

Totem Poles of Alaska

Developed by: Terrie Hanke 2006 TOTT™ and Jean Sandrock

Discipline: Art integrated with Social Studies and Language Arts

Topic: Traditional art form of the Pacific Northwest

Grade Level: 5th and above

Resources / References / Materials Teacher Needs:

Alaska Geographic. *Native Cultures in Alaska*, Vol.23, Num 2, 1996.

Toni Daller. *SchoolArts*, “Silent Sentinels,” February 1999, pg 39.

Erin Ryan MacPhee. *Arts & Activities*, “Totems – Symbols of the Pacific Northwest,” January 1994, Pg 40.

Hunt, W. Ben. *The Complete Book of Indian Crafts and Lore*, Golden Press, NY, 1976. Pg 103.

Brindze, Ruth. *The Totem Pole*, Vanguard Press, NY, 1951.

Various Internet references – search Totem Poles or Totem Lessons

sample site - <http://rbcml.rbcm.gov.bc.ca/totems/totems1b.html>

Pictures and examples of Totem Poles

Supply List:

Understructure – gallon plastic milk jugs, heavy cardboard tubes, lighter cardboard tubes, PVC, 4x4 wood

Cardboard, egg cartons, plastic containers to create noses, ears, etc.

Masking tape, glue & hot glue gun

Heavy duty scissors

Paper Towels

Papier-mâché

Ice cream buckets for mixing papier-mâché

Tempera Paint and brushes

Beads, feathers, wire, pipe cleaners, etc.

Newspaper and plastic sheets for drying

Infrastructure if necessary to prevent toppling (volleyball standard) or sand for bottom milk jug.

Lesson Summary: In conjunction with Native American studies, students will create Totem Poles, an art form of the Pacific Northwest Coastal Indians. The papier-mâché sculpture project commences with a review of what has been learned in the classroom about the Pacific Northwest tribes followed by viewing samples and/or pictures of their artworks. Totem poles and their symbolism for the family or clan become the focus of the students. Small groups of students are formed to represent a “class clan” which then cooperatively plans the totem they wish to use to tell their history or story. With planning complete, construction begins with each student being responsible for one animal of the Totem. Once the individual animals are complete, they are joined together to create the clan’s Totem Pole. English classes can join the project in asking the students to create a descriptive narrative of the meaning of the totem or the construction process. Integration with Social Studies and Language Arts will enhance the studies of each area. The mushers and Iditarod race fans in the Bering Sea coastal villages will see totems of the Pacific Northwest Coastal Indians.

Standard’s Addressed: Wisconsin Model Academic Standards for Art & Design

B.4.1 – Understand that cultures throughout history have used art to communicate ideas.

B.4.3 – Know that designed objects relate to specific times, places and cultures.

E.4.1 – Communicate basic ideas by producing studio art forms such as sculpture.

E.4.3 – Communicate basic ideas by producing popular images and objects such as folk art.

E.4.5 – Use the visual arts to express ideas that cannot be expressed by words alone

H.4.4 – Create three-dimensional forms with paper, clay and other materials.

Learning objectives:

1. Know the place of Totem Poles in Native American Culture.
2. Work cooperatively as a clan to design a Totem Pole.
3. Produce animals to correspond to the clan story.
4. Assemble the clan Totem Pole.

Assessment:

The students will -

1. Be able to explain the history and significance to Totem Poles.

2. Create a finished “clan” Totem Pole that stands, is aesthetic and shows balance in structure form and color.

The teacher will -

3. Observe cooperative group work to include fair sharing and helping classmates.

Procedural Activities

Session 1) Discuss or review history of Totems, show samples/pictures of real totems, discuss animal characters.

Create clan groups of 4 – 6 students, discuss animals, outstanding characteristics, order and colors

Session 2) Meet and decide which animals to include, who is responsible for each animal, order of animals, which animals will have relief features, create a sketch of the totem, determine colors.

Session 3) Create individual animals from understructure to adding features. Don't forget wings.

Session 4 and 5) Papier-mâché over featured understructure with 2 coats over entire animal. Cover tables with newspaper. Dry animals on plastic sheets with none touching.

Session 6) Paint animals with tempera paint.

Session 7) Assemble totem, placing animals in order (head spirit at top) over stable infrastructure. Tape together with masking tape then papier-mâché over joints. Let dry.

Session 8) Paint joints with tempera paint. Add finishing touches such as beads, feathers, wire, pipe cleaners, etc.

Materials Students Need:

Sketch of their personal Totem character.

Technology Utilized to Enhance Learning:

Web search for information on Totems characteristics and designs of animals. With prior knowledge, use a paint program to sketch their character.

Other Information

Materials for the understructure can vary. Cardboard carpet tubes can be cut in uniform lengths for each character as well as tubes for pouring cement columns. Being uniform in size, these are easy to join and will slide onto an infra structure easily. 4x4 posts cut into short lengths and drilled for connecting dowels are another possibility.

Using wood stays more with the traditional structure of Totems. Smaller totems can be built from toilet paper rolls, wax paper tubes or wrapping paper rolls. The figures could be drawn and colored then attached to the rolls rather than use papier-mâché. Pieces of PVC pipe can be easily joined and then mounted on a secure base.

Gallon plastic milk jugs are readily available and can be joined to 5 or 6 high. It's important to fill the bottom jug with sand to create a stable base. Availability will no doubt dictate your understructure.

Modifications for special learners/ Enrichment Opportunities

The teacher could provide sketches of animals for students to color. These sketches should be sized to fit on the understructure. The creation is easier but still supports a three-dimensional art form with historical significance.

Notes: Totem Poles in progress and finished from Jean Sandrock's 5 grade art students in Middleton, Wisconsin.

