

AMERICAN INDIAN HISTORY, CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

Curriculum Framework

ART

LESSON PLAN MODELS

Primary

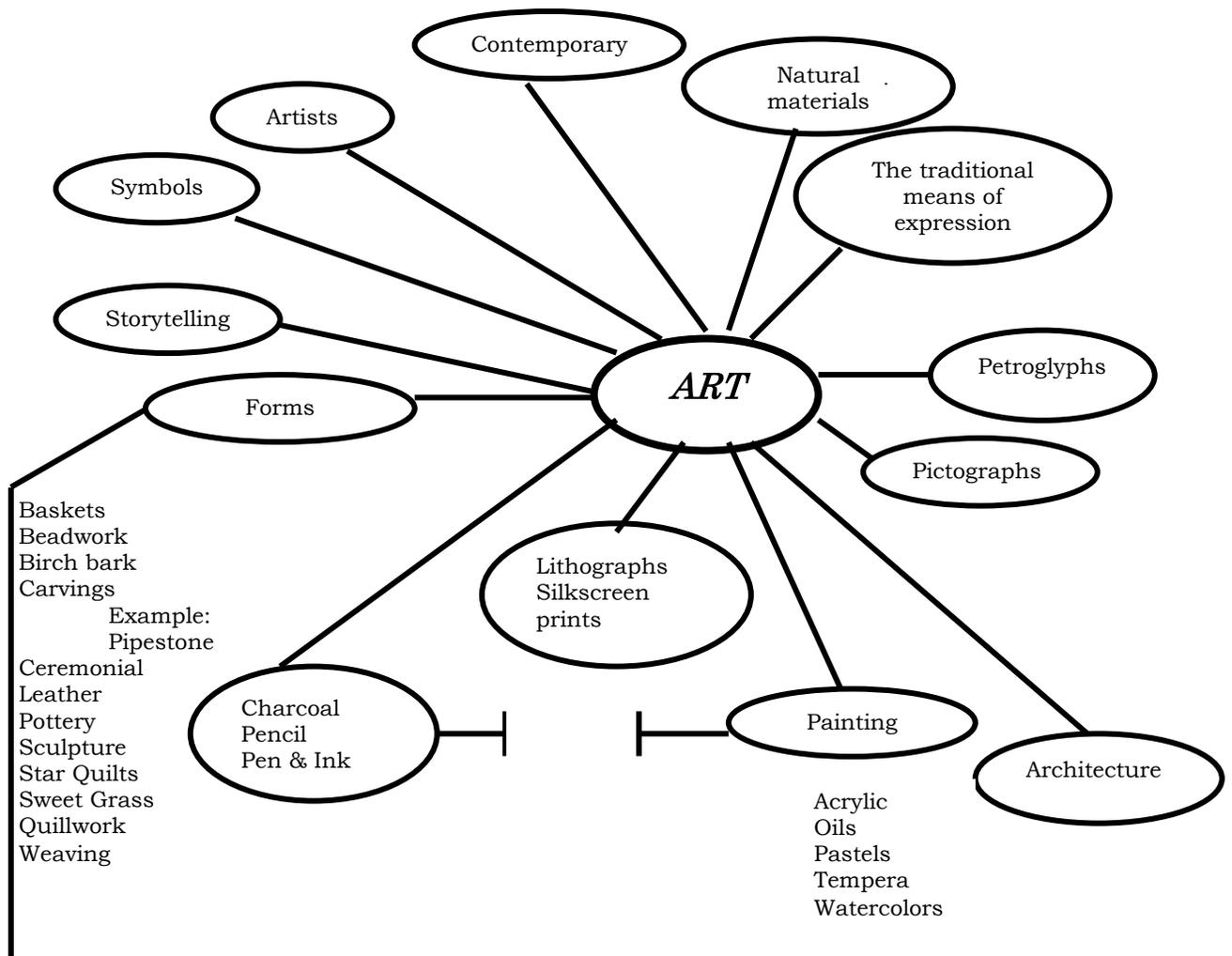
Intermediate

Middle School

Senior High

Office of Indian Education
Minnesota Department of Education
1500 Highway 36 West
Roseville, MN 55113-4266

651-582-8831



Learner Outcome:
Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of the purposes, history and forms of American Indian art.

LEARNER OUTCOME

Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of the purposes, history and forms of American Indian art.

ATTRIBUTES

This outcome includes:

- knowing that beauty and harmony through artistic expression has been and is a part of the American Indian daily life.
- understanding that American Indian art goes beyond beadwork and crafts.
- appreciating architecture in contemporary buildings which reflect American Indian design.
- knowing that many American Indian art forms are expressions of cultural values and a philosophy of life.

RATIONALE

It is important for students to know and appreciate American Indian art in its many forms and to realize that these art forms have existed through the centuries.

CULTURAL CONTENT/WORLD VIEW

Creating beauty and harmony through artistic expression has always been so much a part of the daily lives of American Indians that no separate word for art exists in Ojibwe and Dakota languages. There is no word for artist because all tribal members were seen as artistically gifted. If some were more skilled than others, that simply meant more was expected of them. Art is an extension of spirituality, a means of expressing a way of life. Through self-expression, a way of life is identified. Similarities exist among American Indian art, but there are different specifics to a tribe. Each tribe has its own identify.

TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION

American Indian art is as complex and varied as the art traditions of Europeans or any other group of people. Artistic expression can be found in objects considered sacred and in objects which form a part of everyday life such as pottery and baskets. Through the centuries, American Indians have created art objects of extraordinary beauty reflecting the harmony and balance which are principles of American Indian philosophy. The arts include architecture as well as the visual arts. Sculpture, carving, painting, weaving, embroidery and a variety of other techniques have been used through the centuries to create art in clothing, pottery, baskets, jewelry, beadwork, wood and a variety of other mediums.

Petroglyphs and Pictographs

American Indian art has existed for thousands of years. Evidence for the antiquity of American Indian art can be found in rock art as petroglyphs (carvings on rock walls) or pictographs (paintings on rock walls) in hundreds of locations in the state of Minnesota. A vast array of petroglyphs can be found along Red Rock Ridge in Cottonwood County near Jeffers, Minnesota. The ridge outcrop runs for 23 miles across southwest Minnesota's prairie country. Nearly 2,000 figures were carved into the rock over a period of 5,000 years.

Most of the petroglyphs at Jeffers are of animals, weapons, people and abstract symbols which may have had a spiritual meaning. That many of these rock carvings are very old is suggested by the fact that all atlatl, an ingenious spear-throwing device, appears many times. This hunting implement was used by ancient Indian hunters some 2,000 to 5,000 years ago. Other carvings appear to have been created in more recent times. The Jeffers petroglyphs site is located on a high ridge in the landscape where hunters rested. From this vantage point, they would have been able to spot game miles away on the rolling prairie below them.

We can only speculate about what these carvings may have meant to the people who created them. One possibility is that they recorded actual events in the lives of the hunters. Another possibility is that they were carved in the process of carrying out sacred ceremonies or showing prescriptions for healing.

The Jeffers site is open to the public. The Minnesota Historical Society maintains an Interpretive Center at the site where visitors can learn more about the petroglyphs.

Petroglyphs and pictographs can also be found in caves and along the rock cliffs which border rivers and lakes of Minnesota's forest country. These paintings and carvings are largely of forest animals such as deer, caribou, moose, bear and rabbits. Human figures, often pictured as groups in a canoe also appear as well as the Thunderbird, Serpent and Panther motif. The latter group figure appears prominently in American Indian oral traditions and spiritual beliefs. One group of figures found at Hegman Lake near Ely, Minnesota is especially intriguing. A large human figure with outstretched hands appears beside a moose and a smaller fur-bearing animal. Carl Gawboy, an Anishinabe artist, has suggested that this assemblage represents the constellations as they appear shortly before winter. The pictograph may have served as a calendar.

Anishinabe

The dense pine and hardwood forests of the Eastern Woodlands provided a wide variety of materials for artistic creativity. The Ojibwe, Menominee and other Great Lakes tribes used the white bark of the birch tree in ingenious ways. With birchbark they made slender graceful canoes. Ojibwe women are well known for their skills as birchbark basket makers. Birchbark baskets are made in a variety of shapes and sizes from small delicate baskets to large flat winnowing baskets. Designs are etched on the basket or porcupine quills are sewn on the top and sides in floral patterns. Some of the baskets are bordered with strands of sweet grass. One of Minnesota's most accomplished sweet grass basketmakers is Margaret Hill who is a member of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe.

