MONSTERS IN MY HEAD

AND







TEACHER STUDY GUIDE FALL/WINTER 2025

Vancouver Artgallery

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Cover (left to right): Otani Workshop, Tanilla that Emerged Out of Deer Lake, 2024, ceramic, Courtesy of the Artist, Kaikai Kiki and Perrotin, ©2024 Otani Workshop/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved.; Axel Ebring, Flower Pot, c. 1940s, ceramic, Collection of John David Lawrence, Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery

Above: Installation view of Otani Workshop: Monsters in My Head, exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery from May 25, 2025 to January 4, 2026, Courtesy of the Artist, Kaikai Kiki and Perrotin, ©2025 Otani Workshop/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved., Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery

VANCOUVER ART GALLERY TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Your upcoming Gallery tour includes two distinct exhibitions: *Otani Workshop: Monsters in My Head* and *Written in Clay: From the John David Lawrence Collection*. Both exhibitions focus on ceramics and include works that range from functional wares to fantastical forms.

Monsters in My Head is the first ever solo museum exhibition of work by Japanese artist Otani Workshop. The exhibition invites visitors into an enchanted dreamworld, where myths, memories and materials come together to form a landscape—one that is strange yet deeply familiar. Visitors will encounter works inspired by the Pacific Northwest Coast, made during the artist's Deer Lake <u>Artist Residency</u> at the Shadbolt Centre for the Arts in the summer of 2024, along with new paintings inspired by Otani's personal memories.

Written in Clay presents a history of ceramics made in British Columbia, told through the vast and deeply personal collection of musician, performer, activist and owner of DODA ANTIQUES John David Lawrence. Featuring approximately 200 objects, it examines the materials and processes artists utilized and celebrates the people and movements that have shaped our local ceramics landscape.

The exhibition is organized around three sections: Emphasis on Function; a Sculptural Turn; and Artist Spotlights.

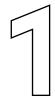
DEAR TEACHER

This teaching guide will assist you in preparing for your class tour of the exhibitions *Otani Workshop: Monsters in My Head* and *Written in Clay: From the John David Lawrence Collection*. It provides activities to facilitate discussion before and after your school tour. Engaging in the suggested activities will reinforce ideas generated by the tour and build continuity between the Gallery experience and your ongoing work in the classroom. Most activities require very few materials and can be easily adapted to the age, grade level and needs of your students. <u>Underlined</u> words in this guide are defined in the glossary section.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Otani Workshop: Monsters in My Head and Written in Clay: From the John David Lawrence Collection take place on the <u>unceded</u> territories of the xwmə0kwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səlilwətal (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

MONSTERS IN MY HEAD AND WRITTEN IN CLAY HAVE THREE MAIN GOALS:



TO INTRODUCE

Students to the artist Otani Workshop and the artists included in Written in Clay



TO CONSIDER

The versatility of clay and its ability to hold stories



TO **EXPLORE**

Individual artworks in the context of ideas, techniques and processes



GLOSSARY

ABSTRACT/ABSTRACTION A style of art that can be thought of in two ways:

- the artist begins with a recognizable subject and alters, distorts, manipulates or simplifies elements of it;
- the artist creates purely abstract forms that are unrecognizable and have no direct reference to external reality (also called non-representational art).

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM An artistic movement that emerged in the United States after World War II. It is characterized by gestural brushstrokes or mark-making, creating an impression of spontaneity and depicting forms not drawn from the visible world.

ARTIST RESIDENCY An opportunity provided by a host organization that enables a guest artist to work in a new environment, often away from the restrictions and pressures of their everyday lives.

CERAMICIST A person who uses clay and techniques such as working on a wheel, hand-building and sculpture.

KAWAII A Japanese term and concept meaning "cute" or "adorable." But its meaning goes much deeper than that: it encompasses a lifestyle and philosophy that values gentleness, innocence and vulnerability.

KINTSUGI The Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with lacquer that is dusted or mixed with powdered gold, silver or platinum. As a philosophy, it treats breakage and repair as part of the history of an object rather than something to disguise.

