

Nahum Gutman Figurines

Topic

Yom HaAtzmaut, Israel, Jewish Art

Grade Level(s)

All ages



Goals for the Lesson/Activity

Students will:

- Learn about one of Israel's leading artists, Nahum Gutman
- Develop an aesthetic appreciation for Israeli art
- Create a sculpture inspired by Gutman's work. By creating their own artwork, children reflect learned material, reinforce critical thinking skills and develop their capacity for creative expression

Materials needed

- Computer, projector and access to the internet to show images of Nahum Gutman's work, featured in the [Nahum Gutman Museum of Art](#). To specifically focus on his clay figurines, [click here](#).
- Polymer clay in Terra Cotta color (available at local art supply stores or [online](#))
- Aluminum foil - about 1' x 1' per student
- Scissors to cut clay
- Pencils and plastic knives for molding
- Oven and oven tray (to bake the clay)

Technology needed

- Camera or video camera (optional)

Background for Teachers

Nahum Gutman (1898 -1980) was an Israeli artist. He emigrated with his family from Russia to pre-State Israel as a child, and spent his life living in and describing the young city of Tel Aviv, "The First Hebrew City," in writing and painting. Gutman studied art at the Bezalel Academy in Jerusalem and was influenced by ancient Middle Eastern art. He used oil paint, watercolor gouache, ink and clay to create bright colored paintings and primitivistic sculptures focusing on Israeli landscapes and people who resemble those from Biblical times.

Nahum Gutman said about his clay figures: "You could say that the story of my sculpture is also my own story which I deliver from the mass of life itself. I carve my characters out of the material, and most of my sculptures have openings the size of several fingers."



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Nahum Gutman is also considered a pioneer in Israeli children's book illustrations, and created large-scale murals and colorful mosaics depicting scenes from Tel Aviv for public spaces in the city. He received the Israel Prize, Israel's highest honor, for his contributions to children's literature in 1978.

In May 1988, the Nahum Gutman Museum of Art opened in Tel Aviv. To learn more about the artist and his amazing collection of work, visit the museum's [website](#).

Description of Activities

- 1) Open the lesson with a question-whip. Posing the prompt, *My favorite medium to create art with is...* have each student share their response with the class.
- 2) Introduce the life and work of Nahum Gutman to the class.
- 3) Take students on a virtual tour of the [Nahum Gutman Museum of Art](#). Make sure to point out the variety of media Gutman worked in and to show examples from his different influences, including Tel Aviv and biblical narratives. At the end of the "tour" spend time looking at and talking about Gutman's clay [sculptures](#). Invite students to describe what they see as they view each art piece.
- 4) Have students create small figurines, like the ones made by Nahum Gutman, to portray a Biblical character or a character from the early days of Tel Aviv. Make the general gesture by pressing together aluminum foil pieces to form a skeleton of about 4" x 3" x 2". Knead a 2" x 2" x 2" lump of clay until soft, and flatten into a ¼" thick flat clay sheet. Wrap the metal skeleton with the clay, adding and carving details as needed. Carve your name with a pencil at the bottom of the figurine.
- 5) Place students' sculptures on an oven tray covered with aluminum foil. Bake in an oven according to directions on the clay's packaging.
- 6) Create a class exhibition! Ask students to name their art piece and write a one sentence description of the character along with the name on an index card. Arrange the finished pieces along with their artist's statements around the room and have students view each other's work and ask questions.

Document the process: While students create their pieces, take pictures or videos to create a "Making Of" documentary of the creative process.

Extend the learning: Engage in study about the first years of Tel Aviv - "The First Hebrew City" and look at Nahum Gutman's paintings through the lens of history. Based on that study, create a collaborative collage or a painting featuring the young city.