

# Treasured Family Plates

**Rebecca Genao**

**H**aving middle-school students value their art can be a challenge. Many students enjoy the process of art but do not recognize or accept beauty in their own work. Artwork that is brought home is often put away in a safe spot to be treasured years later.

## Why Create Functional Work?

One way to motivate students is to make their artwork functional. Art that can be used on a daily basis is very appealing. When a piece of artwork can be eaten from, such as a platter or plate, the value becomes greater and the project more realistic for students. Platters are a special accent to many family events and traditions. Food is often the centerpiece at gatherings and the platter can be a treasured piece that is handed down through generations.

To introduce pattern and design into our work, I chose to reach into my students' culture. Because I teach in a predominantly African American school district, I introduced African tribal motifs to begin this project.

Students were intrigued and not overwhelmed by the simplistic designs. After viewing pages of tribal designs, students brainstormed concepts for their work. I encouraged them to keep color palettes natural and earthy. Design motifs could be applied on top of the glaze in jet black to add contrast.

## Working with Slabs

On the first work day, I demonstrated the slab method for clay. I showed how to knead clay and roll it out to a desired thickness. We used Styrofoam plates and platters as molds. Students simply dropped the clay into the mold, trimmed the excess, and smoothed the edges. At this stage, students were allowed to add some subtle texture if desired.

## Glazing and Firing

I reviewed the drying/firing process for clay. After the work was at a bisque stage, students added glazes and design motifs in black.

When the work was fired, it looked outstanding and students

could not be more proud. The results were fantastic! We held a gallery night to display our work in conjunction with our school's annual Soul Food Fest. The night was a hit and we even sold some of the plates with proceeds going to a local charity. ☺

*Rebecca Genao is an art teacher at Heskett Middle School in Bedford Heights, Ohio.*

**NATIONAL STANDARD**  
*Students integrate visual, spatial,*

*and temporal concepts with content to communicate intended meaning in their artwork.*

## WEB LINK

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African\\_art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_art)



*Diamonique Davis, grade seven.*

*Frederick Rembert,  
grade eight.*



### Objectives

Students will:

- learn a brief history of African culture and traditional art and ceramics.
- hand build ceramic plates using a slab method.
- add subtle patterns, textures, and glazes.

### Materials

- plastic bags
- clay
- Styrofoam plates for support
- clay tools
- spray bottles
- variety of glazes
- brushes



*Beatrice, grade seven.*

