

Writer's Model

I-Search Paper

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HOLT, RINEHART AND WINSTON

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How Memories Are Made

THE STORY OF MY SEARCH

On the dresser in my room is a very special object, a cup made by my grandmother. Grandma Kasamoto was a potter. Years ago, when I was five, I saw this pretty cup sitting on a shelf in Grandma's pottery shop. It was white, with delicate green stems and leaves painted on it. The stems curled up the sides of the cup and ended in tiny purple flowers. I tried to grab it, and my mother told me not to touch it because it might break. However, my grandmother stopped her, sat me down, and handed me the cup to look at. From then on, whenever I visited Grandma, she would give me that cup to drink from. Last year, she died of a stroke at the age of sixty-seven. She left the cup to me to remember her by. I've thought ever since that I would like to learn how the cup was made.

I already knew that my grandmother had begun studying pottery when she was a teenager. She had apprenticed herself to Mr. Hamada, a master potter who used traditional techniques and materials. I also knew that my grandmother's ceramics didn't look anything like Mr. Hamada's, but I didn't know why or how she had moved so far away from the simple designs that her teacher favored.

Since I hadn't often been able to watch my grandmother at work, I needed to find out more about ceramic art. What processes had she used to make her ideas take the shapes of beautiful cups and vases? What had made her choose the delicate designs she painted on her pieces? Could I become a master potter, too? I made a list of questions about ceramics and a list of people who might know what had inspired Grandma's designs. From those lists, I formed my research questions: How are functional ceramics—those that can be used for food and beverages as well as for decoration—made? And what motivated my grandmother to paint flowers on her ceramics? Finding the answers to these questions would make me feel closer to my grandmother, whom I loved very much.

I decided to start my research by visiting the pottery shop that my grandmother once owned. It now belongs to a potter named Claude Mackey, who also makes functional pottery but who, unlike Grandma, uses geometric designs to decorate his work. Mr. Mackey agreed to let me watch him work over a period of several days so that I could see from start to finish how pots, cups, and other ceramics are made. Mr. Mackey even offered to let me try my hand at making pottery.

Because Mr. Mackey had not known my grandmother well and would not be able to tell me what had inspired her painting, I asked my mother where Grandma had gotten her ideas. My conversations with my mother led me to the library to find more information about flower designs. All in all, I found out more than I expected to learn about what it takes to create a piece of usable art and about how artists find inspiration.

THE RESULTS OF MY SEARCH

When I visited Mr. Mackey's pottery shop, I showed him my grandmother's cup. He explained that Grandma's ceramics were made from molds and that the process is called slip casting. He showed me the large sink where he mixes the clay, or slip. The slip is then poured into plaster molds. After a while, the clay around the edge of the mold hardens a bit and the extra clay is poured out of the mold. The ceramic is then taken out of the mold. It is a light gray color and is very soft.

The next step is to carve a design onto the clay using little knives that look like dentist's tools. The design is then painted with special paint that has clay in it. The ceramic is allowed to dry. Then it is placed in a very hot oven, called a kiln. It hardens the ceramic. Finally, the ceramic is coated with a glasslike liquid called a glaze and is baked in the kiln a second time. The whole process takes about five days (Mackey).

After talking to Mr. Mackey, I was still curious about the design on my cup. I asked my mother where Grandma had gotten her ideas for decorating her pottery. Mom explained that, in addition to being a potter, Grandma had studied ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arranging (Kasamoto). She gave me a small box of cards on which Grandma had written the names of certain designs. From those cards I learned that Grandma had modeled the flower designs on her ceramics after her favorite flower

arrangements.

At the library, I found two books on the subject of Japanese flower arranging. One, called Japanese Decorative Arts, was a large picture book. The section on flower arrangements was quite beautiful, but it didn't provide a lot of information. The other, Ikebana (Japanese Flower Arranging) Simplified, demonstrated methods for making different types of ikebana arrangements. While looking through this how-to book, I discovered several illustrations that reminded me of my grandmother's particular style.

My next step was to search the World Wide Web for information about ikebana. I learned that flower arranging is an ancient Japanese art and that people must study ikebana for many years before they master it. The purpose of ikebana is to create an arrangement of flowers and other plants that looks ordered and balanced but not artificial. The arrangement is supposed to look natural, as though it might have happened by accident ("Introduction").

Unlike most Western flower arrangements, ikebana is not symmetrical. It uses natural shapes and empty spaces to create a sense of harmony. Ikebana works might use branches, grasses, fruits—even withered leaves—as well as flowers in bloom. I learned that my grandmother's particular style of ikebana is called moribana, which means "piled up" ("History of Ikebana"). Moribana uses shorter-stemmed flowers arranged in a low container rather than the tall, upright stems found in other styles of ikebana ("Styles of Ikebana").

From my research, I learned the basics about how ceramics are made. I also learned that Grandma had combined the fairly modern, Western pottery-making technique of slip casting with the ancient Japanese art of ikebana to make my cup. Her study of flower arranging had inspired the beautiful paintings she used to decorate her ceramics.

REFLECTIONS ON MY SEARCH

My research was not as time-consuming as I expected it to be, although I did have to go to Mr. Mackey's studio to learn about the pottery-making process. I was able to interview my mother to learn more about Grandma's sources of inspiration. The librarian was very helpful, too, especially in suggest-

ing that I look on the World Wide Web for information about ikebana. Best of all, my research increased my interest in pottery and taught me about ikebana, a part of my Japanese heritage. In the future I plan to study both pottery and ikebana in honor of Grandma and of my heritage. In fact, I am meeting Mr. Mackey next week for my next round of pottery lessons.

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Definition

An **I-Search paper** is a personal research paper about a topic that is important to the writer. An I-Search paper is usually less formal than a traditional research paper; it tells the story of the writer's personal search for information, as well as what the writer learned about the topic.

Many I-Search papers use the structure illustrated in the framework below. Print this framework and use it as a guide when you write your own I-Search paper.

Framework

Directions and Explanations

