

# Salt dough shapes the way for making art at home

**Amanda Karioth Thompson**  
Council on Culture & Arts

Art teacher Angela Merchan planned to start a clay unit after her students returned from Spring Break. Not to be dissuaded by the pandemic, she redesigned her lessons to fit a digital instruction format and made it a family affair. Pineview Elementary School students and their parents were encouraged to work together to create sculptures from clay they made themselves.

Ever resourceful and adaptable, Merchan considered what her students would have access to while quarantin-

ed. Taking inspiration from teacher and media maven Cassie Stephens, a veritable goddess to most elementary visual art teachers, Merchan challenged her students to create salt dough.

Salt dough is a combination of water, salt and flour which results in a soft "clay" that is non-toxic and will harden in the air without the need for a kiln. By measuring out specific quantities of these common ingredients, Pineview students were able to practice math and science skills while creating a medium for artistic expression.

Though the students had a great time making clay and sculpting fish, birds, and fruit, the parents seem to

have enjoyed it just as much. Pineview parent Brandee Blake was an art major in college. Her daughter, Camille Blake is a kindergartener at the school. Together, they took to the lesson with gusto.

Blake said "Camille had so much fun. She spent two hours in the kitchen, singing and bouncing around, just having a good time. I think this is helping release stress for the both of us and it is an activity we can do together. It is work, but fun work."

To compose their creations, students applied their knowledge of art

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**Pineview kindergartener Camille Blake with her fish sculpture created from homemade clay. SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT**

# Art

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elements like shape, form and texture. They added details using food coloring or paint to their air-dried sculptures. Second grader Evelyn Morales went above and beyond the lesson requirements and created a fish sculpture plated with individual scales that glitter in a two-dimensional background aquatic environment.

Many of Merchan's students were so engrossed in the lesson that she provided extension activities and additional online resources to keep the creativity flowing. One of the things Merchan has learned in moving to online instruction is "I have to get out of my comfort zone to connect with my students better and capture their interest."

She said, "in some cases that might mean making myself available for video calls, recording lessons to be shared on social media or even opening a TikTok account. These things don't come naturally to me, but they are a great tool to reach our students, particularly now that we are teaching from a distance."

Second grader Mario Whigham has adjusted well to the distance learning format, and is especially enjoying art. Though his mother Shanay Whigham admitted she sometimes has to coax a bit, she said, "it's been great seeing my son learn first-hand and his teachers have been very helpful and active in this process." She added, the "art projects gave him a chance to have some creative fun."

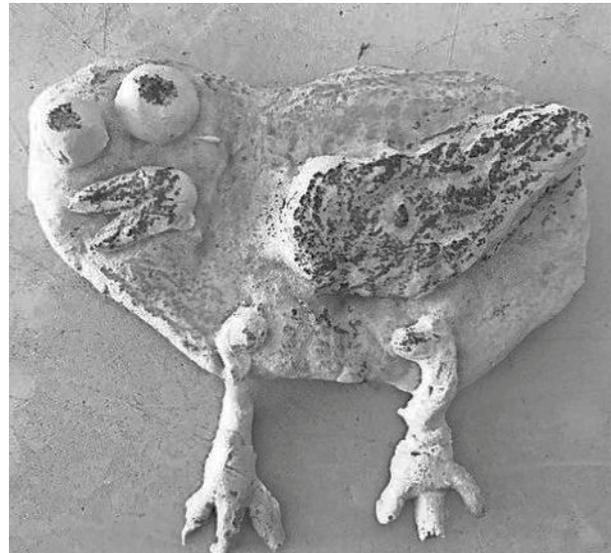
Merchan echoed those sentiments and said, "I have a lot of parents who are glad to have art assignments. It feels like a 'break' even when it's a rigorous lesson. It has been amazing to see parents embracing art at home and enjoying themselves with their kids as they create together."

"Art is more important than ever now for kids and their families because it can help us cope with the stress and anxiety brought on by the pandemic in a healthy way. Art can provide a way to release energy and express emotions. And for families, making art together can do all that with the added benefit of creating an opportunity for families to grow together and bond through a making experience."

*As part of COCA's Creativity Persists collection, this article highlights how area arts educators have used distance learning to teach and inspire during the COVID-19 pandemic. Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Assistant Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).*



**Second grader Mario Whigham shows off his homemade salt dough clay.** SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT



**Mario Whigham added details and color to his air-dried bird sculpture.** SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT