Ryan Rood

According to Japanese history, the technique of Raku pottery originated by accident due to one of the country's many natural disasters. During a frantic rebuilding, Korean potters began producing enormous amounts of roofing tiles. They began to use long tongs to remove tiles from the kilns. They discovered that the tiles did not crack or break. The clay had the ability to withstand the shocking move from the hot kiln to the cool air due to its high sand content.

Raku firing is one of the most exciting and rewarding ceramic processes. The more you fire the more you learn. **Raku pottery is not food safe. Raku is meant for decorative purposes only. So do not use Raku pottery for drinking or eating**. Also, unless it has been treated with a water sealant, the interior of Raku pottery will not hold water.

There are many factors that go into how your piece will turn out: the temperature you pull at, the temperature outside that day, how fast you go into the can, how fast the paper ignites, and how quickly you get the flames out when you put the lid on the can. That is all just from pulling the piece from the kiln.

The truth is that it really starts with the glaze you use, how well you apply the glaze, the reduction chamber you use, and how well you prepare it for reduction. All these factors determine how the piece will look. Every time you fire you get to see how well you perform, it is like opening a present to yourself.

-Here is a picture of someone putting their piece into the can from the kiln.-

Firing a Raku kiln involves an open flame and very high temperatures. The flame from the kiln is like a large blowtorch overdosing on steroids. So DO NOT get to close to the kiln because even a split second can cause severe, even life threatening, burns. Both the flame and heat are very unforgiving. So there is not messing around when you are rakuing. So take the proper precautions should be taken to ensure the safety of all involved.

To protect yourself from the flame and heat you need to think about what you are going to wear. Don't wear any baggy/loose fitting clothing - shirts should be tucked in, no dresses (especially if you are a guy), and sleeves should be elastic or buttoned. At a minimum long pants and long sleeve shirts should be worn (which is again fun in 100F degree heat). You should be dressed in a similar way as this woman below.

Make sure your shoes cover your toes, you don't want to drop molten glaze on your bare toes in sandals. Wear boot or thick shoes.

At 100F+ that would leave a nice little mark on foot. Next, if you have long hair, get it put up, either under a hat, ponytail, or what ever. Hair burns REAL quick! You do not want to be bald before you have to.

If you are able (and you should be) you will need to have a fire extinguisher and water source available, like a water hose. Just in case. You never know when an accident will happen or something unexpected will catch on fire.

Always remove pieces using heavy tongs. Don't try to directly grab the piece. Remember your pieces will be RED HOT! To protect your hands and arms use heavy leather welding gloves. To protect your eyes and face from the heat, flame, and smoke a face shield would be a good idea. Have fun and remember think smarter not harder. Take care of yourself and the ones around you. I hope you will enjoy Raku.

Thanks to ASU grad and art major Ryan Rood for this safety lesson for raku firing. I would add a few things:

1) Do NOT use the raku kiln unless you have cleared it with your instructor. You need to get this permission each and every time you use the kiln.
2) Each Ceramics I class gets several demos on how to light a raku kiln, how to turn gas on and off, how to take the ware out of the kiln safely, and other relevant safety procedures. Make sure you are very comfortable with all of this before you even think about asking permission to do your own firing. A summary of these procedures can be found online on my web page (filename is Raku Kiln Operation). -Priscilla Hollingsworth