Inspirations from Nature: Ojibwe Floral Bead Design Inspired Paintings

**Grade Level:** 4th-6th grade

**Time Needed:** 4-5 class periods

**Focus:** Create an intertwining design with many different leaves, plants, and berries all connected together on the same stem. The composition will be a harmonious design created to infuse culturally responsive American Indian visual arts into the elementary curriculum.

**Objectives:**

* Describe how the principles of visual art such as repetition, pattern, emphasis, contrast and balance are used in the creation, presentation or response to visual artworks (Minnesota Academic Standards 4.1.1.5.1)
* Reflect on a presentation based on the feedback of others (Minnesota Academic Standards 0.3.1.5.2)
* Identify the characters of visual artworks from a variety of cultures including the contributions of Minnesota American-Indian tribes and communities (Minnesota State Department Art Standard)
* Demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of the purposes, history and forms of American Indian Art

**Motivational Resources:**

* Ojibwe Bead Design posters from the Tweed Museum of Art
* Children’s books on Ojibwe and Metis bead designs
* Museum Tour of the Tweed Museum of Art Ojibwe Collection
* Posters of Leah Yellowbirds paintings
* PowerPoint and handouts on traditional and contemporary Ojibwe beadwork and bead inspired paintings
* Video of Christi Belcourt interview
* Pictures of Native Planet from the MN DNR website
* PowerPoint of plants native to Minnesota
* Printed images of plants native to Minnesota

**Art Materials:**

* Small Canvases
* Acrylic Paint
* Brushes
* Toothpicks
* Small Pointed utensils other than toothpicks for different sized dots
* Table Easels
* Palettes (Paper plates work as well)
* Water containers
* paper towels/newspaper
* smocks (Aprons work)
* White Pencils
* Bead pattern stencils

**Introduction to Lesson:**

Manidoominensagm (beads) in Ojibwe mean Berries of the Creator. Ojibwe women have always decorated domestic objects and ceremonial clothing with the sacred patterns of nature using natural materials such as porcupine quills, seeds, wood, shells and bones. Glass seed beads were first introduced to the Ojibwe in what is now Minnesota during the 1660s through the fur trade. Beads were also used as gift trinkets (or friendship beads) by some European explorers. By the 1800s, glass beads were more plentiful and were used in abundance. The bead designs include stylized woodland flowers, vines and berries that symbolize the Ojibwe spiritual relationship with nature. It is believed that people need to have good feelings when beading to continue the gift of beauty from the spirits.

In some beadwork designs, all of the seasons are represented in a single stem: blooms for summer, colored leaves for fall, berries for spring, and a stick with nothing on it for winter. Some scholars believe that the curvilinear Ojibwe bead designs were inspired by European designs found in needlepoint and embroidery pattern books of the French missionaries and northern European and Scandinavian settlers(Aune).

Minnesota is home to a multitude of different trees, from both the Coniferous and Deciduous families. Coniferous trees are the tree family that you would get all of the different types of Christmas trees from. Deciduous trees are the vast array of species that include ones such as Birches, Aspen, Oak, Maple, etc.(Minnesota Native Trees). Minnesota also has a vast variety of wildflowers and other plants, over 1600 in fact, and that number is much higher most likely(Minnesota Wildflowers).

Leah Yellowbird is a Native American painter who is from Grand Rapids, Minnesota. She originally learned from her aunt the tradition of beading patterns. This is an artform that has inspired her to create painting based on it. These paintings are full of vibrant colors, and are done in a peculiar, or unusual, way. She does these paintings with dots, instead of the traditional stroke with brushes. This has resulted in her being very highly regards for her unusual and unique style of painting, with her work being featured in displays at the Macrosite Art Center, the Plains Museum of Art, and the Tweed Museum of Art. Recently, she was commissioned to design the floor of a new government building in Virginia, Minnesota(Dr. Robert Powless Cultural Center).

