

Pinch Pot: THE JAPANESE TEA BOWL

FOR THE TEACHER

A pinch pot is relatively simple to make, and teaches students to control the clay as they work. Although any shape may be pinched from a ball of clay, making a tea bowl is a good opportunity to introduce the Japanese reverence toward pottery and potters.

Fired clay has been found in Japan that can be carbon-dated back to 8000–7500 B.C., but the tea bowl was not generally made until the sixteenth century. The tea ceremony is a social event of great cultural significance. A central part of the ceremony is passing the tea bowl from hand to hand to be examined on all sides and admired before using. In this culture, the bottom of the bowl has equal importance to the top. The bowls often are of unglazed, high-fired stoneware and always have a small foot (the rim on the base of the bowl). Raku (low-firing done in a pit) was introduced by the Japanese, and the smoke-caused imperfections are valued. The tea ceremony wares are rough, to symbolize solitude and remoteness. Many famous bowls have been honored by being given names based on characteristics of the bowl. Although most of the bowls are symmetrical, occasionally they are deliberately marred with paddle marks, or random marks are made by including straw in the firing.

The Japanese reverence for pottery is reserved not only for the work, but also for the potter. A number of Japanese potters are designated as “National Treasures.” Japanese pottery is distinguished by a strong personal relationship between the potter and his work.

MATERIALS

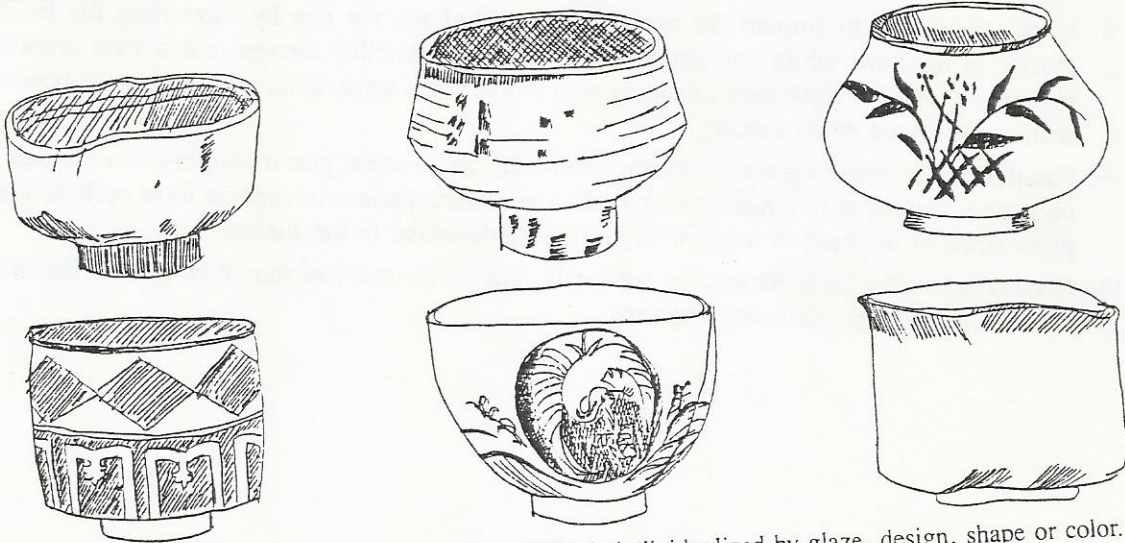
One to two pounds of clay per student (about the size of a small orange)

Glazes

Knife for scoring

Flat sticks or rulers for paddling

Half-moon scrapers



All of these are shapes of Japanese tea bowls. Each is individualized by glaze, design, shape or color.