

ANCHORAGE MUSEUM

CULTURAL ARTS 1 & 2 CURRICULUM: ADORNMENT



Dene Tunic, c. 1850

caribou hide, silverberry seeds, beads, porcupine quills, sinew, red ocher
1981.025.001

This curriculum was created on Eklutna Dena'ina homeland. It is dedicated to all Indigenous peoples working to share their knowledge and culture, striving for a more inclusive future for western education. This resource addresses how to create and implement culturally-competent arts curriculum that uplifts Indigenous voices and ways of knowing. In the creation of this curriculum, we acknowledge and honor all Elders—past, present, and emerging—for their stewardship of the lands, plants, waters, and animals across Alaska. We thank them for sharing their lifeways, experiences, and cultures with students and the wider community. This curriculum would not be possible without their efforts.

UNIT AT A GLANCE

Investigate adornment used in Dene cultures on clothing and other objects.

Cultural Arts 1: Students will focus on beadwork. Students will view beadwork examples from the Anchorage Museum collection, learn more about beadwork techniques from culture bearers in the classroom or through videos, create their own design, and adorn their project with custom beadwork.

Cultural Arts 2: Students will focus on quillwork. Students will view quilling examples from the Anchorage Museum collection, learn more about quillwork techniques and material preparation from culture bearers in the classroom or through videos, create their own design, and adorn their project with advanced beadwork.

Note: This unit can stand alone or be used as an extension to the sewing unit.

A NOTE ABOUT CULTURAL APPROPRIATION FOR EDUCATORS

In this unit, students learn about and develop an appreciation for culturally-specific art-making techniques. Cultural appropriation occurs when students replicate culturally-specific techniques or designs from a non-dominate culture. To avoid cultural appropriation, student projects do not use traditional materials or techniques. Instead, students gain inspiration from cultural artwork and practice skills that are not specific to one culture.

Educators are encouraged to invite an Elder or culture bearer into the classroom to share their cultural practices related to this unit. Elders and culture bearers should receive financial compensation for their time and expertise. Consider grants from the Anchorage School District or the Alaska State Council for the Arts to help cover this cost.

If an Elder or culture bearer visits your class, discuss what they will share and how they want students to use this information. In this case, it may be appropriate for students to use traditional materials or techniques (e.g. an Elder provides salmon leather for students or wants students to copy a specific design).

STANDARDS

Alaska Visual Arts Standards:

VA:CR1a&b VA:RE7a&b VA:CN11a
VA:CR2a&b VA:CN10a

Cultural Standards for Students:

- B.1 acquire insights from other cultures without diminishing the integrity of their own
- C.4 enter into and function effectively in a variety of cultural settings
- D.1 acquire in-depth cultural knowledge through active participation and meaningful interaction with Elders
- D.3 interact with Elders in a loving and respectful way that demonstrates an appreciation of their role as culture-bearers and educators in the community
- E.8 identify and appreciate who they are and their place in the world



MATERIALS

Cultural Arts 1 & 2:

Beads: seed beads, size 11

Thread: medium weight nylon beading thread, such as Nymo in size B or D

Needles: English beading needles, size 10 or 12

Student project from Sewing unit (optional)

KEY TERMS

<i>Athabascan</i>	a word commonly used to identify cultures within the Dene language group; Athabascan is not a native term to any of the Indigenous languages to which it refers
<i>Beading</i>	artforms which use beads to adorn clothing or accessories; this unit investigates bead embroidery, a type of beading using beads in ways similar to embroidery
<i>Cultural appropriation</i>	the act of taking aspects—such as intellectual property, cultural expressions and artifacts, and traditional knowledge—of a less-dominant or colonized culture that is not your own, without proper permission, for your own benefit, and without giving something of reciprocal value in return
<i>Dene</i>	a word for Indigenous peoples belonging to several cultures whose languages belong to the Athabascan language family with traditional homelands in Interior Alaska and into Western Canada; the word Dene means 'people' in several Athabascan languages
<i>Glover needle</i>	a needle with a sharp, triangular point designed for use with hides and leather
<i>Identity</i>	a combination of characteristics which determine part or all of how a person sees themselves or are represented to others
<i>Quilling</i>	an artform created using porcupine quills
<i>Seed bead</i>	small beads used in a variety of beaded artforms





DENE TUNIC

Begin by looking closely at the *Dene tunic*. Use the questions below to guide discussion for 15-20 minutes:

CLOSE-LOOKING

Look closely, quietly at the tunic for a few minutes.