**Instructional Procedure for Art Making:**

**Class 1:**

The teacher will begin the PowerPoint presentation, and give the introduction to the history of bead artwork. The teacher will be sure to point out the intricacies and beauty of the examples throughout the presentation. Be sure to ask the students what they think is being portrayed, or what they think the artist is trying to say in the artwork. After the presentation is finished, the teacher will show the Christi Belcourt interview video. The teacher will then ask the students if they have any questions on the presentation and/or interview. The teacher will then begin the PowerPoint on the plants native to Minnesota, and talk about the plethora of different trees, flowers, etc. that you can find in Minnesota. The teacher may, at this point consider starting early on the second class period activities if the presentations are finished before the class period is over.

**Class 2:**

The teacher will have set up canvases around on the tables with black paint and a large paint brush for each canvas, and will have the students sit down at one. The handouts of examples should also be dispersed among the tables at this point as well. The teacher will instruct the students that they will be painting their canvases black. The teacher will show how they are to do this, with long strokes going in one direction (Either up/down, or side-to-side), this is to create a smooth looking canvas. Once students are done with this, the teacher may show examples of what to do next. This will be using the white pencils to outline/plan what the painter will be putting onto the canvas. The teacher will demonstrate doing this both free hand, and by using stencils as well. Once the teacher is done, or while the teacher is demonstrating, students may start drawing their designs on their canvases. The teacher will make efforts to encourage students to study the examples that were in the PowerPoint, the handouts, and to draw inspiration from them. If students finish with their outlining/stencil work quickly, the teacher may encourage the students to start with their “bead” painting. The teacher will be sure to demonstrate how this is done.

**Class 3:**

This class, the teacher will instruct the students on how they will be actually painting their canvases. The teacher will demonstrate how to use fine point brushes or toothpick and other painting implements to do the “dot painting” technique. The teacher will instruct students that the vast majority, and preferably the whole painting, will be done with this “dot painting” technique. Once the demonstration in finished, have the students come and grab paint for themselves in an orderly fashion, or the teacher will already have paint and implements laid out on the tables around the room. Then the students are allowed to start painting. The rest of the class period is set aside for the students to just paint, this is a work day. The teacher will remain available to the students to answer any questions they may have, or to help give them ideas for technique and/or colors to use.

**Class 4:**

This class period is a continuation of the previous period, allow the students to keep painting. Today is a work day for the student, as these painting can take a while to do depending on the size of the dots that the students chose, and the scope of what they are painting on their canvas. The teacher will walk around and encourage students, along with asking students if they need any help with anything. The students will be done with their paintings by the end of this class period. Otherwise, at the discretion of the teacher, the students may take their painting home to work on it there to be finished before the next class period.

**Class 5**:

On this day, the students will be taking part in a sharing and critique of their work. Depending on the size of the class, the teacher will draw a number of names out of a hat. The students who are called will have the opportunity to share about there painting, and what inspired them. Depending on the time left in the class period, the teacher will also institute a time limit on sharing. If a student would rather not share, the teacher is free to encourage them to share, but must not *make* them share. In the event that a student would not like to share, then the teacher will pull a draw a new name from the pool. The students who do not share may then write a short 1-page evaluation of what they liked about their art, what they would have changed, what plants they included in their painting, and what they learned through this process.

**Evaluation/Assessment**:

Students created a painting using a technique inspired by the bead pattern art create by Native Americans, and then participated in a critique of such work.

**Discipline Based Art Education:**

**Art Production:**  Students made an Ojibwe bead inspired Painting

**Art History:** Students learned about traditional and contemporary Ojibwe bead designs

**Art Criticism:** The students were asked to participate in a critique

**Aesthetic:** The students learned about the beauty of Ojibwe floral bead designs

Bibliography

Professor Allison Aune. (2019, May 1). Retrieved from a sample lesson plan.

Dr. Robert Powless Cultural Center. (1970, April 27). Retrieved from https://www.mnartists.org/event/dimensions-leah-yellowbird-art-opening

Minnesota Native Trees - Minnesota DNR. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/trees\_shrubs/index.html

Minnesota Wildflowers. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/