

Festival Makers Commission Report

Rosanna Martin working at Merton Junior School

My experiences with this commission have been extremely valuable and enjoyable. The idea was to create a display for the festival that was made up of ceramic medals that the children could make and wear, forming a celebratory and colourful display.



I went to Merton Junior School for four days in May, where I spent time working with children from Years 3, 4, 5 and 6. Before the workshops I prepared blank discs of porcelain that I then painted in slip coloured red, green or blue. To begin each workshop I introduced the idea by asking the children about the Olympics and what they thought and knew about it. I explained that the idea behind the activity was to celebrate that the Olympics are coming to the UK, but it is also about celebrating each other and about having aspirations for the future.

The designs on the front of the medals are drawings of what the children want to be when they grow up. Some of the children already knew, but for some we came up with new ideas by responding to a series of questions:

What is your favourite subject at school?

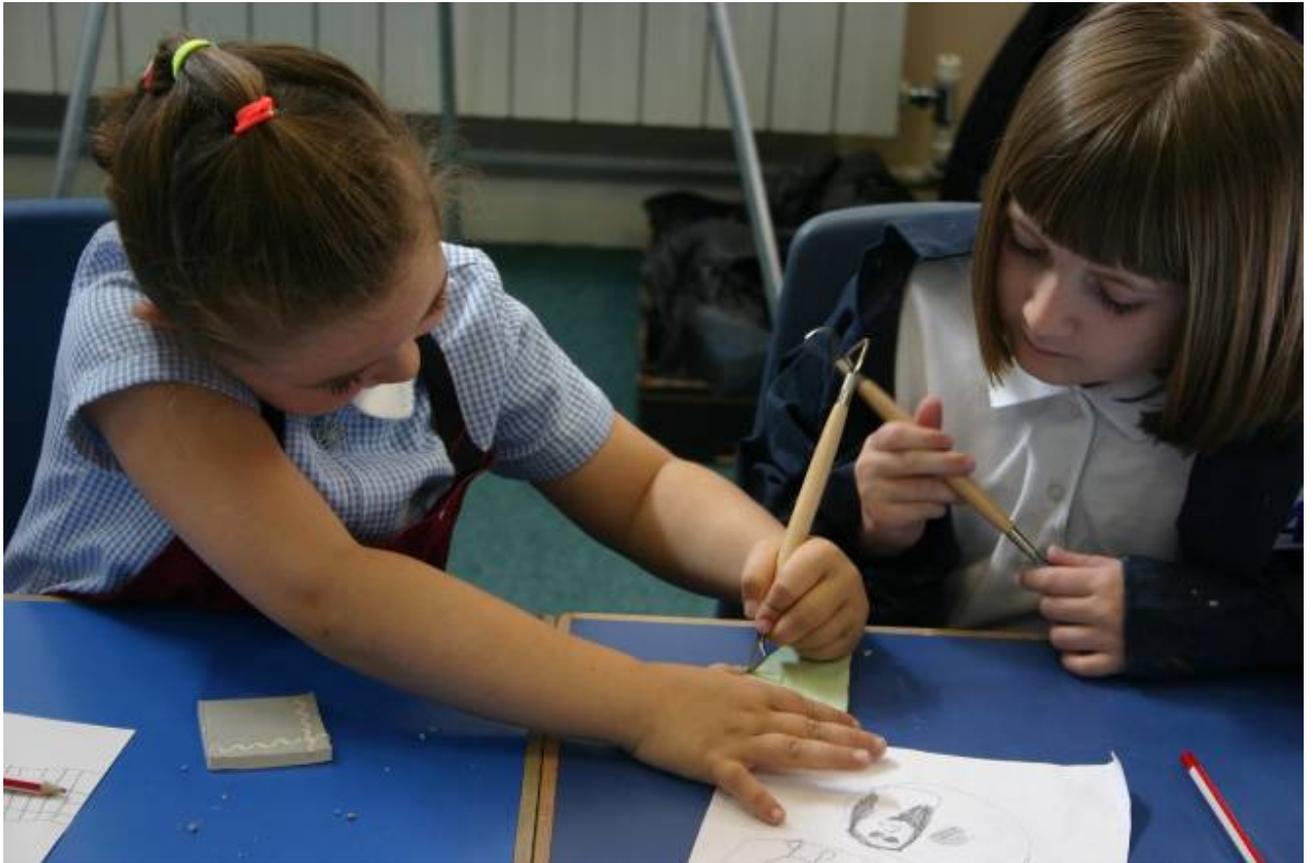
What do you do in your spare time, do you have any hobbies?

Can you describe yourself in three words?

We started each session by thinking through these questions, and having discussions with one another about our ambitions and aims. We wrote down our answers on paper, and then started to try and draw pictures of ourselves doing these activities. Some of the responses were brilliant, we had an aspiring toymaker, an archaeologist, accountants, scientists, chefs, mechanics, presidents, gymnasts, horse riders, bankers, and plenty of artists! Some of the ideas were harder to draw than others, and we thought through ways of representing the job by drawing the tools that you would use, or the place you would work. We also looked at the Olympic pictograms for inspiration and help drawing tricky activities, like gymnastics.



After our initial ideas were down on paper, I gave a demonstration of how we were going to transfer these thoughts onto our final medals. I showed the children a method called sgraffito, which is when you use tools to scratch through the surface of the clay to reveal the clay colour underneath, creating a line drawn effect. Each child was then given a small piece of clay to practice using the tools on, encouraging them to get used to what the clay will do when you apply different amounts of pressure and different kinds of mark making. Some of the results from the test pieces were among the most inspiring. A lot of the boys enjoyed scratching the clay away until there was nothing left of their tiles at all.





