

Native American Storyteller Sculptures



Introduction: The Cochiti Pueblo are located in north central New Mexico near the city of Albuquerque. One of the more famous Cochiti artists is Helen Cordero. She was born in 1915 in New Mexico. In the late 1950s, she and her cousin, an accomplished potter, began making pottery as an alternative to leather and beadwork. Cordero was never satisfied with her bowls and pitchers, but then her cousin suggested that she try figures instead. In Cordero's words, it was "like a flower blooming." Countless tiny birds and animals and eventually, people came to life. Helen Cordero, of Cochiti Pueblo, New Mexico, created her first storyteller figure when she was 49 years old. She modeled it after her grandfather who told stories about their Native American culture. One of the traditional figurine forms was a seated female figure holding a child, known as the Singing Mother. When Cordero tried her hand at this form, she "kept seeing my grandfather [Santiago Quintana]. That one, he was a really good storyteller, and there was always lots of us grandchildren around him." When she shaped the first portrait of her paternal grandfather, she used the traditional design but made the figure male and placed more than a realistic number of children on him. She called him Storyteller. Between five and thirty figures cling to her sculptures. Following the tradition begun by Helen Cordero, many other artists in Cochiti Pueblo began to create storyteller figures and developed their own styles. Seferina Ortiz created drummers and animals. Other artists created cowboy or acrobatic figures.

The Cochiti Pueblo Indians did not record their stories as we do but passed them orally to their children and grandchildren. Many of the storyteller figures are created with their mouth open and eyes closed as the Native Americans will sing or chant their stories aloud. Native Americans tell stories about creation, how certain plants and animals came to be and stories of legends, history, ceremonies or rituals. Many stories and dances or rituals are ways to honor the earth and nature's way. Other stories tell about family, love, friendship, hunting, and so on. Some songs are performed to aid the deceased in his journey to the next world. There are reputed to be over 500 songs just for this purpose.

Helen Cordero was the first Native American to create storytellers and has sold many of her sculptures. Helen Cordero's storytellers have been exhibited in museums in Canada and the United States and have won many awards including the Governor's award in 1982.

http://www.nea.gov/honors/heritage/fellows/fellow.php?id=1986_03

Target Group: Grade 4-5

Goal (Terminal Objective): Students will learn clay building techniques and apply creative problem solving to complete a storyteller sculpture based on the artwork of the Native American Indians. Students will read about the background history associated with storytellers and write about their own storyteller sculpture. Students will also learn how to combine shapes to achieve new ones and to utilize tools to add texture to their artwork. Students will choose symbols and images to express their ideas and feelings.

Objective: Students will demonstrate their understanding of the clay building techniques by creating a ceramic storyteller, which also exhibits their knowledge of sculptural techniques and handling of tools to show texture.

National Standards:

Visual Arts Grades 5-8 Content Standard 1: Understanding and applying media techniques, and processes

Visual Arts Grades 5-8 Content Standard 2: Using knowledge of structure and functions
Visual Arts Grades 5-8 Content Standard 3: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

Visual Arts Grades 5-8 Content Standard 4 Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.

Visual Arts Grades 5-8 Content Standard 5: Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others.

Visual Arts Grades 5-8 Content Standard 6: Making connections between Visual Arts and other disciplines

Purpose: Students will look at, read, and write about examples of works of art by the Cochiti Pueblo Indians for inspiration (Reading/Writing Integration) (Social Studies/ History Integration). Students will apply their knowledge and create an original ceramic storyteller sculpture. Students will visually demonstrate knowledge of elements of art in their original choices of shapes/forms, to complete their sculpture. Students will identify and use different types of clay building techniques such as: the pinch pot, coil and additive methods.

New Vocabulary: clay, ceramic, Cochiti Pueblo, story teller, symbols, Native American, pinch pot, coil, additive, score, modeling stick, texture, terracotta, acrylic paint

Materials:

the following Sargent Art supplies:



#66-5421 Sargent Art Acrylic Paint



#22-1530 Classic Broad Tip Markers peggable carton



#22-3001 Terracotta Air-Hardening Clay



#22-7244 144 ct. Graphite Pencils

Time: approximately 2-3 class periods (50 – 60 minutes)

Instruction and Motivation (Set):

- A. Teacher will show examples of student completed storyteller sculptures.
- B. Teacher will have students read the background history on Storytellers.
- C. Teacher can share book on Helen Cordero and the Cochiti Pueblo.
- D. The teacher will demonstrate how to build the storyteller using the two pinch pots, the coil method, and the additive method of clay building. Teacher will discuss texture, demonstrate how to utilize various tools to create texture, and have students give examples of texture.

