

A Word to Teachers:

I understand the constraints of the End-of-Grade Testing system and limited funds. This framework does not leave much room for the cultural lesson we might like to teach students. In an effort to accommodate budget and state requirement concerns, as well as introduce a culturally sensitive perspective, I have designed this lesson. This is an art project surrounding Native American textile traditions, specifically blankets. The lesson is versatile, and thus can be taught at many grade levels, and on many budgets. Please feel free to personalize the basic plan to make it suitable for your needs. Listed below are the objectives in the North Carolina Course of Standard Study that can be fulfilled by this lesson.

I have provided information (to be found on this website) about three Native American blanket traditions, including links to photographs of examples. The information can be read aloud to students, or printed off and passed out to older students. You can print images for the students, or create transparencies to put onto a projector. The objective is to convey something about the three different styles of blankets, their design elements, and what symbols they contain. A more hands-on activity follows. This can be adjusted greatly according to budget concerns. After having heard the stories and information about the different styles of blankets, the students will design their own “blankets.” This can be done with fabric and embroidery pens, or simple construction paper and markers. Younger students can tell the class about their blanket and what the pictures mean, while older students can write a few sentences to a paragraph about their blanket. Finally, in an effort to demonstrate the community aspect to these textile traditions, all the “blankets” can be hung on a bulletin board, “stitched” together as a quilt. They have created something with individual and community meaning, much like many of the Native American blankets.

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North Carolina Standard Course of Study Objectives in Art  
that are applicable to this lesson

**Kindergarten:**

Objective 2-8 :

Create original pictures of self, others, animals and objects.

**First Grade:**

Objective 1-3 Develop fluency in use of symbols for visual expression.

Objective 5-1 Recognize that art from other times and cultures does not look the same.

**Second Grade:**

Objective 5-2 Identify selected characteristics of art from a particular culture.

**Third Grade:**

Objective 3-4 Use a variety of geometric and organic shapes in creating own work.

**Fourth Grade:**

Objective 1-4 Use complex symbols to fully explore ideas.

Objective 4-4 Compare work of various artists' styles and cultures.

Objective 5-1 Recognize that art can serve more than one purpose and/or function in a given culture.

**Fifth Grade:**

Objective 1-1 Use the imagination as a source for symbolic expression

Objective 5-3 Apply a knowledge of belief systems of selected cultures as reflected in the artwork of those cultures.

Objective 5-4 Compare art of one culture to that of another culture or time.

### Navajo Woven Blankets



A Navajo story tells of Spider Woman, who lived with her husband on a mountain. It was she that brought weaving to the Navajo people. Her husband, Spider Man, made the first loom from things like the earth and lightning bolts. There Spider Woman spun her thread and taught the Navajo women how to weave.

The Navajo weaving tradition is at least three hundred years old. It is done almost entirely by women, even today, although there are a few very accomplished male weavers in recent years. Women would, and still do, support their families by creating blankets and rugs to sell. A young girl will create her first blanket at about six years of age. The female coming of age ceremony, called *kinaalda*, also involves weaving, showing how very important this craft is to Navajo women.

Navajo families often keep a certain kind of sheep, the churro. They shear the wool from the sheep, and then wash and card it. From this clean fuzzy stuff, strong yarn is spun on a very large drop spindle. The yarn is colored with both natural and artificial dyes, creating

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many colors, like blue, red, brown, and grey. From this colored yarn, the weavers create blankets on an upright loom.

Blankets have many different designs and pictures on them. Often, the picture or design indicates where the weaver is from. For example, Ganado and Klagetoh designs both refer to specific locations. The simplest designs are merely stripes, but there are also complex diamond and zigzag patterns. The Storm pattern has a central square and jagged lines from the corner connected to it; this is symbolic of lightning conveying luck onto the *hogan*, the traditional home. Sometimes, there are pictures of people on the blanket; they can be holy people or just family and friends. Or there can be pictures of other things, like trucks, dogs, or even Santa Claus.

