



Lesson

Ojibwe (Anishinaabe) Beaded Design

Emily Felderman

Subject Area

Elementary History & Social Studies

Grade Level

Grades 4–5

Time

2–3 Class Periods for Paper
3–5 Class Periods for Beads

Description

Students will observe traditional Ojibwe beadwork designs, select a design to study, and then recreate it by either sewing beads or using construction paper to represent beadwork patterns.

Lesson Objective

- Learn about Ojibwe culture and beadwork traditions.
- Understand how patterns, color, and symbols communicate meaning.
- Develop patience, fine-motor skills, and craftsmanship.
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- Create a beaded design inspired by Ojibwe motifs.

Big Idea

- Introduction to the Ojibwe (Anishinaabe) people of the Great Lakes.
- Beadwork as functional, decorative, and cultural storytelling.
- Appreciating the authentic work created by women.

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C3 Framework Standards Addressed

Character

1. Build respect for Ojibwe culture, traditions, and living artists.
2. Practice care and patience, honoring beading as a slow, intentional process.
3. Develop perseverance when working with small materials and detailed patterns.
4. Foster belonging by recognizing beadwork as a way to share stories, identity, and values.
5. Learn to be responsible cultural learners, understanding the difference between appreciation and appropriation.

Choice

1. Choose a traditional-inspired design to work from (with guidance and context).
2. Decide how to represent beads: Sewing beads onto fabric or paper, punching circles to model bead placement.
3. Select color combinations thoughtfully, based on observation and meaning.
4. Choose the scale or complexity of the design to match personal readiness.
5. Share learning through: A finished beaded or paper design. Consider a written or verbal reflection about the process and meaning.

Essential Vocabulary

Ojibwe

Ow-jeeb-way

Anishinaabe

Ah-nish-in-ah-bay

Beadwork

Pattern

Symmetry

Motif

Inspired By

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Materials & Resources

MATERIALS

Paper and Pencil

For Planning

Template

Printed for Student Use

Beads

Pony or Seed

Beading Needles

Felt

To Sew the Design Onto

Thread, Floss, or Yarn

Scissors

Heat-Erase Pens

OR

Construction Paper

Paper Punches

To make circles to replicate the beads

Glue

Scissors

Pencils or Pens

PRIMARY SOURCES

Video

[Traditional Indigenous Beadwork: An Indigenous Woman's Journey from Student to Teacher](#)

Video

[Anishinaabe Beading with Nicole Lesson 1: Prep and centre](#)

Authentic Templates

[Métis and Anishinaabe Beading: Templates Vol. 1](#)

Book

Ojibwe Crafts by Carrie A. Lyford, R. Schneider Publishers

**Check to ensure that the needles can fit through the opening of the beads.*

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PROCEDURES

Observe

Observe and discuss traditional Ojibwe beadwork designs.

Notice patterns, colors, and symbols, and consider their meanings.

Plan

Select or sketch a beadwork design you would like to create.

Trace your selected design onto the felt using a heat-erase pen, or onto construction paper using a pencil. Tracing is used to honor and respect authentic Ojibwe designs as a way to study and learn from them. If you prefer, you may also create an original design inspired by what you observed.

Decide how you will represent your beads:

1. Sew with beads and a needle

OR

2. Use a paper punch to create construction-paper circles to represent beads

Plan your color choices and pattern layout before beginning.

Create

Carefully create your design, working slowly and thoughtfully.

Check your work as you go and make adjustments if needed.

Practice patience and perseverance when challenges arise.

Share your finished piece and reflect on your process and learning.

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Warm Up

Research and share examples of Ojibwe beadwork, focusing on color, symbolism, or regional styles.

Video

[Traditional Indigenous Beadwork: An Indigenous Woman's Journey from Student to Teacher](#)

Video

[Anishinaabe Beading with Nicole Lesson 1: Prep and Centre](#)

1. Look closely at images of traditional Ojibwe beadwork.
2. Show one or both videos along with the templates and book.
3. Participate in a brief discussion about patterns, colors, and symbols you notice.
4. Consider what stories, ideas, or values the designs might communicate.
5. Make a quick personal connection: Which design or pattern draws your eye, and why?

