

arts & activities®

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THE NATION'S LEADING ART EDUCATION MAGAZINE

it's time to
get **CREATIVE**
with **CLAY**



COVER story

Peep Show! No, no—not *that* kind! Please, let me explain ...

Three years ago, Linda Arbuckle (University of Florida ceramic professor and internationally known majolica clay artist) and I were on the phone discussing how electric kilns just don't have any artistic design flair to them. The round kiln has basic properties that allow it to function properly, but its looks are far from exciting. We wondered what we could do to add some spark and artistic interest to the design.

Linda suggested the clay peephole plugs could be designed by clay artists and, only seconds after she made that statement, I conceived the idea of a "Peep Show" for the ceramic community!

My work helping Skutt Kilns with their educational programs gave me the necessary connections to take the Peep Show idea from concept to reality. It would be a fun way to involve potters and K-12 students in a project that could be displayed at national conventions, where potters and art teachers gather to exchange ideas and review new products and tools.

After my phone conversation with Linda, I called University of Indianapolis Art Department Chair and Ceramic Professor, Dee Schaad, to check if the idea was sound. He hung up on me because he had so many ideas, he instantly had to head to his studio before he forgot them! I knew I was on the right track. (We ended up using one of his pieces—a devilish little peep—for the invitation postcard.)

This is a great project for clay artists of any age, and you can tailor it to your particular classroom situation. Give it a try!

FIRST, SOME CONSTRUCTION TIPS

1. Remember—clay shrinks, both as it dries and after it is fired. A peep that fits perfectly into the hole while still moist may end up being too small when fired. Different clays have dif-

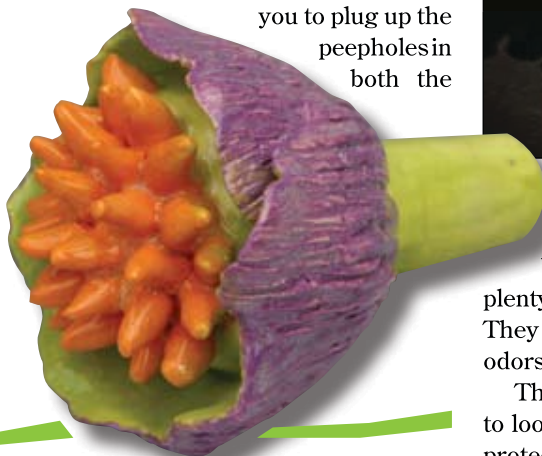
ferent shrinkage factors. It can be as little as 6 percent for sculpture and low-fire clays (04-05), to over 12 percent shrinkage for smaller-particle clays and higher-fire clays (cone 5-10).

2. Taper the end of the peep plug that inserts into the kiln. The peephole is tapered from 1.25 inches on the outside of the kiln to 0.75 of an inch on the inside of the kiln. By tapering the peephole plug end to be smaller at the tip and larger at the base of your design, it will form a better fit for plugging up the hole.

3. No glaze should be on the part of the peep that inserts into the kiln's peephole. Underglaze can be used on that part for color, as underglaze has no flux or melting agent that would adhere to hole walls at the higher temperatures of a kiln firing.

PEEPHOLES: ALL IS REVEALED The peephole and its plug play an important part in the firing of a kiln. The hole has a couple of functions: one, it allows moisture that is driven off by the heat to exit the kiln. And, two, it also allows oxygen into the kiln, which helps burn out organic material during the slow bisque. This is important because if the organic material is not all burnt off, it will again burn off during the glaze fire, producing gas that can cause glaze defects.

"Envirovents," which vent the kiln by drawing air down through the top of the kiln and out the bottom, allow you to plug up the peepholes in both the



ATTENTION:
The Jan. 31, 2010
"Peep Plug Show" registration deadline
has been extended until Feb. 5 for
Arts & Activities readers.

