

CERAMICS I: FUNDAMENTALS OF CLAY

Benjamin Franklin High School | Fall Semester 2026

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Ceramics I is an introduction to clay as an artistic medium. Students will learn the fundamentals of handbuilding, surface decoration, glazing, and basic ceramic design while developing the habits of a working studio. During fourth quarter, students will receive an introduction to wheel throwing.

This class is about more than making pottery. It is about learning to observe, solve problems, embrace failure, and create with intention.

THE FIVE PRINCIPLES OF THE STUDIO

This is a studio, not a classroom. These five principles guide everything we do.

1. Move with Purpose

Be aware of your surroundings. Walk, don't run. No horseplay, no throwing clay, and no careless movement around other people's work.

2. Leave It Better Than You Found It

If you use it, clean it. If you move it, put it back. If you break it, make it right. Respect the studio and the people who share it.

3. Keep Your Mind and Hands Busy in the Making

There is no such thing as "I'm done." Finish a project? Start another. Practice. Sketch. Read. Clean. Studio time is valuable—use it.

4. Commit to the Process

Clay rewards patience, not shortcuts. Failure is part of learning. Show up, keep working, and trust the process.

5. Own It

Sign your work. Stay organized. Label everything. Know where your work is. Don't leave mystery blobs of clay for future archaeologists.

SAFETY REQUIREMENTS

The studio is a safe place when everyone follows procedures.

- Closed-toed shoes are required
 - Keep fingernails short
 - Long hair must be tied back
 - Loose clothing should be secured
 - Students may only use equipment after instruction
 - The extruder may only be used with teacher supervision
 - The kiln room and upstairs office are off limits without permission
 - Clay contains silica dust. Keep work areas clean using wet cleaning methods only—never create dust
 - Cleanup is required at the end of every class. Students who leave a mess behind will lose studio credit for the day
 - We keep a first aid kit in the room. I'd love it if we never had to use it
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SKETCHBOOK

Every class begins with a sketchbook exercise. Some days you'll draw. Some days you'll analyze artwork, respond to prompts, design forms, or reflect on your work. The purpose is simple: transition your brain into seeing, thinking, and making like an artist.

Bring your notebook every day.

MATERIALS

Required:

- Hardcover Sketchbook (no spiral bound or removable pages)
- Wooden pencils only

Hardcover notebooks hold up much better in the studio than softcover or spiral-bound books. Walmart sells inexpensive hardcover sketchbooks that work well.

COURSE OVERVIEW & UNITS

Ceramics I is organized around four units that build from foundational skills toward independent making. Each unit introduces new techniques while expanding your understanding of clay as an artistic medium.

Unit 1 — Fundamentals of Ceramics

Learn how the studio works and how to work safely and efficiently within it. Students will explore the fundamental handbuilding techniques, develop basic craftsmanship, and begin building the habits of a working artist.

Unit 2 — Functional Ceramics

Investigate pottery designed for everyday use. Through projects such as cups, bowls, and other functional forms, students will learn how form, function, craftsmanship, and design work together to create successful objects.

Unit 3 — Introduction to Sculpture

Shift from utility to expression by exploring sculptural approaches to clay. Students will investigate form, structure, texture, and narrative while learning techniques used in ceramic sculpture.

Unit 4 — Independent Inquiry & Wheel Throwing

Students will complete an extended personal project that allows them to apply the skills developed throughout the year while pursuing an idea of their own. During this unit, students will also receive an introduction to wheel throwing and learn the fundamentals of centering, pulling walls, and forming simple vessels.

GRADING

Your grade reflects what you make, how you make it, and how you contribute to the studio. Every project is evaluated using the same four categories.

Category	Guiding Question
Craftsmanship	How well was it made?
Design	How thoughtfully was it designed?
Process	Did you commit to the work?
Studio Practice	Did you uphold the Five Principles of the Studio?

Semester Grade

Studio Work: 80%

Projects, studio labs, field notebook, craftsmanship, participation, cleanup, critiques, and daily studio engagement.

Final Portfolio Review: 20%

Submit three fully completed ceramic pieces that have been bisque fired, glazed, and glaze fired to Cone 5.

What Your Grade Means

A — You consistently produced high-quality work, challenged yourself, and gave your best effort.

B — You met the requirements and completed quality work, but your effort or engagement was inconsistent.

C — You showed up, but your effort was minimal. Work was incomplete, rushed, or did not meet all project requirements.

D — You rarely participated, completed very little work, or failed to use class time productively.

F — You failed to complete the course requirements.

Craftsmanship matters, but this is not a perfection class. Students are evaluated on their commitment to the creative process, consistent effort, technical growth, and the quality of their finished work. Failure is an expected and necessary part of learning ceramics.

ATTENDANCE & MAKE-UP WORK

Wheel throwing is a studio course. Because discussion, critique, collaboration, and guided studio experiences (not to mention access to materials and equipment) cannot be fully replicated outside of class, daily attendance is essential.

If you are absent:

- You must speak with me within two school days of returning to arrange make-up work
- Approved make-up work must be completed within seven school days unless other arrangements have been made
- It is your responsibility to obtain missed assignments, notes, demonstrations, and critique information
- Students with more than nine absences during the semester may earn no more than 60% credit on make-up work completed after those absences

Being present, participating in critiques, and contributing to the studio community are fundamental parts of your learning and cannot always be replicated through make-up assignments.

SCHOOL CONDUCT POLICIES

Please refer to the family handbook for campus conduct policies.

PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have received and reviewed the Ceramics II syllabus for Fall Semester 2026 at Benjamin Franklin High School. I understand the course requirements, expectations, safety procedures, grading policies, and attendance guidelines outlined in this document.

PARENT/GUARDIAN ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Parent/Guardian Name (printed): _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

STUDENT ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Student Name (printed): _____

Student Signature: _____

Date: _____