

# Navajo Sand Painting

(art + social studies, art + history)

During traditional Navajo ceremonies, images are painted in colored sand on the floor of the hogan (Navajo home) by a skilled artisan. Once the ritual is complete, the painting is swept away.

Many symbols are used by Native Americans in Sand Painting, including the image of the Sun, representing life, warmth, growth and all that is good. The "rays" of the sun are often included to signify the four directions or the powerful forces of nature.

Have your students create a painting of the sun and you'll find that they are also likely to portray a warm, smiling face and attached rays — in their own unique style. This lesson plan will help students relate to and understand a Native American Culture as well as helping them learn geographical directions.

By mixing the sand directly in with the tempera, students will actually "paint" with the sand, instead of applying it with adhesive. There's no waste or over-mixing colors. Finished paintings will have a heavy, stucco texture. Because of the thick, gritty application of the paint, use inexpensive brushes or craft sticks to apply to a sturdy, non-warping base. Inexpensive Blick canvas panels are perfect because they have a rigid, cellulose core (not cardboard) and a primed, "toothy" surface that holds the paint in place without cracking.

## Grade Levels 3-8

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

## Preparation

1. Mix the sand with the tempera colors in the color-coded flip-top containers or other plastic container with lids. Any color of sand can be used, because the paint will coat it; however, it is very important to use clean, craft-grade sand. Fill container half full with paint, then add sand and mix with a craft stick. The ratio is slightly less sand than paint or mix just to the point where the paint is thickened with sand yet it drops off the craft stick when it is lifted from the paint. If it clumps to the craft stick, add a little more paint. Keep lid on container until ready to use.



## Materials

[Blick Canvas Panels](#), 8" x 8" (07008-0088), need one per student

[Blick Premium Grade Tempera](#), assorted colors (00011-), need at least four quarts per class

[White Sand](#), 2-lb bag (61006-1002), need at least four bags per class

[Dynasty White Bristle Brushes](#) (05187-2009), share one 72-piece set across classroom

[Craftsticks](#) (60433-1002), need one box

[Richeson Neatness Jars & Tray](#) (04931-1009), need one set

[Stancup Disposable Containers](#) (04918-0100), need four cups per student

Optional Materials

[3M Scotch #845 Book Tape](#) (23021-1003), share

## Process

1. Sketch design onto canvas first with pencil. The paint will cover pencil lines.
2. Distribute sand paint in small amounts in Stancups or other small container. Tempera paint dries quickly, and the absorbancy of the sand will speed dry time even more, so have students paint one area at a time, then come back for more paint.
3. Begin with light colors first and transfer sand paint onto the canvas using craft sticks. Use a stiff-bristle brush to move the paint into the details of the design. Sand will deteriorate brushes quickly, so instruct children not to “scrub” their brushes in the paint.
4. Allow finished paintings to dry. No special coating is necessary; however, excessive handling or dropping the painting may cause cracking. Tile paintings together by using book tape on the back side to display as a group project.

## National Standards

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

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

**5-8** Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas

**Content Standard #2** — Using knowledge of structures and functions

**K-4** Students know the differences among visual characteristics and purposes of art in order to convey ideas

**5-8** Students generalize about the effects of visual structures and functions and reflect upon these effects in their own work