

# EARTHENWARE MASK PROJECT

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*Step-by-Step Guide for Grades 5-12*

Inspired by Rose B. Simpson's "Two Selves" (2023)

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## **PART 1: UNDERSTANDING THE PROJECT**

### **What is "Dual Nature"?**

This project explores the idea that we all have two sides to our personality. Artist Rose B. Simpson created a sculpture called "Two Selves" that shows this concept. Your mask will represent YOUR two selves - the part of you that is calm and grounded, and the part that dreams, reaches, and wants to grow.

### **Project Goals**

- Learn traditional hand-building techniques using earthenware clay
- Explore personal identity and self-reflection through art
- Study contemporary Native American ceramic artist Rose B. Simpson
- Create a mask that tells your personal story
- Practice surface decoration techniques (carving, texture, slip application)
- Complete a multi-week project from concept through final embellishment

### **The Big Idea: Two Selves**

In Rose B. Simpson's sculpture, she shows two figures:

1. The Adult Figure - This figure has no arms and firmly planted feet. It represents ACCEPTANCE and being centered. This is the part of us that is calm, knows who we are, and is grounded in the present.
2. The Child Figure - This small figure has outstretched arms and restless legs. It represents DESIRE and reaching for more. This is the part of us that dreams, wants to grow, and is always reaching for something new.

*Your mask will show BOTH of these parts in one face. Think about which parts of YOU are calm and grounded, and which parts are always reaching and dreaming.*

## **PART 2: MATERIALS CHECKLIST**

### **Clay and Building Tools**

- 2 pounds of red earthenware clay (per student)
- Ware board (for working surface)
- Canvas or cloth for rolling clay
- Rolling pin or slab roller
- Needle tool (for cutting and poking holes)
- Wire tool (for cutting clay)
- Wooden modeling tools
- Scoring tools
- Sponges
- Water container with clean water
- Plastic bags for covering work

### **Carving and Texture Tools**

- Carving tools (loop tools, ribbon tools)
- Texture stamps or press molds
- Fabric pieces (burlap, lace, textured cloth)
- Found objects for making patterns (leaves, buttons, etc.)
- Wooden craft sticks
- Natural materials (twigs, shells) for texture

### **Surface Decoration (During Clay Stage)**

- Black underglaze or black slip
- White slip (OM4)
- Slip containers (small cups with lids)
- Paint brushes (various sizes)
- Small sponges for slip application

### **Mold-Making Materials**

- Newspapers
- Masking tape

### **Post-Firing Embellishment Materials**

- Twine or hemp cord
- Leather strips (optional)
- Wire (for hanging)
- String or yarn
- Beads (wood, glass, ceramic)

- Small found objects with meaning to you
- Natural materials (feathers, shells, seeds)
- Black acrylic paint (for adding symbols)
- Small paintbrushes

### **Equipment Needed**

- Kiln for firing to Cone 04 (1915F/1046C)
- Kiln shelves and furniture
- Drying racks
- Plastic storage containers

## **PART 3: UNDERSTANDING ROSE B. SIMPSON'S ART**

### **Simpson's Ceramic Techniques**

- Traditional coiling - Building up the sculpture with rope-like coils of clay
- Visible process marks - The artist doesn't hide how the work was made
- Mixed clays - Using both red and yellow earthenware together
- Rough, organic surfaces - Not perfectly smooth
- Integration of non-clay materials - Adding twine, hide, and found objects
- Talismanic decoration - Small protective objects that have spiritual meaning

### **Key Themes to Include in Your Mask**

- DUALITY - showing two opposite forces in one piece
- PROCESS - letting your hand-building marks show
- PROTECTION - adding objects that feel meaningful and protective
- IDENTITY - representing who you are AND who you are becoming
- TRADITION & INNOVATION - honoring traditional techniques while making something new

## **PART 4: DESIGN PLANNING**

**Before you touch clay, you need a plan! Take time to think deeply about your two selves and sketch your ideas.**

### **Step 1: Self-Reflection**

Answer these questions in your sketchbook:

- What part of me is calm, grounded, and accepting? (Examples: when I'm with family, when I'm in nature, when I'm doing something I love)
- What part of me is restless, reaching, and always wanting more? (Examples: my dreams for the future, my ambitions, the part that gets impatient)
- How do these two parts coexist in me? Do they fight? Work together? Take turns?
- What symbols or images represent my grounded self?
- What symbols or images represent my reaching self?
- What objects or materials would protect me on my journey?

