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Presentation on the Parfleche
Plains Indians and the Bison Uses Worksheet

Objectives/Outcomes

Students will learn about one of many items that were made by the Plains Indians from buffalo hide and used in their daily.

Students will learn that the Indians used geometric design as both decoration and in a practical sense as a map.

Students will make a craft piece of the Indians made from buffalo hide and learn that they can be simple, beautiful and very useful.

Materials and Resources
• 1 piece of 18”x24” (brown kraft paper.. or a brown paper bag from the grocery store) per student
• Black, white, red, blue, yellow crayons..(also helpful to have Sanguine or Sienna traditional earth pigment pastels. They are a red clay color. They can be purchased at any art supply store.)
• Sprayable fixative (for economy, you can purchase inexpensive Aqua-Net hair spray.)
• Ruler
• Pencil
• Jute string or brown yarn.
• Hole punch

Background Information

Plains Indians
(From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)

The Plains Indians are the Indigenous peoples who live on the plains and rolling hills of the Great Plains of North America. Their colorful equestrian culture and resistance to White domination have made the Plains Indians an archetype in literature and art for American Indians everywhere.

Plains Indians are usually divided into two broad classifications which overlap to some degree. The first group was fully nomadic, following the vast herds of buffalo. Some tribes occasionally engaged in agriculture; growing tobacco and corn primarily. These included the Blackfoot, Arapaho, Assiniboine, Cheyenne, Comanche, Crow, Gros Ventre, Kiowa, Lakota, Lipan, Plains Apache (or Kiowa Apache), Plains Cree, Plains Ojibwe, Sarsi, Shoshone, Stoney, and Tonkawa.

The second group of Plains Indians (sometimes referred to as Prairie Indians) were the semi-sedentary tribes who, in addition to hunting buffalo, lived in villages and raised crops. These included the Arikara, Hidatsa, Iowa, Kaw (or Kansa), Kitsai, Mandan, Missouria, Nez Perce, Omaha, Osage, Otoe, Pawnee, Ponca, Quapaw, Santee, Wichita, and Yankton.

For further background on the Plains Indians, click on the link below...
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plains_indians

Parfleche
(From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)

A parfleche is a Native American rawhide bag, typically used for holding dried meats and pemmican, a concentrated mixture of fat and protein used as a nutritious food.
The word was originally used by French fur traders (it was not a word used by the Native Americans). It derives from the French "parer" meaning "parry" or "defend", and "flèche" meaning "arrow", so called because the hide was tough enough to be used as a shield.

The original bags had graphics that were actually maps, general geographical depictions of the surrounding land. The river as a circle of life and mountains were the most common features.

Plains hide painting is a traditional Plains Indian artistic practice of painting on either tanned or raw animal hides. Tipis, tipi liners, shields, parfleches, robes, clothing, drums, and winter counts could all be painted.

Art historian Joyce Szabo writes that Plains artists were concerned "with composition, balance, symmetry, and variety." Designs can be similar to those found in earlier rock art and later quillwork and beadwork.

**Geometric painting**

Plains women traditionally paint abstract, geometric designs. Bright colors were preferred and areas were filled with solid fields of color. Cross-hatching was a last resort used only when paint was scarce. Negative space was important and designs were discussed by women in terms of their negative space. Dots are used to break up large areas.

Buffalo robes and parfleches were frequently painted with geometrical patterns. Parfleches are rawhide envelopes for carrying and storing goods, including food. Their painted designs are thought to be stylized maps, featuring highly abstract geographic features such as rivers or mountains.

**Process and materials**

Buffalo hides, as well as deer, elk, and other animal hides, are painted. Clothing and robes are often brain-tanned to be soft and supple. Parfleches, shields, and moccasin soles are rawhide for toughness.

In the past, Plains artists used a bone or wood stylus to paint with natural mineral and vegetable pigments. Sections of buffalo rib could be ground to expose the marrow, which was absorbent and worked like a contemporary ink marker. Swelling cottonwood buds provided brown pigment. Lakota artists used to burn yellow clay to produce ceremonial red paint. Lakotas associated blue pigments with women.

