

Southwest Native American Jewelry

(art + history; art + social studies)

Native Americans used symbols and motifs with deep cultural significance in many artforms. Jewelry making allowing meaningful artwork to be worn or held in the hand. Turquoise, coral, shell, wood and bone were delicately carved into beads in pre-Columbian cultures. After Spanish explorers brought silversmithing to Navajo, Hopi and Pueblo artists in the 1800's, Southwest jewelry developed into a distinctive art form.

Grade Levels 7-12

Preparation

1. View examples of Southwest jewelry and look for symbolism in icons. Discuss Native American purposes for creating jewelry, beyond adornment. Some were for healing and medicinal uses, others were used as part of ceremonies and rituals. Many personal pieces were created to bring luck or to indicate status within a tribe.
2. Prepare a clay pendant blank for each student by rolling out a slab of clay 1/4" thick or less and cutting it into 2" x 2" pieces. Each student will also need a 1-1/2" diameter piece of clay for creating beads. Keep moist until it is time to distribute in the classroom by placing in a zip-lock sandwich bag with a wet paper towel.

Process

1. Distribute a clay pendant blank to each student on a paper towel. The pendant can be carved with clay tools, built up relief-style with more clay or texturized with tools. Students should use Native American symbols and patterns to design their pieces. Make two holes in the top part of the pendant with a wooden scratch stick, not too close to the edge. Set aside to dry.
2. Students create two beads from the remaining clay. Roll to a ball or tap to a cube shape. Make both beads the same size and shape. Take the scratch stick and pierce the side of one bead, then pierce the other until a channel is formed in the middle of the bead. Insert the stick and use it to hold the bead while decorating.



Materials

[Sculpture House Claystone Self-Hardening Clay, Red \(33255-2984\)](#), 4-lb box, need one box per 10 students

[Slab Roller \(30323-1024\)](#) and [Thickness Strips \(30323-1009\)](#), need one set per class

[Student Modeling Tools \(30361-1009\)](#), 7-tool set, share four across classroom

[Scratch Sticks \(14907-1045\)](#), package of 100, need one per student

[Blick Artist's Acrylic](#), 8-oz Turquoise (00624-5265), 8-oz Titanium White (00624-1015), 4.65-oz Burnt Sienna (00624-8044), distribute across classroom

[White Silk Sponge \(32904-0100\)](#), cut into four pieces, need one piece per student

[Imitation Leather Cord \(61514-1025\)](#), 25-meter coil, need 1/2 meter per student

Optional

[Assorted Metallic Beads \(60776-1001\)](#)

Process, continued

3. Students create textures and patterns on the beads, striving to duplicate the design on both beads.
4. Slide beads off and rest them on the side with one of the openings to keep from flattening the design. Allow 24 hours dry time, turning the bead over once during that period.
5. Paint the beads and pendant by stippling the surface with acrylic paint applied with a sponge. Stipple the surface with white first, then apply turquoise and small amounts of sienna. Do not allow the paint to run down into the textured areas - allow them to remain the terra cotta color of the clay. Allow to dry.
6. String the pendant on a piece of leather cord. Make sure it is centered. Tie a knot 1" from either side of the pendant, string the beads on the cord and tie another knot on the other side of the beads to secure. Knot both strings together at the ends and the pendant is ready to wear.

Option

- Incorporate silver beads with the clay beads for the appearance of real Southwest metal work.

**Lesson Plan and Artwork submitted by
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National Standards

Content Standard #1 — Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes

5-8 Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas

9-12 Students apply media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks

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

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

9-12 Students reflect on how artworks differ visually, spatially, temporally, and functionally, and describe how these are related to history and culture

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

5-8 Students analyze, describe, and demonstrate how factors of time and place (such as climate, resources, ideas, and technology) influence visual characteristics that give meaning and value to a work of art

9-12 Students analyze relationships of works of art to one another in terms of history, aesthetics, and culture, justifying conclusions made in the analysis and using such conclusions to inform their own art making