### **Step 2: Choose Your Design Structure**

Pick ONE of these design options:

#### **OPTION A: Vertical Split Face**

- Left side = Calm/Grounded self (smooth, peaceful)
- Right side = Active/Reaching self (textured, dynamic)
- Clear line down the middle dividing the two halves
- BEST FOR: Students who see their two selves as very different

#### **OPTION B: Nested Faces (Face within a Face)**

- Main face = your outer self that the world sees
- Small face emerging from forehead = your inner self/true feelings
- Both faces can have different expressions
- BEST FOR: Students who feel oneself is hidden inside

#### **OPTION C: Dual Expression in One Face**

- One eye closed (calm) / one eye open (alert)
- Half the mouth smiling / half serious
- Asymmetrical features showing mixed emotions
- BEST FOR: Students whose two selves blend together

### **Step 3: Sketch Your Design**

Create THREE sketches in your sketchbook:

3. FRONT VIEW - Draw what the mask looks like from the front. Label which areas will be smooth vs. textured.
4. SIDE VIEW - Show if any parts stick out (like a small emerging face).
5. DETAIL SKETCH - Zoom in on the textures and carved symbols you'll use.

In your sketches, include:

- Eye placement and whether they are open or closed
- Mouth expression
- Where texture will go vs. where it will be smooth
- Carved symbols (crosses, stars, circles, etc.)
- Small holes for hanging talismanic objects
- Any dimensional elements (raised areas, small faces)

#### **Step 4: Plan Your Symbols**

Simpson uses symbols like crosses (for cardinal directions and protection) and stars (for guidance). What symbols have meaning for you?

Common symbolic elements:

- Cross or Plus Sign (+) - protection, balance, the four directions
- Circle or Spiral - wholeness, journey, eternity
- Star - guidance, dreams, reaching upward
- Lines or Rays - energy, movement, growth
- Dots - connection, constellation, community
- Waves - emotion, water, flow
- YOUR OWN - create a personal symbol that means something to you

## **PART 5: STEP-BY-STEP CONSTRUCTION**

**This is where you build your mask! Follow each step carefully and take your time. Good craftsmanship matters!**

### **BUILDING THE BASE FORM**

#### **Create the Newspaper Mold (Hump Mold)**

##### **WHAT YOU'RE MAKING:**

A dome-shaped mound of crumpled newspapers that will serve as the form for your mask. The clay will be draped over this mound.

##### **STEP-BY-STEP:**

6. Gather newspapers - You'll need about 15-20 sheets of newspaper.
7. Crumple and shape - Crumple newspapers loosely and pile them into an oval mound on your ware board. The mound should be about the size of your face (8-10 inches tall, 6-8 inches wide).
8. Tape to secure - Use masking tape to hold the newspaper mound together. Wrap tape around it like you're wrapping a present.
9. Shape the face dome - Press and adjust the newspapers to create a face-like dome - slightly rounded, not flat.
10. Set aside - Place your newspaper mold on your ware board. Write your name on the board!

***Your newspaper mold should be firm, face-sized, and secure.***

#### **Roll Out Your Clay Slab**

##### **WHAT YOU'RE MAKING:**

A flat slab that is an even thickness all over.

##### **STEP-BY-STEP:**

11. Take your 2-pounds of clay
12. Prepare your work surface - Lay a piece of canvas or cloth on your table. This keeps the clay from sticking.
13. Make a clay ball - Form your clay into a smooth ball with no cracks.
14. Flatten it - Use your hand to press the ball down into a thick pancake shape.
15. Roll it out - Using a rolling pin, roll the clay flat. Roll from the center outward in all directions. Turn the slab occasionally so it doesn't stick.
16. Check thickness - Your slab should be between 1/4 inch and 1/2 inch thick - about the thickness of your pinky finger. Use thickness guides (wooden slats) if your teacher provides them.

17. Make it big enough - Your slab should be large enough to cover your newspaper mold with some extra hanging over the edges (at least 10 inches x 8 inches).
18. Check for cracks - If you see cracks forming at the edges, use a damp sponge to smooth them out.

***Your slab should be even thickness, large enough, and have no cracks.***

## **Drape the Slab Over the Mold**

### **WHAT YOU'RE DOING:**

Carefully lifting your clay slab and laying it over your newspaper mound to create the basic mask shape.

