



History @ Home!

Cherokee Basket Making: Materials and Patterns

Designed for Grades 1 through 4

Activity Snapshot: Students will learn Cherokee basket making by learning about the materials used to make baskets, coloring Cherokee basket patterns and creating their own basket patterns.

Duration: 45 minutes to 1 hour for lesson and coloring activity. 30-45 minutes for Activity 2. 45 minutes for Activity 3.

Learning Objectives:

Students will:

1. Gain an appreciation for Cherokee culture by learning about the importance of basket making in Cherokee culture.
2. Learn about the natural materials that the Cherokee use to weave and dye baskets.
3. Engage in the visual arts by learning about traditional Cherokee basket patterns and performing a coloring activity.
4. Design their own basket patterns.
5. Older students can learn about the endangered status of river cane and the importance of river cane in Cherokee culture with activity 3.

North Carolina Standards Correlations and Key Terminology

1st Grade

Social Studies

NC.1.G.2 Understand how humans and the environment interact within the local community.

- .1 Explain ways people change the environment (planting trees, recycling, cutting down trees, building homes, building streets, etc.).
- .2 Explain how people use natural resources in the community.

NC.1.C.1 Understand the diversity of people in the local community.

- .1 Compare the languages, traditions, and holidays of various cultures.

Visual Arts

NC.1.V.1 Use the language of visual arts to communicate effectively.

- .3 Recognize that symbols, subjects, or themes are used in the works of others to communicate.

NC.1.V.3 Create art using a variety of tools, media, and processes, safely and appropriately.

- .2 Execute control of a variety of media.
- .3 Use the processes of drawing, painting, weaving, printing, stitchery, collage, mixed media, sculpture, and ceramics to create art.

NC.1.CX.1 Understand the global, historical, societal, and cultural contexts of the visual arts.

- .1 Recognize how visual arts are used in customs and traditions of various cultures.
- .4 Understand how art represents different cultures.
- .5 Understand that art is a reflection of the artist's ideas, environment, and/or resources.

NC.1.CX.2 Understand the interdisciplinary connections and life applications of the visual arts.

- .1 Identify the role of functional art in various communities around the world.

- .2 Identify connections between art and concepts from other disciplines, such as math, science, language arts, social studies, and other arts.

2nd Grade

Social Studies

NC.2.G.2 Understand the effects of humans interacting with their environment.

- .1 Give examples of ways in which people depend on the physical environment and natural resources to meet basic needs.
- .2 Explain how people positively and negatively affect the environment.

NC.2.C.1 Understand how various cultures influence communities.

- .1 Explain how artistic expressions of diverse cultures contribute to the community (stories, art, music, food, etc.).

Visual Arts

NC.2.V.1 Use the language of visual arts to communicate effectively.

- .5 Understand characteristics of the Principles of Design, including repetition, movement, emphasis, contrast, balance, and proportion.

NC.2.V.2 Apply creative and critical thinking skills to artistic expression.

- .3 Create art from real and imaginary sources of inspiration.

NC.2.V.3 Create art using a variety of tools, media, and processes, safely and appropriately.

- .3 Use the processes of drawing, painting, weaving, printing, stitchery, collage, mixed media, sculpture, and ceramics to create art.

NC.2.CX.1 Understand the global, historical, societal, and cultural contexts of the visual arts.

- .1 Exemplify visual arts representing the heritage, customs, and traditions of various cultures.

.5 Understand that artists use natural resources in creating art.

NC.2.CX.2 Understand the interdisciplinary connections and life applications of the visual arts.

.2 Understand relationships between art and concepts from other disciplines, such as math, science, language arts, social studies, and other arts.

3rd Grade

Social Studies

NC.3.C.1 Understand how diverse cultures are visible in local and regional communities.

.1 Compare languages, foods and traditions of various groups living in local and regional communities

.2 Exemplify how various groups show artistic expression within the local and regional communities.

Visual Arts

NC.3.V.1 Use the language of visual arts to communicate effectively.

.5 Understand characteristics of the Principles of Design, including repetition, movement, emphasis, contrast, balance, proportion, harmony, and unity.

NC.3.V.2 Apply creative and critical thinking skills to artistic expression.

.1 Create art through a process that includes generating ideas, planning solutions, and producing original art.

.3 Create art from realistic sources of inspiration.

NC.3.CX.1 Understand the global, historical, societal, and cultural contexts of the visual arts.

.1 Exemplify how visual arts are used by various groups for artistic expression within the local community.

