

# GHOST town

A Greek village deserted during WWI provides an atmospheric focus for a project in which children sculpt their own abandoned community from clay, says **Robert Watts**.

## Today you will...

- > experiment with pattern and texture in clay
- > explore how to design and construct clay structures
- > collaborate to create a whole-class sculpture

Sometimes, inspiration for creativity in the classroom comes when you least expect it. Last summer I took a trip to Kayaköy, a Turkish village nestled quietly into a mountainside overlooking the Mediterranean.

A hundred years ago, the village was home to more than 2000 people, but in the wake of the first world war a population exchange with neighbouring Greece resulted in the evacuation of all its inhabitants, leaving the village entirely deserted.

Today the village is known as the Ghost Town. Its little winding streets are empty and its houses are decaying ruins. Wandering among them, I realised how closely the buildings resembled a collection of crumbling sculptures, and I began to wonder how Kayaköy could inspire children to create their own haunted village.

In this lesson plan you'll find ideas for encouraging children to design and build a collection of ghostly structures, before combining their individual pieces to create a whole-class sculpture of a deserted village. There are tips for improving the strength of children's structures and ideas for experimenting with pattern and texture – together with one or two suggestions that might bring a

little life back to the streets of the ghost town...



## Starter activity

While the idea of a ghost town is sure to fire up children's imagination, you might decide to begin the lesson by providing a little historical or geographical context. You could, for example, link the lesson to a project on World War I, as it offers an opportunity to explore how local communities were shaped by distant events. It's important that children understand Kayaköy is a real place and that it was affected by real events.

Images of Kayaköy are easily found online: share them on screen and encourage children to describe what they can see and to suggest reasons why the town looks the way it does. Decide what background information your children will need to know (depending on

their age and experience) before asking them to imagine

what life in the town might have been like a century ago. Explain to children that the town was once home to many craftspeople who would have been busy designing, making and selling their work – and that it is now their turn to design and create something of their own.

## Main activities

### Experiment with pattern and texture

This lesson is all about sculpting with clay. It's a material that can be difficult to master, but it's one that's always fun to use. Before the lesson, check the clay you'll be using is in a suitable condition: it should be kept in an airtight bag to prevent it drying out and when you slice a piece off, it should come away cleanly.

Try passing a piece of clay between your hands – if you

find a thin layer is left on your skin then it's probably too wet and should be allowed to dry in the air for a while. Alternatively, if it quickly begins to break into smaller pieces then the chances are it's too dry and will need to be returned to the bag, mixed with a little water and left for a few days.

Provide each child with a piece of clay around twice the size of his or her fist. It may have been a while since children have used the material in the classroom, so give them a little time to experiment. Encourage them to play with the clay, to remind themselves what they can do with it and to find out how it behaves when manipulated. They shouldn't worry about making anything too specific at this stage, as each piece of clay will soon be transformed into a house for the ghost town...



## 2 Design and construct clay structures

Once children are feeling confident with the clay, they can begin work on their houses. The first step is to roll

the clay into flat shapes around a centimetre thick, before cutting out a rectangle – this will become the floor of the house. Each of the walls can be rolled in the same way, and children can decide how 'crumbled' they want them to be (i.e. they don't

need to be rectangles) before cutting spaces for windows and doors.

Now, clay is sticky when it's wet but, when it dries, structures can become a little unstuck unless one or two rules are followed. To stick two pieces of clay together, try scoring cross-hatched lines into each of the two surfaces that need to be joined before applying a little water and pressing the pieces securely together.

Children should decide whether they want to include all four walls – or to build only three, so that the interior of their house will be visible. At this point, encourage them to look closely at images of Kayaköy, focusing on the textures of the walls, before experimenting with adding textures of their own. You might have a range of clay tools to help them do this – but if not, use pencils to carve lines and patterns into the clay, or press objects into the surfaces to create 'weathered' effects.

## 3 Create a whole-class sculpture

Children should decide how to combine the houses to create their own ghost town. The buildings could be displayed to best effect, for example by placing them on a 'hillside' made from recycled materials, covered in fabric or painted paper. Keep any scrap pieces of clay, even the crumbs – once dry, they will become the rubble around the buildings. Finally, bring a little life back to the ghost town by lighting tea lights and placing them carefully inside the structures – the flickering shadows on the clay walls will add to the ghostly effect.

## i ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Watts is the programme convener for the MA Art, Craft and Design Education programme at the University of Roehampton, London, and the co-author of *Teaching Art and Design 3-11*, published by Continuum Books.



## Extending the lesson

- Make observational drawings of the sculptures from different perspectives – encourage children to sit at 'eye level' with the buildings and to look closely at how they overlap each other.
- Roll ink onto pieces of textured clay and press paper on to the surface to create prints.
- Fire the sculptures in a kiln – if you don't have one, think about making some creative contacts at a local secondary school.
- Looking at children's finished sculptures, try reflecting on two distinct strands of the project. Have children

- succeeded in building strong structures that will withstand a knock or two? And, equally importantly, do their sculptures combine to create an atmospheric scene, one that evokes the ghost town of Kayaköy?
- Each house in Kayaköy is different – yet they combine to create a community. Although the village changed dramatically almost a century ago, all communities are changing, all the time, and children should understand that they each have a role to play in that process (see 'useful questions').

## Q USEFUL QUESTIONS

- What makes a community?
- What do you do that makes you feel that you are part of a community?
- How do you imagine your community will change in the future? What are the features you would like to keep? And what would you change?



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