Links to Photos

<http://www.chimayoarts.com/weavings.htm>

Click on individual pictures for larger images.

<http://www.bairsindiantradingco.com/Navajo-rug-weaving-styles.htm>

This site contains both photos and information on the various design styles.

<http://www.navajo-indian.com/>

A weaver details her process and displays finished works. With many pictures.

Links to Books

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0689714181/104-0780662-9511955?v=glance&n=283155>

*The Goat in the Rug* by Charles L. Blood and Martin Link

[http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0822597128/ref=pd\\_bxgy\\_text\\_b/104-0780662-9511955?%5Fencoding=UTF8](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0822597128/ref=pd_bxgy_text_b/104-0780662-9511955?%5Fencoding=UTF8)

*Songs from the Loom: A Navajo Girl Learns to Weave* by Monty Roessel

## Lakota Star Quilts



The Lakota, a division of the Sioux, are renowned for their beautiful quilts. Other tribal groups also employ quilting of the same style. They are made from pre-existing fabric, rather than woven, often cotton or satin. The quilts may be either machine or hand quilted. This quilting is a fairly recent tradition, and both men and women may participate. Quilting developed to fill the role of buffalo robes in ceremonies after the buffalo had been almost entirely wiped out. It has become very common to welcome a new baby with a quilt, as the quilt plays a role in the baby's naming ceremony. Graduating high school seniors are also presented with quilts to commemorate the occasion. A prominent form of star quilt is the veteran's quilt, given to honor a Lakota upon returning from war. This sort of quilt usually incorporates patriotic symbols, such as the American flag.

As the name suggests, the basic design of these quilts is a many-pointed star. Stars are sometimes called the eyes of the Creator, according to a story in which the Great Spirit set the stars to watch over humankind. The central image is the Morning Star, symbolizing a new day. This symbol also serves as a reminder to give thanks. Another popular symbol is the Medicine Wheel, a circle with four lines within it, pointing in the

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four cardinal directions. It symbolizes balance and harmony in life and in nature. The circle itself is sacred because it lacks beginning and end. Many other elements are included according to the quilter's creativity. There may be images of warriors and horses, bodies of water, tipis, buffalo, and any number of things important to the Lakota and other tribal groups.

Links to Photos

<http://members.aol.com/agardquilt/prof/index.htm>

This site is run by a family of quilters. There are many beautiful photos and some explanations of the designs used.

<http://starquilts.com/index.php>

A quilter runs this site to display and sell her quilts. Photos of the process and of the finished works.

## Chilkat Blankets

These five-sided blankets are made by the Tlingit people of the Northwest Coast of the United States. They are made from cedar bark and goat hair, rather than from wool yarn like the Navajo blankets. There are very few weavers today who make this sort of blanket.

Chilkat blankets have five sides, rather than four, and often have long fringe. There are worn as capes across the shoulders for important ceremonies. The blanket is often decorated with a clan symbol, a picture of the animal that represents the extended family. The symbols include bears, whales, frogs, and many other animals. Other symbols, like trees, which represent the land, decorate blankets. There may also be abstract geometric forms, such as circles, spirals and blocks.

Traditionally, a man designs the pattern of the weaving, and a woman weaves it. In this way, each blanket is a cooperative effort. They were, and are, very valuable; only very important people had them before they were commercially available. Today, the antiques cost thousands of dollars, and even the new creations are very costly. While very few traditional weavers exist today, the chilkat designs live on in the printed designs of many square blankets. These are more affordable, and still embody traditional design elements.

### Links to photos

<http://clarissahudson.com/seagrizzly.htm>

This website belongs to a contemporary Chilkat weaver and features photos and back stories of her work.

<http://www.sealaskaheritage.org/shop/blanket.htm>

Photos and story of a modern blanket commemorating the Chilkat style.