NC.3.CX.2 Understand the interdisciplinary connections and life applications of the visual arts.

.1 Understand how to use information learned in other disciplines, such as math, science, language arts, social studies, and other arts in visual arts.

4th Grade

Social Studies

NC.4.G.1 Understand how human, environmental and technological factors affect the growth and development of North Carolina.

.2 Explain the impact that human activity has on the availability of natural resources in North Carolina

.3 Exemplify the interactions of various peoples, places and cultures in terms of adaptation and modification of the environment

NC.4.C.1 Understand the impact of various cultural groups on North Carolina.

.2 Explain how the artistic expression of various groups represents the cultural heritage of North Carolina.

Visual Arts

NC.4.V.1 Use the language of visual arts to communicate effectively.

.1 Apply personal choices while creating art.

NC.4.V.2 Apply creative and critical thinking skills to artistic expression.

.2 Use ideas and imagery from North Carolina as sources for creating art

NC.4.CX.1 Understand the global, historical, societal, and cultural contexts of the visual arts.

.1 Understand how the visual arts have affected, and are reflected in, the culture, traditions, and history of North Carolina.

.5 Analyze the effect of the geographic location and physical environment on the media and subject matter of NC art and artists.

NC.4.CX.2 Understand the interdisciplinary connections and life applications of the visual arts.

.2 Apply skills and concepts learned in other disciplines, such as math, science, language arts, social studies, and other arts, in the visual arts

.4 Explain the effect of technology on the way products look and how they are created.

Key Terminology

Social Studies

- Cultural groups: A group of people who share one or more unique characteristics such as race, national origin, ethnicity, or religion.
- Cultural values: The behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic, or age group.
- Diversity: Having or being composed of a variety of different elements i.e. cultural and ethnic background, race, gender values and beliefs, and socioeconomic status

Visual Arts

- Balance: Parts of a picture arranged symmetrically or asymmetrically so that areas seem to have equal visual weight.
- Color: An element of art defined as the effect of light reflecting from an object onto the eye.
- Design: To create a work of art by combining elements of art into a planned whole.
- Geometric: Shapes that are made using specific mathematical formulas and are named such as circle, hexagon, etc.
- Pattern: A principle of design where an element or combination of elements are repeated in a planned way.
- Principles of Design: The way the elements of art such as balance, movement, pattern/repetition, unity/variety and emphasis are used to create a composition.
- Repetition: A principle of design, where an element is used more than once
- Symbol: An image, sign, or element, such as color, that is understood, by convention or context, to suggest some other meaning
- Texture: An element of art that is the way an object feels or looks like it feels.

Materials Needed

- Markers, colored pencils, or crayons: Brown, orange, and/or yellow for first activity, other colors for follow-up activity
- Photos of plants and baskets attached to this document. If the activity is conducted in the spring or summer (and the lesson takes place in the Southeastern U.S.), instructors may be able to conduct a plant walk with students to find outdoor examples of

black walnut, white oak, and butternut trees, as well as honeysuckle and bloodroot. The rarity of rivercane may make it hard to find. Do not harvest river cane or bloodroot, as both species are endangered. You can also take photos of the trees (particularly the leaves and branches), then use this Arbor Day Foundation guide at home to help the students identify the tree:

<https://www.arborday.org/trees/whattree/>.

ACTIVITY 1

Introduction

1. Explain to the students that today, they will learn about Cherokee basket making and get to color their own Cherokee basket designs. Explain that Cherokee people have been making baskets for thousands of years, and that basket making is something that many Cherokee people see as important to their culture and history. While both Cherokee women and men make baskets, Cherokee women have been especially important as people who carry and pass on basket making traditions.
2. **Materials:** Ask the students what materials can be used to make baskets. Explain that the Cherokee traditionally make their baskets out of three materials: honeysuckle, white oak, and rivercane.
 - a. Pass around the photo of the **honeysuckle plant**. Explain that the plant is honeysuckle, that it grows as a shrub or a vine, and that many types of honeysuckle have grown all over North America for thousands of years.
 - i. Pass around the photo of a **honeysuckle basket by Cherokee artist Lucy George**. Ask the students which part of the honeysuckle plant is used to make the basket. Explain that people collect honeysuckle vines and boil them to use for basket making.
 - b. Pass around the photo of the **white oak tree w/acorns and leaves**. Explain that the tree is a white oak tree, and that the shape of the leaves and the acorns can be a clue that the tree is an oak.
 - i. Pass around or show the photo of the **white oak basket by an unknown Cherokee artist**. Ask the students which part of the tree they think is used to make the basket. Explain that the Cherokee use the wood from the white oak tree to make baskets.
 - ii. If you wish, play clips from this video that show the process of creating white oak strips for baskets:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INU2sUo8ca0> Helpful clips: 0:10-0:17 Cutting down the tree, 1:19-1:58 Splitting the trunk, 2:10 onwards: Shaving the bark, splitting the wood into strips, refining the strips, and examples of baskets.