MODERN(ISM)/MODERNIST A historical period of art practice from 1850 to 1970, when approaches to art embraced new ideas in science, political thought and many other areas. The modernists rejected the restrictions of past art traditions and stressed innovation over all other values.

RAKU A firing technique originating in Japan in the 1500s. It is a process by which pottery is fired at a relatively low temperature and then moved while hot to a closed container with combustible materials (such as paper or sawdust) that ignite and cause a reaction that creates colours and patterns on the pottery's surface.

STONEWARE A type of ceramic that is nonporous, watertight and durable and is often used to make cookware and other dishes. It is fired at a very high temperature.

UNCEDED A term for a relationship between the government of Canada and Indigenous peoples when no treaties have been established. In general, "unceded" means the lands and waters of the Indigenous peoples were never surrendered and were taken without permission.

WABI SABI A Japanese aesthetic that accepts things as they are, knowing that even imperfect things are perfect in their own way.

VESSEL A container (such as a cask, bottle, kettle, cup or bowl) for holding something.

PRE- AND POST-TOUR ACTIVITIES GRADES 2-12

1. GET TO KNOW THE ARTISTS

Grades 4–12 | Pre-Tour Activity

2. COLLECTION STORIES

Grades 2–12 | Pre- or Post-Tour Activity

3. PINCH POT CHARACTERS

Grades 2–12 | Pre- or Post-Tour Activity

4. WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Grades 2–12 | Pre- or Post-Tour Activity

PRE-TOUR ACTIVITY





Students are introduced to the lives, artistic processes and works of artists in the exhibition *Written in Clay* and of Japanese artist Otani Workshop.

MATERIALS

- Writing materials
- Access to the internet
- Artists Information Sheet (p. 11) and the Student Worksheet (p. 12)

PROCESS

- Divide the class into small groups.
- Give each group one of the categories from the Artists Information Sheet (p. 11).
- Give each student a copy of the Student Worksheet (p. 12) and ask them to consider what they need to find out to complete their section.
- Have them conduct research using the internet, either at home or at school.



- Ask each group to find and describe a piece of work by the artist and add it into the space provided on the Worksheet.
- Have each group present their information while the rest of the students fill in their worksheets.

CONCLUSION

Discuss the following:

- What were some of the most interesting things students learned or discovered?
- Which pieces are students curious about seeing in the exhibition?
- Do the artists' works connect to or resonate with the students' lives? Why or why not?
- What else are students interested in finding out about the artists?

(left to right): Artist Otani Workshop at his solo exhibition Tanilla Tanilla Tanilla, held at Kaikai Kiki Gallery, Tokyo, Japan, from January 12 to February 24, 2024, Photo: Tomohiko Tagawa, @Otani Workshop/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved.; Installation view of Written in Clay: From the Collection of John David Lawrence, exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery from May 25, 2025 to January 4, 2026, Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery

PRE-TOUR ACTIVITY CONT.

WALTER DEXTER (1931-2015)

Walter Dexter was the first Canadian ceramics artist to gain fame as an <u>Abstract Expressionist</u>. He was also one of the first to introduce Japanese <u>raku</u> pottery techniques to Canada. Born in Calgary and initially aspiring to be a commercial artist, Dexter discovered his passion for pottery while studying commercial art in Alberta and ultimately majored in ceramic art. Based on his early experimentations with the <u>raku</u> process, he became recognized for his work in this medium, as well as for creating <u>stoneware</u> plates with dancing figures. From 1995 to 2012, he produced a series of artistic pottery known as the "torso vases," characterized by their headless torso shape for which he is so well known. He received many awards and distinctions before he died in 2015.

