Mud faces

This activity populates the trees with strange inhabitants and brings the forest alive in a whole new way.

Author: Muddy Faces

**Age Range:** all ages  
**Duration:** 1-2 hours  
**Location:** anywhere  
**Time Of Day:** any time  
**Season:** any  
**Tags:** clay, face, mud, natural materials  
**Category:** art & creating

---

**What you’ll need:**

- waterproofs and/or clothing for messy play
- suitable footwear
- a trowel or small spade per player
- a small bucket or other watertight container per person
- water (for mixing mud)
- soap and clean water (for washing hands afterwards) or lots of wet wipes until you can get to a tap!

**Take It Further**

- **Clay:** 12.5kg Buff School Clay  
  (highlighted items are available from our shop)

---

**Environmental considerations**

Consider the environmental impact of preparing, carrying out & completing this activity. Could this impact be reduced?  
Specific considerations for this activity could include:

- sustainably source of natural materials
- materials used for face features

**Health & safety considerations**

Follow your usual operating procedures and carry out appropriate risk benefit assessments.  
Some considerations particular to this activity include:

- identifying safe natural materials
- hand hygiene
Mud, mud glorious mud...

There is such joy in squeezing and squelching mud through the fingers!

Shaping a face from mud is blissful messy play. With a little imagination, this activity populates the trees with strange inhabitants and brings the forest alive in a whole new way.

Mixing together the elements of earth and water to create a mud face taps into every child’s instinct to investigate natural things, and explore what these do and how they react. This activity combines art, science and sensory development, encourages communication and confidence through creativity, and also gives children permission to get really mucky!

Studies show that being able to get dirty is an important part of a child’s cognitive development. There are health benefits, too: safe exposure to natural organisms in soil helps to develop children’s immune systems, making them more able to fight disease.

Get ready...

Encourage the children to talk about their ideas. Will it be a mud face for a tree, an animal or an insect? Will it be the face of someone they know, or the face of a character in a story or a magical being they’ve invented? Will it have big or small eyes? Perhaps there will be more than two eyes! What about ears? And hair – will it be fuzzy or straight or will there be none at all? Maybe the face will turn into a creature with arms, hands, legs and toes!

When everyone has had a turn talking about what their mud creation will be, head off to gather the materials. Perhaps they’ll pick up acorns or horse chestnuts for eyes, leaves for ears, or sticks for mouths. Tiny feathers may be perfect for hair. Or perhaps they’ll choose something completely unexpected. The makers decide! (Just avoid any rare or poisonous plants!)

Once they have gathered all they need, the children can use a trowel or small spade to dig a hole past the topsoil, down to the mulch-free soil (roughly 5–20cm/2–8in deep). Each child digs out enough soil to quarter-fill their bucket, then slowly adds water until they have sticky mud, the consistency of workable clay. Stickiness can be tested on a tree trunk – if the mud sticks, it’s just right.

(More soil and water can always be added if needed.)
Go!

All the makers find a tree where their creation will live, then takes a good handful of mud from their bucket and shape it into a ball. Smaller children, with their little hands, may need help getting a ball that’s big enough for shaping. Now the ball of mud gets splatted firmly onto the tree trunk.

Press down the edges of the mud, so that it holds firmly onto the tree. Once the ball is stuck, the creative magic begins! Let each child work on their face or creature as they wish. Watch as aliens, fairies, robots, animals and other weird and wonderful creatures emerge, each with their own lively expression and strange features.