Exploring Clay

JUNE 2026

This theme invites infants to explore clay as an art medium, sensory material, and means of expression.

Clay:
Engaging with a sensory material invites exploration with all of the senses. We encourage and welcome all of this learning! What some people might see as "messy" we see as rich opportunities for learning with a sensory approach. What does the clay smell, feel, or sound like?

Tools:
Infants bring their whole bodies to their relationship with the clay. Through this, they experience its responsiveness. Tools that are made of natural materials and provide various types of marks to explore deepen this understanding; however, when interacting with clay, infants will often use their body as a tool. How much pressure does it take to leave a thumb imprint in the clay? Does it feel as smooth on your cheek as it does on your hand? Do your toes leave prints that mirror fingers? This bodily exploration enhances the dialogue between infants and clay.

We encourage people to let your infants' explorations guide your experience! Observe what they notice and mirror the ways that they're exploring!

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We approach infant learning with the understanding that young children learn in many different ways! It can feel simpler to reduce the learning down to what we are able to visibly see from an infant's experience; however, in doing so, we are not accounting for all that is building in their minds, in their imagination.

We find learning in the entirety of the experience at Art Crawl and encourage folks to ask themselves what learning might be happening that we can't see. "Fantasy and rationality, cognition and imagination take strength from each other and above all in education, we must make them interweave, make them dance together." (Vea Vecchi, 2010) How can we provide experiences that deepen that exploration?

"Clay comes from the earth: ancient, organic, substantial. It smells cool and dark. It is grainy inside its smooth moistness. Clay requires muscle. We engage with clay with our hands and feel it on our skin. There is an intuitive aspect to working with clay; through many encounters, we develop a sense of it's fluidity and substance" (Ann Pelo, 2017)