



An Analysis of the Creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis through Clay

Targeted Grades: 6th - 9th grade

By Corinna Brannon

Teaching Visual Art at a Catholic high school has obvious advantages when incorporating Christian themes into the curriculum. However, this project could be adapted to any class within any school.

Many students will be familiar with the book of Genesis, especially the story of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1-24). It might be interesting for the students to learn that Judaism, Islam, and Christianity share this story and to compare their similarities and differences. It also would be useful to look at how the story of Adam and Eve has inspired many artists throughout the centuries.

For adolescent students, Adam and Eve's separation from Eden—the result of their failure to follow God's commandment not to eat of the tree of knowledge—is a wonderful opportunity to discuss the pros and cons of the freedom of choice in society as a whole, as well as relations with authority figures such as parents.

Christian theological interpretations of this story that see it as the explanation of suffering in the world and the reason why humanity needs to be redeemed (Gen. 3:15; Isaiah 1:29 and 11:6-19 have often been interpreted through this lens in the Christian tradition) offer a good way to discuss the ideal parent's love for their children and how the text suggests God's love for Adam and Eve. Students at this stage in their lives are grappling with the ideas so poignantly introduced in these chapters, and dealing perhaps for the first time in their lives with the consequences of their choices through the exercising of their own free will.

Pottery is such a popular class mainly because it is so “hands on.” The chapters in Genesis relate well to this medium because clay has been around from the beginning of humanity as evidenced by figurines and bowls found at various Neolithic sites. There is also something uniquely human and divine in our ability to create forms from the earth. Like God in Genesis chapter 2:6 we can form something from nothing and give life to our imaginings through our creations.

I chose to assign this project to my freshman classes because I felt they would approach the material with an innocence that would lend itself to the project.



Making masks, using their own faces, the students were more vested in the project and more willing to think of their own corresponding lives in light of the biblical text (Gen.2:4-9).

Procedure:

Students were assigned partners and were given the task of making a plaster mold of each other's faces using plaster-coated strips of gauze cloth which can be bought at any good art supply store. These were cut down beforehand and divided up between the students who were given bowls of water and some sheets of cellophane. Students then cut a sheet of cellophane and cut two holes where their nostrils would be. Straws were then inserted into their nostrils and the cellophane placed over their faces, the straws being inserted through the previously made holes. In this way a good barrier is made between the skin and the plaster strips without the student suffocating! Make sure the cellophane sheet covers the students hair as plaster is quite painful to remove from hair once dry.

Students must take turns to layer the strips onto the other student's face, making sure the strips are pressed into the contours of the face to pick up the features clearly. Strips should be dipped in the water and excess water brushed off between two fingers. Students should alternate this task over the course of two days. The plaster strips need about three layers to make a strong mold, and the student should be able to lift the mold off their face easily once it has dried. (A gradual warming of the plaster strips will indicate the mold is drying and once dry the mold will harden.

Once the mold is dry the students will layer clay into the concave area of the mold after taking the cellophane out. Make sure the clay is about a quarter an inch thick especially around the edges and is pressed smoothly into the surface of the mold to pick up the features. Students should also make a triangular wedge shape to connect to the two bottom edges where the jaws would be so that the masks, when finished, can stand. Once the clay is leather hard students can attach shapes and objects they think would add to the piece as it relates to their interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve and possibly to their own lives with slip (clay with added water.)

The clay masks should then be dried thoroughly until they are bone dry. After the first firing to cone 05 the masks can be decorated using underglazes (using underglazes will require an additional firing to cone 05) or if desired, regular paint.

Materials Needed:

Cellophane roll

Plaster strips cut from rolls and placed in trays

Straws

scissors

Bowls of water (one bowl for each pair of students)

Low fire white body clay

Underglazes and gloss glaze (though one could use spray varnish to give the pieces a gloss finish instead of firing the clay for a second time with gloss glaze. One could also use air-dry clay and tempera paint if there is not access to a kiln.)



Left: Students layering plaster strips. Notice how large the cellophane sheet is, covering most of her hair. Plaster strips should not get in the hair!!

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