

Native American Medicine Shields

While many Native American warriors carried shields into battle, their primary purpose was not physical protection. They represented the warrior's personal vision and "medicine" or spirit-guided power. They were put in places of honor in the warrior's lodge.

The personal medicine shield was made of animal hide stretched over a wooden hoop. It was decorated with feathers and other objects, and painted with special images and symbols. The colors used also had great significance.

This lesson plan gives students an opportunity to create their own "medicine" shield, selecting patterns and designs from Native American culture and adapting the ideas to their own.

Grade Levels K-4

Note: instructions and materials based on a class of 25. Adjust as needed.



Materials

[Blick All-Purpose Newsprint](#), 9" x 12" sheets (10204-1003), need one sheet per student

White circle for shield, one per student. Some recommendations:

[Uncoated Paper Plates](#), package of 250 (61446-1009), accepts markers well

White corrugated cardboard circles donated from a pizza restaurant or cake bakery

[Blick Deluxe White Posterboard](#), 14-ply (13104-1006) 28" x 44" sheet, cut eight 11" diameter circles from one sheet

[Helix Graduate Bow Compass](#) (55462-1011), creates 11" circles, need one per student

[Wooden School Ruler](#) (55427-1012), need one per student

[Crayola® Classic Markers](#), set of 8 colors, Broad (21218-1309) or Fine (21218-1309), share one set each between two students

[The Color Wheel](#) (04928-1001), package of 30, need one per student

Optional Materials for Decoration:

[Imitation Eagle Feathers](#) (60906-1004), package of four, need one per student

[Duck Quills](#) (61199-1003), 3-oz bag, need one bag per class

[Indian Seed Beads](#), multicolor (60725-1000), 3-oz bag, need one bag per class

[Raffia](#), natural (60908-1375), 6-oz bag, need one bag per class

[Pony Beads](#), multicolor opaque (60772-1020), package of 1000 beads, need one package per class

[Trait-Tex® Macrame Assortment](#) (65212-1009) one set per class

Preparation

1. Display photos with examples of Native American art. Point out that many designs are symmetrical — whatever was on one side of the design was repeated on the other side. Show examples of pottery, weavings, etc.
2. Have examples of Native American Symbols to show. A good resource is Indian.com

Process

1. On the sheet of newsprint, draw a circle with the compass. Use this sheet to begin planning the design of the shield. Think about patterns and borders, work symbols in with them. Use the compass to draw perfect circles and the ruler to draw straight lines.

Additions to the outside of the shield should be included on this preliminary sketch. For example, feathers and fringe.

2. Lightly draw the design in place on the final shield.
3. Add color with markers, referring to the color wheel:
 - Use complements - two colors across from each other on the color wheel. They are very strong if placed next to each other in a design. Choose one more color that is next to one of them to complete your color scheme.
 - Use analogous colors. Select any three colors on the color wheel that are right beside each other.

Experiment with color combinations on your planning paper before you choose.

4. When the color is complete, add attachments to the edges of the shields:
 - Punch holes on the edges and tie on feathers and beads with raffia, yarn or twine.
 - Create fringe by tying a knot of raffia or twine through holes along the edges.

**Lesson Plan and Artwork submitted by
Anne Pietropola, Mechanicsburg, PA**

National Standards

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

K-4 Students use different media, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories

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

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