

Native american culture: the story behind the dream catchers essay



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Native American Dream Catchers Trashon Pelton University of Central

Oklahoma As a unit in social studies I would investigate the culture of the Native Americans. Native Americans have a wide range of art because of the many tribes that make up the Native American culture. Their art ranges from paintings, jewelry making, sculptures, pottery, masks, drums, totem poles, beadwork etc. I find Native American culture interesting. I am Native American myself and I enjoy learning and finding new things about my culture. The history of the Native Americans is expressed most times through their art.

Their culture is tied with nature and spirits. They believed in respecting the land and the abundance of gifts it offered (Native American History). Native Americans are known for having legends and stories in their culture. Their culture is tied to nature and the spirits. The dream catcher originated within the Ojibwe tribe.

The story behind the dream catcher is about a great spirit, Iktomi who is the great trickster and searcher of wisdom. One day he appeared to an old spiritual leader in the form of a spider. Iktomi spoke to him in a sacred language about the cycles of life we go through. While Iktomi spoke to the man he span a web onto the man's willow hoop that had feathers, beads, horsehair and offering on it. He told the man that each cycle of life contained many forces, those good and those bad.

He advised the man if you listen to the good forces they will lead you in the right direction and if you listened to the bad forces they will lead you in the wrong direction and could potentially hurt you. When Iktomi was finished

spinning his web he told the old spiritual leader to use the web to help his people reach their goals and make positive results with their ideas, dreams and visions. If you believe in the Great Spirit, then the web will catch your bad dreams while your good dreams pass on to you (dream-catchers). In order to make a dream catcher you need to have feathers, strong but thin string, soaked willow, and beads.

First you have to bend your soaked willow into a circle. Using the string, knot a loop on the end you will hang your dream catcher. Then you tie the hanging loop around the top or weakest point of your dream catcher. Next from start to finish the dream catcher repeats the same stitch. To start you hold the string and place it loosely over the top of the hoop.

Next, move the string around to the back of the hoop to form a hole then pull the string back through the hole you made. Don't pull the stitches too tight or they will not allow the dream catcher to lie flat on the ground. Continue this same stitch spacing evenly, the last stitch should be about 1 inch away from the hanging loop. For the next rounds of stitching, instead of the string around the hoop place the string around the center of each stitch from previous round.

While pulling these stitches tight you should start to see the spider web forming. The bead to represent the spider should be added on the 3rd or 4th round of stitching. You continue to stitch until it is difficult to pass through, be sure to leave a hole in the middle. Stop stitching when you reach the bottom of the hole in the center of the web. To complete your dream catcher stitch twice in the same spot, form a knot then pull tight (dream-catchers).

The first artwork, “ Turquoise Dream Catchers” done by Cree women was one of the first dream catchers that exhibited this form.

Instead of the hoop being a circle it is more of a tear drop shape. The feathers on this dream catcher are also stitched along the hoop covering almost half of the hoop and web. I think the feathers cover up too much of the hoop, I think it makes it look just a little sloppy. The web in this dream catcher is also done differently. The web has more open space and not many strings to fill the hoop.

I would add more string for the web inside to make it resemble more of a web and the storyline behind the dream catcher. I like the changes that were displayed on this dream catcher. The second artwork “ Tachwana Dreamcatcher” is more traditional. This dream catcher was handcrafted in the Northern Territories of New France by a Canadian Cree woman.

The form is circular with beads and feathers. The web is tighter than the first artwork but contains no bead in the web to symbolize the spider. I think this dream catcher is plain versus others that I have seen. I do like the white feathers for this dream catcher because they make it pop out against the blue and orange beads and the neutral colors of the brown for the hoop and web. With both of these dream catchers been done by Cree women, it shows that there are different styles and forms within one tribe. The teardrop form really sticks out to me, I don’t know what it about it but it draws me to it.

I do like the extra feathers that were added but I think the number added was a little overboard. If I were making a dream catcher this way I would use fewer feathers on the hoop but I do like the idea. In order to keep children
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attentive you must keep their attention and keeping it is not easy to do.

There are strategies used today that help with teaching children. One strategy is incorporating a visually stimulating story that motivates the child to create a piece of art.

There is a strategy that combines dialogue before the art activity which is used to show visuals for the students. Another strategy involves the discussions and remembering of a previous experience (Herberholz & Herberholz, 2002). Integrated learning is also a good strategy for teaching. “Integrated learning builds on the brain’s propensity to find connections thereby facilitating student learning” (Koster, 2001). When using integrated learning it presents subject matter in a connected way, the active learning activities involved activates several domains at once and presents information in many different ways because of unique skills and format of student (Koster, 2001). When analyzing a children’s artwork, it always tells you something about them.

Kellogg (1968/1970) stated you could investigate the child’s mind analyzing the children’s artwork as a mental test. You can also notice their developmental stage (their view of what they draw aligned with others of that age level) (Herberholz & Herberholz, 2002). In order to teach dream catchers as lesson for children, I would incorporate it into literature. I would start by introducing the history of the Native Americans and then transitions into the story behind the dream catcher.

I would have a dream catcher available so the students will already be intrigued by what it is. After going over the history of the dream catcher I

would read a book to the class that is based on the story of how the dream catcher came about. Some books that would go along are Isaac's Dreamcatcher and Grandmother's Dreamcatcher. After reading a book to them I would introduce the art activity on the dream catchers.

References (n. d.). Retrieved from <http://www.dream-catchers.org/>
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