

Wandering Western Chests
Native American Crate

Teacher Lesson Plans, Grades 3 – 5



1700 Northeast 63rd Street
Oklahoma City, OK 73111
(405) 478-2250
nationalcowboymuseum.org



Native American Crate Contents

Schedule Your Class Visit to the Museum!

The National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum offers a variety of on-site programs focusing on Native Americans. These programs were specifically created for grades K – 12 as an extension of the Native American Crate. Museum docents conduct facilitated programs to engage students and reinforce curriculum. You may also bring students for a self-directed tour. Please call or email to discuss the best fit for your class: **(405) 478-2250 ext. 264** or **education@nationalcowboymuseum.org**.

We look forward to seeing you and your students soon!



The End of the Trail (1915), by James Earle Fraser; plaster.
Museum purchase. (1968.01.01)

National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum

1700 Northeast 63rd Street

Oklahoma City, OK 73111

Monday – Saturday, 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.,

Sunday, Noon – 5:00 p.m.

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nationalcowboymuseum.org

Crate Inventory

Lesson Plans

- ☐ Symbols and Pictographs
- ☐ “Reading” Art and Artifacts

Artifact Reproductions*

- ☐ Animal Pelts (4): beaver, fox, rabbit, ermine
- ☐ Beaded Bag
- ☐ Beaded Rosette
- ☐ Buffalo Horn
- ☐ Moccasins
- ☐ Porcupine Quills
- ☐ Stone Scraper
- ☐ Feathers (3): pheasant, turkey, faux eagle
- ☐ Quilled Medicine Wheel
- ☐ Woven Textile, Basket
- ☐ Pottery

*Educator: Some objects are fragile or may be sharp.
Instruct students to handle objects gently.

Books

- ☐ *Jingle Dancer* by Cynthia Leitich Smith
- ☐ *Doesn't Fall Off His Horse* by Virginia A. Stroud
- ☐ *Gift Horse: A Lakota Story* by S.D. Nelson
- ☐ *Meet Christopher: An Osage Indian Boy From Oklahoma* by Genevieve Simermeyer

Images/Reproduction Artwork On Foam Core

- ☐ *Smoke Talk*, Charles M. Russell, oil on canvas, 1924
- ☐ *Teller of Tales*, Martin Grelle, oil on canvas, 2002
- ☐ *The Hand Warmer*, Tom Lovell, oil on canvas, 1973
- ☐ *Comanche Warrior*, Silver Horn, Ledger paper and colored pencils, ca. 1890s
- ☐ *Morning of a New Day*, Henry Farny, oil on canvas, 1906
- ☐ *Corn Dance*, Tonita Pena, watercolor on paper, n.d.

Lesson Plan Resources

- ☐ Symbol Cards
- ☐ Buffalo Skin Outline (make copies as needed)
- ☐ Sample Pictographs (make copies as needed)
- ☐ Reading an Object Question Cards
- ☐ Swift Bear's Winter Count

Introduction

Goal

Before it was the “West,” this land was home to millions of indigenous peoples. Native American artistic traditions, rich with symbolism, often relate stories important to a particular tribe or culture. This crate features Native American’s relationship to place, the present-day life-ways impacted by harvest cycles, seasonal celebrations, rites of passage, and relationships to the land and the animals in it. Through art and artifacts, learners are exposed to enduring traditions through artists and artisans, working in a wide variety of media, continuing to express themselves, revealing the West to the rest of the world.

Background Information

Native and Artistic Traditions

At the time of early European settlement in the 1500s, an estimated 12 million Native people, comprising more than 500 distinct tribes, populated the Americas. Major differences in language and cultural tradition existed between tribes, and subtle divergence could be found within smaller groups or bands within a tribe. These cultural and linguistic differences often proved as distinct as those of established nations today.

Prior to the 19th century, most Native American tribes lived in the same general geographical area for centuries. The tribes within “cultural regions” resembled each other to some degree in their social, political, economical and religious views, and in their historical experiences. Some tribes lived off the resources within a defined area, while other tribes followed the seasonal migration of wildlife within the larger confines of the region. These geographical and cultural boundaries tended to be fluid, ever changing, and adapting to influences within and outside tribal groups and the regions themselves.

Artistic expression among all Native peoples developed long before the first Europeans arrived. Native artists produced painted and incised motifs and images on rock walls, elegant ceramic pottery, and carved stone effigies dating back thousands of years. Aesthetic norms played an integral part in the creation of virtually all functional, utilitarian items. Particular designs, styles, and materials delineated tribal identity. Artistic expression and craftsmanship were a part of traditional life for both men and women, divided along established lines of social and religious custom. Skills and knowledge, as well as particular patterns and motifs, were passed down from one generation to the next within given extended families.

Western settlement had a profound impact on Indian lands and traditional lifeways. By the end of the 19th century, many tribes were moved to different regions. Several Eastern and Southeastern tribes were relocated onto the Southern Plains. Items once created for functional purposes by Native artisans now were produced for an ever-increasing tourist market. However, traditional items

also maintained an important role within many tribes as tangible forms of identity and cultural awareness.

Language

Native Americans were present long before European explorers arrived. Native Americans did not communicate through writing. Instead, they told stories (oral histories) and created pictures and symbols. This type of communication is not unique to Native Americans, as long before writing was developed people around the world recorded events, ideas, plans, maps, and feelings by drawing pictures and symbols on rocks, hides, and other surfaces.

Historic pictorial symbols for a word or a phrase have been found dating to before 3000 BC. These symbols, called pictographs, are created by painting on rock surfaces with natural pigments. These natural pigments included iron oxides found in hematite or limonite, white or yellow clays, and soft rock, charcoal, and copper minerals. These natural pigments were mixed to produce a palette of yellow, white, red, green, black, and blue.

Native American symbols were like words and often had one or more definitions and/or contained different connotations. Varying from tribe to tribe, it can be difficult to know the meanings of some, while other symbols are clear. With the multiple languages spoken by Native American tribes, symbols or “picture writing” was often used to convey words and ideas. Symbols were also used to decorate homes, painted on buffalo hides, and recorded important events of the tribe. These images are a valuable record of cultural expression and can hold profound spiritual significance for contemporary Native Americans.

Native Lifeways

Native cultures during historic times were defined by two major lifeways – the nomadic hunters and the semi-sedentary horticulturalists. The most prominent nomadic lifeway icons for tribes like the Kiowa, Comanche, Lakota, Nez Perce, and others were the tipi and the horse. Long before the introduction of the horse, however, dogs were integral to the mobile life. They were an essential part of seasonal hunts and served as “beasts of burden” carrying up to 50 pounds of personal belongings, camp gear, food, or bison robes on travois (a type of sled dragged by an animal). Tribes would sometimes relocate up to 200 miles between camps.

In contrast, the Caddo, Hopi, Yokut, Wichita, Navajo, and Mandan tribes were noted for their large grass, earthen or wooden lodges, and advanced agricultural practices. In addition to durable items of rawhide and leather, sedentary tribes produced more fragile items like pottery and basketry for storage. Commerce and trade between the nomadic and semi-sedentary groups were common with hides, meats, suet, and other materials being exchanged for pottery, baskets, blankets, moccasins, melons, and beans.

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The Horse and Changing Lifeways

Except for the arrival of European settlers, the horse had the most profound impact on Native traditions and lifeways, particularly among tribes in the West. The first horses appeared on the Plains during the 1540s with early Spanish explorers. Within 200 years, adaptation to this new mode of transportation spread to most of the Plains and Plateau tribes. Tribes in the Southwest and far West did not directly adopt the new "horse culture," but were influenced by it nonetheless. Ease of travel and more efficient ways of hunting proved the most significant impacts on Plains Indian life. As a result, tribal territories also changed, and new political and economic alliances formed.



Ho-Chunk (Winnebago), Bandler Bag, 1885,
The Arthur and Shifra Silberman Collection, 1997.7.79

Horses were highly revered and commonly received ornate decorative trappings such as beaded or quilled masks, necklaces, and even feathered headdresses. Saddles fashioned from wood, elk horn, and rawhide were made mostly for women and children. Metal bits, commercially made bridles, wool saddle blankets, and other items often accompanied horses from one trade source to another. Some equestrian items were adapted or modified from the Spanish, such as ropes, bridles, quirts, and stirrups, while other items like spurs were rejected by Native horsemen. By the late 19th century, ornately decorated saddle bags or rump drapes, breast collars, and other items were produced for special occasions such as Fourth of July parades and rodeos.

The Symbolic Meaning of a Native American Headdress

When most people think of Indian headdresses they think of the full eagle-feathered war bonnet. This is typically seen in movies, and it is the best-known type of Indian headdress. The Sioux or Pawnee were likely one of the first tribes to use these headpieces. The Native American headdress was often worn only by the wealthiest and influential tribe members.

Commonly used feathers came from crows, hawks, and eagles. In many Native American cultures, the golden eagle feather was a mark of an honored warrior; the eagle was considered a messenger from God. Young Indian boys had to prove they were brave enough to be worthy of wearing an eagle feather in their hair. An eagle feather was never given to a boy, but had to be earned. A feather may be received ceremonially, found or passed down.

An Indian warrior earned a feather for each courageous act he accomplished. The braver the acts he completed, the more feathers he earned. Each feather had special meaning to the warrior, and binding feathers together into a headdress was particularly meaningful.

There are many different styles of headdresses, and tribes could often be identified by the shape or color of their distinctive headdress. Different types of feathers were symbolic of different roles within the community. All Indian headdresses could be considered works of art. A headdress was deeply meaningful to the wearer and was an extension of his beliefs. Native Americans believed a person acquired the powers of an animal or bird by taking part of it to wear or carry. Wearing a headdress made of eagle feathers was believed to be a way to gather wisdom and duplicate the eagles power and strength.

The Museum does not advocate educators or students making headdresses; these art projects demean the sacred and reinforce stereotypes.

Introduction



Eagle Feather Headdress, Blackfoot Nation, attributed, ca. 1910, 1991.01.0495.

Continuing Traditions

Native American artistic expression reflects both tradition and change – tradition in the sense of being grounded by tribal history, culture, and other aspects defining the individual. Each generation is tied to the past, but each also represents change through adaptation to new environments and opportunities. The introduction of glass beads more than two centuries ago radically altered the way Native artisans embellished both utilitarian and ceremonial items, redefining what was, or is, traditional. Contemporary artists often push boundaries, incorporating innovative designs and using new materials. Some artists continue working within traditional tribal arts and crafts, while others incorporate patterns, designs, and objects from other tribes and regions, or from outside the culture entirely. What once was created for purely utilitarian or ceremonial use is now also being produced for commercial markets and fine arts collectors. Today a vibrant, diverse, and highly creative Native American art community continues the traditions of past generations in evolving change and adaptation.

Helpful Vocabulary and Terminology

Items included in the trunk are highlighted in red.

Artifact - An object created or altered by humans from another place or time, or a piece of material culture representing a person, place, and time

Buffalo Horn - They are not cleaned or polished and are in their natural state. Buffalo horns were traditionally used to make spoons, ladles, and, buffalo horn bonnets.

Communication - The successful conveying or sharing of ideas and feelings.

Culture - The beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time

Ermine Pelt - The fur of a stoat, a short-tailed weasel. In summer the ermine is brown with a whitish throat, chest, and belly. In colder climates the winter coat is white except for the black tail tip.

Ledger Art - Nineteenth-century Plains Indian drawings made with pencil, ink, and watercolor on pages of old ledger or account books. Some of the best-known ledger art was created at Fort Marion in Saint Augustine, Florida. See image Comanche Warrior.

Moccasins - A heelless shoe made entirely of soft leather, such as deerskin, with the sole brought up and attached to a piece of u-shaped leather on top of the foot. Worn originally by American Indians.

Oral Tradition - A community's cultural and historical traditions passed down by word of mouth or example from one generation to another without written instruction.

Pictograph - An image, usually simple in form, used to symbolize a word or phrase.

Porcupine Quills - Modified hairs coated with thick plates of keratin and embedded in the skin. Quills were folded, twisted, wrapped, plaited, and sewn using a wide range of techniques to decorate articles of clothing, bags, knife sheaths, baskets, wooden handles, and pipe stems.

Quilled Medicine Wheel - Wrapped with real porcupine quillwork. Used for hair ornaments or decoration on hats, shields, bags, etc.

Stone Scraper - Stone that is sharpened on one edge and left blunt on other edges to allow grasping; used to clean animal hides.

Symbol - An action, object, or event expressing or representing a particular idea or quality; something that stands for or suggests something else by reason of relationship.

Trade - The act of exchanging one thing for another.

Lesson Plan #1

Symbols and Pictographs

Students will learn about pictographs — images that are substituted for words. Many Native tribes did not have a written language like is utilized today; instead, they communicated using oral traditions — talking and telling stories, and by using drawings or symbols. The symbols represented something to the person utilizing the drawing. It was a way for people to keep their history and record important events. The use of drawings differed between individuals, tribes, and cultures. Analyzing symbols encourages students to look at the broader world around them to see how they are used in everyday life and recognize how different symbols can mean the same thing to different cultures.

Time Required: 30 – 45 minutes

Subject Areas: history, social studies, visual arts, English language arts

Learning Objectives

After completing this lesson plan, students will be able to:

1. Identify symbols and how they are used
2. Create their own symbols
3. Create an original narrative using art and artifacts
4. Share stories with classmates/family

Instructional Steps for Educator

1. At the beginning of the lesson, discuss the idea of communication with the class. Ask how people in our culture communicate ideas — let the students brainstorm ways. Explain that Native Americans did not communicate through writing; instead, they told stories and created pictures. Introduce the terms “symbol” and “pictograph.” Show students the laminated symbol cards and have them identify the images. Discuss how they know what the image is without it containing words. Show them Swift Bear’s Winter Count as an example of how some Native cultures keep their history.
2. Show the students samples of pictographs. Draw each on the board and prompt the class to guess what each pictograph represents. Ask the students to design their own pictographs for items or ideas that would be meaningful to them. For example: basketball, school, homework, sadness, happiness, anger, etc. Have students

try drawing pictographs for these on scratch paper.

3. Give each student a copy of the buffalo paper “skin.” Carefully cut or tear along the edges of the skin. Next, have the students crumple their paper into a ball and then smooth it out again. Explain that their paper now resembles buffalo hide.

Write a few sentences for the class to translate into pictographs. These sentences should be Native American themed, but avoid using stereotypes. Some example sentences: “Grandmother built our home.” Or the more complex, “Father hunted the buffalo on a stormy day.”

Instruct the class to design their own pictographs to communicate the sentences written on the board. Students will draw these pictographs onto their buffalo paper. After students have finished, have them share the different images they have used for the same words.

Assessment:

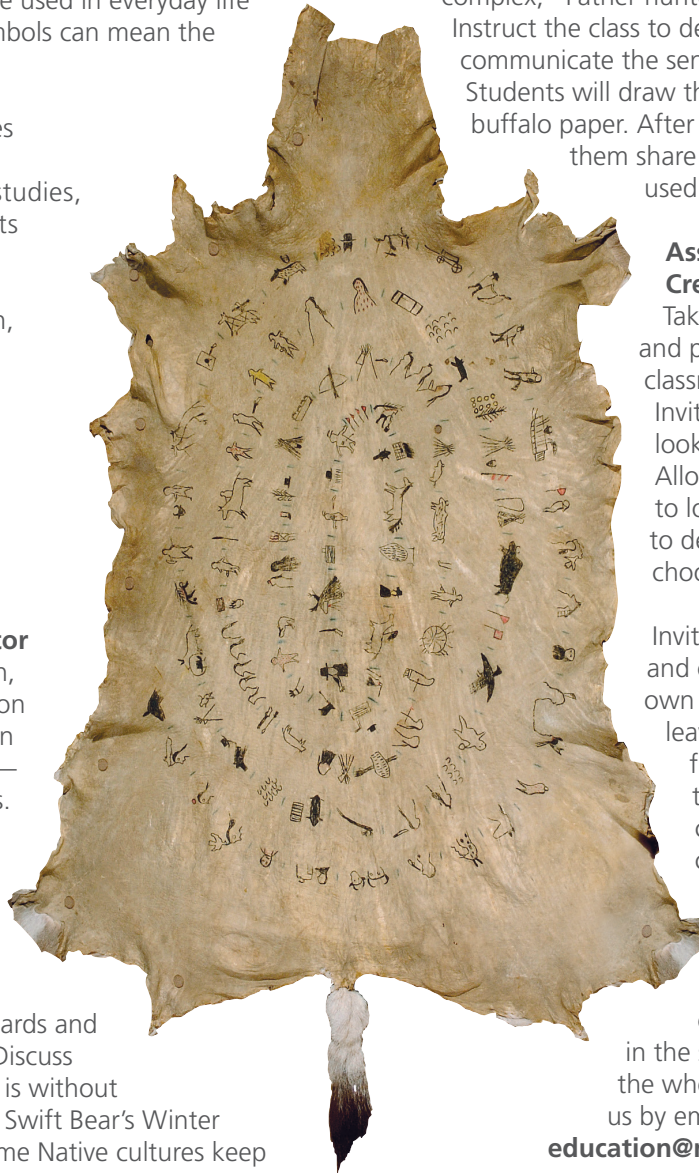
Creative Writing Activity

Take all items out of the crate and place them in the front of the classroom for all students to see. Invite the students to take a close look at the objects and images. Allow the students a few minutes to look at and touch the objects to decide which ones they want to choose for their stories.

Invite students to pick one image and one trunk item to craft their own pictograph story. They must leave the image and object at the front of the room during writing, though, so if more than one child selects the same item they can all still see it while writing.

Allow enough time for the students to write their own narratives utilizing an image as a starting point, and an object that features prominently in the story. Stories can be shared with the whole class. Share the stories with us by emailing

[education@nationalcowboymuseum.org!](mailto:education@nationalcowboymuseum.org)



The Swift Bear Winter Count, by Singlewood. Brule band Lakota, ca. 1899. Gift of Dr. Forrest G. Bratley in memory of Jesse H. Bratley, National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum. 1992.19.

Lesson Plan #2

“Reading” Art and Artifacts

Time Required: 60 minutes

Subject Areas: history, social studies, visual arts, English language arts

Learning Objectives

After completing this lesson plan, students will be able to:

1. Identify Native objects used in daily life
2. Understand how to “read” an artifact or art reproduction
3. Create an original narrative utilizing items from the crate as inspiration

Instructional Steps for Educator

1. Break the classroom into small groups for object study and interpretation. Set out the artifacts included in the crate so they can be seen by all students. Assign one item from the crate for each group to study and assess: stone scraper, moccasins, porcupine quills, parfleche bag, etc. Discuss what an artifact is (an object created or altered by humans from another place or time, or a piece of material culture that represents a person, place, and time) and explain how these artifacts are reproductions, meaning they do not have historic value. Describe what “reading” an artifact means – the students become detectives using their senses to decode clues about their object so they can make an assessment. Allow the groups a few minutes to review the following questions (available on the Reading an Object Question cards in the crate):

- What kind of an object do you have?
- What material(s) is it made of?
- Where did it come from? How can you tell?
- Where was it used? Think about environment, location, etc.
- How was it used?
- Do we have anything of similar use today? If so, what?

Invite each group to report back their object assessments while you write the objects and ideas on the board. (10 – 15 minutes)

2. Have each small group select one of the reproduced mounted art images to discuss with the class. Facilitate a student-led, open-ended conversation about these pieces utilizing the following questions to strengthen the students’ visual literacy: (20 minutes)

What is going on in this image? (Do not tell them what it is about; let them come to the conclusion after careful observation and sharing of ideas.)

What do you see that makes you say that? (Require support for their statements – **DESCRIBE** something the artist tells us Native Americans might have valued from clues in this painting. What do you **SEE** to support that statement?)

What more can we find? (Encourage the students to keep digging by looking and looking again to find more in the images.)

Ask the students to continue being detectives and to search for other clues. What are some items you notice in the paintings we have not discussed yet? List them off on the board. To finish this section, ask the students why/how visual art can aid us in reading artifacts. (15 minutes)

3. Read one of the books to the class aloud. Afterward, ask questions about the portrayal of the Native American in the story. Help the students connect the depiction of the Native American in the story to aspects of their own lives. What are some of the similarities? (20 minutes)

Assessment: Creative Writing Activity

Place all items and images out in the front of the classroom so all students can see them. Invite the students to take a close look at the objects and images. Allow the students a few minutes to look at and touch the objects to select one item they did not discuss in the group activity.

Ask each student to write a short opinion piece on why the object or image they selected captures the real-life experience of a Native American, incorporating a brief explanation of the object or image. These opinion pieces can be shared with the whole class or read by the teacher. Share these writing samples with us by emailing education@nationalcowboymuseum.org!

Optional Follow-up/Additional Assessment

Facilitate a student-led, open-ended discussion about James Earle Fraser’s statue, *The End of the Trail*. While on a field trip to the Museum spend time with your students reading the sculpture: What is going on? What do you say that makes you say that? Require students to support their answers. Utilize the online lesson plan for *The End of the Trail* at nationalcowboymuseum.org/learn-discover/online-unit-studies/end-of-the-trail-introduction/ for additional pre- or post-visit curriculum.

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Galleries to Visit for Teacher-Guided Exploration:

Native American Gallery
Arthur and Shifra Silberman Gallery of Native American Art
The Joe Grandee Museum of the Frontier West
Robert and Grace Eldridge Prix de West® Gallery



Robert Glenn Rapp
Foundation

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