

Timucua Pottery Party

NATIVE AMERICAN LESSON 1

Long before Juan Ponce de León stumbled upon Florida, the land was populated by various groups of *indigenous peoples*, which means the original inhabitants of the area. We've learned about them mostly through *archaeology* – the study of human history by analyzing the things people have left behind. We also know what European explorers recorded about them.

By 750 A.D., America's indigenous peoples had developed corn-based agriculture, which provided plenty of food within their small communities. More food led to population growth, and people began settling longer in certain areas, so that distinctive and diverse regional cultures began to take form.



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Historians call the indigenous peoples of Central Florida the St. John's people because they lived along the *St. Johns River*. These people are also often called the *Timucua*. That's the name Spanish explorers and missionaries used for them, but it may not have been what they called themselves.

The different groups of Timucua in Florida had no political unity, although they shared the same language. They wore few clothes by modern standards. The men wore only a loincloth, and women wore longer skirts. Tattoos were also used as a sign of status among men.

All along the St. John's, indigenous peoples made fired-clay pottery for cooking and storing food. Archaeologists have learned a lot from studying their pottery, including the Timucua's distinctive decorative styles, ability to adapt to their environment, and great ingenuity. The patterns on their pottery not only made the pots more beautiful but also made them easier to hold without slipping from peoples' hands, and even allowed the pots to heat more evenly.

Timucua pottery was made from clay, which was easy to find in nearby rivers or ponds. Some pots were formed using the coiling method – clay is rolled into tubes, and then the coils are pinched and blended together. After forming the pots, the Timucua decorated them by pressing patterns into the wet clay or carving it using readily available tools such as wooden paddles, shells, and corncobs.



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ACTIVITY

Now that we know a little bit about the Timucua and their pottery, let's try making some of our own to get a feel for what their life was like!

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- 1 ball of clay, at least 2 inches in diameter (Don't have clay? Try using Playdough instead! You can also make *salt dough* with 2 cups flour, 1 cup salt, 2 tablespoons vegetable oil, and 1 cup water.)
- Various items to decorate with – shells, textured fabrics, corncobs, sticks, etc.
- Paper plate
- Small cup of water



WHAT TO DO:

- Make sure to work on a paper plate or cover your table to reduce mess.
- Dip your fingers into the cup of water and moisten your palms so the clay doesn't get too sticky.

1.) Take a small pinch of your clay (about 1/4 to 1/3 of it), roll it into a ball, and then flatten it into a round disk – this will become the bottom of your pot.

2.) Divide the rest of your clay into two or three manageable pieces and roll them into long, snake-like tubes between your hand and the paper plate or table.

3.) Begin coiling your clay tubes along the outside edge of the pot bottom (the disc from step 1). Coil them upwards until you run out.

4.) Use your fingers to gently pinch and smooth the coils together. Make sure you join them to the bottom of the pot.

5.) Use whatever materials you have gathered to decorate your pot by either carving or pressing patterns into the outside surface.

6.) Let the pot sit for 24 hours to dry.

Want even more fun? If you have some tempura or oil paints you can also paint your pot once it has dried fully!



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This lesson helps reinforce these Florida State Standards for K-5th grade:

- SS.K.A.2.1 Compare children and families of today with those in the past.
- SS.1.A.2.1 Understand that history tells the story of people and events of other times and places.
- SS.1.A.2.2 Compare life now with life in the past.
- SS.2.A.2.1 Recognize that Native Americans were the first inhabitants in North America.
- SS.4.A.1.2 Synthesize information related to Florida history through print and electronic media.
- SS.4.A.2.1 Compare Native American tribes in Florida.
- SS.4.A.3.2 Describe causes and effects of European colonization on the Native American tribes of Florida.
- SS.5.A.2.3 Compare cultural aspects of Native American tribes from different geographic regions of North America including but not limited to clothing, shelter, food, major beliefs and practices, music, art, and interactions with the environment.

