

Kiln Guardians - Ms. Sandersen - FPMS



"In the United States, ceramists view the making of kiln gods as playful enactments of lost ancient rituals involving demi-god kiln protectors..."

"Western kiln gods are most often displayed on the roof of a kiln just over the kiln door where they can "watch" over the firing, while the kiln gods of China are generally positioned in their own permanent Taoist or "folk religion" temple or shrine, that is always located near the kiln... kiln gods are [sometimes] worshiped and honored as important deities that help to protect the welfare of the entire ceramic community."

- *The Worship of Kiln Gods: From the Temples of China to the Studios of Western Potters*, Martie Geiger-Ho, Outskirts Press, 2012. - [PDF Origins of Kiln Gods](#)

UNIT SUMMARY:

Students will design and sculpt a *Whimsical Kiln Guardian* — a small clay figure inspired by ancient kiln gods, intended to “watch over” the class kiln. This project blends historical context with personal creativity and technical clay skills. Students will learn about cultural traditions, explore textures, build hollow forms, and experiment with color through underglaze and glaze application.

Requirements:

- ☐ Have textures applied to most of the surfaces of your guardians, this should be intentional.
- ☐ Have a hollow form for your guardian.
- ☐ Have secure connections for all parts with slipping and scoring.
- ☐ Fits within the size requirement of 3” to 5” inches for the longest part of your guardians.
- ☐ Used the demoed techniques of clay construction; Coils, slabs and Pinching.

 Kiln Guardians Ideation PACKET

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

1. How do artists use expressive features and characteristics of art to communicate meaning?
2. How can we blend imagination, culture, and craftsmanship in 3D design?
3. What problem-solving skills are needed to turn an idea into a finished ceramic sculpture?

STANDARDS:

- **Create:** Develop, refine, and complete artwork using design principles.
- **Connect:** Relate cultural and historical contexts to personal artmaking.
- **Respond:** Reflect on expressive choices and craftsmanship.

OBJECTIVES:

Content Objective:

Students will experience clay by designing and sculpting kiln guardians using the elements of art and principles of design.

Language Objective:

Students will use art vocabulary to discuss tactile qualities, texture, and expressive features of their clay work.

I Can Statements:

- I can describe what kiln gods are and where they come from.
- I can plan and sketch a unique kiln guardian using multiple sources of inspiration.
- I can construct a hollow clay sculpture using proper building techniques.
- I can create and apply textures to add visual interest and meaning.
- I can apply glazes thoughtfully to enhance surface design.
- I can discuss my artistic choices using key ceramics vocabulary.

KEY VOCABULARY:

Kiln Guardian / Kiln God – A symbolic figure that protects ceramic firings.

Slip and Score – Technique for joining clay pieces securely.

Texture – The surface quality of a material (real or implied).

Form – The 3D shape of an object.

Hollowing – Removing clay to prevent cracking or explosions in the kiln.

Underglaze / Glaze – Materials used to color and seal ceramics.

Exaggeration – Emphasizing certain features for effect.

Craftsmanship – The quality of work and attention to detail in making art.

Rubric

Advanced demonstrates a deep understanding and concentration on the standard. It showcases a high level of knowledge and understanding of my components of the standard. It includes all project criteria.	Proficient demonstrates understanding of the standard. Good knowledge and understanding of some components. Most project criteria included.	Developing shows understanding of standard, some components at developing level, meets project criteria.	Beginning shows limited understanding and knowledge of the standard. Lack of ideas, plans, and adherence to project criteria.
---	--	---	--

.001 Artwork / Creating / Making: Engage in experimentation with the expressive qualities of media, tools, and techniques with refined craftsmanship. (A.A.Cr.9.m)

<input type="checkbox"/> 4 Advanced	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 Proficient	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Developing	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Beginning
I can ALWAYS: <input type="checkbox"/> Take my time while sculpting my kiln guardian, focusing on building strong, hollow, and intentional forms using proper clay construction methods. <input type="checkbox"/> Use slip and score	I can MOSTLY: <input type="checkbox"/> Take my time while sculpting my kiln guardian, focusing on building strong, hollow, and intentional forms using proper clay construction methods. <input type="checkbox"/> Use slip and score	I can OFTEN: <input type="checkbox"/> Take my time while sculpting my kiln guardian, focusing on building strong, hollow, and intentional forms using proper clay construction methods. <input type="checkbox"/> Use slip and score	I SOMETIMES or NOT AT ALL: <input type="checkbox"/> Take my time while sculpting my kiln guardian, focusing on building strong, hollow, and intentional forms using proper clay construction methods.

