

Totems of the Northwest Pacific

Students will explore the cultural context for the sculpture of the Native Americans of the Northwest Pacific Coast by creating a three-dimensional replica of a totem.



Target Grade: 8

Goal (Terminal Objective): Students will become aware of variations of media, techniques, and processes used by a cultural group to communicate ideas, concepts, and narratives.

Objective:

Students will demonstrate the ability to organize knowledge and ideas for the expression and production of art. Students will identify the sources for art expression and describe the processes artists use in developing their ideas. The student will be able to explain the relevance of local materials when generating regional art works.

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 structures 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 6: Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines. **Social Studies Cross Curriculum Connection**

Purpose:

Students will become aware of variations of media, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas. Students will discuss the importance of nature on the art of the Native Americans as they discuss cultural and artistic influences found in specific environments. Students will explain the use of the totems as visual symbols of clans and families as they communicated tribal history, legends, and traditions. Students will understand the relationship of primitive art to the major cultural forces of daily life.

Students will design a totem image representing an aspect of their character or representational of a special event happening during the school year.

New Vocabulary: art forms, sculpture, representational, symbol, cult, clan, culture, spiritual, ritual, ceremony, motif, pattern, environment, stylized, personify

Materials:

Matt board, cardboard, coffee cans, paper towels, or newspaper



#22-8815 Acrylic Matte Medium



#22-8808 Acrylic Gloss & Varnish



#22-8801 Gesso, Extra Thick



#22-1103 Craft Glue

Time:

This lesson may be modified from three to six hours, depending upon the size and complexity of expectations.

Introduction and Motivation (Set):

View examples of the totems of the Pacific Northwest Native Americans. View videos or photos of the geographic region of the Pacific Northwest Native Americans as well as areas in Canada and Alaska. Specific areas of Alaska are Totem Bight State Park, Ketchikan or Saxman Indian Village. Locate various related geographic areas on a map. Study examples. Pose questions such as: What colors are used? What characteristics of the totem suggest the properties of the animal. Describe them. What kinds of shapes are used?

Describe the facial features. What kinds of lines are used? How is color used to emphasize the design? Does the design evoke fear, anger, humor? Can it be construed as benevolent, powerful, or protective?

Discuss background information about Northwest Coast tribes such as location, climate, natural resources, economy, and ceremonies and rituals.

Discuss the importance of totems as a symbol of clan identification, personification of animal traits to symbolize human traits, ancestor worship, family crests, and/or ceremonial props.

Discuss the concept of Totemism as belief that men were closely related to certain animals or mythological beings.

Stress that totems are not now and have never been “idols” or objects of worship. Instead they represent stories, or designate clans or lineage of the owners.

Discuss the construction of the totem following the basic form of a large tree trunk.

Identify abstract and realistic designs used in the totem. Identify which figures are sitting or standing, and how the forms are stylized.

Discuss the placement of the completed totem in honored positions as horse posts and mortuary posts.

Instruction:

Teacher demonstration of totem construction and paper mache techniques.

Students will split into several groups, research totems focusing on stylized characteristics.

Teacher will demonstrate rendering of animal features and transposing those two-dimensional renderings into three-dimensional structures on the sculptural example.

Note the basic design elements such as the form line (*strong contoured line which structures the design, usually painted in black*), the ovoid (*a rounded rectangle*), the U form, the split U form, and the S form. Students discuss symmetry in facial design.

Activities:

(1) Guided Practice:

1. Students create a sketch of the totem.* Using their sketches* as inspiration, students will cover a coffee can with strips of paper mache. *Paper Mache: Make mixture of 1 part Sargent white glue to $\frac{3}{4}$ part water, dip brush into glue water mixture and paint on the can, lay a strip of paper towel onto the can's surface and brush over with mixture. Allow to dry.*



2. Students use standardized features to distinguish one animal from another.* Using masking tape, apply pieces of cardboard or mat board to covered can to simulate facial features, such as beak, ears, wings, etc. Cover with a second coat of paper mache. Allow to dry and cover with a coat of Sargent Gesso.

3. Students will fill the void of their design with pattern. Use dark marker to create designs on surface. Paint large areas of sculpture using Sargent Acrylic Paint. Paint features of sculpture. Outline specific features with dark paint using thick and thin lines.



4. Apply Sargent Matt Medium to protect surface.



(2) Independent Practice and Check for Understanding: Teacher circulates among the working students visually recording students demonstrating an understanding of the objectives and utilizing proper techniques. Teacher provides reinforcement.

(3) Closure: Students record either by checklist or writing prompt, the symbols used, the connection to the exemplar and the innovations they provided to the piece.* Students will generate a title for the sculpture and compose a paragraph about the characteristics chosen to illustrate the totem.

Evaluation:

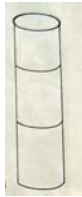
Level One -- The finished sculpture very successfully demonstrates the student's understanding of the importance of nature on the art of the Native American. The student can successfully explain the use of the totems as visual symbols of clans and families as they communicated tribal history, legends, and traditions as well as the relationship of primitive art to the major cultural forces of daily life. The student has very successfully designed a totem image representing an aspect of their character or representational of a special event happening during the school year.

Level Two -- The finished sculpture shows a good understanding of the student's knowledge of the importance of nature on the art of the Native American. The student can successfully explain the use of the totems as visual symbols of clans and families as they communicated tribal history, legends, and traditions as well as the relationship of primitive art to the major cultural forces of daily life. The finished sculpture shows a good use of technical skills in a totem image representing an aspect of their character or representational of a special event happening during the school year.

Level Three --The student demonstrates limited understanding of the importance of nature on the art of the Native American. The student can provide limited explanation of the use of the totems as visual symbols of clans and families as they communicated tribal history, legends, and traditions as well as the relationship of primitive art to the major cultural forces of daily life. The finished totem shows little technical skill. Craftsmanship and effort is minimal.

Level Four -- The student demonstrates no understanding of the importance of nature on the art of the Native American. The student cannot explain the use of the totems as visual symbols of clans and families as they communicated tribal history, legends, and traditions as well as the relationship of primitive art to the major cultural forces of daily life. The finished totem shows poor technical skill. Craftsmanship and effort is poor.

Extension: Surface may have three-dimensional objects glued onto it as a relief design. Students may assemble their sculptures together to create a large totem.



***Sketchbook extension**

Resources:

<http://www.native-languages.org/totem.htm>

<http://www.manataka.org/page30.html> <http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1985/6/85.06.01.x.html> <http://www.video.ca/video.php?id=1966008664>

BY JANE STRICKER
Art Consultant