

Joslyn Art Museum Comprehensive Study Lesson Plan

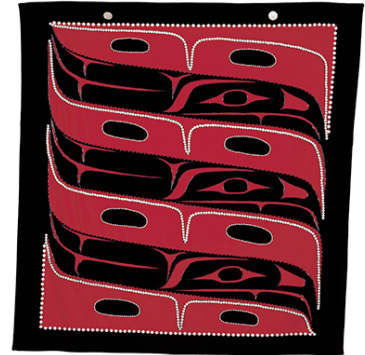
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TEXTILE ART

Focus: Dorothy Grant & Robert Davidson, *Button Blanket*

Objectives – Students will:

- Create a button blanket-inspired wall hanging.
- Respond to Haida button blanket motifs while comparing and contrasting their different designs.
- Present symbols developed to represent their family.
- Connect with their classmates when they collaborate on a project.



Dorothy Grant & Robert Davidson,
Button Blanket, 1994, wool with
mother-of-pearl buttons & glass beads,
58 x 56 in., Museum purchase, 1995.9

Suggested Materials: Dorothy Grant teaching poster; Pinterest Resource Board, red/black felt, white colored pencils, white buttons, wood dowels, hot & fabric glues, scissors, examples of other button blanket designs, see detailed lesson plan for additional materials.

Vocabulary: bead, button, ceremony, collaboration, fabric, Haida, legend, motif, oral history, potlatch, regalia, symbols/symbolism, textile, totem pole, wool

Procedure:

- **Engage:** Symbols. Give students post-it notes and have them draw three symbols then stick on the wall to use to discuss what a symbol is. You may want to give them some parameters or categories of symbols to depict.
- **Art Talk 1:** Teamwork. Together, Dorothy Grant and Robert Davidson created the button blanket in Joslyn's collection. Consider their collaboration and how they worked together to create their art. Discuss how partnerships may work and pair up students before doing **Production 2**. Students will have a hands on project to complete together and afterwards, they can share how well partnering worked – or did not work.
- **Art Talk 2:** A button blanket is a ceremonial robe and worn as regalia during events. Help students understand the sacredness of the robe explaining regalia should not be thought of as a costume.
- **History:** Who is Dorothy Grant and Robert Davidson? Refer to resources in the **Teacher Support Materials** for additional information. <http://goo.gl/BTkzcF>
- **Aesthetics:** Discuss the Whale Rib and Raven motif used on Grant and Davidson's *Button Blanket*. What do they represent? Study other Haida button blankets while comparing and contrasting their designs.
- **Production 1:** Fabric, Beads, Yarn & More! This includes two projects – natural weaving and t-shirt design for students to investigate cause and effect as well as patterning. Refer to the lesson plan presented by Cassandra Mayo at Thursdays for Teachers.

- **Production 2: Symbols & Buttons.** Have students think about symbols that represent their family. Sketch out the design then using red felt for the background, glue symbols cut from black felt to it. Embellish the design with white buttons. This can be turned into a wall hanging by wrapping and gluing the felt to a wood dowel. Refer to the workshop presented by Therese Straseski at Thursdays for Teachers.
- **Other:** Study the button blanket's connection to the totem pole. Why are they known as "totem poles on cloth?"
- **Close:** Using post-it notes, have each student create a symbol to represent themselves and share it.

Extensions:

- **Cultural Connections:** Have students study the potlatch ceremony including how the Canadian government's Indian Act of 1884 outlawed it.
- **Fine Arts:** Study how the blankets come to life through dance and song. *Haida Button Blanket* posted by Smithsonian NMAI https://youtu.be/cYt58pw_WnY
- **Language Arts:** Have students study the button blanket and write a descriptive paragraph on what it would feel like to touch the blanket.
- **Math:** For elementary students, have them identify shapes in the blanket. For middle and high school students, ask them if they think there is more red or black design on the blanket. Then have them calculate the areas.
- **Science:** How does wool go from a sheep to a blanket? Have students study the process including dying textiles black or red.

Academic Standards & additional resources:

Available on online version at www.joslyn.org/education/teachers/thursdays-for-teachers
[select Lesson Plans, then American Indian]

About the Artwork:

Button Blanket is a contemporary example of the traditional Haida [HIGH dah] ceremonial blanket that prominently displays a family crest, with a Whale Rib and Raven motif. The wool blanket is cut in a square shape and large enough to fit comfortably on a person. Prominently displayed across the back of the blanket is an appliquéd family crest. For this blanket, Dorothy Grant and Robert Davidson created a design with a stylized whale rib and the side profile of the folk hero and trickster, Raven.

Most Haida button blankets are created in the simple color combination of red and black. Outlining the whale ribs are hundreds of mother-of-pearl buttons, sewn only millimeters apart. On the Raven, dark blue and black beads were sewn meticulously by hand. The whale rib and Raven repeat down the center, one after the other. The Raven motif is repeated three times with the Raven's beak pointing to the right. The abstract whale rib begins at the top of the blanket and repeats towards the bottom four times.

Davidson created this intricate design perhaps consulting Grant to fill the space on the blanket. Many of the designs seen on the button blankets are representations of Haida oral histories and legends. Once Davidson created the design, Grant would cut out the shapes in cloth and sew them onto the blanket. Depending on the type of the blanket, she used wool, silk, or cashmere and then painstakingly sewed mother-of-pear buttons and beads by hand on it. She considers how the blanket will be seen from afar and how it will move, and adjusts the placement of the beads and buttons, sometimes discussing their placement and application with Davidson. The placement of the decoration is important for the design to be recognizable from many angles including the front.

The motifs on the button blanket do not relate to a single creation story or legend. In the context of various Haida legends, both Ravens and Killer Whales are known for their importance in creating and maintaining Haida life and culture. Raven is both a mythic hero and mischievous trickster. He is prominent in many creation stories from finding the First People to stealing the Sun and Moon. The sometimes helpful and devious Raven has as many roles in Pacific Northwest culture as he is represented in their art. Seen as magical and wise denizens of the ocean, the legendary character Killer Whales were also important in the lives of Northwest peoples by providing meat, oil, and bone.