

Polynesian “Medicine” Sticks

(art + social studies)

Polynesia is a large area in the central and southern Pacific Ocean containing more than 1,000 scattered islands. Many of these islands share cultural similarities among the various groups of people who live on them, especially in terms of their mythologies. Stories often include gods or deities that rule nature. In addition to the oral tradition, “god sticks” are made to represent these deities, usually in the form of a human face or figure wrapped in bark cloth or cord. In this exercise, students create a medicine stick, god stick or walking staff in a similar style to what might be found on one of the Polynesian Islands. Students can then create and share a short story about the stick’s powers.

Grade Levels 3-8

Note: instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 25 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Discuss some of the islands included in the central and southern Pacific Ocean as well as some of the mythology of the areas.
2. Have each student bring a cardboard paper towel tube or gift paper tube at least 1-1/2" in diameter and 12"-18" long.
3. Divide the red clay into 1-lb pieces.
4. Cut 12" x 24" pieces from the Kraft paper roll, one per student.



Materials

[Amaco® Mexican Pottery Clay](#), 25-lbs (33205-3025); share across class

[Jute Twine](#), 2-Ply, 338-ft (62984-8542); share four across class

[Student Clay Modeling Tools](#), 7-piece set (30361-1009); share three across class

Blickrylic™ Student Acrylics

Titanium White, pint (00711-1116)

Raw Umber, pint (00711-8076)

Mars Black, pint (00711-2046)

Burnt Sienna, pint (00711-8046); share one of each color across class

[Colored Masking Tape](#), Black, 3/4" x 60-yd roll (23008-2075); share three rolls across class

[Elmer's® Glue-All®](#), 4-oz (23887-1004); share one between two students

[Gold Nylon Round Brushes](#), 72-piece assorted sizes (05134-1072); share one canister across class

[Foam Brushes](#), 40-piece set (06041-0409); share across class

[Blickrylic™ Polymer Gloss Medium](#), Quart (00711-1027); share across class

[Brown Kraft Paper](#), 24" x 1000-ft roll (11503-1024); share across class

Optional Materials

[Raffia](#), 6-oz, Natural (60908-1375) and Black (60908-2052)

[Darice® Hemp Cord Cards](#), Earthy Colors (62986-2020)

[Hygloss™ Bucket O' Shells](#), Natural, 10-oz (61451-1010)

[Natural Feather Assortment](#), 1/2-oz (61432-1005)

Preparation, continued

5. Mix two parts Blickrylic Polymer Gloss Medium with one part water in a separate container and stir until the mixture has a smooth, even consistency. Make enough for each student to have one cup.

Process

1. Each student begins with one pound of self-hardening clay to create both the head and the bottom point of the staff. Students shape the head to fit on the end of the paper tube. Some of the clay should also fit inside the tube in order to later secure it in place. The pointed end should also fit in the tube the same way. Use the modeling tools to add details to the face. When students are done shaping the head and pointed end, place those pieces aside and let them dry overnight.
2. With a foam brush or roller, cover the entire sheet of Kraft paper with a generous amount of the polymer medium and water mixture and allow it to dry. The sheet will wrinkle as it dries and will replicate paper or cloth made from tree bark.
3. When the clay is dry, enhance the facial features, the head and the pointed end with paint. Allow the head and end to dry before attaching them to the tube.
4. Glue the head and the pointed end to the paper tube using Elmer's Glue All. Reinforce the head and end by securing them to the tube with black masking tape, which will give the appearance of leather.
5. Tear the dry, textured Kraft paper around the edges to give it a natural bark or cloth appearance. Apply glue to the paper tube and wrap the Kraft paper around it. Tear off any excess paper. Extra paper pieces can be glued to the neck or base of the tube for extra texture and interesting effects.
6. Wrap the jute twine around the paper-covered tube. Experiment with wrapping the twine to create patterns. Add glue as needed to keep the twine in place. Tie the twine firmly when wrapping is complete.

Options

- Incorporate raffia or colored hemp when wrapping the tube with twine. Add shells, string or feathers to embellish the stick.

National Standards for Visual Arts Education

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

K-4 Students know the differences between materials, techniques and processes.

5-8 Students select media, techniques and processes; analyze what makes them effective or not effective in communicating ideas; and reflect upon the effectiveness of their choices.

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.

5-8 Students use subjects, themes and symbols that demonstrate knowledge of contexts, values and aesthetics that communicate intended meaning in artworks.

Content Standard #4 Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.

K-4 Students know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationships to various cultures.

5-8 Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures.