D: Pottery Making

- **Objectives**: To learn about the different archaeological time periods in Saskatchewan and the types of pottery associated with each, including the styles of vessels and various decorative elements. The students will also have the opportunity to create their own pottery vessels with clay and be able to replicate the types of decoration that aboriginal peoples used. They can even create their own decorative patterns. Students will also be able to better understand how people used materials from the earth to make cooking and storage vessels that they used in their everyday lives.

- **Materials**: clay (wet or dry) enough for every student to create a small vessel; materials for creating tools such as small sticks, cord (i.e. hemp), mesh/net bags (from oranges or onions), wooden paddles with incised patterns or cord-wrapped; clam shells. If your school has access to a kiln, you can use clay and a tempering agent such as sand, shell, or other gritty material.

- **Vocabulary**: pottery; incise; impress; punctate.

- **Background Information**: Some of the most imperishable archaeological materials are made of ceramics, otherwise known as pottery. The Northern Plains people had pottery beginning about 2,500 years ago. Pottery is seen as a development of people who are more sedentary. Most ceramic vessels found are broken and few vessels are found intact or complete. Pottery is analyzed by examining the manufacture, style, and shape. Pottery in Saskatchewan is made from clay found in nature that is moldable when moist and dries into a hardened form. After the vessel has been formed and decorated it is then fired and the vessel becomes rock-hard.

Pottery vessels found in Saskatchewan are manufactured using two different methods: coiling and molding. The coiling method builds up the vessel from the bottom to the top in a series of long, connected coils of clay. The base may start out as one lump and then coils are added onto it in a series. Both the exterior and interior of the vessel are then worked to create smoother, more cohesive surfaces. Molding vessels involves taking clay and pressing it over a concave shape or into a convex shape. They are then paddled by holding a rock on the inside of the vessel and hitting the outer surface with a paddle. These types of vessels may also be created within a net or bag. See the diagram below.

There are various surface decorations that are applied to the vessel before it is fired. Some of these include smoothing, paddling, incising, impressing, and punctates. Paddling refers to decoration using a paddle that may be incised or smooth and is dragged across the surface of the vessel. Incising is a type of decoration that involves the dragging of a sharp tool along the surface of the wet clay leaving an engraved design. Impressing is a decoration using a tool to press into wet clay leaving behind an impression or a series of impressions (for example a finger imprint). Finally, punctates are made by pressing the end of a (usually) round tool with a flat end, such as a stick, into
wet clay leaving a round impression on one side and a protrusion on the opposite side. Some vessels also exhibit finger pinching along the rim.

➢ **Procedures:** Lead a discussion on the pottery found in Saskatchewan. Refer to Chapter 3 of this document or the SAPA map to become familiar with the various archaeological cultures that have pottery as part of their artefact assemblages (Besant, Avonlea, Old Woman’s, Mortlach, Wascana-Ware, Laurel, River House, Blackduck, Narrows, and Selkirk). Show the students the different types of pottery vessels found in Saskatchewan. Also talk about the different methods of manufacturing and the different types of decorations and how they are applied.

Give each student a small piece of clay to shape into a vessel. This may be an exercise in replicating a type of pottery found in Saskatchewan or it could be an activity where the students create their own style of pottery with personalized decorations using traditional tools.

➢ **Closure:** Allow the students to set up a museum or “gallery walk” with their completed work. Discuss with the class the similarities and differences of the vessels created by their fellow classmates. Even though there was a limitation in the types of tools used to create the decorations, there are still many variations and patterns evident. Ask the students why these utilitarian pots were enhanced with decorations. Ask students to list things from their homes that are utilitarian in nature, but are still decorated to reflect personal style or interests (e.g. dishes, bed sheets, shoes, etc.)

➢ **Other Options:** Note to teacher – traditional pottery has temper added to the clay. Temper can be anything from sand to crushed up shells. This was added to the clay so that it could withstand the firing process. Firing is the final stage in pottery production and is a more advanced activity requiring some knowledge and expertise.