



STATE OF CERAMICS *.edu edition*

Clay Stories

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For this exercise you will explore your locality through its materiality.

1. FIND OUT IF THERE IS CLAY NEAR WHERE YOU LIVE:

Clay can be right under your feet. Take a walk through your neighborhood, strike up a (masked!) conversation with a worker at a local construction site, and/or dig some small holes yourself.

Some resources to help you locate clay: Take a look at geological maps, or even just Google maps to see where digging or new construction may currently be happening. Go out by foot, bike, or even car to explore places and search for dig sites.

Useful tools for your search: plastic bag for carrying clay, small trowel, water bottle, informal conversational skills ☺, gloves (since it is always possible that the clay you find is polluted).

What to do if you think you have found clay: Add water to this potential clay in an attempt to make it workable. If you can make a coil with it (about the thickness of a pencil) and make that coil into a knot without it breaking, you have probably found good quality clay! Next, bag some of that clay! Maybe take some home even if it isn't technically good quality clay. Or collect several dry samples and test them when you get home.

If you want to process that clay into a more workable state: You can dry it completely, put it in a bucket, pour water until it covers it, and let it stand till the next day. Then you can pour out the extra water (or gently scoop it off the top—the clay is heavier and will sink to the bottom), mix the slurry and use a rib tool or similar kitchen tool to sift it through a mesh screen (or even through the sieve in your kitchen). Put it to dry again (perhaps on a wooden board, a plaster bat, or even tied up into a balloon shape in an old t-shirt or kitchen towel and hung to dry) and wedge it when enough water has evaporated that it is wedgeable.

2. INVESTIGATE THE SITE AND CONTEXT OF YOUR CLAY, AS WELL AS YOUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP TO THAT MATERIAL:

How deep did you dig into the ground? What else did you find in the ground? Was there particular plant life or rocks? How much clay did you collect? Are you considering making something with that clay? Is it workable? How would you describe its color? Does the clay you found feel precious to you? What else is happening/happened/will be happening in this area where you found the clay? Is it an urban area, a natural site, etc.?

If there is no clay around you, find out where the “store bought” clay you like to use comes from and the context of that clay. In this case you can look on the company website to see if they provide information on where they might mine clay. What ingredients might they be adding to the clay (such as oxides, ballclay, quartz, chamotte)? What can you find out about those ingredients? If nothing is added to the clay and it is mined elsewhere, where does it come from, what is the geological history of the clay? How long will the mine last? How many people work there?

Most clay companies have technicians on hand who you could call and inquire with about some of these things. Perhaps you know a local geologist or there is a geology professor at your own university who you could email with questions. Do some basic internet research but also don't hesitate to reach out to people with specialized knowledge; most people are happy to share information with interested folks!

There is no wrong way to research your clay. If you don't wind up investigating using the above-mentioned tactics, think through your physical relationship to the material and your personal relationship to your surrounds.

3. DOCUMENT YOUR RESEARCH BY MAKING A COLLAGE IN ANY MEDIUM:

By now you will have gathered a lot of information! You know something about your relationship to your surrounds, the history of your locality, the physical properties of what you have found, the way it feels against your own skin, and maybe you have learned new information from other people and sources. What feels important to document, to record, to archive for yourself and for future individuals?

Make a visual document in the form of a collage—it can be made out of anything! Video, clay, paper, photo, sound, etc. Think about the ways in which your collage can communicate the story of your clay, what it contains, where it came from, where it is going, who it has met along the way, etc.

Take a photograph of your collage. Consider sharing it on Instagram and using the hashtag #claystorycollage so that we can all see and share what we make. If you don't want to post it online but you still want to share it, bring the collage with you to our group discussion and/or email it to Sigrid: sigrespe@khio.no