American Indian women of the Great Lakes are also known for artistry in creating bandolier bags. These men's shoulder bags were originally made of deerskin and embroidered with flattened porcupine quills. As trader's cloth and glass beads became available, the bandolier bag took the form of a cloth bag profusely embroidered with beads of various colors in flower and leaf designs.

Over a century ago, the valuation of bandolier bag was equal to that of a pony. American Indian women of the Eastern Woodlands used deerskin and later trader's cloth as a sort of canvas upon which they created beautiful clothing designs. Shirts, coats, dresses, leggings, moccasins and other everyday items were transformed into works of art by American Indian women. This style of clothing is used on special occasions today in ceremonies and at pow wow celebrations.

Dakota

The tribes of the Great Plains created a portable art tradition well suited to the lifestyle of mobile hunters. Buffalo hides were used as canvas upon which Indian artists painted scenes of hunts, warfare and everyday life as well as geometric designs and abstract symbols. These designs were painted on clothing, tipi covers, carrying cases, shields and other items. Before European fur traders introduced glass beads, women used beads made of animal teeth, shells, seeds and dyed porcupine quills to decorate clothing and carrying bags of various kinds. Later, Plains Indian women excelled in the art of beadwork embroidery.

One art form introduced by Euro-American missionaries is that of quilting. Dakota, Lakota and Plains women of other tribes excel in this art and are well known for the star quilt. A star, representing the morning star, is placed at the center of the quilt. Each quilt is then bordered with complimentary colors. The star quilt evolved out of the dew cloth placed in the interior of tipis long ago. Some star quilts are sold commercially, but most are made for ceremonies and giveaways in which family members or guests are honored by the gift of a star quilt.

Creative Exchanges

The exchange between American Indian and European derived cultures stimulated artistic expression and creativity in both groups. The introduction of metal tools, for example, led to a more elaborate woodcarving tradition among the Northwest Coast tribes. It also led to the creation of the wood splint basket in the Eastern Woodlands. The introduction of processed cloth and trade beads (especially seed beads and pony beads) led to a burst of creative expression in clothing. American Indian traditional arts also greatly influenced fashion and style in the larger American culture. Some architecture is modeled after American Indian housing designs. American Indian geometric art can be found copied in mass-produced items such as rugs, towels, sweaters, handbags, jewelry and hundreds of other products. Authentic traditional American Indian art products are widely sought after. American Indian art has also served as an inspiration to surrealist painters.

Contemporary American Indian Art

American Indian artists today often use modern mediums and techniques to express individual feelings about a particular tribal heritage. The canvas painting of modern American Indian artists often expresses tribal themes. American Indian artists also feel free to express the influence of many different cultures.

The following is a list of Minnesota artists. There are many more.

Joanne Bird, is a sculptor and painter, who created a bronze bust of the historic Dakota leader, Wabasha. It is on permanent display at Minnesota's state capitol in St. Paul. Bird is the first Dakota woman to have a work of art displayed at the state capitol.

Patrick DesJarlait was one of Minnesota's most famous American Indian artists. DesJarlait grew up on the Red Lake Reservation in northern Minnesota. While in the Navy during World War II, he worked in the studios of Walt Disney. Upon his return to Minnesota, he established a

career for himself as a commercial artist. The animated Hamm's beer bear is one of DesJarlait's creations. DesJarlait drew inspiration from the works of Pablo Picasso and Diego Rivera. His paintings capture the life and culture of his people, the Ojibwe. DesJarlait's sons, **Robert and Patrick Jr.**, are both established artists in their own right.

Carl Gawboy is a member of the Bois Forte Band of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. He has spent most of his life painting and teaching in northern Minnesota and Wisconsin. His work is in public and private collections including the Minnesota Historical Society, Bemidji State University, Federal Reserve Bank, Northwestern Bank of Commerce in Duluth, the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe at Cass Lake and Augsburg College. He has had numerous one-person and group exhibitions over the years in universities and college galleries throughout the Midwest, in the Ojibwe Show of which he was a founding member in the early 1970's and in the Eight Native Minnesota Artists' exhibition at the Minnesota Institute of Art in 1982-1983.

Gawboy's style is both carefully specific, especially in matters of historical detail, and richly expressive in those parts of the paintings where the water flows, the grass ripples, and the sky is always hovering, ready to change life abruptly with new weather. Gawboy's expression of the universal experiences of life – physical survival, the turning of the seasons, love and loss – are made real and poignant by carefully painted details: a red and black checkered shirt, Aunt Mary's old hat, a 1940 Chevy pickup truck, or the painstakingly applied seams of pitch that keep the birch canoe water-tight. These provide the context for relating to the scenes. Without thinking about it, viewers enter into Gawboy's worlds, whether contemporary or historical, and experience them as warm, living realities.

Frances Keahna, an elder from the White Earth Reservation, has been making black ash baskets for many years. She has taught many classes and given demonstrations to numerous groups, most notably at the Minnesota State Fair. Keahna's black ash baskets are highly prized.

Black ash basket making is an art form that utilizes materials from the Earth. The process of extracting the materials and making the splints that are woven into baskets is difficult.

George Morrison grew up on the Grand Portage Reservation in extreme northeast Minnesota and is an enrolled member of the Grand Portage Band of Chippewa. His art has been displayed in galleries on the East Coast as well as in Europe. One of his works, a large wood collage, is on permanent display at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. His collage is unique in that it combines the techniques of painting and sculpture in wood panels that are two and three-dimensional. The Grand Portage Reservation has served Morrison as an inspiration for his art.

One of his works is an 8-foot tall design for the American Indian Center on behalf of the National Endowment for the Arts. In Seattle, Morrison created an 8' x 20' underwater design, based on Ojibwe legends – the whole design done in redwood. In Idaho, he created a totem pole for display at the Forestry Building. In the LaSalle Plaza in Minneapolis, stands his 21' totem pole that stands in the lobby. In 1992, Morrison designed a 26' x 28' mosaic on the sidewalk outside the Nicollet Mall in Minneapolis. It is made of granite in 12 colors. He has completed numerous horizon paintings – most about 7" x 12". These are abstract paintings, but each is dominated by striking horizon line and represents the changing colors of the light, the water, the rocks, the seasons.

Ellen Olson, an enrolled member of the Grand Portage Band of Chippewa Indians, was raised by a medicine man and his wife (foster parents) on the Grand Portage Reservation. Olson learned her art by watching her foster mother and her aunts. She creates beautiful beadwork and leatherwork using woodland floral designs.

Her works are displayed in many locations including the National Museum of American Indians, which opened in 1994. It is associated with the Smithsonian Institute. She was commissioned by the museum to produce a beadwork Ojibwe bandolier and was one of the artists recognized at the 1994 opening. She was a Grand Portage National Monument employee for many years and demonstrated beadwork skills there. Her art work is displayed at the Minnesota Historical Society and the Plains Museum. She has won top awards at the Ojibwe Art Expo, Colorado Indian Market, Red Earth (Oklahoma), Minnesota Indian Art Market and Kansas Indian Art Market. Ellen has two daughters, Shelly and Marcie, who are also award winning artists. Ellen is a resident of the Grand Portage Reservation.

It is important for students to learn the artistic traditions of American Indians and contemporary artists and their work. Some American Indian art is created to be shared with others. Pottery, birch bark and woven baskets, weavings, beadwork jewelry and quilts fall within this category. **Other art objects were and are created to be used by tribal members within the context of ceremonies and other tribal traditions.** Teachers who are considering having students make American Indian art objects in the classroom, should ask tribal members if it is proper to reproduce these items within a classroom context.

RESOURCE LIST

Elementary:

American Indian Women in Careers. Elementary Reader includes Indian women artists of the past and present. Anoka-Hennepin Indian Education Program, 1988. Phone: (762) 506-1145.

DesJarlait, Patrick. *Patrick DesJarlait.* Minneapolis: Lerner Publications, 1975.

Hirschfelder, Arlene. "Arts" in *Happily May I Walk: American Indians and Alaska Natives Today.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1986.