After our tests we then moved on to drawing our designs onto the actual medals. The children produced some fantastic results, as well as their pictorial descriptions they covered the medals with patterns and creative designs. On the back we wrote names and a short description of our aspiration, hopefully these will prove to be insightful objects to look back on in years to come!







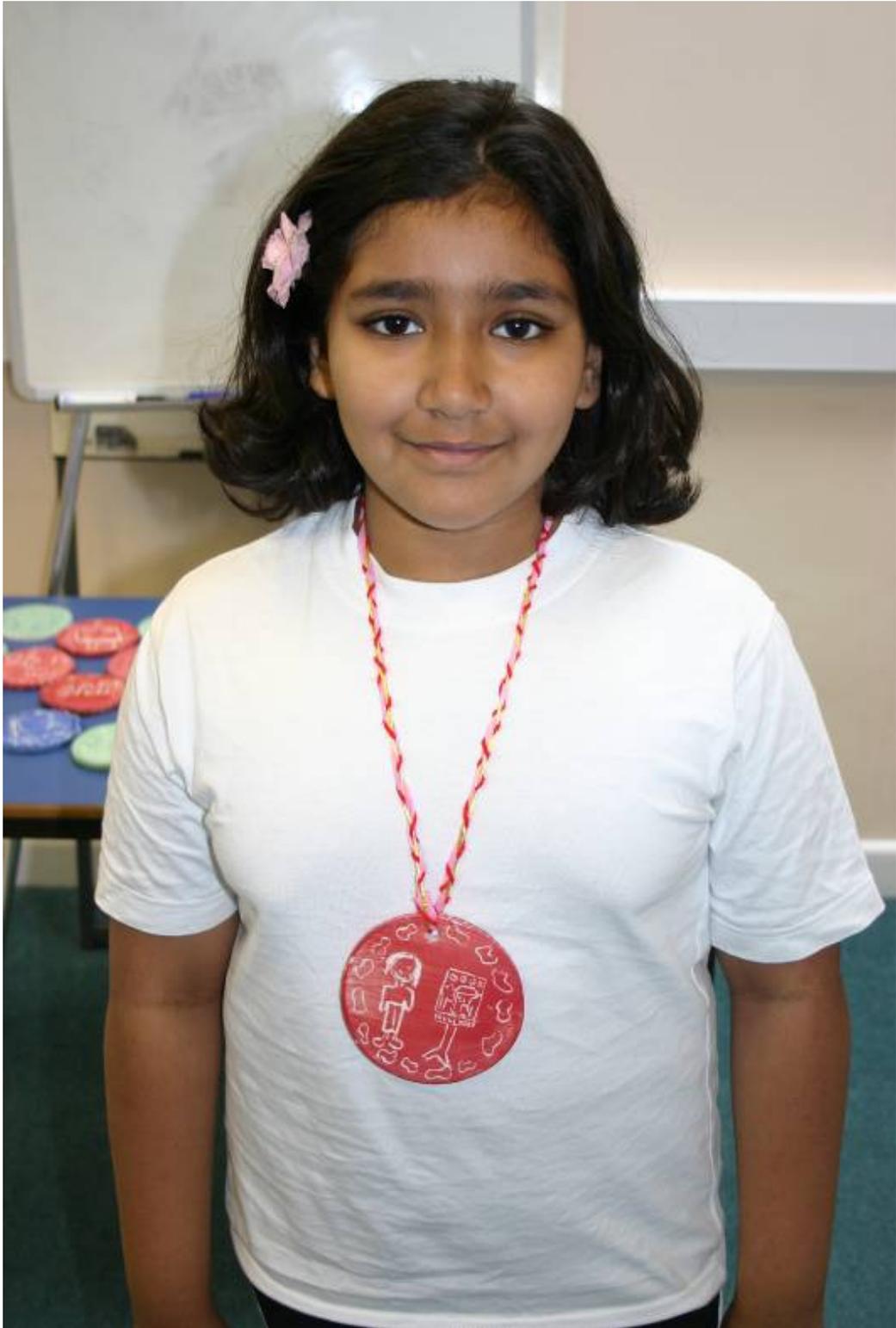


As well as working with the children I also ran a short workshop for the teachers, so that they could have a go at what the children had been up to, but also to give them some ideas and understanding of working with clay, to hopefully encourage them to think about using it in the classroom in the future. They all seemed to really enjoy using the clay and as well as the medals they made flowers, pots and leaf imprints, which sparked an idea for a tiled wall for somewhere in the school.

After the four days in school I packed up all the medals and took them home to get them glazed and fired. The finished results looked great!



I then took them back to the school and spent a day making ribbons from plastic, wool and string so that the children could wear them at the festival. I showed them how to plait and everyone had a go, choosing different colours and creating their own designs. The children were excited about the difference between their medals when they made them and the end results after firing.









The medals were then ready to wear and packed up for the festival. Unfortunately I did not get any photos of them being worn at the festival, but Miss Jackson assured me that it was a great success -

"Hi Rosanna,

Thank you for your lovely email! We all loved the workshops with you and the parade at Eastrop Parade - we were so lucky to have such good weather! I'm sorry we didn't get to see you - it was quite a manic day! We saw some fab

pictures in the Gazette.

Thank you so much for all of your hard work, you were fab to work with and the children LOVED it!

*Best wishes,
Kayleigh”*

I also had the chance to work with members of the public on the day of the festival, making and decorating more medals which people could then take home with them. It was a great workshop and the public seemed to really enjoy having a go and playing with what effects were possible.

The whole project has been a real success; I have learnt a huge amount and the children have provided me with a lot of inspiration!