GATHIE FALK (b. 1928)

Born in Manitoba, Gathie Falk has fond memories of her childhood: piles of fresh vegetables, trees covered in fruit, beautiful homemade dresses—all images that would later become key to her creative process. After moving to Vancouver, she studied ceramics at the University of British Columbia. She later established a ceramics studio, creating and exhibiting over three hundred functional ceramic objects, such as bowls, mugs, teapots, vases and candlesticks. Though clay would remain essential to her practice, after this time, she would not return to making functional objects. Falk is perhaps best known for her series of ceramic fruit piles, which she began producing in the late 1960s. Her interest in stacked fruit was inspired by the similar orderly piles she encountered at the greengrocers in her Vancouver neighbourhood. In addition to ceramics, Falk works in painting, drawing and performance art, often reinventing clothing, fruit, plants and shoes to ask us to consider the beauty of everyday things. This idea is also evident in her early functional objects, which invite the viewer to see something curious in a bowl, a plate or a teacup. Now in her late nineties, Falk has become one of Canada's most critically acclaimed artists.

THOMAS KAKINUMA (1908-1982)

Thomas Kakinuma was an important ceramic artist and beloved teacher. He is known for his work in stoneware that spans various genres, including functional wares like teapots and bowls, as well as large-scale abstract sculptures and small, stylized depictions of animals, including cats, penguins, fish and birds. He is also an acknowledged contributor to the modernist art scene in Vancouver. Kakinuma was born and raised in Japan and immigrated to Canada in 1937. He intended to study art in Paris, but World War II interrupted his plans. Little information exists about Kakinuma's wartime experience in Canada. Around this time, he lived in Toronto, where he studied painting and drawing at the Ontario College of Art (OCA) and graduated with honours. He then studied painting in New York, followed by a year in ceramics at OCA and then at the University of British Columbia, where he would later teach ceramics. His travels to Mexico and Japan enriched his understanding of traditional pottery; yet he remained committed to a distinctly modernist vision. Kakinuma's best-known subjects were birds and fish. Numerous major Canadian museums feature his work. Throughout his lifetime, he received many awards and, as a teacher, influenced a generation of ceramic artists in British Columbia.

PRE-TOUR ACTIVITY CONT.

LAURA WEE LÁY LÁQ (b. 1952)

Laura Wee Láy Lág is a ceramic artist, educator and cultural caretaker from the Stó:lō Nation. Her work reflects a deep connection to the earth and spirit. She discovered clay at the age of fifteen, and, as soon as she touched the material, she knew it would allow her to express her reverence for the natural forms of the earth, a practice that has endured over the last fifty years. Early in her career, unable to find a ceramic tradition to draw from among the Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast, Wee Láy Lág looked to the ancient pottery techniques of the American Southwest. Rather than use a potter's wheel, she handbuilds her ceramics using traditional methods like coiling and pinching. When the piece reaches the "leather-hard" stage, she rubs the vessel with flintstone or bloodstone. It can take hours to burnish a piece, but this process makes glaze unnecessary. She buries the vessel in sawdust in a hand-built backyard kiln, which creates smoke designs that can resemble landscapes or animals. When Wee Láy Lág fires her work, she gives it back to the earth, to the sawdust, the elements. It has the final say. She has also produced a line of Northwest Coast dinnerware called Kwelas. Her work has been showcased and collected both locally and internationally.

OTANI WORKSHOP (b. 1980)

Shigeru Otani, known by his professional name Otani Workshop, was born in Shiga Prefecture in a town near Shigaraki, one of Japan's oldest and most storied pottery centres. As a child, he wandered the forests, spotting faces in rocks and animals in shadows. That sense of wonder still fuels his work today. He first discovered sculpture in high school and then went on to study the subject at university in Okinawa, where he learned to let his hands guide his creativity. He only encountered pottery after graduating. Otani doesn't see himself as a ceramicist. His work isn't made to be useful. It's expressive, sculptural and often monumental. He first used the name "Otani Workshop" at a local craft fair. It reminded him of kids' art classes and gave him space to play. Today, Otani has emerged as a leading figure in contemporary ceramics. He works alone on Awaji Island in a converted tile factory with a massive kiln. His process is largely spontaneous. As he builds, the figure reveals itself, and, at some point, he decides: "This is a bear." His practice and work range broadly from sculptures made using ceramics and bronze to a more recent practice in painting. Japanese history and culture, especially kawaii, inspires him. Otani's work has been presented in group and solo exhibitions throughout Japan and abroad.

PRE-TOUR ACTIVITY CONT.

