

BASKET LESSON – 3rd through 5th Grades

For experiencing the *Rooted, Revived, Reinvented: Basketry in America Exhibition*

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Goals & Expectations

Big Idea / Theme: **Objects Tell Stories.** Man-made objects nearly always contain inherent connotations about their purpose based on appearance and materials used. Baskets are no exception and are literally “woven” into the fabric of human history from some of the earliest civilizations to the present day.

Pre-exhibition visit plan:

- First we will discuss the list in the “Essential Investigative Questions” below, reviewing the pieces that will be on display as we discuss these important aspects of basketry. In particular, we will focus on the following exemplar artists after we’ve covered all of the questions:
 - o **Pinot Tribe** – Wedding basket: this is the perfect example of a basket made from natural, traditional materials for the traditional purpose of commemorating a wedding.
 - o **Jan Hopkins** – “Forbidden”: Jan Hopkins uses waxed linen and natural discarded materials from the environment such as cedar bark, fruit peels and leaves. The purpose of her weaving is strictly aesthetic, however.
 - o **Ed Rossbach** – Mickey Mouse basket: Ed Rossbach’s work is a perfect example of an artist using contemporary discarded materials such as plastic and newspaper to weave baskets featuring a design that references contemporary culture. The basket is both functional, but has been treated primarily as an aesthetic art piece.
 - o **Nathalie Miebach**: any of Nathalie Miebach’s pieces utilize both natural and man-made materials. Her work is a visual / physical translation of contemporary scientific data related to astronomy, ecology and meteorology. Her work is purely aesthetic.

These artists are of particular interest because they are in contrast of each other in terms of types of materials, purpose and period. Each one embodies a different combination of those factors.

Essential Investigative Questions:

- Basic vocabulary
 - o functional vs. aesthetic
 - o man-made vs. natural
 - o traditional vs. contemporary

- What is a basket?
 - o What can they be used for?
 - o Distinction between aesthetic, functional, both

- Who makes them?
 - o Lineage of basket makers
 - o Cultural traditions

- From what materials? Why?
 - o Differentiation between natural and man-made materials
 - o Availability of materials based on environment
 - o What do materials say about the environment of the makers?

- More complex essential questions:
 - o How does the materiality of the basket speak to the time, culture, and function?
 - o What is the artist communicating through the vessel?

Responding & Connecting

“Raiders of the Lost Basket”

What students will learn about baskets: Students will understand the history and significance of basketry in society, they will learn about some specific basket makers, and they will learn how to identify the purpose and historical context of a basket based largely on its appearance.

Museum Activity: There will be 3 baskets at the museum brought by the teacher. The teacher will fill each basket with folded papers, each containing a property of baskets:

Basket 1 (Purpose):

- Functional
- Aesthetic
- Both Functional and Aesthetic

Basket 2 (Materials):

- Natural Materials
- Man-made Materials
- Both Natural and Man-made Materials

Basket 3 (Period/Era)

- Historic / Traditional (prior to the past 100 years)
- Contemporary
- Contemporary but traditional in appearance

Students will be teamed in groups of 3. Each team member will draw a piece of paper from one of the 3 baskets (they must each draw from a different basket). One team might end up with the following combination:

“Aesthetic, Man-Made Materials, Contemporary”, while another team might get the following combination: “Functional, Natural Materials, Historic/Traditional”. Other teams might end up with unlikely combinations such as: “Aesthetic, Man-Made Materials, Historic/Traditional”. In those cases, since it’s unlikely that the exhibition would feature a purely aesthetic piece made by an ancient culture out of man-made materials, the students are encouraged to identify this discrepancy and may substitute another basket property for 1 or 2 of the ones that don’t exist at the museum. The important thing is that they are able to identify which properties are present.

Once each team has identified a basket at the museum that fits the properties they drew from the teacher baskets, they will write down the artist, name of the piece and any information found on the display placard such as materials, date and purpose. They will take a picture of the basket. When we return to class, each team will present their picture (submitted to the teacher for overhead projection), explain what they know about the basket and why they chose it based on the properties they drew.

Creating & Presenting

“The DaVessel Code”

Students will answer a series of questions about an imaginary culture and then draw / design on paper a basket that gives visual cues to all of those questions and “tells a story” about itself and the people who use it. We will be pretending that this basket, found by archeologists (or astronauts) is the only clue about the civilization from whence it came.

Each student will secretly fill in his or her answers to the following questions:

1. We lived on a world covered in _____.
2. Our most abundant resource was _____ and we used it to make our baskets / vessels.
3. Our primary source of food was _____.
4. We needed baskets / vessels for _____.
5. We spent a lot of time doing _____.
6. We worshipped _____.
7. Our technology was (advanced / primitive)_____.

(Feel free to add or replace questions as you see fit!)

Using pencil, colored pencils, marker, paint, and/or image cutouts on poster board (or whatever available medium they choose, including digital if available), each student will design a basket that visually provides clues / reveals the answer to as many of these questions as possible. Each student will take a turn presenting his or her basket design to the class. The class will be the “archeologists” that

discovered the basket and are now trying to solve the mystery of the civilization it came from. The questions to answer will be written on the board and students will raise their hands and try to answer each question as they look at the design. The creator of the design will answer only with yes or no. The class has 5 chances to get each answer right. After all of the questions have been tackled, the creator will explain the design and any answers that were not correctly solved.

Assessment

Museum Activity ("Raiders of the Lost Basket"):

Based on the appearance of the basket chosen by each team, as well as the team's explanation for their choice, the teacher will be able to determine how well the students understood the properties of baskets chosen for use with the exercise. For example, if a team chose a basket made entirely of grass and part of the property list was "man-made materials" then they didn't quite understand either the property or the activity.

Archeology Game ("The DaVessel Code"):

Student work will be assessed both by the teacher and by the students' peers. How well their design provides clues and answers questions for their peers will serve as a self-assessment for each presenter. The teacher can assess how well each student understood what they've learned about materials, form & function and how well they've utilized this knowledge in designing a basket for the archeology game. Their artistic skills will also be on display here, but it is more important that they understood the principles covered in the pre-museum discussion. Their designs will also likely include certain visual influences from artists reviewed before and during the museum visit.