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Direct Instruction

Content

1. Learn about the Ojibwe people and the cultural significance of beadwork.
2. Observe and analyze traditional Ojibwe designs, colors, and symbols.
3. Understand how patterns often reflect nature, community, and storytelling.
4. Explore the beading process: Selecting a design, colors, and pattern with sewing beads **or** representing beads with paper circles.
5. Connect beadwork to math concepts (patterns, repetition, symmetry).
6. Connect beadwork to history, recognizing women’s and community knowledge passed through generations.

Student Instruction

Beading Process

Show how to either sew with beads or use a paper punch to create construction paper circles to represent bead.

Demonstrate how to plan a beadwork design on felt or paper—do you want the design in the middle or off to a side?

Model How to Sew on Beads Step-by-Step

1. Thread the needle and tie a secure knot
2. Bring the needle up through the fabric
3. Slide three beads onto the needle.
4. Lay the beads on their side to determine where to go down with your needle.
5. Push the needle down through the fabric after the third bead.
6. Pull gently to secure the beads.
7. Bring the needle back up through the same three beads to secure them so they lie flat. This also doubles to secure the beads.

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STUDENT INSTRUCTION CONT.

Paper “Beading” Process
Model how to create paper punches and glue the construction-paper “beads.”

1. Use a small dot of glue.
2. Place the paper circle carefully on the design.
3. Press gently and allow time to dry.
4. Review safety expectations for needles, glue, and shared materials.
5. Emphasize careful craftsmanship, patience, and respect for the tradition.

Guided Practice

It is very helpful to have other adults to help in the beginning!

1. Demonstrate the beading process with the whole group, using oversized materials so all students can clearly see each step.
2. Repeat the demonstration in small groups, adjusting pace and support as needed.
3. Pause frequently to check for understanding and clarify steps.
4. Practice together, completing the first few beads as a guided class activity.
5. Circulate to provide hands-on coaching, modeling again as needed.
6. Re-demonstrate key steps multiple times throughout the work period.
7. Encourage students who understand the process to support peers by modeling and explaining the steps.
8. Gradually release responsibility, so students work more independently while helping one another.

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Independent Practice

1. Students independently create their beadwork design using their chosen method (sewing beads or gluing paper beads).
2. Students follow their planned pattern, making intentional choices about color, repetition, and symmetry.
3. Students work at their own pace, practicing patience and perseverance.
4. Teacher circulates to observe, provide feedback, and offer support as needed.
5. Students problem-solve independently before asking for help.
6. Peer support is encouraged when appropriate.
7. Students reflect quietly on their progress and make adjustments to improve craftsmanship.

Summarizer

Finish & Reflect

Student reflection and feedback.

Include a gallery walk for students to share and observe each other's work throughout the process

ASSESSMENT & HOMEWORK

Assessment

Students demonstrated an understanding that Ojibwe beadwork is a meaningful cultural art form. They used pattern and color intentionally and showed care and focus throughout the process. Students worked through challenges, made thoughtful design choices, and completed artwork that reflected both personal expression and respect for Ojibwe traditions. Reflections showed growing awareness of the cultural and historical significance of beadwork and confidence in learning through making.

Homework

Look for beaded art or patterned designs in your everyday life.

FURTHER RESEARCH & RESOURCES

Modification & Accommodation

This lesson is designed to be flexible and accessible to all learners. Modifications and accommodations support fine-motor needs, attention, processing, and varied learning styles.

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MODIFICATION & ACCOMMODATIONS CONT.

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8. Gradually release responsibility, so students work more independently while helping one another.

Extension & Enrichment Activities

1. Create a more complex or larger-scale design using increased pattern repetition or symmetry for the whole class to work on.
2. Research and share examples of Ojibwe beadwork, focusing on color, symbolism, or regional styles.
3. Write or draw a design story, explaining the meaning behind their pattern and color choices.
4. Explore math connections by identifying fractions, symmetry, or tessellations within their design.
5. Compare Ojibwe beadwork with beaded or patterned art from another culture, noting similarities and differences.
6. Translate a beaded design into another medium (drawing, painting, textile, or digital pattern).

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Student Examples