### **STEP-BY-STEP:**

19. Lift carefully - Slide your hands under the slab. Lift it gently - clay can tear if you're not careful!
20. Center it - Carefully drape the slab over your newspaper mold. Center it so the middle of the slab is at the top of the mound.
21. Let it drape naturally - Allow the clay to drape and fold naturally over the mold. Don't stretch it too much or it will get too thin.
22. Press gently - Use your hands to gently press the clay against the newspaper form. Start at the top and work your way down and out to the sides.
23. Smooth out air bubbles - Make sure there are no air pockets between the clay and the newspaper. Press them out gently.
24. Trim excess - Using a needle tool, trim away the excess clay hanging below. Cut in a rough oval or face shape. Leave about 1/2 inch beyond where you want the final edge.

***Your mask should be draped smoothly over the mold with no air pockets.***

## **Cut Eye Holes and Basic Features**

### **WHAT YOU'RE DOING:**

Marking and cutting the eye holes and establishing the basic face structure.

### **STEP-BY-STEP:**

25. Mark eye positions - Using a pencil or needle tool, lightly mark where the eyes will go. Eyes should be about 2-3 inches from the top of the mask, spaced about 2.5-3 inches apart.
26. Draw eye shapes - Sketch the shape of the eye holes. They can be circles, ovals, almond shapes, or asymmetrical (one different from the other).
27. Cut carefully - Using a needle tool, carefully cut out the eye holes. Cut slowly and smoothly - don't rush!
28. Smooth the edges - Use a damp sponge or your finger to smooth the edges of the eye holes so they're not rough or sharp.
29. Mark other features (optional) - Lightly mark where the nose, mouth, or other features will go. Don't cut these yet - you'll develop them more in the next steps.

### **IMPORTANT:**

- If you're doing the NESTED FACE design, now is when you should add a small face emerging from the forehead. Form a small face separately and attach it using the score-and-slip method (see next section).
- If you're doing the VERTICAL SPLIT design, use your needle tool to lightly draw a line down the center of the face to divide it in half.

## **DEVELOPING THE DUALITY**

### **Create the "Calm" Side**

#### **WHAT YOU'RE DOING:**

Working on the grounded, peaceful side of your mask. This side should feel calm, smooth, and centered.

#### **TECHNIQUES FOR THE CALM SIDE:**

30. Smooth the surface - Use a damp sponge to smooth this side until it's very smooth. Work in circular motions.
31. Refine the features - Gently shape a peaceful expression - maybe a closed eye, a slight smile, or a serene look.
32. Minimal texture - Keep this side simple - maybe just a few gentle curves or soft lines.
33. Use slip for smoothness - If you want it extra smooth, you can paint on a thin layer of white or black slip and burnish it (rub it smooth) with the back of a spoon when it's leather-hard.
34. Closed or downcast eye - If one eye represents calm, it might be closed, half-closed, or looking down peacefully.

#### **VISUAL QUALITIES:**

- SMOOTH - like calm water
- SIMPLE - not busy or cluttered
- PEACEFUL - gentle curves, relaxed expression
- GROUNDED - solid, stable feeling

## **Create the "Active/Reaching" Side**

### **WHAT YOU'RE DOING:**

Working on the restless, ambitious side of your mask. This side should feel energetic, textured, and dynamic.

### **TECHNIQUES FOR THE ACTIVE SIDE:**

35. Add coil marks - Roll out small coils (rope shapes) of clay and press them onto this side of the mask. Leave the coil marks visible - don't smooth them completely. This honors Simpson's traditional coiling technique.
36. Carve dynamic lines - Use carving tools to create energetic, swirling, or radiating lines that suggest movement and energy.
37. Add texture - Press textured materials into the clay (fabric, leaves, stamps). Create rough, active surfaces.
38. Build up dimension - Add small raised areas or bumps to make this side more three-dimensional.
39. Open, alert eye - If one eye represents reaching/desire, make it wide open, alert, and looking outward.
40. Active expression - Create a more intense expression - maybe the mouth is open, or the eyebrows are raised.

### **VISUAL QUALITIES:**

- TEXTURED - rough, with visible marks
- ENERGETIC - lines that suggest movement
- REACHING - upward lines, open features
- RESTLESS - busy, active surface

### **IMPORTANT TECHNIQUE: Score and Slip**

When adding coils or dimensional pieces to your mask, you must use the "score and slip" method:

- SCORE - Use a scoring tool to scratch rough marks on BOTH surfaces (the mask and the piece you're adding)
- SLIP - Paint a little bit of liquid clay (slip) on both scratched surfaces
- PRESS - Press the pieces together firmly
- SMOOTH - Smooth the joint with your finger or a tool so it's secure

## **Add Symbolic Details and Meaning**

### **WHAT YOU'RE DOING:**

Adding the symbols, marks, and details that make your mask personally meaningful.

### **STEP-BY-STEP:**

41. Carve your symbols - Using carving tools, carefully carve your chosen symbols into the clay. Make them deep enough to show up clearly (at least 1/8 inch deep).
42. Add a cross or plus sign - Simpson uses crosses for protection and the four directions. Where does this symbol belong on YOUR mask?
43. Make holes for hanging objects - Use a needle tool to poke small holes (about 1/8 inch diameter) where you want to hang talismanic objects later. Make these holes near the edges or where they fit your design.
44. Refine facial features - Add details to the eyes, nose, mouth - but remember to keep the DUALITY clear!
45. Add your personal symbols - Carve or add the symbols you identified in your planning stage.
46. Consider slip decoration - If you want to add black or white slip designs, paint them on now. You can carve through slip (called sgraffito) to create designs.

### **SLIP TECHNIQUES (OPTIONAL):**

- Painting slip Use a brush to paint black or white slip onto areas of your mask. This creates color contrast.
- Sgraffito: Paint slip all over an area. When it's dry enough (leather-hard), carve through it to reveal the red clay underneath. This creates beautiful line designs.
- Slip resist Paint slip on certain areas only, leaving others natural red clay color.

## **Final Details and Signature**

### **WHAT YOU'RE DOING:**

Making final adjustments and signing your work.

### **CHECKLIST:**

- Check the contrast, look at your mask from a distance. Can you clearly see the two different sides? Is the duality obvious?
- Smooth rough edges use a damp sponge to smooth any rough edges around the outside of the mask.
- Check all attachments make sure all added pieces (coils, dimensional elements) are firmly attached. Press any loose pieces again using score and slip.
- Check holes, make sure holes for hanging are clean and go all the way through.
- Clean up your work and use a damp sponge to wipe away any fingerprints or smudges you don't want.
- Sign the back, on the back of your mask, use a needle tool or carving tool to write your name and the date. You can also add your class period.
- Carefully remove from mold and gently lift the mask off the newspaper mold. The newspaper can stay inside until the piece is leatherhard.

## **PART 6: SURFACE TECHNIQUES REFERENCE**

This section explains different techniques you can use to create surface textures and patterns on your mask.

### **Texture Techniques**

#### **Coiling (Simpson's Signature)**

Roll clay into rope-like coils. Press them onto the surface and leave the marks visible. This is a traditional Santa Clara Pueblo technique that Simpson uses.

#### **Carving**

Use loop tools or ribbon tools to carve lines, patterns, or images into the clay surface. Carve at least 1/8 inch deep so marks show after firing.

#### **Stamping**

Press stamps, found objects, or textured materials into the clay to create repeating patterns.

#### **Fabric Textures**

Press pieces of burlap, lace, or other textured fabric into the clay to transfer the texture.

#### **Natural Textures**

Press leaves, twigs, bark, or shells into the clay to create organic patterns.

#### **Scratch Marks**

Use a fork, comb, or brush to scratch active, energetic marks into the surface.

#### **Building Up**

Add small pieces of clay to create raised, dimensional areas.

### **Slip Decoration Techniques**

#### **Basic Slip Application**

Paint clay (slip) onto your mask using a brush. Black slip creates dark designs on red clay. White slip creates lighter designs.

#### **Sgraffito (Scratch Through)**

Paint slip all over an area. When it's leather-hard (still damp but firm), carve through the slip to reveal the clay underneath. This creates beautiful line designs.

## **Slip Trailing**

Put slip in a squeeze bottle and "draw" with it like icing on a cake. This creates raised lines.

## **Resist Technique**

Paint slip on some areas but not others to create color contrast. The areas without slip will stay the natural clay color.

## **Contrast Strategies**

To make the duality clear, you need **STRONG CONTRAST** between your two sides. Here are ways to create contrast:

- **TEXTURE:** One side smooth / one side rough
- **PATTERN:** One side plain / one side patterned
- **COLOR:** One side light slip / one side dark slip
- **DIMENSION:** One side flat / one side with raised elements
- **DIRECTION:** One side with vertical lines / one side with horizontal or swirling lines
- **EMOTION:** One side peaceful expression / one side intense expression

## **PART 7: DRYING AND FIRING**

### **Why Proper Drying Matters**

Clay that dries too fast will crack. Clay that goes into the kiln while still damp will EXPLODE. Proper drying is crucial for success!

