

An Interview with PVSS Clay Workshop Volunteer Teacher Michelle Hofmann

What do you love about clay as a medium?

Its three-dimensionality offers something to people who may be intimidated by drawing or painting a picture. Having your hands in clay opens up so many possibilities. That's what it offered me in college, when I knew that I loved art but had never felt good at drawing. Working with clay is a rich experience!

Did you create with clay as a child or did you discover clay later in life?

I grew up in the country on a farm, doing arts and crafts. I would be outside with our animals or inside doing crafts. I was exposed to clay in college at Purdue University. I was pursuing a Marketing Degree and chose clay sculpting classes as my electives. In those classes I learned the majority of what I know about clay.

How did your passion to work with clay evolve later in life?

I have a kiln and I was in pottery production for 10 years or so, throwing a ton of clay every month – making bowls, plates, pots, candle holders, and sugar bowls, among other items. I was supplying 15 different items to Chart House Restaurant Company, which supplied over 30 restaurants.

What do you love about teaching clay workshops at PVSS?

I love preparing a project and seeing where the kids take it. I usually have a theme and the kids will expand on it. We were making masks once, and one of the boys added a body to his mask. In his words, making the mask was "easy." His figure turned out like a flat Stanley from the children's TV series. Others expanded on the idea and decided to make snowmen.

I also love getting ready for a class, because it's dynamic and fun. I'm able to create as well. I love giving these classes; it fills me up!

What did you hope that clay sculpting would bring to kids and families at PVSS?

My favorite part of working with clay is the "creation" part and that's what I'm bringing to PVSS – the actual process of creating.

Working with clay is a healing process. Participants learn to embrace the creation part, because we don't fire the pieces. It's not about having a finished product to hang on a wall; it's about the process. Some children will ask if they can take their creations home, but they don't get attached once they understand that they are there to embrace the process.

What do the kids learn?

They learn to stick with the creative process. They also learn about sharing and patience, as I have a limited number of tools. Kids will teach you about boundaries... I'm really excited that parents are embracing the process too! At first, only the parents of the youngest kids would work with them. Now, other parents are working at a separate table on their own projects. Any of the parents can and do participate, space-permitting.