OBSERVE

Share your observations about the tunic.

ASK

- *What do you notice about the tunic?*
- *What colors and materials does the artist use?*
- *Describe the sensory experience you imagine of this tunic. What would it feel like to touch or wear?*
- *What moods do the materials create?*
- *What do you know about possible techniques used to create the embellishment?*
- *What does it remind you of?*
- *What more do you see?*
- *What more can you find?*

DISCUSS

USE [20 Questions Deck](#) for more group discussion questions about the tunic.

A NOTE ABOUT TERMINOLOGY

The Anchorage Museum refrains from using the terms Eskimo, Indian, and Aleut and instead uses language identified by the Alaska Native language groups. Due to these words' complicated history, the Anchorage Museum does not use these terms. However, it is important to note that Indigenous communities and individuals are at different places of healing and self-identity and may use these terms.

The largest Indigenous language family in North America is the Dene language family, which is commonly identified as 'Athabascan'—a word that is not native to any of the Indigenous languages to which it refers. Dene is a word for Indigenous peoples belonging to several cultures whose languages belong to the Dene language family with traditional homelands in Interior Alaska and into Western Canada; the word Dene means 'people' in several Dene languages.

LEARN MORE

ABOUT THE TUNIC

[Athabascan Moosehide Tanning & Sewing \(20 of 23\): Making Silverberries into Beads](#)

Women's Work, Women's Art: Nineteenth-Century Northern Athapaskan Clothing by Judy Thompson

ABOUT BEADING AND QUILLING

Museum of the American Indian—[The technique of porcupine-quill decoration among the North American Indians. 2d ed., 1971](#)

Dena'ina language—[Dena'ina Beading Colors](#); [Dena'ina Sewing Items](#)

Ahtna language—[Linay'sdułkaas de' Colors](#); [Linay'sdułkaas de' Beading Items](#)

University of Alaska Fairbanks—[Blue beads in the Tundra](#)

Athabascan Women's Blog—[Interview with Elaine Alexie](#); [Interview with Brenda Mahan](#)

PBS Postcards—[Postcards: Quill Working](#)

ABOUT DENE CULTURES

Smithsonian Learning Lab—[Gifts from the Land: Lifeways and Quill Art of the Athabascan Peoples](#)

Alaska Native Heritage Center—[Living Dena'ina \(Part One\)](#) and [Living Dena'ina \(Part two\)](#)



CULTURAL ARTS 1: INTRODUCTION TO BEADWORK

TIME FRAME Approximately 60 minutes

MATERIALS *Wall Pocket* created by Minnie Carter; 1970.041.012
Mittens created by Mrs. Percy Herbert; 1968.021.002AB
[**Athabascan Moosehide Tanning & Sewing \(21 of 23\): Making a Moosehide Yoke**](#)

DIRECTIONS



1970.041.012



1968.021.002AB

1. Close look at Minnie Carter's *Wall Pocket* and Mrs. Percy Herbert's *Mittens*.
[20 min.]

CLOSE-LOOKING: Look closely, quietly at the objects for a few minutes.

OBSERVE: Share your observations about the objects.

ASK: *What do you notice about these objects? What materials might be used? What do you know about potential techniques and processes used to create these objects? What do these objects remind you of? What else can you find?*

2. Offer students more information about the objects and their creators.
[10 min.]

***Wall Pocket* created by Minnie Carter; 1970.041.012**

A souvenir piece with tabs at the top to hang on the wall. Made of fish skin, beaver fur, cotton cloth, and beads. This piece was purchased from the Festival of Native Arts with a grant from the First American Youth Council circa 1970. It was created by Yup'ik artist Minnie Carter of Eek, Alaska.

