

## LESSON PLAN 4: Tree of Life - Limerick City Gallery of Art



VIDEO



The Tree of Life was made by Mexican ceramic Artist Tiburcio Soteno.

It was made during a residency at the Douglas Hyde Gallery in 1998.

*From the Collection at the Limerick City Gallery of Art.*

### **Resources included in this lesson plan:**

- 1** A short stop-motion video that:
  - Describes the Tree of Life, who the artist is and where it was made
  - Describes the artist's family background in Mexico
  - Gives information about the Mexican holiday 'Day of the Dead'
- 2** A short demonstration video of a local ceramic artist demonstrating how Tiburcio Soteno would have built the Tree of Life.
- 3** A short video of a teacher in a classroom delivering the hanging decoration lesson, and the results.
- 4** What's the story? A looking and responding activity which includes a list of questions and printable copies of shapes to use to tell the story.
- 5** A short instruction video on how to make slip, to complement the written instructions.
- 6** A short instruction video on how to score and add slip during the clay construction activity.



## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

### STUDENTS ARE LEARNING:

- Visual literacy skills to interpret the imagery depicted on this piece
- About basic pottery construction and decoration process used by artist Tiburcio Soteno to create the Tree of Life
- To use pinch shaping and to create a decoration

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

### STUDENTS WILL BE SUCCESSFUL WHEN THEY CAN:

- Describe the cultural context of a Tree of Life sculpture
- Apply new vocabulary to explain how the Tree of Life was made and decorated
- Produce a 3D piece of art that can be hung on a tree

### CURRICULUM LINKS:

#### **Visual Arts:**

#### **Strands:**

#### **Clay –**

Developing form in clay.  
Looking and responding.

#### **Construction –**

Making constructions

#### **Social, Environmental and Scientific Education: History:**

#### **Strands:**

working as a historian, Local studies, life society work and culture in the past, continuity and change over time.

#### **Geography:**

#### **Human Environments –**

Pupils will develop an awareness of culture and tradition in non-European environment and cultivate respect for people from different social, cultural, ethnic and religious traditions.

### KEY SKILLS:

- Hand building
- Attaching cut out shapes to a rounded form
- Producing an art piece that can be hung from a branch or hook



## MATERIALS FOR CLASS

- Air Dry Clay
- Clay Slip
- Acrylics or Poster Paints
  
- Clingfilm
- Newspaper
- Disposable cup

## TOOLS

- Objects from nature for mark making; twigs, sticks, acorns,
- Small lidded containers (strong yoghurt pots with lids)
- Zip lock bags
- Lollipop sticks
- Cocktail sticks
- Paint brushes
- Cutlery - forks / knives / old credit cards cut to sharp edge
- Plastic sheet to work on
- Containers for water
- Plastic mixing bowls
- Old newspapers and/or kitchen roll
- Twine



## **STEP BY STEP INSTRUCTIONS FOR TEACHER:**

### **Pinch pot with decorations - Making a bell decoration to hang on a tree**

- Take a chunk of air dry clay and roll into a ball using both hands. Make it as spherical as possible
- Crumple old newspaper into a tight ball, add a mist of water to help hold it's shape. If necessary, use cling film to cover it completely and tie a tight knot to hold the ball shape
- Holding the clay ball in one hand, use the thumb to create a hole in the centre
- Rotate the clay ball in the palm while using the other hand to manipulate the clay, turning it as you press gently with thumb and forefingers, pushing the clay outwards
- When you feel the walls of the clay form is as thin as you require, cut a straight edge around the base to make it level
- Sit the clay form on top of the newspaper 'ball'. It will help to support it as it's drying
- Support the paper by placing on top of a cup
- The support will also help when decorating the clay or punching a hole at the top to thread through the twine for hanging
- Decorative clay pieces can be added (use scoring and slip) and paint can be applied for surface decoration
- Create small clay balls and punch through with the top of a paint brush. When dry these will be the beads that will hang from twine
- The beads will hang at the end of the twine which will be threaded through the circular clay pot to create a hanging decoration similar to a bell.

## WHAT'S THE STORY? TELLING THE STORY OF THE OBJECT...

### INFORMATION ABOUT ACTIVITY:

#### 1. What's the story? Looking and responding activity.

Pupils to use Tree of Life Shapes to write answers to questions provided. Use these to create a story Tree on a wall or desk. Question the object/deconstruct meaning/come up with research questions about it. Pupils may decorate their shapes as they wish to make a colourful Tree of Life story tree.



### LOOKING AND RESPONDING:

#### QUESTIONS

- How old are you?
- Where do you come from?
- Who made you?
- How were you made?
- Why were you made?
- Are you important?
- Who used you?
- What were you used for?
- How are you used now?
- Why have you been kept this long?
- Why do you live in the Limerick City Gallery of Art now?
- Are you beautiful?
- How are you decorated?
- Are you part of a set?
- What sort of things lived around you?
- What sort of things live around you now?

*What's the story? Telling the story of the object.*

### TEACHERS NOTES:

#### *Looking and Responding:*

**Look at the shapes on your grid. How many different objects can you identify? Share your findings with the class and listen to what they can see.**

- **What is an altar?**

Pupils to identify what their understanding of an altar is. Is it the same kind of altar that this piece would be displayed on?

- **How old are you?** Comprehension of the information from the lesson

- **Where do you come from?** Understanding maps shown and information from the lesson
- **Who made you?** Comprehension from the lesson, using detective skills to consider who in society was the maker of the piece under discussion
- **How were you made?** Answers to include new vocabulary to describe ceramic processes
- **Why were you made?** Be able to describe the purpose of the object based on information from the lesson, using detective skills and imagination to describe why this object was made
- **Are you important?** Pupils to discuss if/why the object is important, why and to whom
- **Who used you?** Using detective skills and information for the lesson to describe this person
- **What were you used for?** Using information from the lesson and detective skills to describe the object's use
- **How are you used now?** Understanding the importance of being on display in a museum/Gallery, using their imagination
- **Why have you been kept this long?** Using their imagination and detective skills to consider how much care it takes to preserve fragile items for 1000s of years
- **Why do you live in the Hunt Museum/Limerick Museum/LCGA?** Considering/discussing why objects are kept on display and why?
- **Are you beautiful?** Observing the objects carefully. How long did it take to make? Does it look nice? Would you have this in your house?
- **How are you decorated?** Observing carefully. What processes have been described in the videos. Use new vocabulary to answer this
- **What sort of things lived around you?** Using knowledge of context of the piece describe other objects/people/places around the object. If it was kept on a shelf; what was beside it on the shelf. Was it on the ground? In a house or some other building?
- **What sort of things live around you now?** Using imagination and knowledge of context around the object, describe what lives next to this object now. Are they the same things as 2000 years ago?



## TO MAKE AIR DRY CLAY SLIP (SLURRY)

- Shred small pieces of fresh air dry clay - a small cupful, and place in a plastic bowl
- Add approx 2/3 tablespoons of water and leave overnight with a tight lid
- Next day stir gently adding more water if needed. Let it sit for 24 hours, with the lid on
- After at least 48 hours, the mixture can be repeatedly stirred to create a smooth creamy texture
- This is now ready to be used as a 'glue' to bind air dry clay sections together
- If colour is required, divide the mixture equally into 3/4 separate lidded pots, depending on how many colours are needed
- Add either poster paint or acrylic paint to each pot in very small amounts at first. Stir well until the colour emerges. The more colour that is added, the brighter and deeper the tone will be
- Colours can be mixed together as well, such as blue and yellow to make green. Small colour tests are advised before adding to the slip