ARTIST INFORMATION SHEET

WALTER DEXTER

- First Canadian ceramics artist to achieve fame as an Abstract Expressionist
- One of the first to introduce the Japanese ceramic raku process to Canada
- Created "torso vases" characterized by their headless torso shape
- Achieved many awards and distinctions before his death in 2015

GATHIE FALK

- Childhood memories are key to her creative process
- Transforms ordinary objects into extraordinary things
- Created and exhibited over three hundred functional objects before focusing on sculpture, painting and performance
- Produced dozens of ceramic fruit piles inspired by neighbourhood grocery stores

THOMAS KAKINUMA

- Born and raised in Japan; immigrated to Canada
- Acknowledged contributor to the modernist art scene in Vancouver
- Best-known subjects are birds and fish
- · Travelled to Mexico and Japan to enrich his understanding of traditional pottery

LAURA WEE LÁY LÁQ

- · Ceramics artist from the Stó:lō Nation
- Looked to ancient pottery techniques of the American Southwest
- Hand-builds, burnishes with smooth stone and fires ceramics using sawdust
- Work reflects a deep connection to the earth and spirit

OTANI WORKSHOP

- Born near one of Japan's oldest and most storied pottery centres
- Japanese history and culture, especially <u>kawaii</u>, inspires him
- Work ranges from sculptures made of ceramics and bronze to painting
- Process is largely spontaneous

PRE-TOUR ACTIVITY CONT.

STUDENT WORKSHEET (FILL IN THE CHART WITH THE FOLLOWING)

	PERSONAL INFORMATION	INTERESTING FACT	KNOWN FOR	AN ARTWORK
WALTER DEXTER				
GATHIE FALK				
THOMAS KAKINUMA				
LAURA WEE LÁY LÁQ				
OTANI WORKSHOP				

GRADES 2-12 | COLLECTION STORIES

PRE- OR POST-TOUR ACTIVITY | INSPIRED BY THE JOHN DAVID LAWRENCE COLLECTION



OBJECTIVE

Consider collecting and the importance objects hold to create an illustrated story.

DISCUSSION

Born in rural Vermont, John David Lawrence is a musician, performer and activist living in Vancouver. He is also a passionate collector, owning around 1,500 ceramic works by BC artists from the 1920s to 2000s. His collection, which includes pieces from both famous and lesser-known potters, reflects his deep connection to the community and his desire to understand his adopted home. For Lawrence, these works matter because they serve as portals to culture and show the creativity of people across place and time. He appreciates his collection because it highlights the value of creativity and the important roles that things play in our lives. Lawrence believes his collection should be displayed and enjoyed rather than stored away. As he explains, "I don't live

with things in boxes. I like to look at them. For me, a big part of the enjoyment of an object is how you got it, how it came into your life." Each work in his eclectic collection tells a story, not just about the artwork itself, but also about how he acquired it. His collection also shares a meaningful story of British Columbia's creative spirit. Lawrence feels a deep responsibility to care for the works in his collection, stating: "They do matter to me. I see them not as something I own, but as things that I'm taking care of."

MATERIALS

- Paper
- Drawing materials

GRADES 2-12 | COLLECTION STORIES

PRE- OR POST-TOUR ACTIVITY CONT.

PROCESS

- John David Lawrence has over 1,500 ceramics in his collection. What are some of the reasons he began collecting ceramics? Why does he think it is important to display his collection?
- What is something you collect? Why? What is an interesting story behind one of the items in your collection? Is it about where you discovered it? Who gave it to you? Why is it important to you?
- Choose five items from your collection and consider their meaning to you.
- Choose one you'd like to share with the class and create a drawing of it.
- Write a story about the importance of the item from your collection that you drew.
- Share your work with the class.

CONCLUSION

Discuss the following:

- What aspects of John David Lawrence's collection resonate with your own collecting?
- What similarities and differences do you notice about the class's collections and stories?
- Did any of the collections make you look at objects differently? Why or why not?
- What are three new things you have learned?
- What are two things you are going to remember?
- What is one thing that is most interesting to you?



