History of Himmeli Sculptures

**Grade Level:** 2nd – 5th Grades

**Time Needed**: 2 class periods

**Focus**: Create a Himmeli sculpture and learn of the history behind them

**Objectives:**

* Create original two- and three- dimensional artworks to express ideas, experiences or stories. (Minnesota Academic Standards 0.2.1.5.1)
* Share and describe a personal artwork. (Minnesota Academic Standards 0.3.1.5.1)

**Motivational Resources**:

* PowerPoint on the history of Himmelis and their significance to Finnish Culture
* Finished Himmelis as examples
* Posters and Handout of Himmelis
* “How To” handout of a basic Himmeli

**Art Materials:**

* Straws
  + Bundles of shorter ones cut to the same length, as well as full length straws
* String
* Scissors
* Streamers
* Pom-Poms (Fuzz balls)
* Pipe cleaners
* Large Needles

**Introduction to Lesson**:

Himmelis are a traditional Finnish decoration made out of straw. Himmelis have been made for centuries, but it is not certain when this tradition began. The word Himmeli is believed to have been derived from the German word for heaven, “Himmel”, which in turn is derived from the Old Norse word himinn, which is roughly translated as heaven or sky. These pieces of art were geometrical shapes made using straw and string. They are usually made of a bunch of triangles put together to form another 3-dimensional shape. They were made out of straw for a specific reason, that reason being that people would make them, then hang them over the harvest celebration to ensure a good harvest the next year. The belief was that the more elaborate a Himmeli was, the better the harvest would be the following year.

Traditionally, Himmeli were made from specially selected straw that was prepared in a special way. This straw was then made into a octahedron, and eight sided polyhedron. The straw used to make this needed to be straight, clean and unblemished, and the same size. This would require people to plan the construction of their Himmelis in advance, so that they had enough time to prepare all of the materials.

**Day 1:**

The teacher will begin the PowerPoint presentation and give the introduction on the history of Himmelis. The teacher will be sure to point out the different styles and breadth of types of himmelis throughout the presentation. The teacher will be sure to ask the students what they notice about patterns in the construction of these Himmelis. Once the presentation is finished, the teacher will show off all of the different examples of Himmelis on the posters and handouts, as well as the examples of the completed Himmelis. The teacher will then begin instructing the students in the method of making Himmelis. The teacher will demonstrate the process of making the first triangle, and then adding the additional triangles onto that. At this point, the teacher will hand out the informational sheets on how to construct Himmelis to the students, as well as the bundles of cut straws. The teacher will then walk the students through threading the string onto the needles, to ease the passing of string through the straws. The students may then proceed to construct their first Himmeli. The teacher will walk around the room and make sure that all students are making progress on their Himmelis. The teacher will also ensure that students are able to finish the process of tying their Himmelis together. At this point, the teacher will encourage students to look at the other examples to take inspiration from them in how to create larger Himmelis.

**Day 2**:

This class, the students can finish creating their Himmelis. The teacher will continue to help the students with their projects, and encourage them in furthering their creations. At this point, the students should be getting close to finishing up the structure of their Himmeli. Now the students will start to decorate their Himmeli. This is a optional step though, if students like to keep their Himmeli clean, there is no need to decorate them. Once students are finished with their work, the teacher will transition the students into a critique period. Once the students have tidied up their tables, the teacher will call them up alphabetically to share their creations. The students will share two things they liked about their creation, and one thing they would like to add to it.

**Evaluation/Assessment:**

Students created a Himmeli inspired by the traditional Finnish artform, and then participated in a critique of their work.

**Discipline Based Art Education:**

**Art Production**: Students made a Himmeli inspired by the Finnish traditional art form

**Art History**: Students learned about the history of Himmeli making and the traditions behind it

**Art Criticism**: Students participated in a critique of their artwork

**Aesthetic**: Students learned about the beauty of the traditional Finnish Himmeli

References:

Fraser, C., & Fraser, C. (2016, July 05). Himmeli: The Geometry of the Heavens. Retrieved from https://blog.etsy.com/en/himmeli-the-geometry-of-the-heavens/

Koskiahde, U., & Itkonen, M. (n.d) *The art & science of the traditional finnish christmas decoration: the himmeli*. Retrieved from https://www.kiks.unican.es/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/The- Science-and-Art-of-the-Traditional-Finnish-Christmas-Decoration-HuhtasuoFinlandReport.pdf