**Vocabulary**  
(Return to Links)

*Plains Indians* are the Indigenous peoples who live on the plains and rolling hills of the Great Plains of North America.
**Parfleche** is a Native American rawhide bag, typically used for holding dried meats and pemmican, a concentrated mixture of fat and protein used as a nutritious food.

**Geometric design** is the use of designs, such as squares, triangles, oblongs, and circles to form designs for fabrics, clothing, utility items, packages etc.

**Negative Space** is the area of an image not occupied by shapes or forms. This part of the drawing is often neglected. Negative space drawing involves concentrating on drawing the background.

**Regular Pattern** is a pattern that repeats in a repeated fashion. It can be the repeat of geometric shapes or motifs and the repeat of the use of a color.

**Procedures**  
(Note: The dimensions of the finished parfleche will easily hold 8 ½” x 11” sheets of paper if students wish to place finished writings, reports or other valuable papers inside.)

**Before starting, print and distribute the informational worksheet attached under ‘Other Resources’ on the uses of the bison/buffalo for the Plains Indians.**

(link to….. Plains Indians and the Bison Uses Worksheet)

1. Measure in 4” and draw a line parallel to edge along both of the 24” sides of the brown paper. You will now have a piece of paper with edges folded in and measures 10” x 24”.
2. With the paper in a vertical format, measure and fold 4” from one end and 8 ½” from the other end. You will now have finished fold and shape of the parfleche. It will measure 10” wide x 11 ¼” tall. The top 4” fold will overlap the bottom 8 ½” fold by about 1 ½”.
3. Along this overlap line, place your ruler and lightly draw a pencil line.
4. Open your paper back up. Turn it over so that the outside faces of your parfleche are facing up. The geometric design will extend from the side folds, to the top that overlaps the bottom fold and then to the lightly drawn line.
5. Students should plan their design before applying it to their parfleche. This should be done with some planning on a blank sheet of paper. Remind them that where the bottom of the parfleche meets the top overlap that the design must line up. They will need to plan this so as not to have a collision of their geometric patterns.
6. When applying the design to the brown paper, they should use pencil lightly applied in case corrections are needed.
7. Upon completion of the geometric design, they may add color. If pastels are used, care should be taken so as not to smear them. Additionally, the parfleche will need to be sprayed with the fixative for the same reason.
8. When complete, you will need to punch holes in order to tie string or yarn to the parfleche to use as a tie to hold the parfleche closed.
9. You will need to punch 2 holes into the top flap and 2 holes in the lower flap.
10. The string/yarn should to put through the 2 lower holes, evened up and loosely tied in a note so as to be permanently attached.
11. The 2 ends should be long enough so that 1 can be pulled through each of the holes in the top flap. The top flap can then be secured by applying a shoe tie loop and ½ bow knot.

12. Other pieces of string could be tied to the parfleche for exterior decoration or design but care and consideration must be taken so as to still allow the package to be opened for insertion of papers.

Criteria for Assessing Student Learning (Return to Links)

General statement: Students design and fabricate a paper parfleche based upon the concepts and designs of the Plains Indians.

Target Learning: Students demonstrate an understanding of the many purposes of the buffalo for the Plains Indians.

Assessment Criteria: Student can express both in a group and individually usage examples of the bison and that all of the bison was of used.

Target Learning: Students design and successfully complete a parfleche with a geometric design on the face of the parfleche.

Assessment Criteria:
- Geometric design demonstrates an understanding of regular patterns both in shapes and colors.
- The design matches up where the front flap at the top overlaps the bottom flap.
- It has a rectangular shape.

California Standards in Visual & Performing Arts (Return to Links)

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION
Creating, Performing, and Participating in the Visual Arts
Students apply artistic processes and skills, using a variety of media to communicate meaning and intent in original works of art.

2.5 Assemble a found object sculpture (as assemblage) or a mixed media two-dimensional composition that reflects unity and harmony and communicates a theme.