Installation view of Written in Clay: From the Collection of John David Lawrence, exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery from May 25, 2025 to January 4, 2026, Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery

GRADES 2-12 | PINCH POT CHARACTERS

PRE- OR POST-TOUR ACTIVITY | INSPIRED BY THE SCULPTURES OF OTANI WORKSHOP

OBJECTIVE

Create a clay creature inspired by aspects of Otani Workshop's sculptural process.

DISCUSSION

Otani Workshop is an artist and sculptor known for his whimsical and playful creations. After studying sculpture at an art university, he worked in a collaborative studio in Shigaraki, an area in Japan known for ceramics production, before settling into an enormous studio in a former tile factory on Awaji Island. Otani doesn't see himself as a ceramicist because he creates works that are not intended to be useful. His style reflects a principle of Japanese culture known as kawaii, or cuteness. He often starts with a vague idea, sometimes no more than a simple shape that reveals itself as he moulds the clay in his hand, and, at some point, he decides what it is going to be. His sculptures feature various textures, often incorporating materials such as wood and iron, along with earthy, natural glazes that highlight the materials' raw beauty, embracing the wabi sabi philosophy, which celebrates imperfection.

Many works in this exhibition were created during his <u>artist</u> residency at Deer Lake in Burnaby. Although some pieces cracked due to his use of unfamiliar materials, Otani embraced this challenge and used <u>kintsugi</u> for the first time on his sculptures, repairing and highlighting the imperfections by filling the cracks with synthetic resin and using gold leaf for the finishing touches. One ceramic character that repeats throughout Otani's practice and that he drew inspiration from during his residency is Tanilla. The name "Tanilla" comes from combining "tani" from "Otani" and "lla" from "Godzilla." His parents bought him an illustrated book of dinosaurs that he read and reread as a child. When he later went on to study sculpture, he says, Tanilla suddenly emerged while he was searching for forms within the clay. Tanilla has since become one of the most iconic characters created by the artist.

MATERIALS

- Air-dry clay
- Clay tools and gadgets (toothpicks, craft sticks, pencils, etc.)
- Newspaper or scrap canvas to cover your work surface
- Container of water
- Paint (optional)

PROCESS

- Look closely at Otani Workshop's sculpture Tanilla that Emerged Out of Deer Lake (2024).
- What do you notice? Describe the physical characteristics and visual elements.
- How does the sculpture capture your attention? What initial thoughts or feelings does it evoke?
- How does this sculpture transport you to a different world?
- Otani Workshop doesn't start with a plan. He simply begins to form the clay in his hand, and, at some point, he decides what it is going to be as the form reveals itself.
 You will create your own character inspired by Otani's process. Take a chunk of clay about the size of a plum and form it into a ball.
- Make a hole. Make a dip with your thumbs in the centre of the clay. Press down until your thumbs are about onequarter to one-half of an inch from the bottom.
- Widen the hole. Slowly widen the hole by pinching up the wall of clay. Turn the piece slowly as you pinch to keep the walls even in thickness.
- Form a bowl or pot. Continue drawing up the walls to gradually mould the piece into a bowl, pot or cup. The bottom and the walls must at least be one-quarter of an

GRADES 2-12 | PINCH POT CHARACTERS

PRE- OR POST-TOUR ACTIVITY CONT.



GRADES 2-12 | PINCH POT CHARACTERS

PRE- OR POST-TOUR ACTIVITY CONT.

inch thick.

- Otani embraces the cracks, pinch marks and rough surfaces created when moulding, but you can smooth down any cracking on the surface of your pot and make sure your rim is even.
- Turn your pot upside down. Add clay details to reveal the character of your sculpture. You can use any of the tools provided to cut holes for some of the common characteristics found in Otani's work like eyes, a mouth or a nose. You can also use the tools to add other textures and patterns to your work. If you want to add clay details to your sculpture, make sure you adhere them securely, smoothing them into your clay with a bit of water, so they do not fall off when drying.
- Once dry, you can add paint or leave it as-is.
- Create a title for your work or write a creative short story or personal essay describing your character.