<p>correctly to attach all parts securely, ensuring the guardian survives drying and firing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Explore multiple types of texture (carving, stamping, incising, adding, subtracting) to enhance personality and symbolism. <input type="checkbox"/> Consider the expressive purpose of eyes, posture, and exaggerated features to communicate protection, watchfulness, or whimsy. <input type="checkbox"/> Keep my workspace organized and clean up thoroughly, respecting shared materials and tools. 	<p>correctly to attach all parts securely, ensuring the guardian survives drying and firing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Explore multiple types of texture (carving, stamping, incising, adding, subtracting) to enhance personality and symbolism. <input type="checkbox"/> Consider the expressive purpose of eyes, posture, and exaggerated features to communicate protection, watchfulness, or whimsy. <input type="checkbox"/> Keep my workspace organized and clean up thoroughly, respecting shared materials and tools. 	<p>correctly to attach all parts securely, ensuring the guardian survives drying and firing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Explore multiple types of texture (carving, stamping, incising, adding, subtracting) to enhance personality and symbolism. <input type="checkbox"/> Consider the expressive purpose of eyes, posture, and exaggerated features to communicate protection, watchfulness, or whimsy. <input type="checkbox"/> Keep my workspace organized and clean up thoroughly, respecting shared materials and tools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Use slip and score correctly to attach all parts securely, ensuring the guardian survives drying and firing. <input type="checkbox"/> Explore multiple types of texture (carving, stamping, incising, adding, subtracting) to enhance personality and symbolism. <input type="checkbox"/> Consider the expressive purpose of eyes, posture, and exaggerated features to communicate protection, watchfulness, or whimsy. <input type="checkbox"/> Keep my workspace organized and clean up thoroughly, respecting shared materials and tools.
---	---	---	---

Questions:

1. What are three things you learned while building your kiln guardian? Describe the fun parts, the challenges, or what surprised you during the sculpting process. Provide specific examples.

TYPE HERE:

2. What was the most challenging part of constructing your kiln guardian, and what could you do differently next time to improve your craftsmanship? Explain with evidence.

TYPE HERE:

3. How did experimenting with textures, forms, and exaggerated features help improve your skills as a ceramic artist? List three ways and explain why.

TYPE HERE:

.005 Connecting / Content and Context: Cultural, Social, and Historical Awareness: Analyze how art and design and viewers' responses to them have been influenced by the times, places, traditions, and cultures.
(A.A.Cn.9.m)

<input type="checkbox"/> 4 Advanced	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 Proficient	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Developing	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Beginning
<p>I can ALWAYS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Explain how the tradition of kiln gods from China and contemporary ceramics inspired my guardian's purpose, features, and symbolism. <input type="checkbox"/> Make meaningful connections between cultural traditions and my own design choices (eyes, facial expression, protective qualities, textures, motifs, etc.). <input type="checkbox"/> Use past clay knowledge AND new techniques learned in this project to influence my design decisions. <input type="checkbox"/> Reflect on how perseverance, problem-solving, and creativity in art connect to challenges I face in other areas of life 	<p>I can MOSTLY:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Explain how the tradition of kiln gods from China and contemporary ceramics inspired my guardian's purpose, features, and symbolism. <input type="checkbox"/> Make meaningful connections between cultural traditions and my own design choices (eyes, facial expression, protective qualities, textures, motifs, etc.). <input type="checkbox"/> Use past clay knowledge AND new techniques learned in this project to influence my design decisions. <input type="checkbox"/> Reflect on how perseverance, problem-solving, and creativity in art connect to challenges I face in other areas of life 	<p>I can OFTEN:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Explain how the tradition of kiln gods from China and contemporary ceramics inspired my guardian's purpose, features, and symbolism. <input type="checkbox"/> Make meaningful connections between cultural traditions and my own design choices (eyes, facial expression, protective qualities, textures, motifs, etc.). <input type="checkbox"/> Use past clay knowledge AND new techniques learned in this project to influence my design decisions. <input type="checkbox"/> Reflect on how perseverance, problem-solving, and creativity in art connect to challenges I face in other areas of life 	<p>I SOMETIMES or NOT AT ALL:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Explain how the tradition of kiln gods from China and contemporary ceramics inspired my guardian's purpose, features, and symbolism. <input type="checkbox"/> Make meaningful connections between cultural traditions and my own design choices (eyes, facial expression, protective qualities, textures, motifs, etc.). <input type="checkbox"/> Use past clay knowledge AND new techniques learned in this project to influence my design decisions. <input type="checkbox"/> Reflect on how perseverance, problem-solving, and creativity in art connect to challenges I face in other areas of life