Kostich, Dragos D. *George Morrison: The Story of an American Indian.* Minneapolis: Dillon Press, 1976.

Minneapolis Institute of Art. *Surrounded by Beauty. The Arts of Native Americans.* Slides and accompanying text.

Visions of the People. A Pictorial History of Plains Indian Life. Slides and accompanying text.

Poatgieter, Hermina. "The Heritage of Indian Arts" in *Indian Legacy: Native American Influence on World Life and Culture.* New York: Julian Messner Publication, 1981.

Roots. "Early Indian People" Vol. 7/No. 2 (Winter 1979.)

Secondary and Adult:

- Bahti, Tom. *Southwest Indian Arts and Crafts*. Las Vegas: KC Publications, 1977.
- Bushnell, G. *Ancient Arts of the Americas*. New York: Praeger Publications, 1965.
- Coe, Ralph T. *Sacred Circles: Two Thousand Years of Native American Indian Art*. Kansas City: Nelson, 1977.
- Dockstader, Frederick. *Indian Art in America*. New York: Promontory Press, 1973.
- Feest, Christian. *Native Arts of North America*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1992.
- Flanders, Richard. *Beads: Their Use by Upper Great Lakes Indians*. Craft Publications, 1981.
- Fowler, Carol. *Daisy Hooee Nampeyo*. Minneapolis: Dillon Press, 1977.
- Gebhard, David. *Indian Art of the Northern Plains*. Santa Barbara: University of California Press, 1974.
- Holm, Bill and Reid, Bill. *Indian Art of the Northwest Coast*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975.
- James, George W. *Indian Blankets and Their Makers*. New York: Dover Publications, 1974.
- Lothson, Gordon A. *The Jeffers Petroglyphs Site*. Minnesota Prehistoric Archaeology Series. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1976.
- Milton, John R. *Oscar Howe: The Story of an American Indian*. Minneapolis: Dillon, 1972.
- Minneapolis Institute of Art. *Surrounded by Beauty. The Arts of Native Americans*. Slides and accompanying text.
- Minneapolis Institute of Art. *Visions of the People. A Pictorial History of Plains Indian Life*. Slides and accompanying text.
- Nelson, Mary Carroll. *Maria Martinez*. Minneapolis: Dillon Press, 1972.
- Orchard, William. *Beads and Beadwork of the American Indians*. Museum of the American Indian. New York, 1975.
- Steltzer, Ulli. *Indian Artists at Work*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976.
- Video: "George Morrison," Blandin Foundation.

ART - PRIMARY LESSON

I. DEVELOPMENTAL CHECKPOINT

Primary students realize that objects used in daily life are forms of art. Primary students can recall examples of American Indian art which are both useful and beautiful.

OUTCOME INDICATOR

Checklist to record responses in class discussions

CURRICLUM INTEGRATION

Art, History

LESSON OUTCOMES

Students will be able to:

- identify useful and artistic objects around them.
- identify useful and artistic American Indian objects.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

1. Ask students to think of everyday items they consider essential or useful. Record items on chalkboard or flipchart. Note if items are in the room.
2. Ask students which of these objects they consider to be beautiful or attractive. What makes the object beautiful? If a particular object is not considered artistic, what in their opinion would make it so? (Possibilities: shoes, clothes, desks, furniture, toys, dishes, lunch boxes, pencils.)
3. Show a variety of things used in the daily life of American Indians which represent artistic expression.
4. Acquire knowledge of the meaning behind one or more of these pieces of American Indian artwork. Have students infer feelings represented. Discuss with students the true meaning of a piece of American Indian artwork.
5. Ask students to describe an artistic object of value to them and to tell why they value it. See if the students value these objects because they came from someone they care about.
6. Explain that American Indian art is often given to a person as a sign of love and friendship. It is therefore closely tied to the American Indian cultural value of generosity.

VOCABULARY

artist
objects
texture
pattern

MATERIALS

American Indian art objects – slides, pictures or actual objects – (“Please Touch!” A hands-on arts experience from the Plains Art Museum. A trunkful of authentic objects may be ordered from:

Plains Art Resource Center

P.O. Box 2338, Fargo, ND 58108
Information: 701-293-0903

ASSESSMENT TASKS

- Brainstorm a list of practical objects, which are also artistic.
- Students describe a personal object of value and explain why they value it.

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

Produce an art object putting as many feelings into the object as possible. The student should write an account of feelings which exist in this art. Emphasize that for this assignment the amount of thought put into the art creation is more important than the finished product itself.

