

# HANDS-ON! The Invention of Writing

## WRITE ON CLAY IN AN ANCIENT SCRIPT

Meets Illinois State Standards: 16, 17, 18, 25, 26, 27 (Subject Areas: *Social Studies, Fine Arts*)

### Objectives

- Recreate activities that took place in a Mesopotamian school
- Experience the complexities of learning how to read and write in cuneiform script on clay tablets
- Experiment with various art materials

### Materials Needed

Self-hardening clay

Stiff reeds or stems—pencils can also be used

Newspaper

Copies of **Student Stuff** hand-out: “Write on Clay in an Ancient Script” for each student

### Suggested Time Needed

One-and-a-half class periods

### Suggested Procedure

1. Cover desks or tables with newspaper.
2. Give each student a “Write on Clay in an Ancient Script” hand-out.
3. Tell students that the chart on their sheet shows cuneiform versions of the letters in our alphabet and that they can use these cuneiform signs to write messages on clay as the Mesopotamians did.
4. Tell the class that the Mesopotamians wrote from left to right in lines going from the top to the bottom of the tablet, just as we do on a piece of paper.
5. Have students decide what message they would like to write in cuneiform. They could write their name, or they could create a message.
6. Hand out lumps of clay and a reed or pencil to each student and have them create a tablet, following the directions on their sheet.
7. Let tablets dry overnight. At the start of the next class, have students exchange their tablets and see if they can decode each other’s messages.



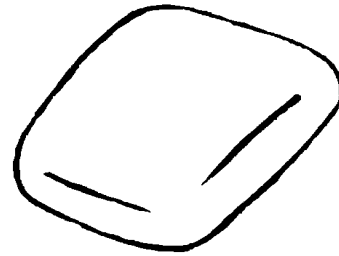
*The Invention  
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## WRITE ON CLAY IN AN ANCIENT SCRIPT

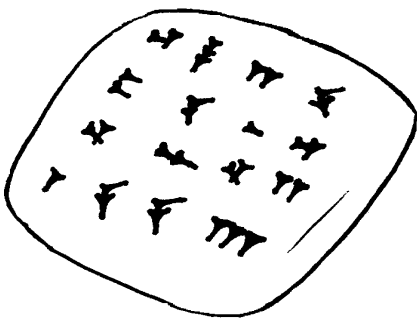
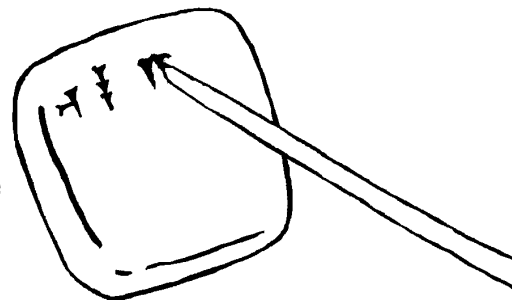
### A Cuneiform "Alphabet"

A	➤	N	➤➤
B	⚡	O	▶
C	⚡	P	⚡
D	⚡	Q	⚡
E	⚡	R	⚡
F	⚡	S	⚡
G	⚡	T	⚡
H	⚡	U	⚡
I	⚡	V	⚡
J	⚡	W	⚡
K	⚡	X	⚡
L	⚡	Y	⚡
M	⚡	Z	⚡



1. Take enough clay to fit in the palm of your hand and form it into a flat square about an inch thick.

2. Use the chart on this page to find the cuneiform versions of the letters you want to write. Hold the clay in one hand and take a reed or pencil in the other, pressing into the clay to make wedge-shaped marks.



3. Let the clay dry overnight. Pass your tablet to a friend and see if they can decode your message!

STUDENT STUFF

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