***Mittens* created by Mrs. Percy Herbert; 1968.021.002AB**

Pair of beaded moose-hide mittens with beaver fur trim and braided yarn attaching the mittens together. Made circa 1940 by Mrs. Percy Herbert of Fort Yukon, Alaska. The mittens were donated to the Anchorage Museum in 1968 by Mrs. Jack Ferguson.

3. Watch [**Athabascan Moosehide Tanning & Sewing \(21 of 23\): Making a Moosehide Yoke**](#) to learn some basics of Dene culture, beadwork process, and connection to tanning and sewing.

[20 min.]

4. Discuss [**Athabascan Moosehide Tanning & Sewing \(21 of 23\): Making a Moosehide Yoke**](#). Ask: *what did you learn about Dene beadwork and culture? How is the process of beadwork connected to tanning and sewing? What more do you want to know about Dene beadwork and culture?*

[10 min.]

CULTURAL ARTS 1: BEADWORK TECHNIQUES

TIME FRAME Approximately 45 minutes

MATERIALS *Wall Pocket* created by Minnie Carter; 1970.041.012
Mittens created by Mrs. Percy Herbert; 1968.021.002AB
Beads
Beading needles
Thread
Felt
[**Athabaskan Moosehide Tanning & Sewing \(21 of 23\): Making a Moosehide Yoke**](#)
[**Angela Gonzalez demonstrates beading techniques**](#)
[**Teri Greeves demonstrates beading techniques**](#)

DIRECTIONS

1. Invite an Elder or culture bearer into the classroom to demonstrate beading techniques and share about cultural practices. Encourage students to observe closely and practice the techniques.

Or, if unable to host an Elder or culture bearer:

1. Invite students to familiarize themselves with beading tools and materials.
[5 min.]

2. View videos showcasing beading techniques by a culture bearer.
[5 min.]

Rewatch [**Athabaskan Moosehide Tanning & Sewing \(21 of 23\): Making a Moosehide Yoke**](#) beginning at 9:20 to see Melissa Shaginoff demonstrate beading techniques

[**Angela Gonzalez from Athabaskan Women's Blog demonstrates beading techniques**](#)

[**Teri Greeves demonstrates beading techniques from the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture**](#)

3. Encourage students to utilize the techniques demonstrated in the videos to create both straight and curved lines as the videos continue to play. Circulate around the room helping students with technique and encourage students to help each other.

[30 min.]



CULTURAL ARTS 1: CREATING BEADWORK

TIME FRAME	Approximately 180 minutes
MATERIALS	<i>Wall pocket</i> created by Minnie Carter; 1970.041.012 <i>Mittens</i> created by Mrs. Percy Herbert; 1968.021.002AB Paper Pencil Beads Beading needles Thread Felt—or student project from sewing unit

A NOTE ABOUT CULTURAL APPROPRIATION FOR EDUCATORS

This art activity takes inspiration from the processes used in the creation of the artwork, rather than copying or replicating forms. It is culturally appropriative to directly replicate Dene beading designs and beading designs of other Indigenous cultures or misrepresent your beadwork as Indigenous. As such, encourage students to be inspired by Dene patterns to create their own unique beadwork. Learn more: [Aboriginal Culture: Appropriation or Appreciation?](#)

DIRECTIONS

1. Return to Minnie Carter's *Wall Pocket* and Mrs. Percy Herbert's *Mittens*. Invite students to look closely at the objects again, sharing new insight after their experiences with beadwork techniques.
[20 min.]
2. Draw inspiration from museum objects, artist perspectives, and student experiences during the previous class. Invite students to create a beadwork design that reflects them as a person to adorn their wallet. Offer students paper and pencil to create a design for their beadwork that represents their personal experiences or identity. Apprise students of the time frame to complete projects and criteria for assessment.
[20 min.]
3. Allow students time to work on their projects. As they work, discuss the various techniques they are utilizing for their piece and any ways they have adapted their approach to beadwork through experience.
[90 min.]
4. Invite students to share their finished artwork with the class. Discuss as a class: *how did your skills and approach grow as you gained more experience? How did your design shift from your original plan? What have you learned about beadwork through this experience? How would you view Minnie Carter's Wall Pocket and Mrs. Percy Herbert's Mittens differently now that you have more experience creating beadwork?*
[45 min.]