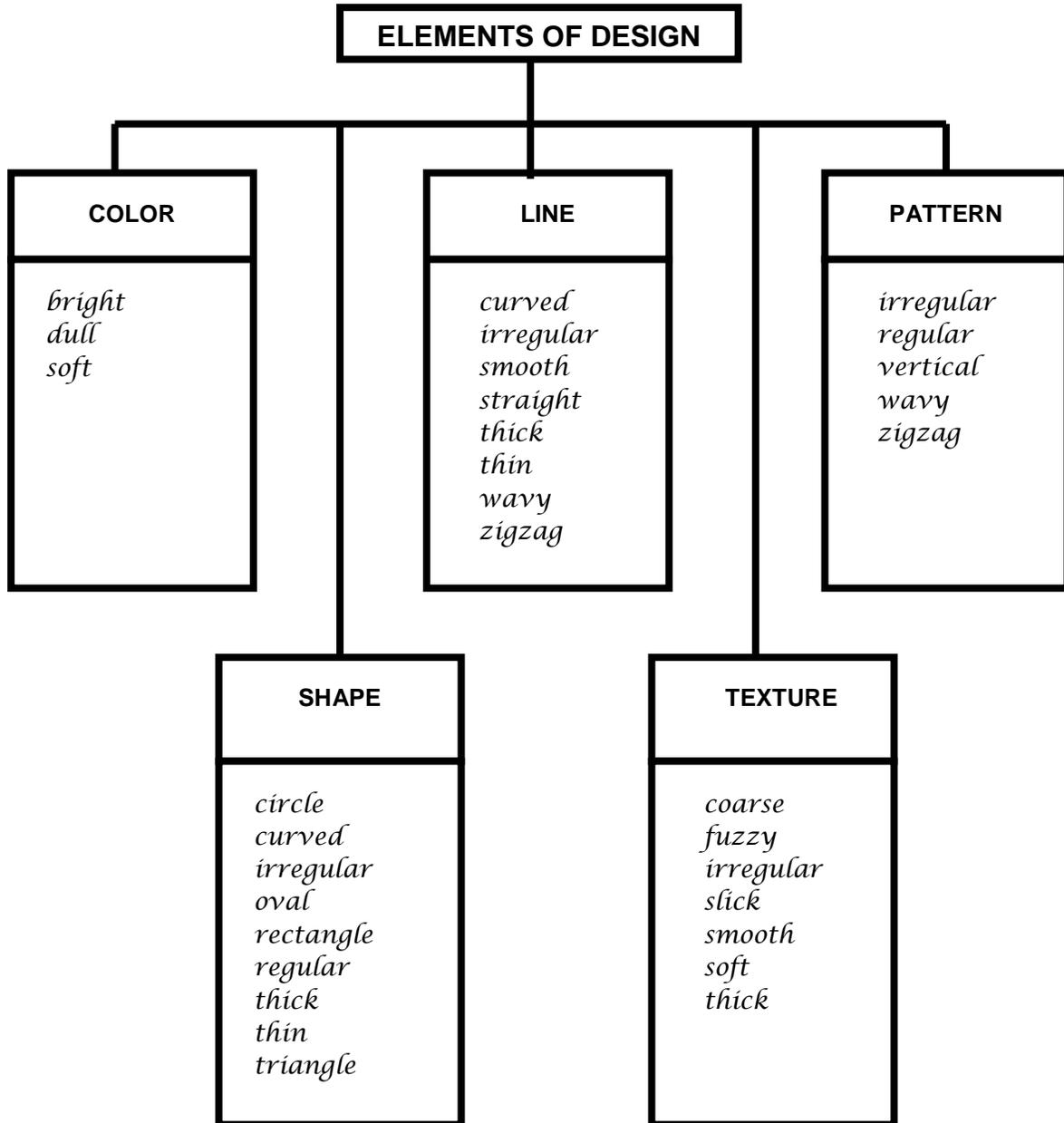
LINKAGES

Social Studies, Language Arts

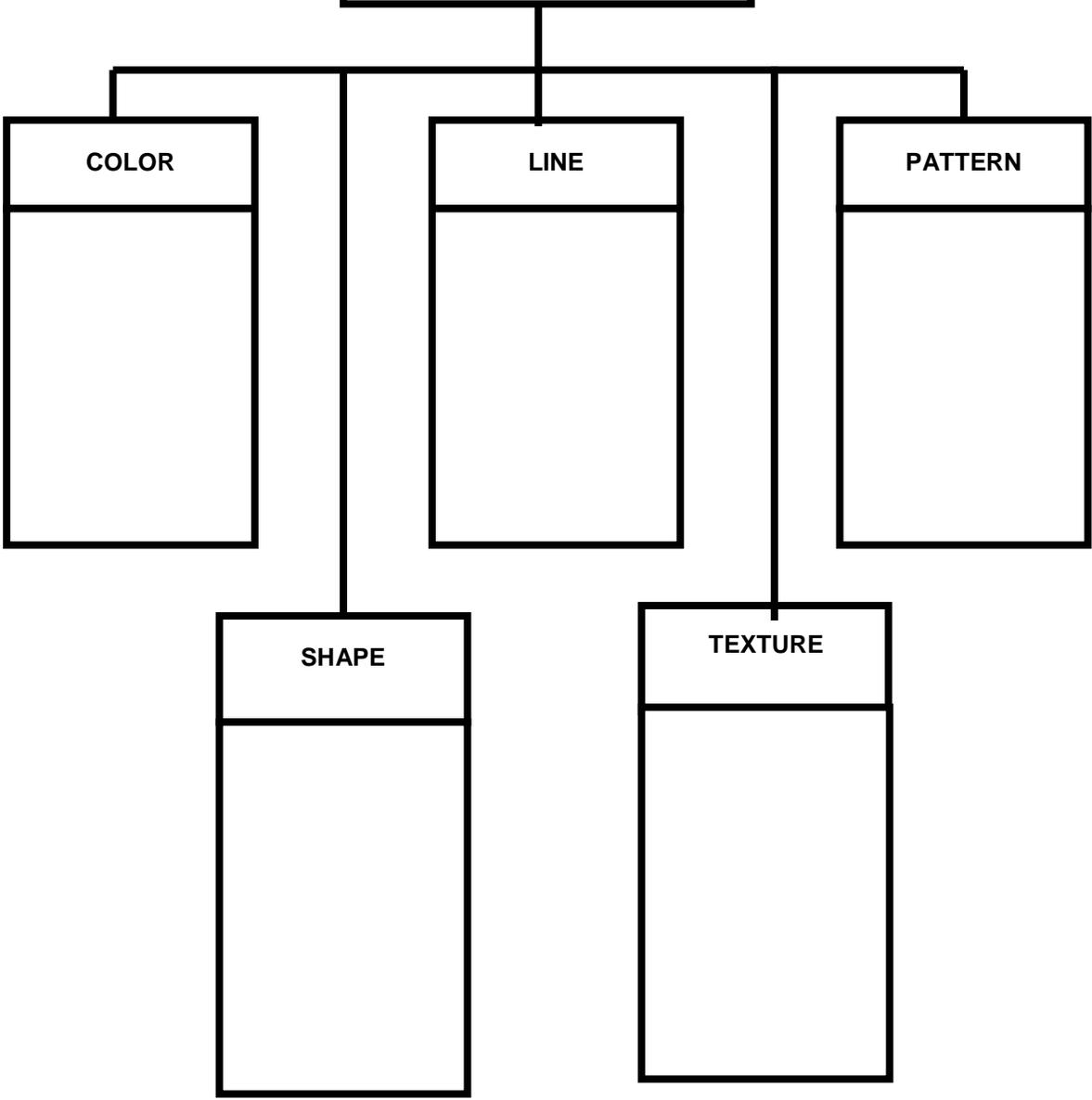
ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

Directions: Sort the following terms by the element of design which each describes. Terms may be used in more than one box.

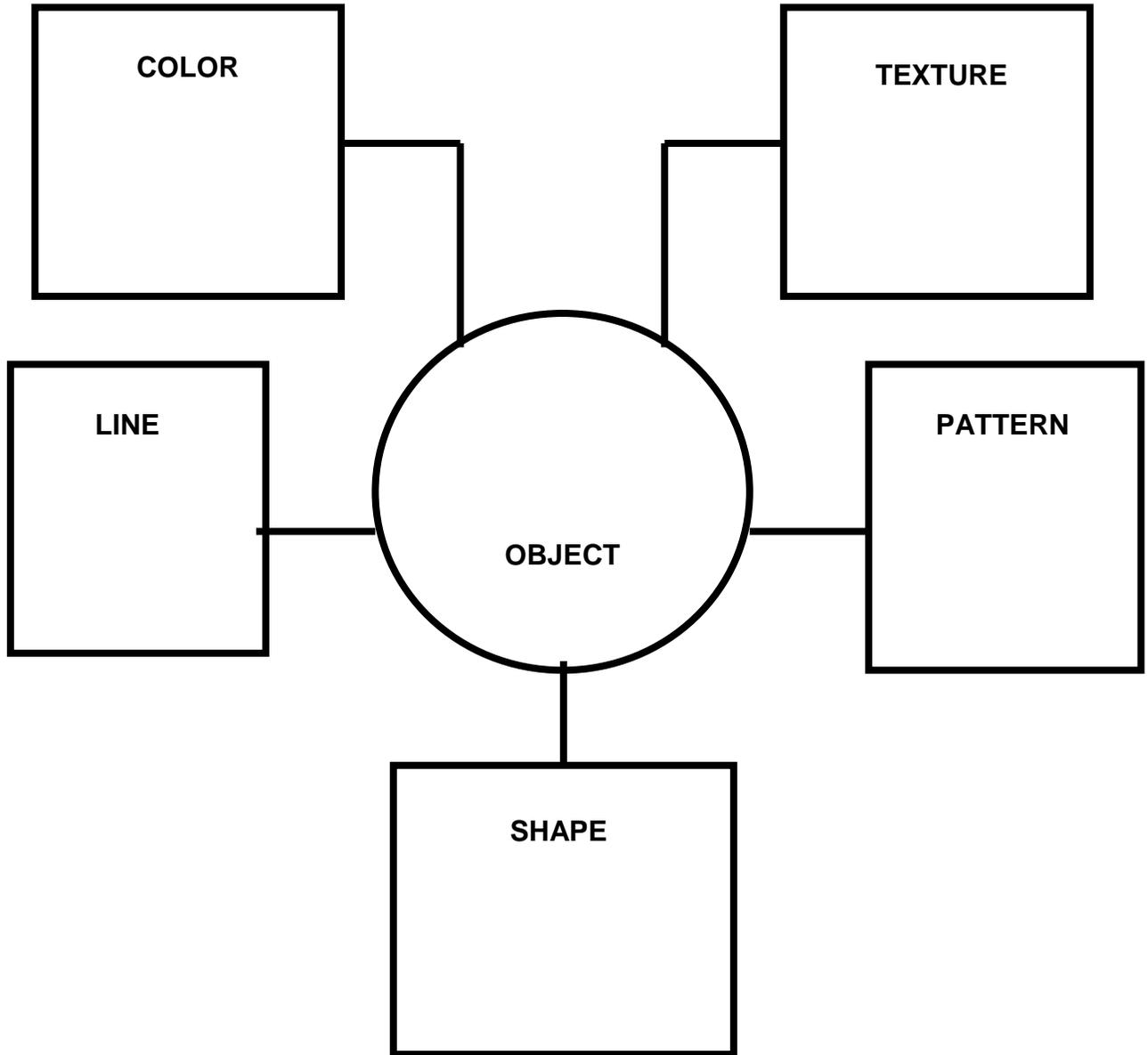
bright, circle, coarse, curved, dull, fuzz, irregular, oval, rectangle, regular, slick, smooth, soft, straight, thick, thin, triangle, wavy, zigzag.



