



1859

Alkaline-glazed stoneware
26 1/2 x 15 1/2 inches (67.3 x 39.4 cm)

**MADE BY DAVID DRAKE
(DAVE THE POTTER)**

American

125th Anniversary Acquisition. Purchased with funds contributed by Keith and Lauren Morgan and with the gifts (by exchange) of John T. Morris, Mrs. John D. Wintersteen, and the bequest of Maurice J. Crean, and with the Baugh-Barber Fund, the Haas Community Fund, and other Museum funds (by exchange), 1997, 1997-35-1

LET'S LOOK

How were these pots made?

How big do you think they are?

LET'S LOOK AGAIN

What could you put in the large jar? How was it originally used?

Where else have you seen faces on things? Why do they have faces?

What kinds of expressions do you see on the face jugs? What emotions do they communicate?

How do you think the face jugs might have been used? Explain why.

STORAGE JAR

Enslaved African American potters created these pots around the time of the Civil War in the Edgefield District of South Carolina, a place famous for its pottery throughout the 1800s. The Edgefield District was known as a crossroads of clay because it became a meeting point of ideas from Asia and people from Africa and Europe. The distinctive glazed stoneware was stronger and cheaper than any European or American ware of the same kind at that time. Stoneware is pottery made of a very hard clay that is then fired (baked) at high temperatures. After clay is wedged (kneaded) to make it smooth and remove air bubbles, it is built up by hand or formed on a potter's wheel—a round table that spins around like a record player to create centrifugal force. Pulling the clay up or out against this force creates a variety of shapes, like straight-sided cylinders, round bowls, and flat plates. Liquid glazes are used to coat and color clay pots before they are fired in the kiln (a special oven), where the glazes melt and then become hard and shiny as they cool. These pots feature alkaline glazes, made with ash and sand, that were used primarily in China before being rediscovered in Edgefield.

A remarkable African American potter named David Drake (also known as Dave the Potter), who worked as a slave in the Edgefield District from 1834 to 1864, created this large jar by taking two bowls formed on a wheel and placing one upside-down on top of the other. The lug handles were formed by hand and attached on both sides. The brownish glaze was poured on, leaving a few streaks and bare spots. On one side of the jar Dave wrote "Lm May 3rd 1859" and his name. "Lm" are the initials of Dave's fourth owner, Lewis Miles. On the other side of the jar is a verse referring to a New Testament story (*Acts 10:10–16*) about the apostle Peter, who had a vision of a large sheet of sailcloth full of creatures. Peter interpreted

this as God telling him to accept all people, regardless of their race or religion. Dave's verse reflects the hope he found in this biblical passage for equality for all people.



Face Vessel
c. 1860-70

Glazed stoneware,
unglazed earthenware
7 1/2 x 7 3/4 inches (19 x 19.7 cm)

**ATTRIBUTED TO
THOMAS J. DAVIES
POTTERY**

American, Edgefield district,
South Carolina

Gift of Edward Russell Jones,
1904, 1904-36



Face Vessel
c. 1860-70

Glazed stoneware,
unglazed earthenware
6 3/8 x 5 5/8 inches (16.2 x 14.2 cm)

**ATTRIBUTED TO
THOMAS J. DAVIES
POTTERY**

American, Edgefield district,
South Carolina

Gift of Edward Russell Jones,
1904, 1904-36



Face Vessel
c. 1860-70

Glazed stoneware,
unglazed earthenware
6 3/4 x 5 1/16 inches (17.1 x 12.9 cm)

**ATTRIBUTED TO
THOMAS J. DAVIES
POTTERY**

American, Edgefield district,
South Carolina

Gift of Edward Russell Jones,
1904, 1904-36

The smaller face jugs (see above) were created using several construction methods and types of clay: some features (the eyes and teeth) were formed by hand in white porcelain and applied to pots made of stoneware on a wheel. Firing this combination of clays was a technical feat that required a high level of skill. The use of three colors is also ingenious: unglazed matte white clay (the eyes and teeth), shiny green or brown alkaline glaze (covering most of the pot), and unglazed buff or reddish brown clay (the lips and eyelids). While slaves made a wide range of utilitarian pots—which their owners sold to pioneers, plantation owners, and the Confederate army—they made face jugs on their own time and for their own purposes. However, no one knows for sure how these jugs were used or what they meant to enslaved African Americans. The white eyes and teeth—a color associated in Africa with deceased ancestors and the spirit world—resemble those of wooden figures carved by the Kongo

people of Central Africa. Many who were enslaved in South Carolina in the 1800s came from this region. Face jugs have also been found along the routes of the Underground Railroad and on grave sites, which indicates how highly they were valued and how closely connected they were with the enslaved African Americans' own culture.

ABOUT THESE POTTERS

The names of the enslaved African Americans who made the face jugs seen here are unknown, but the large storage jar was made by a potter known as David Drake, or Dave the Potter. He is one of the very few African American artisans who can be identified during the antebellum period (before the Civil War). Of the fifty or so white and black artisans who worked in the Edgefield District potteries, Dave was the only one known to sign and date his pots. His well-crafted vessels are notable for the witty poetry he inscribed on them and for their impressive size, some large enough to hold more than twenty gallons.

Dave was born around 1800 and we know of 150 vessels he made between 1834 and 1864. He signed his name and wrote verses on over 100 of these pots, starting in 1840. Some of the verses refer to himself ("Dave belongs to Mr. Miles/wher[e] the oven bakes & the pot biles"), while others explain the purpose of the pot they are written on ("Made at Stoney Bluff/for Making lard enuff"). There are flashes of humor ("Another trick is worse than this/Dearest Miss, spare me a kiss") and biblical references ("I saw a leppard & a lion's face,/then I felt the need of/grace").

How Dave learned to read and write remains a mystery, since in the 1830s most southern states forbade education for African Americans. Dave may have learned from one of his owners, who published a newspaper. Judging from how Dave wrote his name—very clearly, with a flourish on the upper walls of his pots where it was most easily seen—he wanted to be known and recognized for his work, and was allowed to do so. Perhaps he also meant his verses to be noticed by other enslaved African Americans, to inspire them to learn to read.

After Emancipation and the end of the Civil War in 1865, Dave chose the last name Drake, his first owner's surname. There is no specific information about his death, but he signed his last (known) vessel in 1864. A master potter and a poet known for his command of the English language, Dave asserted his identity within the hardships and anonymity of slavery with wit and vigor.

RELATED ART PROJECTS

Use clay to form a container, then add eyes, nose, mouth, and ears. Write a paragraph describing what your face jug means and how it can be used.

Use colored paper to cut out the shape of a container (jewelry box, cookie jar, teapot). Write a verse on it about an important idea or special event in your life.

CONNECT AND COMPARE

Compare Dave's verses with those of other African American poets, like Langston Hughes, Phillis Wheatley, Muhammed Ali, and Maya Angelou.

Visit the kitchens in your school cafeteria and a local restaurant. How do the contemporary storage containers there compare with Dave's jar?

Imagine that you are escaping on the Underground Railroad and you need to stay out of sight and move fast. Make a list of what you would take with you.

Create a wall chart showing the heights of Dave's jar, a trash barrel, the face jugs, a milk carton, and you! Write your measurements on cutout tracings of your own body and the containers.

This pottery is included in African American Artists: 1859 to the Present, a set of teaching posters and resource book produced by the Division of Education and made possible by generous grants from Delphi Financial Group and Reliance Standard Life Insurance Company.