Resources: Book- Helen Cordero and the Storytellers of the Cochiti Pueblo



Teacher photo

Example from the National Museum of the American Indian Wash., D.C

Instruction:

- 1) Students will brainstorm ideas about what type of storyteller and listening figures they would like to make and begin a sketch of their sculpture. Teacher should have students label the back of their papers with their names using a pencil. They should think of family members such as grandparents or parents who have told them a story. Students should think about what position they were in, sitting, leaning, lying down, etc. They should think what the story might be about -- what family or holiday traditions they could incorporate into their sculptures such as birthdays, holidays, or gaining a new family member or pet?



2) After dampening hands, students will form a ball with the clay. Then they will form two pinch pots.

Forming a Pinch Pot



**Step
1**

Press your thumb in the center of the ball. Place fingers around the bottom of the ball and gently press, moving the ball in a circle. Use equal pressure.



**Step
2**

Move your fingers to the middle of the ball. Gently press into the clay while moving the ball in a circle.



**Step
3**

Move your fingers to the top of the ball. Gently press into the clay while moving the ball in a circle.

3) After two equal pinch pots are formed, then roll out a coil piece of clay and attach.



Form two pinch pots of approximately the same size.



Place one pot on top of the other. Join both securely with a coil, pulling clay down with your thumb to seal. Smooth thoroughly.



4) Roll out a ball of clay and attach for a head at the top of the uppermost pinch pot.



Form a ball and attach to make the head.



Roll coils for arms and thicker coils for legs and attach securely. Form hands and feet.

5) Roll out two coils of equal thickness for the arms and legs. Attach by scoring or scratching into the clay and moistening before adding the coils.

Forming the Smaller Figures

Model clay into the form of a wide bowling pin. Make cuts for arms and legs.



Use the pinch and pull technique to form and pose the limbs.

6) Form clay into a bowling pin shape -- wider at the bottom than the top. Use a modeling stick, or popsicle stick, to make the limbs. Position smaller figures, then score and attach.



Lesson 2: Students will personalize their storytellers by applying facial features, details, colors, textures and patterns. Student may use paint or markers to add color.



Activities:

(1) Guided Practice:

- a. Students view and discuss examples of artwork representing storytellers that utilize basic clay building techniques.
- b. Students discuss ways to add texture using a variety of tools.
- c. Students demonstrate their technical ability to work in a three-dimensional manner to achieve an original storyteller figure.

(2) Independent Practice and Check for Understanding:

- a. Teacher will circulate and help students with design questions. Teacher may make suggestions to students to combine shapes or to add art elements.
- b. Teacher may offer individual help with combining or attaching forms smoothly and evenly and effective use of shapes.

(3) Closure:

- a. Teacher leads students in a discussion of what clay building techniques and textures each student used to create their original storyteller figure. Teacher will inquire why students chose various shapes/symbols and encourage students to further discuss and assess the works of others created in the class.
- b. Students may take a gallery walk to view the works of others in the class.

Evaluation:

Level One -- The finished design very successfully demonstrates the student's understanding of a storyteller figure. The student has shown strong technical skills in their use of clay building techniques and use of shapes or texture. The student has shown a high level of creativity in completing the motif with original detail. Craftsmanship is outstanding.

Level Two -- The finished sculpture demonstrates the student's understanding of a storyteller figure. The student has shown good technical skills in his/her use of clay building techniques and

use of shapes or texture. The student has shown creativity in completing the motif with original detail. Craftsmanship is good.

Level Three -- The finished sculpture demonstrates effort on the student's part to show his/her understanding of a storyteller figure. The student has shown little technical skill in his/her use of shapes or clay building techniques. The student has shown limited creativity in completing the motif with any detail. There is only one listening figure. Craftsmanship is minimal.

Level Four -- The finished sculpture lacks evidence of the student's understanding of a storyteller figure. There is no technical skill shown in his/her use of shapes or use of clay building techniques. There are no listening figures included or texture evident. The student's final project lacks creativity and craftsmanship.

Extension: Students could be asked to create a companion story teller for a different visual effect. In addition, students could be asked to choose just one animal and use it repeatedly in different sizes.

Resources:

http://www.native-potterylink.com/Pueblo_Pottery_Page_Nine.htm#PF62tag Pueblo Pottery website from New Mexico

National Museum of the American Indian

http://www.nea.gov/honors/heritage/fellows/fellow.php?id=1986_03

Background info. on Helen Cordero and the Cochiti Pueblo

Pueblo Stories and Storytellers by Mark Bahti.

Helen Cordero and the Storytellers of Cochiti Pueblo. Book by Nancy Howard. Davis Publications 1995

The Pueblo Storyteller: Development of a Figurative Ceramic Tradition. Phoenix, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1990. Book by Barbara Babcock

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