THURSDAYS for TEACHERS
Museum to the Classroom

STEAM LESSON PLAN

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Grade Level Middle school (adaptable for lower and higher grades)

INSPIRED BY Jacqueline Lauren Stevens (Winnebago, b. 1949), *Untitled Vessel,* 1997

Jacqueline Lauren Stevens (Winnebago, b. 1949), *Untitled Vessel,* 1997, micaceous clay, wicker withes, and glass beads, overall: 10 1/4 in. high; 17 1/2 in. diameter (26.04 cm; 44.45 cm), Commissioned and given in memory of Shirley Warden by her fellow docents, 1998.19

PROJECT TITLE: But is it Art?

DRIVING QUESTION
How can we use what nature gives us to create?

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES: Put these on the board or have students write them in a notebook/journal.

- *I will create a coil-built pot.*
- *I will respond to the question—"is it art?"*
- *I will present findings about Indigenous peoples' weaving traditions.*
- *I will connect natural materials to how Native American potters utilize these resources.*

CONTENT STANDARDS
NEBRASKA CONTENT AREA STANDARDS
IOWA CORE STANDARDS

THE FOUR C'S FOR STEAM CAREER READINESS SKILLS

- **Critical Thinking:** Students will consider their own understanding of art.
- **Creativity:** Students will get to make something using natural materials.
- **Collaboration:** Students will work together to learn about and present Native Americans' different basket weaving styles.
- **Communication:** Students will share their research with their classmates.

VOCABULARY: art, ceramic, connect, create, functional, natural materials (clay, grasses, etc.), pottery terms (coils, fire, slip, etc.), present, respond, vessel, weaving

RESOURCES: Stevens Teaching Poster; Stevens Pinterest board; Nelson Teacher Resource Center

- Resource - NAEA Position Statement on Use of Imagery, Cultural Appropriation and Socially Just Practices
- Resource - Woodland Ways: Folk Arts Apprenticeships Among Wisconsin Indians 1983–1993 by Janet C. Gilmore and Richard March
- Resource - Native American Cultures, History.com (overview of 10 culture areas)
- Images - In the Eyes of the Pot: A Journey into the World of Native American Pottery
- Video - How to weave Native American inspired basket, Tania Van Der Walt, YouTube

► Preview all resources before sharing with students.

PROCEDURE

Cultural Note: The legacy of **colonialism**, including the myth that Europeans discovered America, perpetuates the erasure of Indigenous peoples. It is thus important to remind students that there are over 2,000 tribal groups living across the Americas today, each with their own unique and dynamic culture. It is also important to discuss **cultural appropriation** with students so they understand how to celebrate, not use, a group's culture. For further resources regarding *Native American cultures, see Native Knowledge 360°: Essential Understanding about American Indians* published by the National Museum of the American Indian: americanindian.si.edu/nk360

Overview: Students will be inspired by Jacqueline Lauren Stevens (Winnebago, b. 1949) work to explore Native American pottery and basket weaving traditions to discover out Indigenous peoples' use natural materials to create.

Engage: Show students images of functional objects made with natural materials from utensils to furniture and from ancient ones to items made today. With each image, ask, *is this art?* Have students vote on them. Include works that are found in museums, like Joslyn's *Attic Black-Figure Ovoid Neck-Amphora* attributed to The Omaha Painter and Native American pottery.

The Omaha Painter (attributed (Greek, 6th century B.C.), *Attic Black-Figure Ovoid Neck-Amphora,* ca. 570 B.C., clay, 15 in. high, Joslyn Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas C. Woods, Jr, 1963.480

Ask students...

- What is your criteria for something to be art?
- Does it need to be in a museum or gallery to be art?
- Do you need someone tell you it is art?
- What does time do to objects?
- Does time play a factor–does it make them art?
- What is art in different cultures?
- How do different cultures define art?
- Who gets to call it art?

Deliverables: Tell students they will...

- Teach their classmates about Indigenous peoples' basket-weaving practices in North America.
- Study types of clay and create a coil-built pot.
- Learn simple weaving techniques.

Art Talk: While Stevens was born in Omaha and grew up on the Winnebago Reservation in northeastern Nebraska, her pottery techniques are based in traditional Pueblo methods. Discuss her process for creating a pot as well as her connection to the Earth with the materials she uses as well as how she incorporates her Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) heritage in her art. For older students, study other well-known Native American potters to compare and contrast their techniques.

Ask students...

- What can you create from nature?
- Can you create art from nature?
- Can you create functional objects from nature?
- Why do you think Stevens included other materials in her pottery?*
- Do you think these are functional or nonfunctional objects?**

*Quotes to consider.