ELEMENTS OF DESIGN



DESCRIBING AN OBJECT



EXAMINING AN ART OBJECT

Directions: Describe for students each element in art objects. Have students look for that characteristic in the displayed object and describe its effect. Record these responses on transparency or flipchart for future reference.

1. To describe **color**, name the colors in the object and how they are combined. If primary colors are next to each other on the color wheel (such as red, purple, blue) the blending of the colors seems more calm. If colors are opposite each other on the color wheel (such as red and green), the colors contrast with each other. The reds stand out from the greens. The effect is active and exciting.

Colors can also suggest objects, ideas, or attitudes. Red, yellow and orange seem warm; blue, green, and purple seem cool. Blue and green give the appearance of water and plants. They suggest woods, oceans, sky, quiet, and harmony. Red and orange suggest fire, speed, or energy.

2. We describe **line** by describing what the lines look like. Are they straight, curving, wavy, or zigzag? Each type of line has its effect. Straight lines seem firm and strong; wavy or curving lines seem graceful or soothing; jagged or zigzag lines seem active or sharp.
3. **Shape** may be described by the type of geometric figure used (circles, squares, trapezoids, triangles, spirals, or rectangles). Shapes have a special meaning. For example, the circle represents the Circle of Life and harmony.
4. **Texture** is what the surface looks like (how the surface would feel if we touched it): rough, scratchy, hard, smooth, soft, or wet. Texture can also suggest meaning: round textures seem strong and bold; soft textures seem gentle and peaceful.
5. We describe **pattern** as the arrangement of shapes and lines. Repeating shapes create a rhythm the same way that repeating sounds create rhythm in music. Regular rhythm seems calm but irregular ones suggest confusion.

ART - INTERMEDIATE LESSON

II. DEVELOPMENTAL CHECKPOINT

Intermediate students will reveal in discussions and writings that they understand that architecture includes the clearing and arranging of spaces as well as the design and decoration of buildings. Students will be aware of the variety of architectural styles and traditions used by American Indians in North America and will be familiar with the constructions of the Anishinabe and Dakota.

OUTCOME INDICATORS

- Rubric for construction of model community
- Rubric for collaborative/cooperative skills

CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

Art, History, Mathematics

LEARNER OUTCOMES

Students will be able to:

- define architecture in its broadest sense.
- list materials, shapes, styles, traditions of historic American Indian homes and settlements.
- explain symbols, patterns and traditions involved in Dakota and Anishinabe home building.
- cite examples of these traditions continuing in contemporary structures.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Introduce lesson by leading a walking tour to explore area around the school.

List things to observe:

Types of buildings (residential, commercial, industrial)
Natural features

1. Students sketch what they observed on the tour.
2. Homework: sketch area immediately around home.
3. Focus a discussion on architectural styles and treatment of nature and space.
4. View maps and pictures of American Indian settlements of the past. Learn of customs observed through history. Good source: *Native American Architecture* by Peter Nabokov and Robert Easton.
7. Locate contemporary buildings which have American Indian influences.
8. Plan a Box Community. Sketch and plot ideas for an ideal community on a grid and construct models from boxes and other materials.

VOCABULARY

architecture

MATERIALS

- Pictures and maps of American Indian homes and settlements of the past.
- Pictures of contemporary buildings showing influence of American Indian worldview.
- Boxes, cardboard, materials to make model buildings and landscape.

ASSESSMENT TASKS

- Work in small groups to construct “Box Community.”
- Keep journals of document plans, disagreements, decisions and reasoning used throughout the building process.
- Plan a visitors’ time for parents, teachers, and peers to visit “Box Community.”

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

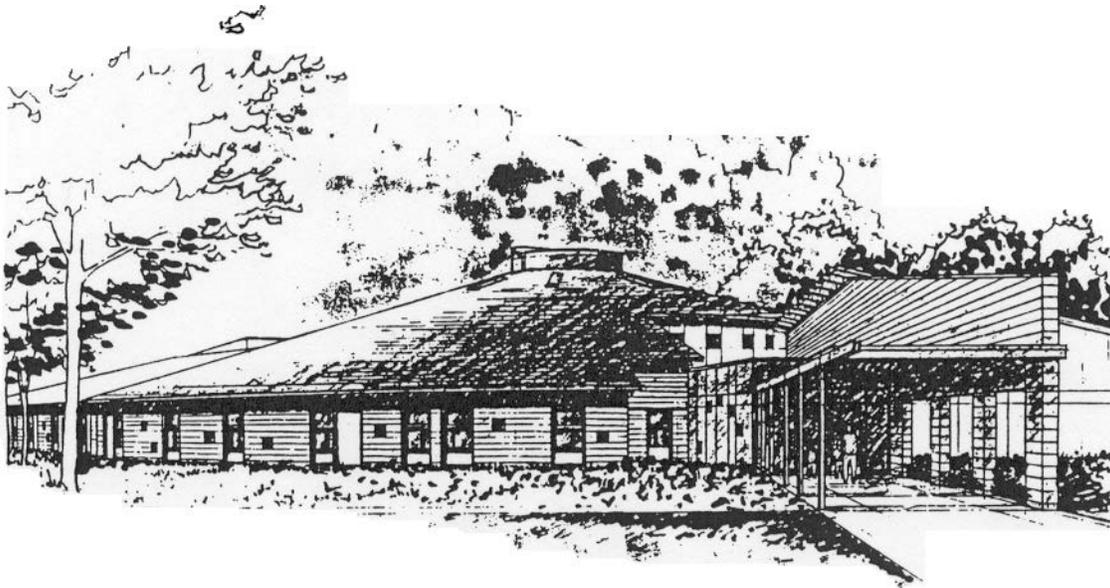
- Create posters that summarize conclusions about community building.
- Create a video that compares building in the community that has the American Indian influence with buildings that do not.

LINKAGES

Social Studies, Language Arts

Ojibwe culture is evident in the Nay Ah Shing School:

Students enter the schools through a circular room with a skylight – the circular design inspired by the American Indian sacred circle or hoop of life. The school's interior design reflects the four sacred colors and directions of the Earth: north is white, east is red, south is yellow and west is black. American Indian paintings and posters are found throughout the buildings.



Nay Ah Shing Primary School

ART - MIDDLE SCHOOL LESSON

III. DEVELOPMENTAL CHECKPOINT

Middle school students are able to develop the skills of observation and to understand the power of art to create and reflect cultures.

OUTCOME INDICATOR

Checklist for matrix assignment

CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

Art, History

LESSON OUTCOMES

Students will be able to:

- identify the elements of drawing – media, technique and aesthetics as represented in a drawing by Robert DesJarlait.
- understand the cultural components reflected in the drawing.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

1. Students view “Gi-Gi Aw Assema” (“With This Tobacco”).
2. Without any prior instruction or discussion students analyze and react to the drawing and record their thoughts.
3. Students participate in small group discussions to share ideas about the drawing and record questions they have about the art and the artist.
4. Distribute background readings for the drawings. After students have read the paragraph, they will record new information to their notes for this lesson.
5. Distribute copies of “Conversation with Robert DesJarlait.” Students read the artist’s interpretation of his work and add new information to their notes for this lesson. Record any answers obtained for their questions.
6. Discuss or write an answer to this question: How did knowing what to look for change the way you look at or talk about art?
7. Use the elements of design to describe a picture of their own choice. Students may use the matrix provided or design their own.
8. Using drawing pencils and coarse paper students create drawings to reflect something important to them and their lives.

VOCABULARY

media
technique
perspective
vanishing point perspective
composition
aesthetics
contemporary
traditional
pipestone
tobacco

MATERIALS

Drawings:
“Gi-Gi Aw Assema” (“With This Tobacco”)

Student readings:
“Background for Traditional Drawing”
“Background for Contemporary Drawing”
Reading: “Conversation With Robert DesJarlait”
Matrix

ASSESSMENT TASKS

Students use matrix to summarize knowledge obtained.

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

Gather information on the artwork of Patrick DesJarlait and Patrick DesJarlait, Jr., father and brother of Robert DesJarlait. Compare the work of the two brothers and their father.

