



Roads Scholar Educational Adventures in Our Own Backyard

By Kathleen Williams
CRIZMAC Art and Cultural Marketplace

Lots of Pots--and More--at the Amerind Museum

The Amerind Museum, sixty miles east of Tucson in beautiful Texas Canyon, houses a wonderful collection of Native American art and artifacts from Alaska to South America. Currently, the Museum is featuring an exhibit with examples of pottery from the ancient Casas Grandes civilization (1200 to 1440 C.E.), as well as contemporary pots that were made during the last few decades. Interestingly, there is not as much difference between the old and the new pots as you might expect, and there's a good story behind this:

About thirty years ago, a young boy named Juan Quezada became intrigued by the ancient pottery sherds he found while collecting firewood around his home in Mata Ortiz, Mexico. These sherds were from pots made by ancient people in Paquimé, the largest city in the Casas Grandes civilization. Ceramics played an important role in the Casas Grandes culture and they created some of the finest pots found anywhere.

The fall of Paquimé is a mystery. In the end, the city was sacked and burned, perhaps by nomadic warriors from the north. With this final destruction, many of the details of the life and culture of these people, including the techniques used to create their wonderful hand-built ceramics, were lost.

Armed with his growing collection of pot sherds as a reference, Juan Quezada began experimenting to see if he could create similar pots. He realized that the ancient people must have used local materials, so he searched until he found clay deposits and the minerals needed to create different colors for decoration. Through trial and error over many years, he discovered how to process and shape the clay so that it wouldn't crack when it was drying or being fired. Juan formed his pots using the coil method, and decorated them with a small paintbrush made of human hair (sometimes as little as one strand). He learned to use pieces of bone and stones to smooth and polish the surfaces to a high shine. Finally, he developed a technique for firing his pots. The pots were placed under an inverted clay tub, or *quemador*, with a fire built around the outside.

All the time that Juan was learning to make pots, he was working as a farmer and railroad worker. When he could, he would sell or trade his pots. In 1974, an anthropologist named Spencer MacCallum found three pots in a shop in Deming, New Mexico. At first, he thought they were some of the ancient pots by the Casas Grandes people. After looking at them more closely, he realized they were contemporary, and set out to find the person who had made them. Eventually his search led him down a dusty road to the little town of Mata Ortiz and the home of Juan Quezada. When Juan showed him other similar pots, he knew his search was over. This discovery led to major recognition of Mata Ortiz pottery, with shows in museums and galleries around the United States. Juan taught other members of his family, and neighbors who wanted to learn, how to make the pots. In 1999, the Mexican government honored Juan Quezada with the National Art Award. Today Mata Ortiz is a community of world-class artisans. More than 400 artists live and work in Mata Ortiz, and nearly every house is home to at least one potter.

Visit *The Potters of Mata Ortiz: Inspired by the Past...Creating Traditions for the Future* exhibit on the 2nd floor of the main museum building at the Amerind to see examples of Juan Quezada's work, works by other Mata Ortiz potters, and ancient Casas Grandes pottery.

Tune Up Your Mind

Look for these books and related resources

The Many Faces of Mata Ortiz by Susan Lowell (Rio Nuevo, 1999)

The Miracle of Mata Ortiz by Walter P. Parks (The Coulter Press, 1994)

The Pot that Juan Built by Nancy Andrews-Goebel (Lee & Low Books, 2002)

Southwestern Pottery: Anasazi to Zuni by Allan Hayes and John Blom (Northland Publishing, 1996)

Details

What: Amerind Museum

Where: 2100 North Amerind Road, Dragoon, AZ 85609
Exit #318 off I-10, about 60 miles east of Tucson

When: Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Closed most major holidays

Admission:

\$5.00 Adults

\$4.00 Seniors (60 and up)

\$3.00 Youth (12-18) and College Students (with ID)

Free Children under 12

Information: (520) 586-3666 or www.amerind.org

Discovery Detours

If you go...

When you write a report or story for school, you have probably been taught to include information about "Who, What, When, Where, and Why." Archeologists who work with pottery classify it by "Period, Culture Center, District, Ware, and Type." In doing this, they are answering the same basic questions as you do in school.

Let's see at how this works:

Period.....**When** was the pot made?

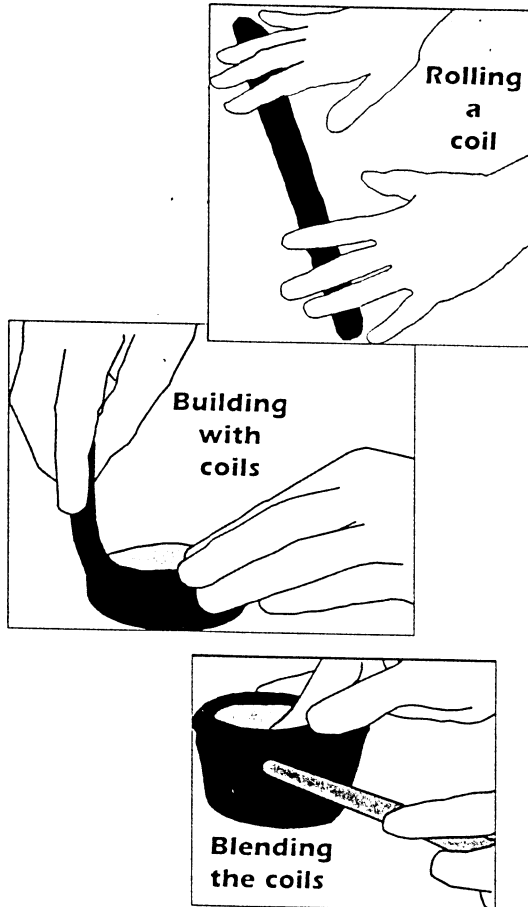
Culture Center.....**Who** made it (by what cultural group)?

District.....**Where** was it made (in what general area)?

Ware.....**What** are the pots made of and how were they made?

Type.....**Why** was the pot made (what purpose did it serve)?

When you visit the exhibit at the Amerind, choose two pots that appeal to you, one old and one new. Compare and contrast them based on the answers to the questions above. To help you organize your information, visit www.crizmac.com before you go and click on the “Roads Scholar” link to print out a Venn Diagram form.



Make a Coil Pot

Begin by making the base, or what Juan Quezada calls his “*tortilla*.” Roll out a flat slab of clay about the thickness of a slice of bread. Use a pointed tool or plastic knife (it may help to trace around a plate or bowl) to cut a round shape from the slab. Next, roll what Juan calls “*chorizos*,” coils of clay a little thinner than a hot dog, but longer. You will use the coils to build the sides of your pot. Score the coils and the slab with crosshatching marks at the places where they will be joined together and then attach the two pieces using slip, a thick liquid made by adding water to clay. Use your fingers or a popsicle stick to blend the coils together to create a smooth surface. Continue in this way until your pot is the desired height. The techniques for finishing your pot will depend upon the type of clay used. Some types of clay can simply air dry, while others need to be baked in an oven or fired in a kiln.

Think Tank

Discussion questions for the whole family to consider:

Weaving and basketry preceded pottery by hundreds of years. Pottery only became practical when the Native Americans in the Southwest learned to irrigate and shifted their emphasis to agriculture. Why do you think this was? Consider what the people’s lifestyle was like as hunter/gatherers vs. farmers.

What the experts say:

Once the Native American began farming, it became more important for a storage vessel to hold up well than for it to be easy to carry. Also, agriculture resulted in the need for more storage vessels because crops were harvested at certain specific periods and had to be stored for much longer periods of time.

Source: Southwestern Pottery: Anasazi to Zuni by Allan Hayes and John Blom

Fuel for Thought

Did you know...

Ceramics is both an art and a science. Some of the pots made in Mata Ortiz are earth-toned, while others are black. Many people assume that the potters used different types of clay or glazes to get these different effects, but that isn't the case. Actually, it has to do with the way the pots are fired. The clay and slip used to create the pots contain iron, which changes color as it oxidizes (is combined with oxygen) during the firing. The earth-toned pots are created when air is allowed to circulate during the firing (an "oxidation firing"). The black pottery may be made from the very same materials, but the firing process is different. Black pottery is produced when oxygen is eliminated during the firing. This is known as a "reduction firing."

Wheels Are Turning

Parents and Caregivers: These activities can help your child meet Arizona's educational standards. The standards addressed here include:

1AV-R4. Begin to look at, and talk about, art (K)

1AV-F7. Expand knowledge and use of different arts media (Grades 1-3)

1AV-E3. Identify and demonstrate the basic physical and scientific properties of the technical aspects of visual arts media (Grades 4-8)

1SS-F2. Describe everyday life in the past and recognize that some aspects change and others stay the same (Grades 1-3)