- Stevens said, "Beads, I never dreamed they would give me ideas! Such a whole link of generations from my grandmother. It's a growing thing. It's like our language, that's a link, a connection. For me this is a time of freedom!
- Also, reflecting on basketry, she said, "The Winnebagos kept the language in both places, and that helped keep their ways. It is a strength for me."
- Source: Pottery by American Indian Woman–The Legacy of Generations: the Avant-Garde. Jacquie Stevens, Purdue

**Share with your students that Stevens always intended for her work to be art rather than used for another purpose.

Ask students...

- Why do you think Stevens created nonfunctional rather than functional vessels?
- How do people *use* pottery?
- What if someone uses one of Stevens works to, for example, store food? Is that disrespectful to the artist's intention? Why or why not?

Description of Activity:

Start with investigating clay. Stevens sources it from around her home. Study how this material differs around various parts of North America.

- Take a large map and label it with the different types of clay. Encourage students to find images of the raw material as well as how it was used in pottery.

Maria Martinez (San Ildefonso Pueblo, 1887–1980) and Santana Martinez (San Ildefonso Pueblo, 1909–2002), Plate, 1946–1956, ceramic and black slip, overall: 2 in. high; 14 3/4 in. diameter (5.08 x 37.47 cm), Joslyn Art Museum, Gift of Clarke Field, 1957.53, No Known Copyright

Then, using the teaching poster, share the ceramic methods for creating an object.

- The artist uses micaceous clay slip over her object. Have students examine mica to learn its properties, determine where it originates, and explain why Stevens uses it.

- Discuss how she uses her understanding of chemical and temperature changes to control the finish of her pots when firing them.

- Investigate other potters, such as Maria Martinez (San Ildefonso Pueblo, 1887–1980), to see discover their process, including their knowledge of the chemistry of the fire pit.

Stevens incorporates her Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) culture in her pottery practice by embellishing some of her works with weavings using wicker withes.

- Assign students, working in pairs or small groups, one of the different Native American culture areas that have basket weaving in their daily life. Have them investigate the different methods for preparing the natural materials to creating a basket. Look at the technology of making a basket.
  - Encourage students to present their discoveries to the class.

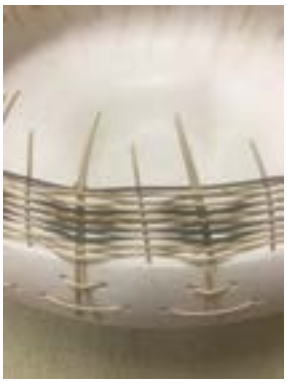
- Time to create. Have students experiment with clay to make a coil-built pot. Tip: if you don't have access to a kiln, self-hardening clay is an option.

- Show examples of Stevens work and discuss symmetry and asymmetry.

Ask students...

- What do you think she chose to make many vessels asymmetrical?
- Do you think one is easier to make over the other? Explain.
- For your pot, will you choose to make it symmetrical or asymmetrical? Explain.

- Then explore simple weaving projects inspired by Native American basketry.
  - It may not be feasible to create a basket with wicker withes or grasses, but perhaps weaving something flat to simply get the natural materials in students hands to examine how they go together will work for this lesson.



Detail. *Untitled Vessel,* 1997, micaceous clay, wicker withes, and glass beads © Jacqueline Lauren Stevens

Closing: Show the same slides to see anyone has changed their opinion about these objects, made from natural materials, being art now that they have had the opportunity to create with some resources.

Assessment: In Stevens own words, "I study the form and color of the almost finished pot and add ornaments to give it a feeling of mystery belonging to a people of a culture gone by. The pottery is intended to leave it up to the individual viewer to envision its people in another time."

So now, is it art? Answer in essay or appropriate type of writing for your students' grade level.

STEAM LESSON PLAN Joslyn Art Museum uses the Nebraska Department of Education's STEM Approach as a guide, but we took the liberty of adding the "**A**" to emphasize the ARTS.

NDE's STEM Approach reflects an integrated and interdisciplinary philosophy to teaching and learning that emphasizes collaborative school-based, work-based, family-based, and community-based experiences as a context for helping students to master key competencies within science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Teaching and learning resources, experiences, and example activities included within NDE's STEM Approach serve as a standards-based framework for supporting the engagement of students in hands-on, authentic, and contextual learning experiences that provide students with the opportunity to learn STEM content while promoting essential career readiness skills, including communication, creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking.

NDE's STEM Approach strives for compatibility with all content-areas, all grade levels, and all career clusters, not just those traditionally defined as STEM.