- c. Pass around the photo of the **rivercane** (the image with the man in the middle) and explain that the plant is rivercane. Rivercane is the only type of bamboo native to North America, and it likes to grow along rivers and streambanks.
 - i. Pass around the photo of the **rivercane basket by Cherokee artist Carol Welch**. Ask the students which part of the rivercane they think is used for making the basket, and explain that the bamboo is split many times until it is thin.

3. After looking at the pictures, ask the students how they might be able to tell that these baskets are made from different materials. Prompting questions you can ask include:

- If you were to imagine touching these baskets, would they feel different? Would some be rough or others be smooth?
- Are there differences in size or thickness?
- Are there differences in color?

4. Dyes: Point out that the baskets in the pictures all have dyes, and ask the students what color dyes they see. They will point out browns, oranges, and yellows. Ask the students what they think the dyes might be made out of, and explain that the Cherokee use dyes from many different kinds of plants. Three of those plants are black walnut, butternut trees, and bloodroot.

- a. Pass around the photo of the **black walnut trees and the butternut trees (the latter have longer fruits)**. Explain that the fruit of the walnut and butternut can be used to make a dark brown dye.
- b. Pass around the photo of the **bloodroot** plant with its cut roots. Explain that bloodroot gets its name from the red sap that comes out of its roots, and that these roots can be used to make an orange dye. You can watch this short video, which shows more pictures of bloodroot at different growing stages, made by teacher Jessica Metz:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ee5-ot2NKPk&feature=youtu.be>.

5. Videos: If possible, share this video in which Cherokee basket weaver Vivian Garner Cottrell harvests and splits rivercane, dyes her cane with black walnut and bloodroot, and discusses weave patterns: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_RN0O7mIfw4. Note: Vivian Garner Cottrell is a member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, which is a distinct community from the Eastern Band of Cherokee in North Carolina. However, her use of traditional materials such as rivercane and bloodroot is similar to practices of members of the Eastern Band. In addition, you can share this video about efforts by the Eastern Band of Cherokee to revitalize traditional basket weaving using rivercane: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_MhmKEOtWg&feature=youtu.be.

6. Patterns: Ask the children to notice how the baskets they are looking at contain repeating images, or patterns. Define a **pattern** as when an artist repeats an image in a planned way. Explain that the Cherokee use traditional patterns when weaving their baskets, and that the students will now do a coloring activity using traditional colors used for dying. As they color, the patterns will emerge!

7. Activity:

1. Below are two patterns on a grid. **Two pictures of baskets that demonstrate these patterns are attached to this document.** You can choose not to tell the students what pattern will emerge, and hold a discussion afterwards about the patterns they see. See wrap up discussion.
2. If students carefully color in the boxes with an x in them in dark brown, orange, and yellow, and leave the other boxes uncolored, they will see the pattern emerge.
3. The strips can then be cut out and either wrapped around a container like a can or bottle, or just taped at the narrow end, to get the effect of a 3D basket.

8. Wrap Up Discussion: Ask the students what their patterns look like, and explain that the pattern names are “fish bone” and “peace pipe.” Show the students the photos of the fishbone and peace pipe patterned baskets as examples of the patterns they just colored.

*A note on Peace Pipes: Peace pipes are ceremonial pipes used by a number of American Indian cultures in their sacred ceremonies. Traditionally they are used to offer prayers in a religious ceremony, to make a ceremonial commitment, or to seal a covenant or treaty. Not all native cultures have pipe traditions, and there is no single word for all ceremonial pipes across the hundreds of diverse Native American languages.

ACTIVITY 2: Making a Basket Design

1. Ask the students to design their own basket patterns using patterns and repetition. Draw examples of repeating patterns to help students understand the concept. Younger students can draw a basket and color in a repeating pattern. Older students can use the blank grid provided below to plan and execute a pattern so it has a repeating design, using a pencil and marking “x’s” to make a draft. Students will need to use their counting skills and spatial reasoning to plan a consistent, repeated pattern.
2. After the students have created their patterns, encourage them to name their patterns. Emphasize that, like the Cherokee patterns, the pattern doesn’t need to look exactly like something in real life. Rather, the pattern can be a very simple representation of a more complex object.
3. Students can cut out these designs and wrap them around tin cans or other objects to complete their “basket.”