Open-Ended Questions

Which kiln guardians, ancient or modern (from our class examples), influenced your design the most?
Describe how you used their ideas in your sculpture.

TYPE HERE:

What are two things you learned about the cultural tradition of kiln gods, and how did these facts change or deepen your design choices? Provide specific examples.

TYPE HERE:

What THREE pieces of advice would you give to next year's students when they create their own kiln guardians? Support each piece of advice with evidence.

TYPE HERE:

.004 Responding / Critique / Evaluate: Create a convincing argument critiquing artwork and design utilizing established criteria, considering styles, process, media, and artistic goals.

<input type="checkbox"/> 4 Advanced	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 Proficient	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Developing	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Beginning
<p>I can ALWAYS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Explain how the tradition of kiln gods from China and contemporary ceramics inspired my guardian's purpose, features, and symbolism.<input type="checkbox"/> Make meaningful connections between cultural traditions and my own design choices (eyes, facial expression, protective qualities, textures, motifs, etc.).<input type="checkbox"/> Use past clay knowledge AND new techniques learned in this project to influence my design decisions.<input type="checkbox"/> Reflect on how perseverance, problem-solving, and creativity in art connect to challenges I face in other areas of life.	<p>I can MOSTLY:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Explain how the tradition of kiln gods from China and contemporary ceramics inspired my guardian's purpose, features, and symbolism.<input type="checkbox"/> Make meaningful connections between cultural traditions and my own design choices (eyes, facial expression, protective qualities, textures, motifs, etc.).<input type="checkbox"/> Use past clay knowledge AND new techniques learned in this project to influence my design decisions.<input type="checkbox"/> Reflect on how perseverance, problem-solving, and creativity in art connect to challenges I face in other areas of life.	<p>I can OFTEN:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Explain how the tradition of kiln gods from China and contemporary ceramics inspired my guardian's purpose, features, and symbolism.<input type="checkbox"/> Make meaningful connections between cultural traditions and my own design choices (eyes, facial expression, protective qualities, textures, motifs, etc.).<input type="checkbox"/> Use past clay knowledge AND new techniques learned in this project to influence my design decisions.<input type="checkbox"/> Reflect on how perseverance, problem-solving, and creativity in art connect to challenges I face in other areas of life.	<p>I SOMETIMES or NOT AT ALL:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Explain how the tradition of kiln gods from China and contemporary ceramics inspired my guardian's purpose, features, and symbolism.<input type="checkbox"/> Make meaningful connections between cultural traditions and my own design choices (eyes, facial expression, protective qualities, textures, motifs, etc.).<input type="checkbox"/> Use past clay knowledge AND new techniques learned in this project to influence my design decisions.<input type="checkbox"/> Reflect on how perseverance, problem-solving, and creativity in art connect to challenges I face in other areas of life.

Which kiln guardians, ancient or modern (from our class examples), influenced your design the most? Describe how you used their ideas in your sculpture.

TYPE HERE:

What are two things you learned about the cultural tradition of kiln gods, and how did these facts change or deepen your design choices? Provide specific examples.

TYPE HERE:

What piece of advice would you give to next year's students when they create their own kiln guardians?