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT
Understanding the Historical Contributions and Cultural Dimensions of the Visual Arts
Students analyze the role and development of the visual arts in past and present cultures throughout the world, noting human diversity as it relates to the visual arts and artists.

3.2 Identify and describe various fine, traditional, and folk arts from historical periods worldwide.

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING
Responding to, Analyzing, and Making Judgments About Works in the Visual Arts
Students analyze, assess, and derive meaning from works of art, including their own, according to the elements of art, the principles of design, and aesthetic qualities.
4.2 Compare the different purposes of a specific culture for creating art.

**California Standards for Integrated Subject**  
(Return to Links)

**History-Social Science**

5.1 Students describe the major pre-Columbian settlements, including the cliff dwellers and pueblo people of the desert Southwest, the American Indians of the Pacific Northwest, the nomadic nations of the Great Plains, and the woodland peoples east of the Mississippi River.

1. Describe how geography and climate influenced the way various nations lived and adjusted to the natural environment, including locations of villages, the distinct structures that they built, and how they obtained food, clothing, tools, and utensils.
2. Describe their varied customs and folklore traditions.
3. Explain their varied economies and systems of government.

**Mathematics**  
(Measurement and Geometry)

2.0 Students identify, describe, and classify the properties of, and the relationships between, plane and solid geometric figures:
2.1 Measure, identify, and draw angles, perpendicular and parallel lines, rectangles, and triangles by using appropriate tools (e.g., straightedge, ruler, compass, protractor, drawing software).

**Other Resources**  
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**Presentation on the Parfleche**  
(There are 8 slides to scroll through. They could be pasted into a PowerPoint or Keynote presentation.)
American Plains Indians

Parfleche

There were many native American tribes. Several tribes lived in the Plains region of America - the high, flat grasslands between the Mississippi River Valley and the Rocky Mountains.

The orange area on the map.

The tribes included the Blackfoot, Crow, Dakota, Arapaho, Osage, Cheyenne and Comanche.
The Plains Indians were great buffalo hunters. They used the buffalo meat for food, the fur for warm blankets and clothes, the skins for their homes or teepees (tipis), and other items.

One item made from buffalo skin was called a parfleche. The skin was folded in a special way to form a container to carry dried food items, clothing, jewelry, and other items.

The word was originally used by French fur traders (it was not a word used by the Native Americans). It derives from the French "parer" meaning "parry" or "defend", and "flèche" meaning "arrow", so called because the hide was tough enough to be used as a shield.
I hope you enjoy making one yourself.

All you need is some paper, a ruler, triangles, rectangles, colors and your imagination.

What would you carry in yours?

**Plains Indians and the Bison Uses Worksheet**  *(Return to Links)*

On the next page, there is a diagram with a list of how the Plains Indians utilized the entire bison.

Go to diagram… **Plains Indian Bison Diagram**
The bison was very important to the Plains Indians. They used every part of the animal.
(diagram-using the bison)

- meat - roasted on the campfire, boiled, for pemmican and jerky, sausages
- hides with the hair left on - winter clothing, gloves, blankets, robes, costumes for ceremonies or for hunting.
- hides - ropes, blankets, shields, clothing, bags, tipi covers, bull boats, sweat lodge covers, containers, drums
- sinew (muscles) - bowstrings, thread for sewing, webbing for snowshoes
- bones - for making hoes, shovels, runners for sleds, pointy tools, knives, pipes, scrapers, arrowheads
- horns - spoons, cups, bowls, containers to carry tobacco, medicine or gunpowder, headdresses, arrow points, toys
- hair - rope, pillow stuffing, yarn, shields, medicine balls
- beard - decoration on clothes and weapons
- tail - fly swatter, whip, tipi decoration
- brain - used for tanning the hides (to soften the skin)
- hoofs - rattles, boiled to make glue
- fat - paint base, hair grease, for making candles and soap
- dung (manure chips) - fuel for campfires and smoke signals
- teeth - for decorating, necklaces
- stomach - containers for water and for cooking
- bladder - medicine bag, water container, pouches
- skull - ceremonies and prayers

Source: