

Shaped by the Loom: Dyeing & Coloring educator guide

designed for grades 4–6

This educator guide is designed for teachers and students in grades 4–6 as a complement to the exhibition *Shaped by the Loom: Weaving Worlds in the American Southwest* (organized by Bard Graduate Center Gallery, New York, 2023, and curated by Hadley Welch Jensen alongside a team of collaborators). By highlighting the collective knowledge that guides the making process, the exhibition presents weaving as an art form, a cultural practice, and a lived experience.

In this lesson plan, the classroom is encouraged to navigate the online exhibition, which features the work of Diné (Navajo) weavers and visual artists, interactive media, object studies, and historical items from the American Museum of Natural History, New York.



“Rhus aromatica, or ‘Chiitchin,’ is both a dye and a pillar of Diné traditional foodways. The limbs of the plant are the main weaving material in Diné-style coil baskets. The root and leaves are also combined with rendered piñon pitch to create a black dye primarily used in basket designs.”—Tyrrell Tapaha (Diné), fiber artist and sixth-generation weaver

Black dye material (bundle), Chaco Canyon, San Juan County, New Mexico, date unknown. Sumac leaves and twigs (*Rhus aromatica*). Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History, New York, Collected by George H. Pepper, between 1896–98, 1/5337.

Essential Questions

How does Navajo weaving tell a cultural (hi)story while also demonstrating an intricate understanding of home and the land across time and place?

How does Navajo weaving act as collective knowledge with multiple participants (from the people who dye the yarn to those who weave it)?

Lesson

This lesson plan provides two different activities. If you only have one class session for this lesson, choose whichever activity works best for your class. If you have more than one class session, you can spread these activities over sessions or have students complete the other activity by themselves at home.

Acknowledgments

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Additional acknowledgments for the *Shaped by the Loom* online exhibition can be found [here](#).

Learning Goals

T'áá Sha Bik'ehgo Diné Bi Na'nitin doo Íhoo'aah / Diné Cultural Content Standards for Students¹

For non-Diné educators: Refer to **Diné Culture Standards** before teaching the lesson as a guide for your teaching of the subject matter. This is a way to approach and understand this lesson in relation to Diné cultural values. All the cultural standards listed are directly linked to weaving, as every piece of the loom represents a natural element that is tied to Diné origin stories.

4th–6th Diné Culture Standards

STANDARD: K'é dóó nitsáhákees dóó nahat'á náásgóó iiná bee siih hasingo ádoolnííł.
I will develop an understanding of Diné way of life.

<p>Nitsídzíkees Dzizlįį' <i>One begins to think and do things on one's own.</i> (4th–6th grade)</p>	<p>Concept 1: Nitsahákees Shintsáhákees shił nilįįgo bee ádaa ákonisdzin dooleeł. I will acknowledge and value my thoughts and personality.</p>	<p>Concept 2: Nahat'á Nahat'a' bits'ąądóó anootįįgíí bik'ehgo ánisht'ée dooleeł. I will apply and practice the Diné way of life through planning.</p>
	<p>PO 1. Diné be'é'ool'įįł bóhoosh'aahgo binahjį' ádił nishdįį' dooleeł. I will develop my cultural knowledge to build self worth.</p> <p>PO 2. Yódi ałtaas'éi choosh'ínigíí baa háąh nisin dóó baa áhášyąą dooleeł. I will organize and keep track of my personal belongings.</p> <p>PO 3. Nit'iz ałtaas'éi baa ákonisin dóó baa hashne' dooleeł. I will explain the significance of my cultural possessions.</p> <p>PO 4. Jį dóó t'ée' bił hoolzhishígíí bitaa iínishii dooleeł. I will identify the specific phases of the day/night.</p>	<p>PO 1. Nahasdzáán dóó Yádiłhił bee nashidi'neestá'ígíí baa náháhshne' dooleeł I will retell my cultural teachings of earth and sky.</p> <p>PO 2. Shił ilįįgo K'é nisdzin dooleeł. I will express appropriate kinship terms.</p> <p>PO 3. Nítch'i ał' aan ánáá'nítigíí baa hane' yíisínist'ąągo shił bééhózin dooleeł. I will listen to and retell stories related to elements of nature.</p> <p>PO 4. Naat'agii dóó ch'osh dadilzinígíí shił bééhózin dóó baa hashne' dooleeł. I will retell the sacred stories of the Birds and Insects.</p>

¹ https://oscad.navajo-nsn.gov/Portals/0/FILES/Programs/Dine%20Culture%20Standards/4_6_Dine_Culture_Standards_6.pdf

Grade 6 Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts²

Writing: Text Types and Purposes

1. Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
 - a. Introduce claim(s) and organize the reasons and evidence clearly.
 - b. Support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.
 - c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to clarify the relationships among claim(s) and reasons.
 - d. Establish and maintain a formal style.
 - e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the argument presented.
2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
 - a. Introduce a topic; organize ideas, concepts, and information, using strategies such as definition, classification, comparison/contrast, and cause/effect; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
 - b. Develop the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.
 - c. Use appropriate transitions to clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
 - d. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.
 - e. Establish and maintain a formal style.
 - f. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the information or explanation presented.

Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration

1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacherled) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
 - a. Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.
 - b. Follow rules for collegial discussions, set specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.
 - c. Pose and respond to specific questions with elaboration and detail by making comments that contribute to the topic, text, or issue under discussion.
 - d. Review the key ideas expressed and demonstrate understanding of multiple perspectives through reflection and paraphrasing.
2. Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.

² https://learning.ccss.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/ELA_Standards1.pdf

Activity 1 (30 min)

Objectives

- Students will learn that Navajo weaving is a historical practice and continues to be practiced today in active and various ways.
- Students will be able to differentiate between different forms and methods of dyeing and coloring.
- Students will learn that many steps and people are involved in the dyeing process.

Materials

- Projector
- Either laptop / tablet for each group – or – Activity 1 Handouts, 1 copy printed total and single-sided

Instructions

1. Introduce the creator, time period, and context of the video ***Navajo Rug Weaving***, using the Background as a guide. Pay attention to these questions:
 - a. How is each family member involved or contributing?
 - b. What are the steps involved in this part of the weaving process?
2. Watch the video *Navajo Rug Weaving* together (3 min at 2x speed)
 - a. Start time of the video should begin at 9:15 and the end time closes at 14:39
 - b. Use Narration as a guide to narrate the video
3. Project the interactive Dye Chart in the **Shaped by the Loom: Dyeing & Coloring page** of the digital exhibition.
4. Student(s) get into groups of four
 - a. If groups each have a laptop / tablet, they can continue to explore the Dye Chart in their group. Assign each group one color from the Dye Chart that includes a recipe. Since not every dye has a recipe, we suggest the teacher assign from the following: Indian Paintbrush, Purple Larkspur, Mountain Mahogany, Wood Lichen, Small Rabbit Brush, Canaigre Dock Root and/or Navajo Tea.
 - b. If groups do not have a device, teacher can distribute printouts of the Dye Recipes (see “Activity 1 Handouts”). Each group only receives one recipe. Note: recipes should be printed single-sided.
5. Students read the recipe and discuss the following. Then they form a written response for presentation:
 - a. For each step of the recipe, decide which group member would be involved in or in charge of that particular step.
 - b. Write out each step and who’s in charge of that step.
6. Students present their recipe and process, using “I” statements (“I boil the water.”)

Background

Navajo Rug Weaving (1941)

Tad Nichols studied archaeology at the University of Arizona. He later worked for many years at the University of Arizona in documenting archaeological excavation sites throughout the Southwest and worked frequently with Navajo and Hopi people. He maintained his own personal interest in documenting Native culture through photography and film making. Following his work at the University of Arizona, Nichols became a professional filmmaker and devoted his time to creating educational films for the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

In 1941 Tad Nichols and his wife traveled to Wupatki, Arizona, to visit their friend Davy Jones, another archaeologist who worked for the National Park Service at the Wupatki National Monument and lived in Wupatki with his wife, Courtney Jones. Clyde and Sally Peshlakai were the Jones's closest neighbors.

Clyde and Sally Peshlakai were a well-known Navajo family. Clyde's father was a well-known silversmith and was respected for his artistry and wisdom. He even traveled to Washington, DC, and met with President Theodore Roosevelt in 1902 and 1904. Clyde and Sally had a close relationship with the Museum of Northern Arizona, and shared their knowledge about Navajo history, artifacts, and artwork, including weaving. Sally was an important figure in the community because of her skills and talent in Navajo weaving.

In her personal letters, Courtney wrote,

“Clyde was really the mainstay of our life at Wupatki. He was sort of the head Navajo, although I don't think he was much older than his brothers. We saw those people a lot, almost daily. They helped us in any way that a neighbor would. And we helped them as we

could. Clyde's older wife, Sarah or Sally, as we called her — was well . . . there's hardly a word to describe her. She is a distinguished person, and whenever there was a Sing, or ceremony, that required a woman to be a role model for a young person, she was the one chosen. I always thought she was a big, tall matron. The strange thing is I found out she was tiny. She was shorter than I was. I still can't believe it — she was larger than life and always will be.”³

During the Nichols's visits with the Jones, they also befriended the Peshlakais. Between 1938 and 1939, they partnered with the Peshlakai family and created the film *Navajo Rug Weaving*.

In the section of the film shown, Sally Peshlakai and her family are dyeing, carding, and spinning wool that will be used to create a Navajo weaving.

Narration

9:22–9:41 Young man gathers walnut leaves

9:41–10:15 Closeup of dye, which is then transferred to container

10:15–11:05 Add wool and muddle, then dry wool on sagebrush

11:05–12:00 Katherine cards the dyed wool, then a toddler attempts to do the same

12:00–12:32 Katherine, with a baby in a cradleboard next to her, spins the wool by hand

12:39–13:07 Closeup of yucca root, which Sally crushes to make soap for washing the spun wool

13:07–13:49 Sally washes the spun wool in a pot of sudsy water

13:49–14:15 Wupatki landscape/Sally dries the dyed, spun, and washed wool

3 Jones, Janelle. “Starring Sally Peshlakai: Rewriting the Script for Tad Nichols’s 1939 Navajo Rug Weaving.” In *Amateur Filmmaking: The Home Movie, the Archive, the Web*, edited by Laura Rascaroli, Gwenda Young, and Barry Monahan, 123–36. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781628929935.ch-009>.

Activity 2 (30 min)

Objectives

- Students will learn that Navajo weaving is a historical practice and continues to be practiced today in active and various ways.
- Students will be able to identify the differences between the four weavings and discuss why and how designs and colors changed over time.
- Students will learn how to read a museum label.

Materials

- Projector
- Compare + Contrast Discussion Questions
- Activity 2 Handouts, 1 copy printed for each student

Instructions

1. Introduce the creator, time period, and context of the video “**Ruth Teller Weaves with Color**,” using the essay **Dah iist’ó bikée’ yisháál (My Journey with the Loom)** as a guide. This essay was written by Ruth Teller’s daughter Lynda Teller Pete.
2. Project the video and watch with the students. Pay attention to these questions:
 - a. What are some different design and color styles?
 - b. What parts of Ruth Teller’s work transformed, and what parts stayed the same over time?
 - c. How are weaving and family connected?
3. Project the **Shaped by the Loom: Dyeing & Coloring page** on the digital exhibition site
 - a. Scroll down to the first item on the page: the Woman’s Manta.

4. Explain to students that they are going on a digital museum field trip where they will use labels to gather information about the items in the exhibition.
 - a. Label Format: Museums often display information which accompanies each item. Museums might present this information in slightly different ways, but below is a breakdown of the label format used in this digital exhibition.
 - b. Walk the students through the format of a label, using the Woman’s Manta as an example.

Asdzáá bi bééldléé (woman’s manta)	<i>This is the title of the artwork or a description of the item.</i>
Diné artist	<i>This is the maker of the item. In some cases, we know their name; in other cases, they have not been identified.</i>
1850s–60s	<i>This is the date the item was made. In some cases we may know an exact date, in other cases it might be an estimate, or it may take several years to create an object.</i>
Dyed and undyed wool, twill weave with interlocking tapestry weave	<i>The first part is the material the item is made out of, the second part is the technique they used to make it.</i>
Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History, New York, Collected by Erastus T. Tefft, ca. 1910, 50.1 / 2012	<i>This part tells us that the item is kept in the Anthropology Division in the American Museum of Natural History, and it was collected by Erastus T. Tefft around 1910. The number at the end is its identification number in the museum’s system.</i>

Instructions (cont.)

5. Hand out the Weaving Summary Sheet (see “Activity 2 Handouts”) to each student. These can be printed double-sided, so students only receive one sheet. Read the text for each Summary aloud and use the projector to share the image details.
6. As a class, use the Compare + Contrast Discussion Questions to reflect on the four weavings.
7. Hand out the Drawing + Writing Worksheet (see “Activity 2 Handouts”) to each student. Students complete the activities and respond to the questions.
8. Students share their drawings, and reflect on their choices and what they’ve learned.

Note: After completing both activities, we encourage you & the students to explore the rest of the exhibition (either together with a projector, or on individual devices)

Compare + Contrast Discussion Questions:

1. How many colors are present in each of the weavings?
2. How are the colors present in each weaving different?
3. What different patterns are present in the weaving?
4. When you look at the design, does it feel calm or chaotic? Why?
5. How do you think different events affected the styles of weaving? (For example: larger trade, access to synthetic yarn, European influences, etc.)