### **Drying Process (5-7 Days)**

#### **DAY 1-2: Slow Drying Under Plastic**

- Cover with plastic
- After you finish your mask, loosely cover it with a plastic bag. Don't wrap it tight - just drape the plastic over it.
- Why?
- This slows down drying so it happens evenly. Fast drying = cracks!
- Where to put it
- Place your covered mask on a shelf away from windows, heaters, and fans.
- Check daily
- Each day, remove the plastic for 10-15 minutes to let a little moisture escape, then cover again.

#### **DAY 3-4: Leather-Hard Stage**

- What is leather-hard? - The clay is still damp but firm, like hard leather. You can't shape it easily anymore, but it's not completely dry.
- Plastic off - Remove the plastic covering.
- Check for cracks - If you see small cracks, you can repair them by rubbing them with a damp sponge.
- Last chance for carving - You can still carve cleanly at this stage.

#### **DAY 5-7: Air Drying (Bone Dry)**

- Leave it out - Leave your mask uncovered to finish drying completely.
- How to tell if it's bone dry - The clay will be lighter in color (paler red/pink instead of dark red). It will feel cool to the touch but not cold.
- DON'T RUSH - If your mask isn't completely dry, it WILL explode in the kiln!

### **Firing Process**

**SINGLE FIRING: Cone 04 (1915F/1046C)**

## **PART 8: POST-FIRE EMBELLISHMENT**

This is where you add the talismanic (protective) objects and final touches that make your mask complete. Simpson adds twine, hide, and meaningful objects to her sculptures. You will too!

### **What Are Talismanic Objects?**

Talismanic objects are small items that have protective, spiritual, or personal meaning. They're like lucky charms or sacred objects. In many cultures, people wear or display talismans for protection, good fortune, or to honor their ancestors.

### **Choosing Your Talismanic Objects**

Think about objects that are meaningful to YOU. They can be:

- Natural items - Small stones, shells, seeds, feathers
- Family connections - Buttons from a grandparent's shirt, a small charm from a family member
- Cultural symbols - Items that connect to your heritage or culture
- Personal meaning - Something from a special memory or place
- Things you made - Small clay beads you can fire separately, painted symbols
- Found objects - Interesting items you discovered that caught your attention

***IMPORTANT: Keep items small and lightweight. They should enhance your mask, not overpower it.***

### **Materials for Embellishment**

- Twine or hemp cord - for hanging objects
- Leather strips - for decoration (optional)
- Wire - for creating hanging loops
- Beads - wood, glass, or ceramic
- Paint - Black or earth-tone acrylic paints for adding symbols
- String or yarn - in natural colors
- Small found objects - meaningful items

#### **STEP 2: Add Painted Symbols**

- Use acrylic paint - Black acrylic paint works great on fired clay.
- Paint symbols - Add any symbols you didn't carve (crosses, stars, dots, lines).
- Keep it meaningful - Every mark should have meaning, not just decoration.
- Let dry - Allow paint to dry completely before adding hanging objects.

#### **STEP 3: Create Hanging Attachments**

47. Measure twine/cord - Cut pieces of twine long enough to thread through holes and tie. Usually 8-12 inches per piece.
48. Thread through holes - Push twine through the holes in your mask. Use a needle or wire to help if needed.
49. Knot inside - Tie knots on the inside/back of the mask so the twine stays in place.
50. Leave hanging ends - Let the ends hang down from the mask - these are where you'll attach your talismanic objects.

#### **STEP 4: Attach Talismanic Objects**

51. String beads - Thread beads onto your hanging cords. You can add one or several per cord.
52. Tie on objects - Tie small objects to the ends of the cords. Make secure knots.
53. Add meaning - As you attach each object, think about what it represents for you.
54. Use variety - Mix different types of objects - natural items, beads, found objects.
55. Test weight - Gently lift your mask to make sure nothing is too heavy.

#### **STEP 5: Create a Hanging System**

- Wire loop
- Attach a wire loop or string loop on the back/top of the mask so it can be hung on a wall.
- Make it strong
- Use sturdy wire or doubled string. Your mask is heavy!
- Test it
- Make sure the hanging loop can support the weight of your mask.