

Way Out West: Clay stacked Totem poles

Key Facts

Totem poles are monuments created by First Nations of the Pacific Northwest to represent and commemorate ancestry, histories, people, or events.

Contrary to what most people believe and understand about totem poles, the Haida people constructed these poles not for religious purposes but to preserve their culture and heritage for future generations. To the untrained eye, totems are carvings of religious figures and coastal animals but to the Haida people these poles held a deeper meaning. Totem Poles are like family trees to us but using animal figures.

A totem pole typically features symbolic and stylised human, animal, and supernatural forms.

Totem poles are typically created out of red cedar, a malleable wood relatively abundant in the Pacific Northwest, and would be erected to be visible within a community.



Key Skills

3-dimensional planning	Plan ideas for 3D objects in sketchbooks, showing the design from all sides.
Sculpture	Create clay sculptures using different joining techniques, including slipping. Make appropriate choices about different ways of adding texture and pattern to 3D sculptures.
Add colour to 3D sculpture	Make appropriate choices about different ways of adding colour to a 3D construction, including the choice of pattern for decoration.
Discuss artist's work	Look at, talk critically about and get inspiration from artists working in 3D in a variety of media.



Key Vocabulary

sculpture	The creation of artistic objects in three dimensions.
malleable	Capable of being shaped or formed, whether by hand or with tools.
modelling	The technique of representing an object in a miniature form using clay or wax.
maquette	A small scale model for a large scale sculpture.
slab	The slab building technique involves rolling out clay to an even thickness – usually 1 cm – then cutting shapes, folding, bending, manipulating and joining together to form a finished object.
slip	The suspension of clay particles in water, used to join pieces of clay, to decorate or to protect it.
rolling	The movement of clay between two surfaces to create a curve.
kneading	A step in preparing clay for shaping.