CONCLUSION

Discuss the following:

- What did you enjoy about creating a pinch pot character?
- How are the works in the class similar or different?
- What was easy or hard about creating your work?
- What elements of Otani Workshop's work did you consider or use in your work?
- Did you find it challenging to begin your project without an idea and just let the character reveal itself while you were forming the clay, as Otani Workshop does? Why or why not?
- If you were to do this project again, what would you do the same and what would you do differently?







GRADES 2-12 | WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

PRE- OR POST-TOUR ACTIVITY

"I love[d] to play with clay in kindergarten. Sometimes, I feel like I'm made of clay." —Otani Workshop



Otani Workshop, Picture Book Painting: Self-portrait as Clay, 2024, oil on canvas with wooden frame, Courtesy of the Artist, Kaikai Kiki and Perrotin, Photo: ©2024 Otani Workshop/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved.

GRADES 2-12 | WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

PRE- OR POST-TOUR ACTIVITY CONT.

OBJECTIVE

Create a pastel drawing sharing a moment or person that has played a pivotal role in your life journey, inspired by the paintings of Otani Workshop.

DISCUSSION

Otani Workshop is known for his ceramic sculptures, but he also paints, which enriches his sculptural art. His large, expressive portraits use thick oil paint mixed with materials like beeswax, clay, aerosol paint, glitter and mica, which gives them a unique texture and feel. These works are inspired by his memories, capturing childhood sentiments of wonder, solitude, longing and hope.

Picture Book Painting: Self-portrait as Clay (2024) is part of a series of eleven paintings that depicts Otani Workshop's journey to becoming an artist—from his early love of shaping things out of clay and Lego, to his childhood memories of watching American painter and television personality Bob Ross on Japanese television, to the high school art teacher who introduced him to the work of many international artists, such as Swiss sculptor Alberto Giacometti. The series was created for a children's book that accompanies the exhibition. It features uncanny monsters that reflect early fears, curiosities and creative impulses. His artworks invite viewers to dream, imagine and play.

MATERIALS

- Oil pastels
- Paper

PROCESS

- Begin by looking at Picture Book Painting: Self-portrait as Clay (2024) and answer the following questions:
 - 1. What are three words you would use to describe this work?
 - 2. How would you describe this figure?
 - 3. Imagine you can hear their thoughts. Based on what you see, what might they say?

- 4. What story is suggested? What might happen next? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Brainstorm ideas around moments, events or people who have played an important role in your life. What moments filled you with wonder? What people have inspired you?
 What activities do you fondly remember?
- Create a drawing of a single image that represents your memory.
- Begin by drawing in the shapes for your portrait with a light pastel colour. This way, anything you don't like will disappear as you begin to add more colour to your work.
- Think about what colours you will use to describe your experience. The colours do not have to be the same as they are in real life. You can use colour to describe emotion and mood.
- Fill in your drawing with colour. Try to add at least three
 layers of oil pastel colour to your work. This way, it will
 build up texture and interest. As you add more colour, you
 will discover that the pastels blend nicely and begin to
 look like paint.
- Write a short story about the memory you have captured to go with your drawing.
- Display your drawings in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

Discuss the following:

- Otani Workshop draws upon his memories to inspire his paintings. After creating your own memory-story artwork, do you feel you have successfully created a way to share ideas that are important to you with others? Why or why not?
- What were some of the things you took into consideration when creating your story portrait?
- If you were to do this project again, what would you do the same and what would you do differently?

FURTHER LEARNING

TEACHER AND STUDENT RESOURCES

BOOKS

The Place of Objects: The John David Lawrence Collection, Vancouver Art Gallery, 2025

Monsters In My Head, Vancouver Art Gallery, 2025

WEBSITES

Otani Workshop Exhibition | Kaikai Kiki Gallery

Tour Otani Workshop's Spellbinding Studio on Japan's Awaji Island - Galerie Magazine

VIDEOS

Laura Wee Láy Láq 2015 First Nations Art Award Recognition Film

Behind the Scenes with Otani Workshop

How Otani Workshop Is Transforming Ancient Japanese Ceramics

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