ENTRY RULES FOR K-12 NAEA "PEEP PLUG SHOW"

- 1.** To participate, art teachers must be attending the NAEA spring conference and bring an accepted peep plug to the Skutt booth (#436) at the beginning of the conference. All K-12 students are eligible.
- 2.** Peeps must be made of clay and fired. The part that is inserted into the kiln's peephole should not be glazed, though underglaze can be used for color. The part outside the peephole can be glazed.
- 3.** Peeps must fit into and balance in the peephole opening of the kiln, with a diameter of 1.25 inch tapering inward to 0.75 of an inch in diameter. At the Skutt booth, there will be bricks in which peepholes have been drilled to display the clay peeps at the conference. (The peep display bricks will be laying flat, allowing the peep to be protruding straight upward, instead of outward from the kiln wall—their natural habitat.)
- 4.** For full contest information, visit: www.skutt.com/peepholeplug/index.php



▲ Dee Schaad (NCECA).
◀ Melissa Parrot-Quimby (NCECA).

bisque and glaze firings, and get plenty of oxygen to help in the firings. They also do a better job of removing odors and vapors.

The hole provides you with a way to look into the kiln—always using eye protection—to see well-placed senior cones or, my favorite, self-supporting cones that measure the heat work (time and temperature) that has occurred. These cones are accurate, and give you great information that allows you to make adjustments to your kiln sitters, other controllers and firing schedules,

THE PEEP SHOW

by David L. Gamble



Kelly Berning (NCECA).



Peephole plugs by Tracey Krell's students at West Newton (Ind.) Elementary School.



Here, an unembellished peephole plug is flanked by one created by Bill Griffith (left) and Dianne Mann (both NCECA entries).

to help you create more consistent and accurate firings.

When shaping the peep plug form, less mass means it will retain less heat, if actually used. The more even the clay walls of the peep are, the less chance there is of breaking or cracking. So, hollow peeps with a hole at one end transfer the heat from the kiln better. Always use kiln gloves to remove peep plugs from a kiln that is firing or in the process of cooling.

When firing peeps in the kiln and glazing, design becomes a factor in how the peep supports itself. This is not a problem when firing the bisque, but stilts or a stacked post structure might be needed

for the glaze firing, if glaze is added.

LET THE SHOW BEGIN! The "Peep Show" was originally created for the potters attending the 2009 NCECA (National Council on Education for Ceramics Association) Convention.* A more appropriate, perhaps less-suggestive title, "The Peep Plug Show," was created for the K-12 art teachers who attend the National Art Education Association (NAEA) convention. Prizes were created to encourage and reward those participating in the exhibitions.

Art teachers interested in participating in this year's exhibition at the 2010 NAEA Convention are asked to bring the accepted student-created pieces to the convention in Baltimore, April 14-18. (For information about the NAEA, visit www.arteducators.org.)

An exhibition of the peep plugs will be displayed in the Skutt booth (#436) in the exhibit hall, and teachers attending the conference all have one vote they can use to help choose a winner. The student peep with the most votes will win their art teacher and the school they attend a new Skutt kiln with a Kilnmaster controller.

This is all for fun and laughs, but there also are lessons to be learned about the peeps' function. Themes and ideas seem to run rabid in the art room: baseball gloves, animals, fish, lips, faces, flowers, spaceships, flying pigs and, yes, even those ubiquitous marshmallow PEEPS® we see at Eas-tertime. So many, too numerous to name, have all successfully been used. We are sure to see many—made by K-12 students at NAEA and potters at



Peephole plugs must be tapered so they will fit properly into the kiln.



Here, the 2009 NAEA Peep Plug Show winner—created by one of Crosswind Elementary School (Collierville, Tenn.) art teacher Ann Wolfe's students—is placed in the kiln's peephole.



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NCECA—that will bring smiles to our faces this spring.

What artist or teacher wouldn't want his or her students' clay work—or their own—to be in an exhibition at the national level? Now, *that's* the kind of Peep Show we all want to be in! ■

For over 30 years, David L. Gamble has been involved with ceramic arts and businesses, and continues to make clay art and teach. He has conducted hundreds of workshops in the United States and Canada, and helped organize and participated in five clay symposiums in Eastern Europe.

* At the 2010 NCECA conference in Philadelphia (March 31-April 3), five participants will be rewarded with a cash prize to help with costs in attending. Clay artist, author and college instructor Paul Wandless will judge the entries onsite at the Skutt booth. All potters, professors and students who will be attending NCECA are eligible to enter the Peep Show. Deadline for entry is Jan. 31, 2010; visit www.skutt.com/peepshow/index.php for information.