LINKAGES

Social Studies, Language Arts

STUDENT READINGS

Background for Contemporary/Traditional Drawing

By Robert DesJarlait

Title – “Gi-Gi Aw Assema” (“With This Tobacco”)

Medium – Graphite (pencil)

“There are two kinds of drawings and paintings which are called *contemporary*. One kind is Indian art which is strongly influenced by modern art. The other kind of contemporary art depicts the continuance of traditions and ceremonies, and personal experience of present-day Indian people. “With This Tobacco” is an example of the continuance of traditions. The offering of tobacco to a plant to be picked is an old tradition which existed long before Columbus. Today, Indian people still say a prayer and offer tobacco when picking needed plants and herbs. In the drawing, the old man represents the old way; the young boy represents the new way. The tradition of the tobacco offering connects the new way with the old way. Tribal identity is continued through this act. The title, “With This Tobacco,” are the opening words of the young boy’s prayer. Blowing birch leaves indicates autumn – the proper time for picking the sage plant.”

STUDENT READING

“Conversation with Robert DesJarlait”

“The drawing for this lesson is titled “With This Tobacco.” This drawing was originally titled in Ojibwe; however, given the difficulty of pronunciation, the title has been translated into English. The image is of present-day Ojibwe. The elements of drawing – media, technique and aesthetics – are represented. Identifying the three elements enriches one’s reading and comprehension of the drawings.

Media:

My preferred choice of media is graphite (pencil). Basically, I “paint” with graphite. By using different grades of graphite, I can create various effects. The paper used for the drawings is called Fabriano – it is a high quality rag paper. Paper can make a great difference in a drawing. I like a good rag paper that allows the graphite to move freely over the surface.

Technique

Several examples of technique are:

Perspective: Two kinds of perspective are used in my drawings. **Aerial** perspective creates the effect of looking down.

Vanishing point perspective is used for “With This Tobacco.” This perspective creates the effect of distance. In this drawing, the foreground with the old man, the young boy, and the sage plants is close-up. The middle distance is made up of a hill with five birch trees. The far distance is composed of a far off hill with a solid treeline on its edge. (Beyond this hill, unseen, is a vast lake; in this lake, the old man and his ancestors have fished for hundreds of years.)

Composition:

My art is called figurative art – that is, it is the art of drawing or painting the human figure. I build my compositions around the figure. Most of my compositions are spontaneous. “With This Tobacco” is made up of four image-groups – the two figures and the sage plants; the middle distant hill with birch grove; the far hill and treeline; and the sky over the (unseen) lake.

Aesthetics:

In my style of drawing, I've strongly focused on the line. I put a lot of feeling into my line. The line – that is, how the artist draws his line – is an extremely important aspect of art. The line is the artist's signature – it is original and no two are alike. In my line work, I've developed a line which is based on the circle. I use few straight lines in my drawings. My lines curve. Sometimes the curve is sharp and sometimes the curve is soft. Many of my drawings, like the two in this lesson, are themselves contained within a circle. My influence in using the circle and circular line is based on the Circle of Life, our Mother Earth, Grandfather Sun, and Grandmother Moon, the Universe, and the soul-spirit in all living beings. All life is a circle. Like life, my line is composed of circular movements.

Certain images reappear throughout my work. An example is my use of the birch tree. The birch tree appears in many of my drawings. In those drawings without a birch tree, there is always something made of birch. In my art, the birch tree is a motif, or symbol, which is related to my culture. I call this a tribal motif, or tribal symbol because for the Ojibwe people the birch was (and is) the Sacred Tree of Life. The use and products of birch bark were many. In my art, the use of the birch tree serves a threefold purpose:

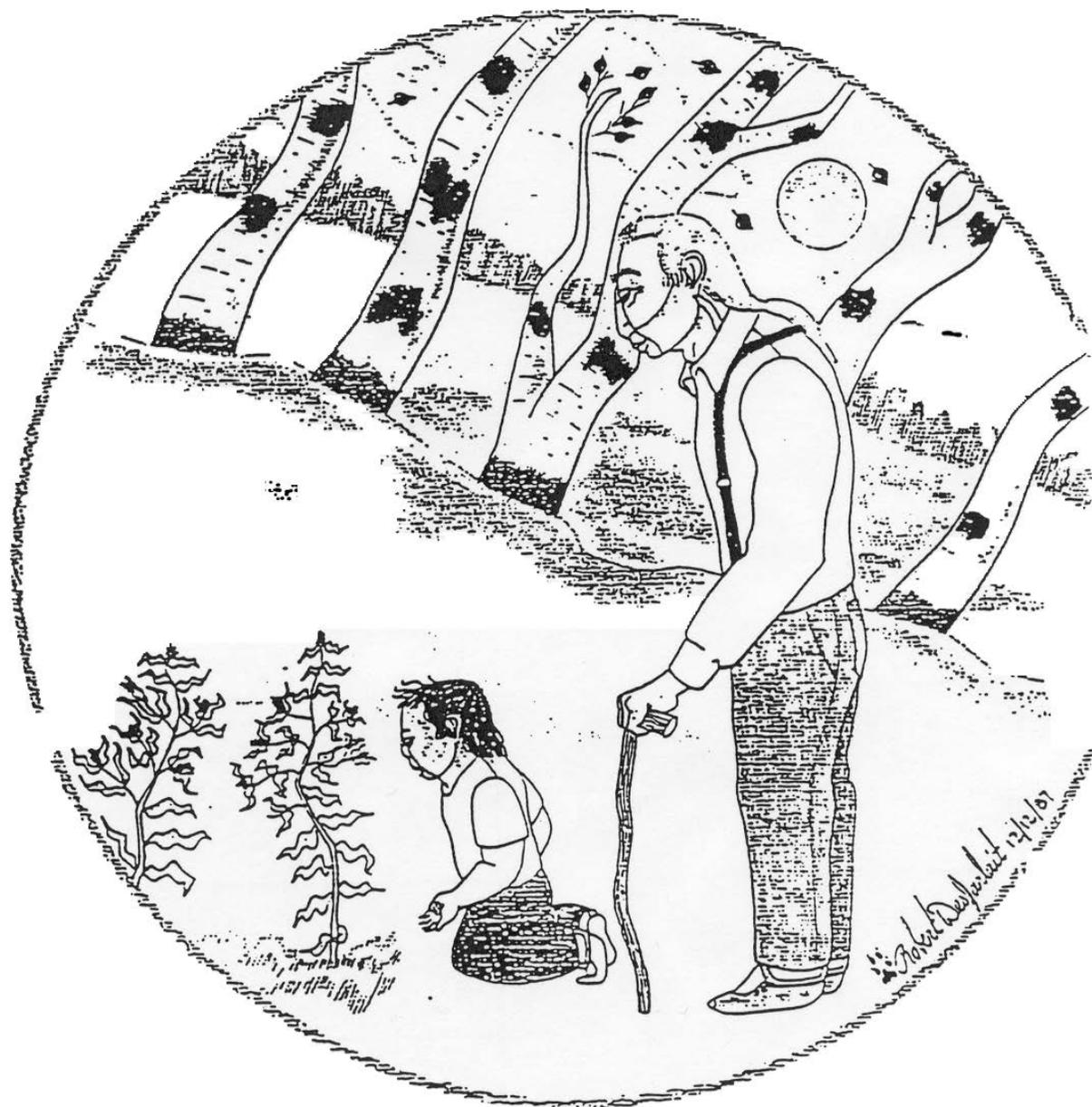
- a. it adds aesthetic quality;
- b. its use as tribal symbol; and
- c. its use as stylistic devise

In “With This Tobacco” the birch trees are used to create a repetition line. This means that a rhythm of line is used throughout the drawing. The main movement begins with the figure of the old man. His body is stooped and bent by long years. His arm repeats this bent pattern. And this “bent” pattern is repeated in several images, including the can, the sage plants, and the birch trees. This bent curve creates a rhythm of line which adds an aesthetic balance to the overall composition.

The above examples of aesthetics are, for the most part, examples of style – that is, how the art looks. However, aesthetic is more than just the way an artist draws or the artist's personal techniques. For it is this element of drawing that expresses the spiritual link between the artist, his creation, and the creator. The result is a quality, that is felt rather than seen. And what is felt is the life-force within an artist's imagery. I feel that this quality finds expression in my art.”