ASSESSMENT

Students will be assessed based on participation in class discussion and practice with the Elder or culture bearer, completion of artwork, and artwork presentation to the class.



CULTURAL ARTS 2: INTRODUCTION TO QUILLWORK

TIME FRAME Approximately 60 minutes

MATERIALS *Dene tunic* (quillwork detail photo); 1981.025.001
Wristlet; 1998.025.135
[Creating Quillwork 7 \(of 8\): Meet the Artists](#)
[Creating Quillwork 2 \(of 8\): Materials and Preparation](#)
[Planet Alaska: Gifts from the Porcupine](#)

DIRECTIONS

1. Close look at the *Dene Tunic* and the *Wristlet*.

[20 min.]



1981.025.001

CLOSE-LOOKING: Look closely, quietly at the objects for a few minutes.

OBSERVE: Share your observations about the objects.

ASK: *What do you notice about these objects? What materials might be used? What do you know about potential techniques and processes used to create these objects? What do these objects remind you of? What else can you find?*

2. Offer students more information about the objects and their creators.

[10 min.]



1998.025.135

***Dene tunic*; 1981.025.001**

Made of caribou hide, silverberry seeds, beads, porcupine quills, red ochre, and sinew circa 1850. Museum purchased in 1981 from the grandchildren of Alaskan missionaries. Kate Duncan suggested in 2005 that the quillwork designs may be of Dena'ina or Ahtna origin and remarked that the sleeves had been lengthened with additional sections at the wrists.

***Wristlet*; 1998.025.135**

Made of moose or caribou hide, dyed porcupine quills, beads, and commercial thread. Collected by Willard and Alma Lahnum, who arrived in Anchorage after WWII and began collecting Alaskan artifacts. Based on the 121 label and limited records from the Lahnum family, it is thought to have been collected circa 1956 in Fort Yukon, Alaska. The estate of Alma Lahnum donated this wristlet and much of the Lahnum family collections to the Anchorage Museum in 1998.

3. Watch [Creating Quillwork 7 \(of 8\): Meet the Artists](#) and [Creating Quillwork 2 \(of 8\): Materials and Preparation](#) as an introduction to the history and basics of quillwork in Alaska. Read [Planet Alaska: Gifts from the Porcupine](#) in the *Juneau Empire* to learn more about quillwork in Lingít culture.

[20 min.]

4. Discuss what students learned from watching the introductory videos. Ask: *what did you learn about quillwork? How did learning more about the artform and process change your observations of these artworks?*

[10 min.]

CULTURAL ARTS 2: QUILLWORK TECHNIQUES

TIME FRAME	Approximately 45 minutes
MATERIALS	<i>Dene Tunic</i> (quillwork detail photo); 1981.025.001 <i>Wristlet</i> ; 1998.025.135 Creating Quillwork 4 (of 8): Folding and Wrapping Creating Quillwork 5 (of 8): Edging Creating Quillwork 6 (of 8): Weaving Creating Quillwork 3 (of 8): Dyeing Quills Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage: Porcupine Quills and Blueberry Dye Smithsonian Learning Lab: Quill Art Collection Portage College: How to Dye Porcupine Quills

A NOTE ABOUT CULTURAL APPROPRIATION AND THIS ACTIVITY

Students will learn about quillwork and develop an appreciation for quillwork methods. Students will not try quilling or use quilling in their project because it may be considered culturally appropriative by some to replicate culturally specific techniques and materials without consulting an Elder or culture bearer. These are the same reasons students are using felt, rather than tanned skin, for their projects. Instead, students will learn and use beading techniques and materials that are not culturally specific.

If an Elder or culture bearer visits your class, discuss what they will share and how they want students to use this information. In this case, it may be appropriate for students to use tanned skin and/or incorporate quilling into their project.

DIRECTIONS

1. Invite an Elder or culture bearer into the classroom to demonstrate quilling techniques. Encourage students to observe closely.

Or, if unable to host an Elder or culture bearer:

1. Watch a video segment showcasing one quilling technique at a time. Invite students to discuss the technique in small groups and identify where the technique might be utilized in the *Dene Tunic* and *Wristlet* before introducing the next technique.

[20 min.]

[Creating Quillwork 4 \(of 8\): Folding and Wrapping](#)
[Creating Quillwork 5 \(of 8\): Edging](#)
[Creating Quillwork 6 \(of 8\): Weaving](#)

2. Read an article from Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage about [pre-contact porcupine quill usage and dyeing](#) in Gwich'in, Han, and other Northern Athabaskan cultures and Elder discussion from the Smithsonian Learning Lab relating to natural dyes used in quillwork on a [tunic](#) and [belt](#).

[15 min.]

3. Watch [Creating Quillwork 3 \(of 8\): Dyeing Quills](#) to learn more about the dyeing process using natural dyes and Portage College's [How to Dye Porcupine Quills](#) to learn about the dyeing process using RIT. Discuss the steps of the dyeing process you will follow and record them somewhere easily visible for future reference.

[10 min.]

4. Return to the *Dene Tunic* and *Wristlet* as a class. Encourage students to share in small groups how their perspectives of the artworks changed as they learned more about the techniques and processes of quillwork. As a class, record any questions that may have arisen as they learned more.

[10 min.]



CULTURAL ARTS 2: ADVANCED ADORNMENT

TIME FRAME	Approximately 180 minutes
MATERIALS	<i>Dene Tunic</i> (quillwork detail photo); 1981.025.001 <i>Wristlet</i> ; 1998.025.135 Emma Hildebrand: Art As A Process Of Connection And Care Athabaskan Moosehide Tanning & Sewing (21 of 23): Making a Moosehide Yoke Angela Gonzalez demonstrates beading techniques Teri Greeves demonstrates beading techniques Paper Pencil Beading needles Beads Thread Felt—or student bag from sewing unit

A NOTE ABOUT CULTURAL APPROPRIATION FOR EDUCATORS

This art activity takes inspiration from the processes used in the creation of the artwork, rather than copying or replicating forms. It is culturally appropriative to directly replicate Dene beading designs and beading designs of other Indigenous cultures or misrepresent your beadwork as Indigenous. As such, encourage students to be inspired by Dene patterns to create their own unique beadwork. Learn more: [Aboriginal Culture: Appropriation or Appreciation?](#)

DIRECTIONS

1. Return to the *Dene Tunic* and *Wristlet*. Invite students to look closely at the objects again, sharing new insight after their experiences with quillwork techniques. Read about [Emma Hildebrand's process and experience](#) as a Koyukon quillwork and beading artist.

[20 min.]

2. Review beading techniques learned in Cultural Arts 1 by rewatching videos showcasing beading techniques by a culture bearer.

[5 min.]

[Athabaskan Moosehide Tanning & Sewing \(21 of 23\): Making a Moosehide Yoke](#)
[beginning at 9:20]

[Angela Gonzalez from Athabaskan Women's Blog demonstrates beading techniques](#)

[Teri Greeves demonstrates beading techniques from the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture](#)

3. Draw inspiration from museum objects, artist perspectives, and student experiences during the previous class. Invite students to create a design for beadwork to adorn their bag. Offer students paper and pencil to create a unique design for their beadwork that represents their personal history and identity. Apprise students of the time frame to complete projects and criteria for assessment.

[20 min.]

4. Allow students time to work on their projects. As they work, discuss the various techniques they are utilizing for their piece and any ways they have adapted their approach to beadwork through experience.

[90 min.]



5. Invite students to share their finished artwork with the class. Discuss as a class: *how did your skills and approach grow as you gained more experience? How did your design shift from your original plan? What have you learned about quillwork through this experience? How would you view the Dene Tunic and Wristlet differently now that you have more experience creating beadwork?*

[45 min.]

ASSESSMENT

Students will be assessed based on participation in class discussion and practice with the Elder or culture bearer, completion of artwork, and artwork presentation to the class.

