

**CLAY MODELLING FOR
SCHOOLS: A PROGRESSIVE
COURSE FOR PRIMARY
AND GRAMMAR GRADES**

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Clay Modelling for Schools: A Progressive Course for Primary and Grammar Grades by Anna M. Holland

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ANNA M. HOLLAND

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FOR SCHOOLS

A PROGRESSIVE COURSE FOR PRIMARY AND
GRAMMAR GRADES

BY

ANNA M. HOLLAND

"We must have a basis for our higher accomplishments,
our delicate entertainments of poetry and philosophy, in
the work of our hands." — EMERSON.

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CLAY MODELLING.

THE USE OF CLAY IN EDUCATION.

EMERSON says that the "healthy growth of the mind is just in proportion to the activity of thoughts on the study of outward objects." (*Natural History of Intellect*, p. 12.) Modern science says the same thing when it teaches that the human brain is by no means developed by the study of books alone, but very largely by the use of the hand. History also shows how tools and weapons have been the means of immense mental growth in the human race before the invention of printing. The scholarly Romans were conquered by our illiterate ancestors the Goths and Saxons, who proved themselves to be statesmen as well as warriors. It is certainly safe to say that there have been centuries of brain development in the evolution of man, comparatively few of which have been influenced by books.

It would be curious if it were some day to be discovered that the peculiar power acquired in modelling, drawing, and painting is as helpful to the success of the

literary man as a knowledge of Latin or Greek. Whether the truth of such a theory is susceptible of proof or not, there is certainly some ground for the belief that the training of the sculptor and the painter has imparted a certain vigorous quality, in notable cases, to the literary training by which it was supplemented, since it is not to be forgotten that the great names of Leonardo da Vinci, Benvenuto Cellini, Michael Angelo, and later those of Morris, Rossetti, Du Maurier, and others, stand among those who have both wrought and written with the strong hand of the master. Such facts as these strengthen the belief that the best education, even for the most intellectual pursuits, must still be pursued on the line of race development.

I go so far as to believe that our race owes more of its education to the use of clay than to any other one thing. The first efforts of men to make anything were in the soft clay or mud, with which they fashioned utensils, built their huts, and made rude images of worship. This soft material needs almost no tool; the hand of the worker follows directly the guidance of the eye, which, stimulated by a new demand, learns to see correctly. It would be impossible to say how much brain power has been developed by clay; but if we follow the progress of the race through all the ages, we see it everywhere; no period has been without it. When it was found that fire made it imperishable, a great discovery in the world's industrial

and educational progress was made. Then the enduring character of the utensil called for more careful workmanship, and lines were drawn on it to beautify it, to tell a story, or in some way to record the thought of the maker. The hut, made at first of soft mud, became by use of sun-dried or burned bricks a more elaborate building; and enduring beauty and symmetry were possible. Ages later, when civilization was at its highest, clay was still the best medium of expression; and the glory of Greek sculpture was due to the possibilities of clay.

Now is there not a lesson to educators in all this? Can we afford to ignore this common substance which has been the means of such wonderful development, which is the nearly perfect material in which to express form, and which has a fascination beyond any other? Nothing is more prosaic or ugly than the shapeless lump of clay; but nothing is more beautiful than this same clay transformed by the sculptor into a work of art. What can so well train the muscles to delicate use as a material upon which the slightest pressure is apparent? What can so well train the eye and the hand as clay, in which the finest subtleties of form can be expressed?

Clay is also susceptible of the greatest accuracy, although the softness of the material makes its attainment at first less easy than in wood. What is lacking in accuracy, however, is perhaps balanced by the infinite variety of form-study afforded by clay, the rapidity

with which results may be obtained, and the endless possibilities of improvement. The clay is never spoiled by a false touch; it can be corrected and worked over indefinitely.

The surpassing advantage of clay, however, over other mediums for manual and artistic training is perhaps the possibility of its employment at a very early age. I know no work in which children of all ages will be interested so long, nothing which better cultivates observation and taste, nothing which better teaches at once persistency, carefulness, industry, neatness, and truthfulness. I would therefore urge that provision be made for the increase of brain power in every child through the largest possible development of eye and hand, and that the literary education of our children should be strengthened, step by step, at every age by manual and artistic training, which includes not only tool work and drawing, but also modelling in clay.

AIMS AND METHODS.

This course of work is the result of fourteen years' experience in teaching modelling to more than six thousand children from seven years of age upward, from both public and private schools. Many models and methods have been tried, and while the present course of work is not wholly satisfactory to me, it has proved the best I have yet found. It is progressive, elastic, and educational.

In my early attempts in the use of clay with children I gave them only freehand work, and although the first results were, in a few cases, surprisingly good, the progress of pupils was noticeably unsatisfactory, and it soon became apparent to me that, for children above the kindergarten age, a certain amount of definite technical training must precede freehand or imaginative work in clay. I am convinced that it is for the lack of such training that the use of clay in schools has sometimes been rejected by teachers as too difficult. The young child has no power over his material, and in untrained hands clay is not adapted to picturesque treatment. The love of the picturesque can better be developed at first by other methods. In the modelling of the kindergarten much freehand work is given, and it answers its purpose well. The little child is delighted with his work, as was the primitive man; his sense of form is undeveloped; the rudest animal is to him a horse, a cow, a dog — anything having four legs. Soon, however, he sees that his animals are not like real ones; he tries to improve them and fails. As soon as he feels that his work is not right and does not see how or where to mend it, compares it with better things and cannot make it better, he loses interest and is discouraged. At this moment some technical training is essential to satisfactory progress. Such training has also a moral significance to the teacher in that it becomes a safeguard