ACTIVITY 3: Understanding the Importance and Preservation of Rivercane, for 3rd and 4th Grade

1. Discuss the importance of river cane in Cherokee culture with the students.
 - a. The Cherokee have used river cane for thousands of years. The Cherokee have used it to make houses, sleeping mats, and floor coverings, utensils, baskets, blow guns, fish traps, benches, and torches.
 - b. River cane was so important to the Cherokee that they cultivated river cane- meaning that they intentionally planted and grew river cane so that they could use it when they needed it. When river cane grows in groups it is called canebrake, and the Cherokee cultivated cane brakes across the Southeast.
 - c. River cane also helps the environment by fighting erosion- meaning it helps soil stay in place so that it doesn't flow into streams and rivers. River cane also provides a home for many animals and other plants.
 - d. When Europeans arrived, their cattle and other livestock started to eat the river cane. When river cane is just starting to grow as a small, tender shoot, it's easy for grazing animals to eat the plant, preventing the cane from reproducing. Europeans also destroyed river cane when they cleared land for their crops.
 - e. Today, it is estimated that 98% of the river cane that was present when Europeans arrived has been lost.
 - f. The Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma and Eastern Band of Cherokee in North Carolina are working on restoration projects to help river cane continue to grow. Amongst other benefits, this will help basket makers have a supply of cane for their work.
2. Watch this video, [Saving Cane](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Km3OE1axhLs), about the Cherokee uses of river cane and the work to restore river cane in Oklahoma:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Km3OE1axhLs> Even though the video takes place in Oklahoma, with a member of the Cherokee Nation, the topic matter is relevant to the Eastern Band of Cherokees and Southeastern ecology as well.
 - a. You can also watch this video of a demonstration of using a blow gun made of river cane:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jtyQxMivPkc>
3. Students can write down or discuss answers to the following questions:
 - Why is river cane important to the Cherokee? What are some ways the Cherokee use rivercane?
 - How does river cane help the environment?
 - Why is there less river cane now than there used to be? What cultures of people contributed to making the plant endangered?

- How can we help protect river cane?
4. As an additional activity, students can research other plants that are endangered in their bioregion and write a short essay on the qualities of the plant, its uses by humans, what human activities have led it to being endangered, and what can be done to help protect the plant. Ideas for Southern Appalachian plants include bloodroot, ginseng, goldenseal, and ramps.

			X	X	X				X	X	X				X
		X	X	X				X	X	X				X	X
	X	X	X				X	X	X				X	X	X
X	X	X				X	X	X				X	X	X	
X	X				X	X	X				X	X	X		
X				X	X	X				X	X	X			
			X	X	X				X	X	X				X
		X	X	X				X	X	X				X	X
	X	X	X				X	X	X				X	X	X
X	X	X				X	X	X				X	X	X	
	X	X	X				X	X	X				X	X	X
		X	X	X				X	X	X				X	X
			X	X	X				X	X	X				X
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X	X				X	X	X				X	X	X		
X	X	X				X	X	X				X	X	X	
	X	X	X				X	X	X				X	X	X
		X	X	X				X	X	X				X	X
			X	X	X				X	X	X				X

Design 1

X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
X				X							X				X	
X				X							X				X	
X				X							X				X	
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	
X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
X				X							X				X	
X				X							X				X	
X				X							X				X	
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	

Design 2





Lidded storage basket by Lucy George. Honeysuckle woven over white oak ribs. Walnut dye for brown colored ribs, bloodroot for orange, and yellowroot for bright yellow. Courtesy WCU Hunter Library Digital Collections.





Storage or laundry basket by unknown Cherokee artist. White oak. Courtesy WCU Hunter Library Digital Collections.



Photo credit Alex Rajewski



Lidded storage basket by Carol Welch. Rivercane, with butternut for dark brown dye and bloodroot for orange dye. Courtesy WCU Hunter Library Digital Collections.





White butternut





Storage basket using Peace Pipe design by Lottie Queen Stamper. Rivercane with black walnut dye. Courtesy WCU Hunter Library Digital Collections.



Egg basket using fishbone or, arrow point pattern by Annie Ropetwister. Rivercane with butternut dye. Courtesy WCU Hunter Library Digital Collections.