

Persian and Navajo

Bookmarks (art + history, art + social sciences)

This lesson plan explains two diverse and beautiful style of textiles: Persian carpets and Navajo rugs. Similar colors and geometric shapes are two common elements of both.

Persian (now Iran) carpets are finely woven of wool, cotton and silk on highly sophisticated looms permitting multiple yard direction and patterns. These date back to 500 BC. Most carpets depicted scenes of deer, animals and horsemen. The background or “field” told a story of hunting, famous buildings and life in general. Patterns often repeated geometric designs, flowers and trees. “Motif” is a pattern of designs sometimes used alone or repeated in the field. Persian carpets have an overall pattern, a central motif, or a one-sided pattern. These detailed carpets are very story-like and often desired as wall hangings due to richness of fibers and motif details. Persian carpets were rich in dark reds and neutrals.

The history of Navajo rugs is quite different in subject and construction. The first weavings by Native American Indians were thought to have come from the Pueblo culture around 1300-1500 AD and were mostly made of cotton from plants. These early rugs or blankets were used for warmth. Later Spanish traders introduced yarn made of sheep’s wool. Early Navajo designs were simple broad stripes, geometrically stacked shapes, and diamond patterns. Their more simplistic weaving style on upright looms resulted in uneven and knotted textures. Dark reds, natural fiber, and an imported blue-black Indigo dye were often used in a simple motif of geometric designs that were not connected to storytelling and religion.

These two diverse cultures share a love of design – one deep in storytelling and one deep in a need for survival.

Grade Levels 4-6

Note: Instructions and materials based on a class of 25 students. Adjust as needed.

Recommended resources:

Dover Pictura Electronic Clip Art Books and CD-ROM, Native American Design (71310-1011) and Islamic Design (71310-1004).



Materials

Blick Studio® Canvas Pad, 9" x 12", 10-sheet pad (07400-1043); share two pads across class

Blickrylic®, pint (00711-); choose assorted colors to share

Jute Twine, 3-ply, 219-ft roll (62984-8543); share one across class

Elmer's® Glue-All®, 7-5/8-oz bottles (23810-1005); share 3 across class

Sharpie® Fine Point Marker, Black (21316-2001) and Brown (21316-8001); share six each across class

Blick® Soap Eraser, box of 24 (21519-1024); share two boxes across class

Blick Studio® Artists' Colored Pencils (22063-); choose assorted colors to share

Process

1. Cut each 9" x 12" canvas sheet into quarters (4.5" x 6") and give each student 3-4 pieces. This will allow each student to make 2-3 bookmarks; suggest they make one Persian Carpet and one Navajo Rug. Paint each piece on the whitest side of the canvas with choice of acrylic colors. Mix white with a little burnt sienna for a beige or natural fiber look. Beige, dark red, and burnt sienna create particularly effective backgrounds and can also be used for details later with a fine brush.
2. Use the canvas vertically for either a Persian Carpet or Navajo Rug. Use a ruler to mark pencil guidelines across the width of the Navajo Rug; lines can be randomly spaced. Follow these with horizontal diamond or other geometric shapes in colored pencil.
3. Because of the mini size, the motif on Persian Carpet bookmarks should use minimal detail. Borders and flower designs in any of the three basic motifs - overall geometric, center design, or one-sided pattern work well. An example of a one-sided design would be a building on one side and a tree on the other. Sketch first with a graphite pencil then blend and fill with colored pencils.
4. To color with pencils, use repeated layers to get colors to adhere well. The textures of the canvas and paint looks like real fiber, especially when combined with layers of pencil. Lightly rub the pencil shading with a tissue to blend and remove loose pencil scraps.
5. Fine point markers, particularly black and brown, can be used for fine detail and texture. Press gently and keep lines as thin as possible. Break lines up to look like fibers weaving in and out. Add pencil again to soften a line that might be too pronounced.
6. Fold the Navajo Rug in half vertically for a bookmark, Cut 6 or 8 pieces of twine about 1/2" long. Place glue evenly on the backside of the bookmark or inside the fold. Place several pieces of twine in the



top open corner and bottom corner to make a tassel. Press firmly to seal the "rug". Tassels in these two corners mimic the single upright Navajo loom.

7. The Persian Carpet bookmark will accommodate more detailed design when left open at 4.5" x 6". The Persian loom created fringe on top and bottom, so cut the twine into 1/2" pieces then twist them between fingers to separate strands. Cut enough to use as fringe on both ends of the carpet. Place glue on both top and bottom edges of the back of the "carpet". Place twine closely side-by-side on the glue with half extending past the edge of the canvas. Repeat for both ends. Let dry then add more glue to cover the back of the carpet to the edges. Place one last canvas piece on top to finish. Press well, especially edges where fringe is covered.

Options

1. Grades K-2 could substitute 9" x 12" drawing paper, crayons and cut brown crepe paper for a "rug" rather than making a bookmark.
2. Paint canvas with bright colored designs for a contemporary bookmark
3. Use school colors rather than traditional colors
4. Use crepe paper cut into fringe instead of twine
5. Use ribbon between folds; add beads to ribbon

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National Standards for Visual Arts Education

Content Standard #3 Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

K-4 Students explore and understand prospective content for works of art

5-8 5-8 Students use subjects, themes, and symbols that demonstrate knowledge of contexts, values, and aesthetics that communicate intended meaning in artworks

Content Standard #4 — Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

K-4 Students know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationships to various cultures

5-8 Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures

Content Standard #6 — Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

K-4 Students identify connections between the visual arts and other disciplines in the curriculum

5-8 Students compare the characteristics of works in two or more art forms that share similar subject matter, historical periods, or cultural context