

LESSON PLAN: American Indian Art

By Cynthia Lofquist and Amy Wunsch, June 2008

Learn about contemporary American Indian art and create a clay vessel with your own symbols.



Key Ideas

One of the most important Southwest American Indian traditions is pottery making. Thousands of years have been invested into this craft. With each pot that is created, American Indian philosophy, spirituality, as well as individual and cultural identity is explored. American Indian artists today continue this tradition by not only recreating ancestral symbols and methods of construction, but also by creating their own personal, artistic language.

Objectives

1. Students will tour the museum and campus to view several American Indian artworks, focusing on coil-built pottery. Students will engage in a dialogue about each art work, as prompted by the instructor's questioning strategies.
2. Students will create a coil pot, incorporating other pottery techniques, and decorate it with personal symbols

Vocabulary

Indigenous Americans: the indigenous peoples of the Americas are the pre-Columbian inhabitants of the Americas, their descendants, and many ethnic groups who identify with those peoples. They are often also referred to as Native Americans, First Nations, and by Christopher Columbus' historical mistake, "Indians".

Scoring: to roughen, notch, scratch or incise a surface.

Slip: clay that has been moistened with water to form a paste, used in ceramic/pottery construction.

Olla: "oy-ah": water jug; a rounded earthenware pot or jar, used for cooking or for carrying water. The olla was used to store water and was wrapped in burlap to keep the water cool.

Register: a limit or boundary; a border.

Stylized: having generalized forms, often according to specific cultural conventions; represented or designed according to a style or pattern rather than according to nature; simplified, exaggerated visually.

Utilitarian: having regard to usefulness rather than beauty, ornamentation, etc.

Relief: the projection of figures or forms from a flat background, as in sculpture

Sgraffito: decoration produced on pottery or ceramic by scratching through a surface of plaster or glazing to reveal a different color underneath.

Evaluation

Each student will evaluate his or her own artwork in a group critique along the following questions:

- Discuss the symbols and decorative motifs you used on your pottery. What prompted you to use these particular symbols?
- Would you view your artwork as a utilitarian piece or non-utilitarian? How does the form of your piece reflect its use?
- What technical challenges did you encounter while creating your pottery? How did you problem-solve to overcome these challenges?

Tour Artwork Images



Nathan Begaye (American Indian, Navajo-Hopi, b. 1958- d. 2010)

Double Shoulder Jar, 2001

Clay

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 2014.39



Helen Shupla (American Indian, Santa Clara Pueblo, b. 1928 – d. 1985)

Black Melon Jar, c. 1975

Ceramic

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007.67



Diego Romero (American Indian, Cochiti Pueblo, b. 1964)

Dancing Coyotes, 2007

Earthenware

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007.46



Barbara Cerno and Joseph Cerno (American Indian, Hopi-Acoma and Acoma Pueblo,
b. 1951 and 1947)

Train Pot, 2006

Clay

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 2006.67



Black Bear / Stephen LeBoueff (American Indian, Blackfeet, b. 1940)

Thunderbird, 2007

Clay

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007.73