TYPE HERE:

Day-by-Day Plan

Day: 1	Focus: Introduction, Exquisite Corpse and planning
Objectives and Activities: Learn about kiln gods and begin generating ideas.	



In ancient China, sculpted figures—whether in tombs, temples, or near kiln sites—served as protective beings or guardians. For example, during the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE) ceramic tomb guardians were placed alongside the deceased to protect the departed from spiritual threats.

- Discuss: What is a guardian? What does it protect? Why eyes?
- **Exquisite Corpse Activity:** Students draw a head, middle, and base of a “mystery guardian,” folding and passing papers to reveal a collaborative creature.
- Begin **Ideation Worksheet:** brainstorm themes, exaggerations, and features.

Day: 2	Focus: Ideation & Planning
<p>Objectives and Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students refine their guardian design using the Planning Worksheet: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Combine 2–3 animal/human/object forms. Sketch front, side, and back views. Label texture areas and color ideas. Share designs with peers or teacher for feedback and for formative assessment, and have ALL worksheets checked off. Prepare workspace and materials for clay 	

Day: 3	Focus: Clay Basics and Forming the base
<p>Objectives and Activities:</p> <p>Begin sculpting basic structure.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quick demo: wedge clay, roll slabs, build base forms. Emphasize hollowing, slip & score, and size limits (3"–5") talk about poking holes to prevent their sculptures from blowing up. Students build a base body or form of guardian. Store safely on their assigned wooden shelves. Clean up all clay, clean up and put tools away, extra clay or too dry clay in the recycle bin, tables wiped down, etc. 	

Day: 4	Focus: Building Structure & Stability
<p>Objectives and Activities:</p> <p>Add body parts and ensure balanced form.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demo: connecting parts securely using slip and score. Focus on balance, proportion, and structure. Teacher check: all pieces must be hollow and well-joined. Mini lesson: Look at animal or deity figures from China's Yixing ware or ancient Greek kiln sites. Store safely in plastic bags for next class on their individual board, and each table stores their little boards on one big board. Clean up all clay, clean up and put tools away, extra clay or too dry clay in the recycle bin, tables wiped down, etc. 	

Day: 5	Focus: Explore and apply surface texture techniques.
<p>Objectives and Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demo: using texture tools, stamps, carving, and additive sculpting. 	

- Vocabulary focus: *relief, incise, impress, carve, emboss*.
- Students experiment with textures on test slabs, then add to their sculptures.
- Clean workspace and wrap sculptures carefully.

Day: 6

Focus: Refining Details

Objectives and Activities:

- Focus on craftsmanship: smoothing rough areas, cleaning joins, final textures.
- Emphasize *eyes* and “watchful” expressions.
- Encourage inclusion of symbolic or cultural motifs.
- Short peer feedback session: one positive + one constructive comment.

Day: 7

Focus: Refining Details Cont.

Objectives and Activities:

- Focus on craftsmanship: smoothing rough areas, cleaning joins, final textures.
- Emphasize *eyes* and “watchful” expressions.
- Encourage inclusion of symbolic or cultural motifs.
- Short peer feedback session: one positive + one constructive comment.
- PREPARE FOR BISQUE FIRING!

Day: 8

Focus: Glaze Introduction & Demonstration

Objectives and Activities:

- Show examples of finished guardians with glaze effects.
- Demo: glazing rules, brushwork, layering, and safety.
- Students create small **glaze test tiles** or color maps on paper.
- Begin applying glaze to bisque-fired guardians.
- Remind students: no glaze on bottoms, 2–3 thin coats.

Day: 9

Focus: Glazing Cont.

Objectives and Activities:

- Review key tips (clean brushes, thin coats, even coverage).
- Students complete glazing, touch up details, and check craftsmanship.

- Set pieces on firing shelves with labeled names/class periods.
- Discussion: How can color and surface add emotion or character?

Day: 10

Focus: Self Assessment and Reflection

Objectives and Activities:

- Complete final self-assessment and rubric reflection.
- Group discussion:
 - What did you learn about 3D design and symbolism?
 - What would you change or try next time?
- Optional extension: Students write a short *Guardian Story* describing their figure's name, purpose, and powers.