MATRIX

	PICTURE 1	PICTURE 2
TITLE		
ARTIST		
TRIBE		
MEDIA		
TECHNIQUE: Perspective		
COMPOSITION		
AESTHETICS Line		
Image		
Life-Force		



Gi – Gi Aw Assema (With This Tobacco)

Art – Senior High School

ART - SENIOR HIGH LESSON

IV. DEVELOPMENTAL CHECKPOINT

Senior High students recognize that many American Indian art forms are expressions of cultural values and philosophy of life.

OUTCOME INDICATORS

Sensory/Descriptive Journal of Observations

Art work using appropriate media (sketch, painting, collage, sculpture) to express dominant observation

CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

Art, Social Studies

LESSON OUTCOMES

Students will be able:

- understand that contemporary American Indian art makes use of the natural environment as well as other elements of modern society.
- understand that certain works of contemporary American Indian art represent the same values as traditional American Indian art of the past.
- know the work of George Morrison, Ojibwe artist from Grand Portage
- observe and record something in nature over a period of time
- produce an original work of art related to these observations.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

1. Display a variety of American Indian art including contemporary forms. (This lesson might be included in art themes of landscapes, seascapes or abstract and impressionist works. If this is the plan, display examples to enable students to view a variety of creative work.)
2. In addition to viewing prints and other items available, allow time for students to browse through art books such as *American Indian Art: Form and Tradition* a publication of Walker Art Center and the Minneapolis Institute of Art.
3. In an introductory discussion bring out the following:
 - Art was and is an integral part of everyday life for many American Indians.
 - American Indian art of the past made use of the natural environment.
 - Contemporary American Indian art makes use of the natural environment as well as other elements of modern society.
 - American Indian art was originally both functional and aesthetic; it was directed to the decoration of useful objects or fulfilled the spiritual needs of the tribe.
 - Today, some forms of American Indian art are created for an aesthetic purpose only.
 - Certain works of contemporary American Indian art represent the same values as traditional American Indian art of the past.
4. Assign student reading: "Contemporary Indian Art."

5. In large group discussion, students will relate what they conclude from the browsing, introductory discussion, and the reading “Contemporary Indian Art.”
6. Assign student readings on George Morrison. Video “Standing in the Northern Lights”, a documentary portrait of artist George Morrison, may be shown as an introduction to the readings or as a follow-up.
7. Conduct a debriefing session on George Morrison articles.
8. Ask each student to select a place to sit alone and observe something in nature over a period of time. It could be outdoors or by a window, depending on weather. These observations should take place daily or several times a week.
9. Assign students to write descriptions in a journal. The observations should involve all the senses and include personal feelings.
10. Ask students to produce original works of art related to their personal observations.

VOCABULARY

Students compile own lists as needed

MATERIALS

Prints of Landscapes, Seascapes

Prints of Abstract and Impressionist artists

Copies of George Morrison’s artwork

Student readings on George Morrison

Books on American Indian art and artists – examples:

American Indian Art: Form and Tradition a publication of Walker Art Center and the Minneapolis Institute of Art.

Coe, Ralph T. *Lost and Found Traditions: Native American Art 1965 – 1985*. New York: The American Federation of Arts, 1986.

Journal paper

Art supplies

RESOURCE LIST

Wade, Edwin L. ed. *The Arts of the North American Indian: Native Traditions in Evolution*. New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1986.

Film: "The Dawn Riders." This film gives an excellent overview of American Indian art.

Video: "Standing in the Northern Lights" is a documentary portrait of artist George Morrison. Grace Productions, 1991.

ASSESSMENT TASKS

- Each student selects a place to sit alone and observe something in nature over a period of time. It could be outdoors or by a window, depending on weather. These observations should take place daily or several times a week.
- The students write descriptions in a journal. The observations should involve all the senses and include personal feelings.
- The students produce original works of art related to their observations.

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

- Arrange students' artwork in a display for viewing. Make captions, titles, and a brochure for viewers.
- Invite artist from the community into the classroom.

LINKAGES

Social Studies, Language Arts, Art Appreciation

STUDENT READING

Contemporary American Indian Art

In the past, all American Indian art was linked to Indian spirituality. This was because every aspect of daily life was linked to the spiritual nature of the various American Indian cultures. Today, many American Indians maintain these traditional values. However, with the merging of cultures that has taken place since the time of European contact, the spiritual nature of American Indian art has been capsulized. It is clear that many American Indian artists still produce artwork that serves a spiritual purpose. It is also clear that the lifestyle of all American Indians has changed drastically since European contact. In the past, American Indian cultural and spiritual traditions were outlawed. American Indian children have been sent away to boarding schools in an attempt by the United States Government to assimilate these cultures. And the list of changes goes on. Today, American Indians have had to learn to exist in a cultural setting quite different from their cultural past. For this reason, two forms of American Indian art have come into being. The traditional art, which maintains the philosophical and ritual standards of the past and a form of American Indian art that is similar in design but is being produced for strictly aesthetic purposes. This last form of American Indian art is important to the tribes who produce it. It has contributed a great deal to the economies of these tribes and is in constant demand by tourists.

Art for art's sake has existed on the European continent for years and was brought to this continent by Europeans. American Indians today now produce art objects for this reason, however, it is a new dimension of Indian art that has only recently come into existence.

It is true that American Indian art expresses unique concepts. This is true for all types of artistic expression. Many American Indian artists feel that the term "Indian Art" is a stereotype. They feel that the term separates Indian art from other types of art and that this puts it in a category in which it is not taken as seriously as other forms of artistic expression. For the American Indian artist who feels this way, the focus of art is not racial in content. Rather, Indian artists draw on their own cultural experiences to express something of value to the whole human race.

STUDENT READING

George Morrison **Renowned Ojibwe artist speaks to Pine Point Youth**

In the 5th grade he was always the one that got chosen to draw the turkey on the black board for Thanksgiving, because everybody knew he could draw. In high school, they didn't have much for art at Grand Marais, but he got into shop class because he liked to work with tools. Growing up, his sketch books were like a diary to him, and they still are. He says they're a means of self-expression, and encourages all students to use them. George Morrison told these and other facts about his life to a group of students at the Pine Point School.

Morrison, an enrolled member at Grand Portage, grew up on the Grand Portage Reservation, along the North Shore. His place of origin is obvious in many of his paintings, the Lake Superior water being a source of inspiration for him.

Taking his love of drawing one step further, Morrison wanted to go to school for commercial art, so he went to the Minneapolis School of Art after graduation from high school. After graduation, he got his big break. "I got a one-way ticket to New York. I always dreamed of being an artist in New York, and I got a scholarship...I stayed there for 20 years," he said.

It was there that he was able to make a living as an artist, and the exposure at art galleries helped establish his claim to fame. But his talent and drive are really what made him successful as an artist.

His credits include an 8-foot design for the American Indian Center that he created for the National Endowment for the Arts. In Seattle, Morrison created an 8' x 10' underwater design based on Ojibwe legends. It is now at the Starbreak Center. The entire design is done in redwood. In Idaho, he created a totem pole at the State Forestry Building. "My version of a totem pole...the totem idea is universal, it's like a gravestone marker," he said. Morrison is responsible for the 21-foot totem pole that stands in the lobby of the LaSalle Plaza in Minneapolis. It features many images – birds, flowers, leaves, other animals. In 1992, he designed a 26' x 28' granite mosaic in twelve colors on the sidewalk on the Nicollet Mall in Minneapolis.

Besides working as an artist on commission, Morrison has also taught art beginning in 1960. "Teaching is one of the good ways for an artist to make a living," he said. Growing tired of the big city life; Morrison decided to get back to his "spiritual place by the lake." He got a teaching job at the University of Minnesota and moved back to Grand Portage. He taught from 1970, until he "retired" in 1983.

In 1993, Morrison completed about 80 paintings, and had a display on exhibit at the Dolly Fiterman Fine Arts Gallery in Minneapolis.

Though he started drawing "recognizable forms", like animals, the sky, the sun, things you could see, he now draws mostly abstract paintings, ones that the beholder uses his or her imagination to figure out.

“I’ve been at this a long time – 50 or 60 years. I guess an artist is never really retired until he’s dead,” he said.

Adapted from an article by Barb Nelson in *Anishinabe Dee-Bah-Gee-Mo-Win*, newspaper published on the White Earth Reservation, July 1993.

STUDENT READING

George Morrison

Art collection of infinite horizon fits Morrison well

From the Grand Portage Indian Reservation, where he was born in 1919, to the art worlds of Minneapolis, New York, Paris, Provincetown (Mass.) and then back to a studio on the rocky shore of Lake Superior, George Morrison has come full circle.

His abstract painting, wood mosaics and geometric totems are in museums, galleries and private collections throughout the country from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts to the Art Institute of Chicago. During his New York decades (1943 to 1963), his circles became the stuff of art world legend.

Now his cycle is that of the seasons and the lake whose variable moods and seemingly infinite horizon he has been painting for the past seven years. His 61 horizon paintings – small, intense abstractions shimmering with myriad colors – [were] featured in a show at the Minnesota Museum of Art. They are, he says, the culmination of everything he knows about painting and what he’s coming to know about nature and the spiritual values of his Chippewa heritage.

“Landscape has always been a subject for me and that landscape became more of a subject because it was right outside,” Morrison said during an interview that was done in the turn-of-the-century St. Paul condominium apartment he shares with his artist wife, Hazel Belvo. “I was picking up on the idea of landscape and horizon and combining a lot of the old techniques that were my foundation and throwing all of this into these little paintings.”

The paintings are small, most about 7 by 12 inches, in part because Morrison has been struggling against Castleman’s disease, a cancer-like blood condition, for several years and larger work is too exhausting. Some of the paintings were made in St. Paul, but most were made at his studio in Grand Portage, Minnesota, on a rocky ledge at the water’s edge.

“If you go to George’s studio and home you understand immediately what these paints are about, because 20 feet out the window is Lake Superior, which changes hour by hour, minute by minute,” said Steven Klindt, director of Duluth’s Tweed Museum of Art. “Each painting is dominated by this striking horizon line and, even though they are very abstract, they really represent what he sees – the changing colors of the light, the water, the rocks, the seasons.”

For Morrison, the paintings contain more than his observations of nature and understanding of paint. They are also a meditation on the lake that has been a part of his life since he carried the family’s drinking water from it while growing up in Chippewa City, an Indian village near Grand Marais.

“The lake has many moods,’ Morrison said. “It is a living thing, a very powerful thing that changes by the hour like a living human being. If you’re close to it, it becomes more potent as a subject. By virtue of living near it or being born by it, it has a certain meaning for your life. It’s good for you and it has certain healing properties.”

The third of 12 children, Morrison grew up in the Depression when times were hard for everyone but perhaps even more difficult for Indian families, many of whom were uneducated, unskilled and isolated. The Morrison house was over-crowded and had no plumbing or electricity. His father was a “woods person” who got a job with the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) digging and installing a water system in Grand Marais.

Food was sometimes scarce, and two of his siblings died in infancy and two later in life. A childhood leg injury left Morrison with a permanent limp, and when he was 9 years old he was hospitalized for 18 months with tuberculosis. He recalls the hardships stoically and without rancor. He is a strong man who moves quickly despite the limp and with the aid of a cane. He walks vigorously at least an hour a day. He credits the hospitalization with giving him time to develop interests in reading and music. The limp kept him out of military service in World War II; several of his high-school buddies were killed in action, and he said he believes he would have met the same fate because many Indians “were drafted into rougher service and became hard-line infantry material.”

He speaks equivocally about discrimination he encountered in his early years. The Indian community wasn’t exactly segregated, but Indians lived “pretty much apart,” he said. Education through eighth grade was compulsory, but Indian children often found little encouragement to continue beyond that. Morrison was the only member of his family to complete high school, though several brothers and sister have since earned equivalency diplomas.

Though he spent two years in a government-run Indian boarding school in Wisconsin, he all but forgot his native language and learned little about his Chippewa heritage because the schools disparaged Indian culture. “

When we grew up we had to do like the white people, to dress as nice as they, to be as clean as they, to talk as proper as they,” he said. “They were trying to civilize the savages in their dress, behavior and language. In other ways they were destroying a society and trying to assimilate a culture into so-called civilized society. We were made to be ashamed of being Indian.”

He regrets the early suppression of his Indian heritage, but he learned how to succeed in white society. His obvious artistic talent attracted the attention of high-school teachers who helped him get a Chippewa Agency scholarship to the Minneapolis College of Art (now the Minneapolis College of Art and Design).

There he excelled at painting and won the school's most prestigious prize, the Vanderlip Traveling Scholarship, upon his graduation in 1943.

"I bought a one-way ticket to New York and stayed for 20 years," he said.

Even during World War II, New York City was a mecca for artists and Morrison quickly became part of the social and cultural ferment at the Art Students League, the most famous art school of the era. He studied there for three years and set about becoming a New Yorker. He spent summers at the Provincetown, MA, artists' colony, and sold enough paintings and drawings to survive, sometimes supplementing his income by frame-making.

The New York art world of the 1940's and 1950's was less of a fame factory than it is today. Morrison recalls the camaraderie of artists living in Greenwich Village and in what is now the hyper fashionable East Village. Everyone worked hard, offered encouragement at gallery openings, and hung out at the Cedar Bar, which was as legendary in the 1950's art scene as the Algonquin Hotel was among writers in the 1920's.

Morrison is modest about his passing acquaintance with such luminaries as Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline and equally about his career, which included seven years on the faculty of the Rhode Island School of Design, A Fulbright Grant that gave him a year in France, and about 15 years at the University of Minnesota, where he taught American Indian studies and studio art.

Though he was involved with the Indian community even during his New York decades, he began to delve more deeply into his Ojibwe heritage after he returned to Minnesota in 1970.

His paintings and large wood mosaics fashioned from driftwood and stained and weathered lumber are more clearly related to surrealism and abstract expressionism than to traditional Indian imagery or crafts such as beadwork. Nevertheless, his Indian roots are subtle and complex.

Patricia Hobot, a Lakota Indian who is gallery director at the Minneapolis American Indian Center, finds a philosophy distinctive to the American Indian in Morrison's use of "natural" materials such as driftwood and in his way of fitting hundreds of small pieces of carefully polished wood into a single large design.

"People often want something that is stereotypical Indian and involves racial stereotyping," Hobot said, "but George's work embodies the abstract values of the Indian people ... His use of pieces to make up a whole is very Indian. It shows respect for individuality but indicates how the individual is expected to fit into a whole..."

Museum director Klindt also sees a natural spiritualism in both Morrison's life and his work. Morrison weaves the customs of Indian and non-Indian together easily, Klindt said. Following a Thanksgiving celebration one year, Morrison and his wife invited Klindt and other guests to smoke a peace pipe and make a pilgrimage with them to the "Witch Tree," a famous gnarled Lake Superior cedar that is the subject of dozens of Belvo's paintings and drawings. They left a small offering of tobacco near the roots of three, something Morrison says they do often.

"I have never heard him talk about it and say that the Great Spirit came out of the water or anything like that..." Klindt said, "But I think his spiritualism would be tough to deny."

Morrison doesn't deny it, though he is cautious not to claim expertise in such matters and speaks carefully to avoid trivializing the subject. Only now, late in life, is he beginning to learn the traditions of his own people, and he speaks with regret of the lost years. He was honored recently when a tribal elder dreamt two names for him – Gway Ki Go Nay Ga Bow, which means "turning feather around," and Wa Wah Tay Go Nay Ga Bow, which means "standing in the northern lights."

Unbeknown to the dreamer, two of Morrison's most important works were on the subject of feathers and the northern lights, one of them being the handsome wood mosaic on the facade of the American Indian Center on Franklin Avenue in Minneapolis. The feather motif also appeared in a dream, which Morrison had many years ago, of a field covered with feathers. Haunted by the dream, he drew the image in a journal from which he later abstracted the mosaic design.

And so in the names and the dreams of others, Morrison found his life coming full circle. He was honored by a naming ceremony and helped, he said, by a healing ceremony. His illness is in remission...and he is feeling good.

"In my own way I believe in a lot of the old Indian ideas," he said. "I like the idea of prayer to give strength, to make you well; and I believe in the healing power of prayer in the Christian sense, as well as the Indian sense."

—From an article in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* by Mary Abbe Martin

Editors Note: *George Morrison passed away on April 17, 2000.*