

# String Painting

## Inspired by Huichol Nierikas

(art + social studies, art + math)

High in the Sierra Madre mountains of west-central Mexico, the Huichol people are one of the last Native American tribes whose culture remains much the same as it was in pre-Columbian times. Without a written language to pass on their rituals and beliefs, these highly creative artists create beautiful paintings filled with symbolism and images that portray history, stories, traditions, prayers and visions.

Huichol Nierikas are beautiful paintings made from yarn pressed onto beeswax-coated wood. Hours and even days of work are represented in each piece.

A simple way for students to experience the color, geometric linework and symbolism of Huichol art is outlined in this lesson plan. Using colorful string applied to an adhesive-backed piece of felt, students create their designs without messy glue or sharp cutting tools — one section at a time.

**Grade Levels** 3-12

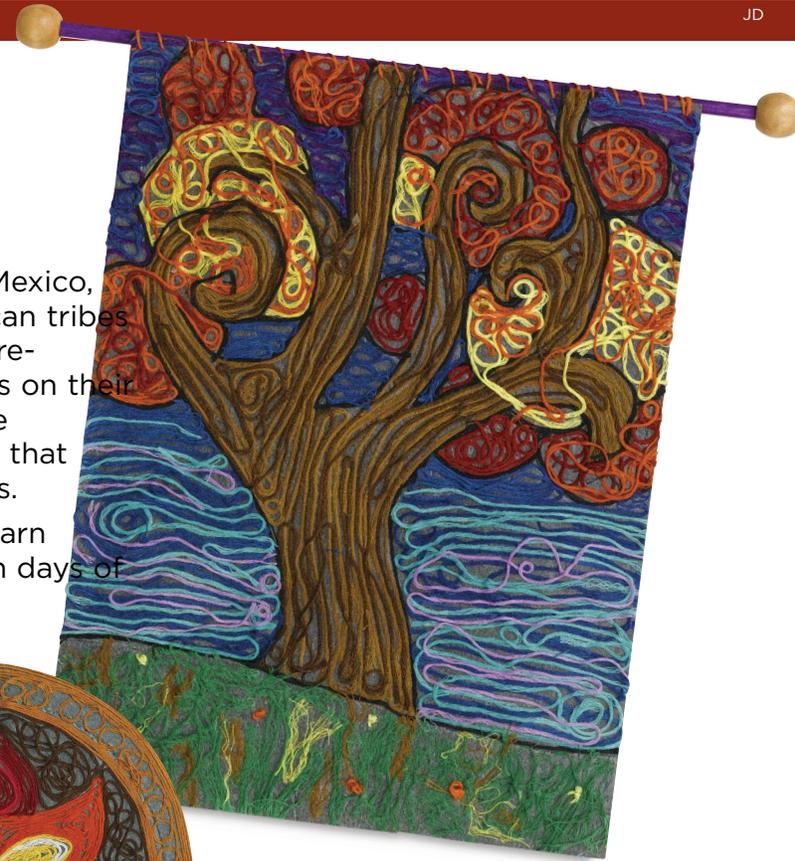
*Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 25 students. Adjust them as needed.*

### Preparation

1. View examples of work by Huichol artists. Note that image themes are drawn from nature: deer, peyote cactus, corn, earth, sun, water, fire and so on. Observe color use: images are often outlined with contrasting colors to give them emphasis. Point out how Huichol artists use repeating patterns and shapes to give their pieces overall unity.

### Process

1. Make a preliminary sketch on a 9" x 12" piece of paper. Look for places where the design can be divided into sections that can be worked while other sections remain covered; emphasize those lines. Transfer the design by placing it on the back (or paper) side of the felt and tracing it with a hard pencil or ballpoint pen to impress the lines.



### Materials

**Stick-It Felt Sheets**, package of six, 9" x 12", assorted colors (63211-); one sheet per student



**Creativity Street® Embroidery Floss**, set of 24 skeins (63100-1009); share three sets among the class



**Blick® Studio Drawing Pencils**, 4H (22220-2042); one per student

**Snippy® Scissors**, blunt (57040-1005); one pair per student

**Blick® Acrylic Matte Medium**, 1-qt (00623-1047); share among the class

### OPTIONAL MATERIALS

Embroidery Needles

**Wooden Dowel**, 12"L x 1/4"Dia, package of 12 (60448-1412)

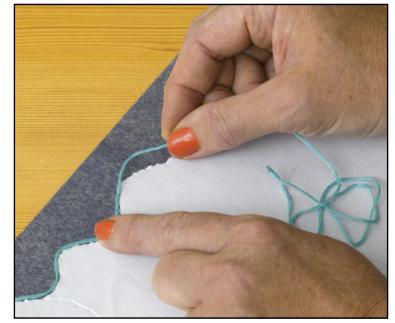


## Process, continued

- The release paper covering the adhesive can be easily “cut” with hard pencil lines. Simply draw over the sketch one section at a time using firm pressure. Multiple strokes may be required in order for the cuts to go all the way through the paper. When you are finished, lift off the paper. The lines made by the pencil will be jagged.
- “Paint” the image by filling in the area with colorful string, pressing it gently onto the adhesive. Here are some guidelines:
  - Use one hand to arrange the string and the other to follow it and tap the string gently into place. Once an area is filled, it can be burnished down completely.
  - Place long strings side by side to make smooth fills, then loop, swirl, zig-zag, cut, fray and cross the strands to create texture.
  - It’s easy to make changes by pulling up the string and repositioning it. Whereas yarn would leave residue, string will leave very little and will not pull up the adhesive.
  - Try to keep fingers from too much contact with the adhesive or it will lose its tackiness. Working with clean hands is always best.
- Repeat the process by cutting away another section and applying string until the piece is complete.
- Permanently seal the finished piece by brushing a coat of matte medium over the surface.



**Step 1:** Draw a design on the paper-backed felt. Use a hard pencil to “cut” pieces out and expose the adhesive.



**Step 2:** Press colorful string into the adhesive to create the design.



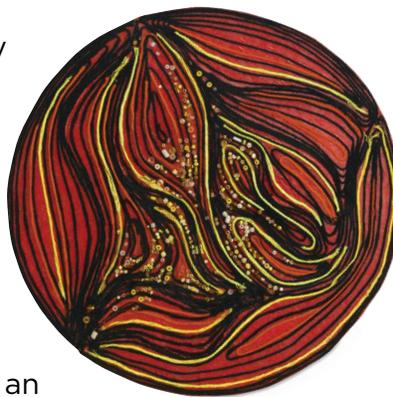
**Step 3:** Continue cutting away one area at a time and applying string until the piece is complete.



**Step 4:** Seal the piece with a coating of matte medium.

## Options

- Huichol artists are also known for “Chaquira,” or beaded artworks. As an embellishment to the string painting, press tiny beads into the adhesive as a final step before sealing your work. [Potpourri Glass Beads Mix](#) (61518-) contains seed beads, bugle beads and rocaille beads in assorted colors.
- Thread the remaining embroidery floss through a needle and finish the piece with stitching. Make a blanket stitch around the edges, add French knot accents or use other embroidery techniques. Stitch the top edge around a dowel to make a hanging piece.
- For faster projects, cut the adhesive felt in half or quarter-sheet pieces.



## 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** Students integrate visual, spatial and temporal concepts with content to communicate intended meaning in their artworks.

**9-12** Students integrate visual, spatial and temporal concepts with content to communicate intended meaning in their artworks.

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

**K-4** Students demonstrate how history, culture and the visual arts can influence each other in making and studying works of art.

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

**9-12** Students differentiate among a variety of historical and cultural contexts in terms of characteristics and purposes of works of art.