attention to the sensations of working with clay, like the texture, temperature, and resistance. As they work on their vessels, they focus on breathing and staying present with each motion.

MUSIC (Music Smart)

Play ambient nature sounds (like birdsong, ocean waves, or rain) as students work on their vessels. Encourage them to focus on how these sounds make them feel and try to convey that atmosphere through textures, shapes, or patterns in their clay work.

Challenge students to design vessels that could produce sound, such as whistles, bells, or even clay instruments like ocarinas. They explore how the vessel's shape and thickness can impact the sounds it makes.

RUBRIC

	4 - MASTERY	3 - PROFICIENT	2 - DEVELOPING	1 - BEGINNING
CREATIVITY & CONCEPT	Vessel design is exceptionally creative, showing a deep, personal connection to nature and mindfulness. Concept is original and thoughtful.	Vessel design demonstrates creativity and connection to nature, though some elements may be common or predictable.	Some creative effort is shown, but the concept lacks depth or originality. Connection to nature/ mindfulness is unclear.	Vessel design is basic or underdeveloped, with little to no personal connection to the theme of nature or mindfulness.
HANDBUILDING TECHNIQUE	Vessel is constructed with excellent craftsmanship. Techniques (slab, coil) are applied skillfully, and the form is structurally sound and well-balanced.	Techniques are well-applied, though there may be minor imperfections in the form. The vessel is structurally sound with good balance.	Some issues with construction, such as uneven walls or weak joints. The form may not be structurally sound or balanced.	Major issues with technique and construction. Vessel is structurally unstable, unbalanced, or poorly assembled.
SURFACE DESIGNS & TEXTURES	The vessel's surface is richly textured with intentional layering. Textures are expertly integrated and enhance the overall design and concept.	Textures and surface designs are thoughtfully applied and add to the vessel, but some areas may feel underdeveloped or inconsistent.	Textures are present but not well-integrated into the design. They feel superficial or do not enhance the overall concept.	Little to no surface texture or layering. Any textures present seem accidental or irrelevant to the vessel's design.
REFLECTION & PROCESS	Student demonstrates deep reflection throughout the process. Clearly documents creative journey from initial idea to final product, showing growth and thoughtful decision-making.	Student reflects on their process and documents the creative journey but may lack depth or skip some stages of reflection.	Minimal reflection on the process. Documentation of the journey is incomplete or lacks thoughtful insights.	Little to no reflection or documentation of the creative process. Student shows limited engagement with their journey.

This rubric provides a clear and balanced way to assess both the technical and creative aspects of the project, while also encouraging student reflection and effort throughout the process.

Total Score: _____/16

PERFORMANCE LEVELS

16 POINTS: THE STUDENT EXCELS IN ALL AREAS, SHOWING CREATIVITY, SKILL, AND DEEP REFLECTION.

9-12 POINTS: THE STUDENT DEMONSTRATES STRONG WORK BUT HAS SOME AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT.

5-8 POINTS: THE STUDENT IS PROGRESSING BUT NEEDS TO WORK ON REFINING SKILLS OR CONCEPTUAL DEPTH.

4 POINTS: THE STUDENT STRUGGLES TO MEET EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIRES SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT.