

LESSON EIGHT: Quillwork

Time 30 minutes

Trunk Resources

Worksheets

#16 Starburst design

#21 Porcupine

Objects

Medicine Wheel

Quills

Book

Quillworker: A Cheyenne Legend, by Terri Cohlene

Teacher Resources

Photocopy worksheets #16 Starburst design and #21 Porcupine for each student

Objectives

1. Students will identify where quills come from.
2. Students will recognize how quills were used in decorating.

Historical background

Many Indian tribes decorated their clothing with quillwork. Women were usually responsible for this. Men, on the other hand, hunted porcupines, skinned them, and pulled out their treacherous quills. The quills are coarse, sharp-pointed, cylindrical needles of various sizes and lengths. They were colored by boiling in natural dyes of red, yellow, blue, green, and black. The pointed tips were then cut off and women would soak the quills in water or place them in their mouths to soften them. Sometimes the quills were flattened by holding them firmly between the teeth and pulling them through. Holes were made in the buckskin with an awl. Quills were then sewn to the skin with a sinew thread. As quills were rather stiff, most of the designs were geometrical in form. Quillwork appeared on clothing, pipes, pouches, tipis, and jewelry. Quillwork and painting were the most common forms of decoration before Europeans introduced beads to the Native Americans.

Sources: *Traditions* brochure, KSHS; Mary Strohl and Susan Schneck, *Native Americans*

Vocabulary

Breechcloth – Worn by men and boys, this soft square of leather hangs from the waist by a belt.

Buckskin – Usually refers to deer skin, but sometimes is used to mean any animal skin.

Gauntlets – Worn at the wrist to protect the hunter from being snapped by the bowstring.

Leggings – Buckskin tubes which fit over the legs and tied to the belt.

Moccasins – Footwear, usually made from tanned hide. Some moccasins have rawhide soles. Moccasins are sometimes partially or fully decorated.

Parfleche – A leather container, often decorated, used for storage.

Pemmican – A cross between fruit leather and beef jerky, made by mixing dried chokecherries, animal fat, and dried meat.

Quillwork – Ornamental decoration made using the spines of a porcupine.

Quiver – A container that holds arrows.

Sinew – Tendon found along the backbone of the buffalo and other animals; used for sewing thread.

Travois – A carrier pulled by a horse, dog, or person. Two poles are crossed and tied at one end, a leather pad is attached to the other.

Activities

1. Give each student a copy of worksheet #21 Porcupine. Ask the students if they know what the name of this animal is. (Porcupine) Ask students if they know what the sharp pointed spines on its back are called. (Quills) Explain that the porcupine was another animal hunted by the Plains Indians. The porcupine was hunted for its quills. The animal's pointed "needles" were pulled out and dyed different colors and used to decorate clothing and many other items. The quills were sewn onto leather pieces which were then attached to the item being decorated. (Note: glass beads were not available until Europeans brought them to America.)

Have each student color the worksheet #21 Porcupine.

2. Show students the samples of porcupine quills and the quilled medicine wheel.
3. Discuss how small the quills are and how long it must have taken to make a large design with them. Young girls would begin working with the older women at

around eight years of age. The older women would teach the girls how to make designs for clothing for the men and the boys and themselves.

4. Read the book *Quillworker, A Cheyenne Legend* to the class. Ask students the following questions:
 - a. What was the little girl's name and why was she called this? (Quillworker, because she was very talented in quillwork.)
 - b. Who taught Quillworker how to do quillwork? (The older women of the tribe.)
 - c. Why did Quillworker make the warrior's garments? (It came to her in a dream.)
 - d. How many did she make? (Seven)
 - e. Who were the warrior outfits for? (Quillworker's seven brothers.)
 - f. Why did the buffalo want Quillworker? (Because she made beautiful buffalo hides.)
 - g. What saved Quillworker and her brothers from the buffalo herd? (Wihio's arrows caused the tree to grow tall enough to touch the clouds.)
 - h. What did Quillworker and her brothers become? (Stars)
5. Have students color the worksheet #16 Starburst design. It is similar to the design on the brothers' buckskin clothing shown in the book.

Extended activities:

Porcupine Quill Hair Ornament and Armband

Trunk Resources

Worksheets

#6 Quillwork

#8 Porcupine Quill Hair Ornament and Armband

Teacher Resources

Raffia, needles, yarn, glue, photocopies of worksheets #6 and #8, pencil, feathers and/or beads (optional)

Activity

- a. Read through worksheet #6 Quillwork and have students practice their quilling techniques on scrap paper or a thin paper plate.
- b. Have students follow the directions on worksheet #8 Porcupine Quill Hair Ornament and Armband. They may choose to make a hair ornament or an

armband. Have them decorate their patterns as they wish using raffia to simulate quillwork.

“Quillwork” with toothpicks

Trunk Resources

Medicine Wheel

Teacher Resources

Colored toothpicks, glue, 6 inch squares of cardboard for each student

Activity

- a. Remind students how Native Americans used quills from the porcupine to create decorative pieces. Show students the Medicine Wheel from the trunk. Porcupine quills were dyed different colors and sewn or wrapped to create these designs. Students will now make a “quillwork” design of their own.
- b. Supply students with a six-inch cardboard square. Have them glue colored toothpicks to the cardboard in different directions to create a design.