

Making an Impression

Encourage the children to work collaboratively in small groups to make some plaster casts.

Materials

Clay
Objects/tools to impress into clay e.g. sticks, shells etc.
Plaster of Paris or powdered all-purpose filler e.g. Tetrion®
Talcum powder
Disposable plastic tray
Spoon
Water.



Method

- Give each small group a piece of clay about the size of a small apple and ask them to flatten the clay to 1 – 2cm thickness.
- The children can explore the kinds of impressions made by different tools or objects. The beauty of clay is that it allows them to try out some different ideas then smooth the clay out again ready to take their chosen impressions.
- Instruct the children to make their final impressions into the clay, avoiding going too deep so that there are no holes in the bottom.
- Model how to roll out a piece of clay into a sausage shape. Press the sausage of clay on to form a wall about 2cm high all the way round the impressions then ask the children to do the same. Ensure there are no gaps anywhere.
- **HEALTH AND SAFETY:** An adult must mix the Plaster of Paris/all-purpose filler. If using filler, mix to the consistency of thick pouring cream.
- Brush a little talcum powder all over the clay. This helps it to release easily when the plaster cast has set.
- When the plaster is mixed the children can watch as it is poured into their moulds and start to predict what they think might happen. In particular focus on what the surface will be like. They impressed items into the surface so will the plaster cast also have indented surfaces?
- Encourage the children to discuss the process and consider how the finished plaster cast might feel when it has set. Ensure that the children keep their fingers away from the plaster until it has set.
- Once the plaster is completely dry the children can peel the clay away to reveal the finished plaster cast.
- Help the children to draw some conclusions about the process e.g. indenting the clay means the cast will have a raised surface.



Taking it Further

Paint the plaster casts with ready mixed paint mixed with a little PVA glue to stop it flaking and to give a shiny finish. Look at ceramic tiles with raised patterns then make square plaster casts in response.

Although safety requires the children to watch the plaster being mixed this activity still gives them plenty of involvement. In particular, it enables them to concentrate on making predictions about how the finished cast might look and feel. Encourage them to explain their reasoning as well as their predictions.