

NEBRASKA BY HEART

Folk Arts • Traditional Arts • Folklife
Curriculum Unit • Grades 6–8
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Instructions and Patterns for Native American Style Beadwork

For the Teacher

Grades: 4–8

Instructional Objective

Students will:

1. Learn the history and significance of Native American beadwork as function and as art.
2. Design and make a beaded bracelet or bookmark with small/medium sized glass or plastic beads using needle and thread or make a small animal or insect shape using wire or lanyard to string glass or plastic beads.

Beadwork as a Traditional Art Form

Native Americans made beaded items before contact with Europeans by using such items as cut shells, coral, bone, dyed and flattened porcupine quills and various seeds. After the arrival of glass beads, however, tribes began producing a greater amount and variety of these decorative arts. They also developed new techniques of beading and many distinctive regional and tribal styles.

Most of the tribes who now live in Nebraska (or who are known to have lived in the state in the recent past), such as the Arapaho, the Cheyenne, the Lakota (Oglala and Rosebud Sioux), the Northern Ponca, the Omaha, and the Pawnee, primarily create their beadwork in variations of the plains regional style. Plains style employs mostly geometric designs and straight lines. However, the older traditional beadwork styles of Nebraska's Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) and Istanti Dakota (Santee Sioux) tribes include floral and other curved applique designs that are more like those of the other woodland tribes in their original Great Lakes area homelands. Some common design motifs, such as lightning, rainbows and thunderbirds, are shared by many tribes, but other designs and techniques are unique to only one tribe or even to just one clan or family within a tribe. These are traditions that are passed down person to person and from one generation to the next.

Vocabulary and Design Elements/Principles

beads – Common types are: **crow** (large format), **pony** (mid size format) and **seed** (tiny glass that became popular by the end of the 1700's). Seed beads are used to ornament clothing, moccasins, and other accessories.)

color scheme – Range of colors within a composition

double needle applique – A beading technique that uses two needles. On one thread a small number of beads at a time are lined up and arraigned on the fabric to form curved designs. The woodland tribes make their floral beadwork designs this way. The second thread is used to whipstitch over the beading thread, usually between each bead, to sew it to the backing fabric.

lazy stitch – A technique used to attach up to seven beads at a time onto the base surface to cover a large area in a short period of time. Also used to create geometric designs in parallel rows of equal numbers of beads. Sometimes called “lane stitch”.

loom weaving – A bead weaving technique done on a hand loom with traditional loom cording for the warp and weft.

rhythm – A sense of visual movement; regular or harmonious pattern created by repetition of lines, shapes, or colors.

unity – One of the principles of art, seen or felt when all parts of an artwork give viewers a sense of harmony and completion.

wampum – White or purple-black shell beads historically used for ceremonial purposes and as money by some Native American tribes.

warp – The normally vertical strands of string or yarn through which the weft is woven.

weft – Horizontal strands of string or yarn woven through the warp to make a weaving.

Teacher Preparation

1. Have a computer with Internet access, large prints or slides to show students some examples of Native American beadwork designs. For some sources, see Resources.
2. Have a partially completed example of each item that students will be making that you can use to demonstrate the appropriate techniques.

Materials

1. For making a bracelet or bookmark

precut pieces of firmly woven solid-color fabric (one 2” x 5 “ or longer strip per student)
300 or more glass “seed” beads per student (vibrant colors work best),
needles
thread
scissors
pencils
scrap paper

2. For making a beaded animal or insect

4 or 5 feet of lightweight wire (older students only) or lanyard per student
100 or more medium-sized plastic or glass “pony” beads
pencils
scissors
scrap paper

Native American Style Beadwork

Instructions For Students

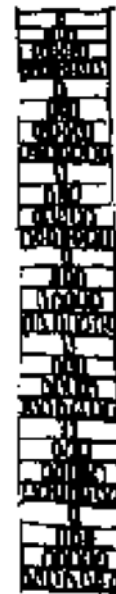
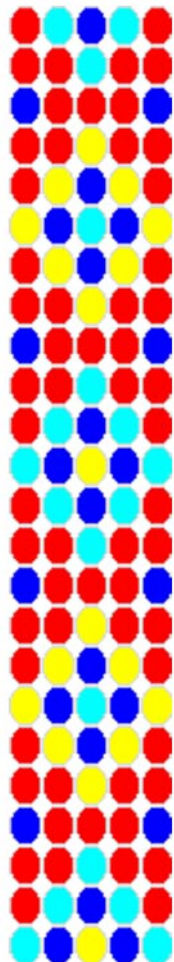
For a Bookmark or Bracelet

1. Watch the demonstration on how to create (or choose) a design for a bracelet, or a bookmark. Note how to bead onto cloth. Try out the basic skills of threading beads and knotting. Learn the vocabulary.
2. Transfer a sketch of a chosen design onto cloth 2" x 5" or longer.
3. Start beading row by row.
4. Tie off neatly each time as you change to a new piece of thread.
5. Finish each string of beads by tying the ends with a knot on the backside of the fabric.
6. Once the beadwork is finished, fold the fabric in half lengthwise and inside out.
7. Sew along the outer edge, leaving the ends open.
8. Turn the fabric so the beads are facing out.
9. For the bookmark, sew both ends shut and add a tassel, if desired. For the bracelet, sew longer "ties" or hooks on both ends to fasten around your wrist.

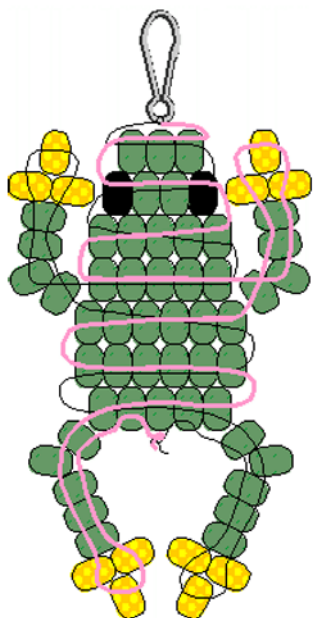
For a Small Beaded Animal or Insect

1. Watch the demonstration or use sample instructions on how to design your animal or insect shape and how to thread beads onto wire (or plastic lanyard).
2. Draw (or select) a shape to bead.
3. Begin threading the beads. Be sure to keep the wire or lanyard tight so the beads are equally spaced and close together.
4. Finish each horizontal string of beads by reversing the wire in alternate rows.
5. Tie off or embed ends neatly each time you change off to a new piece of wire or lanyard.
6. At the end, twist the two wires together, trim and tuck into the row above. Lanyard resists being knotted neatly. Weave the ends back into the last rows, or you can knot the ends on a hook or clip that can be used to hang the animal from a backpack.
7. Follow clean-up procedures.

Bookmark or Bracelet



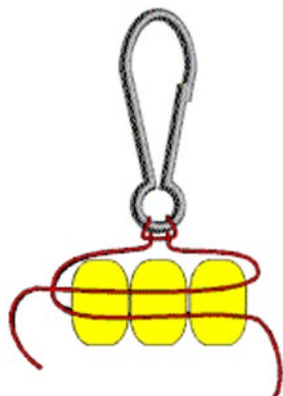
Frog



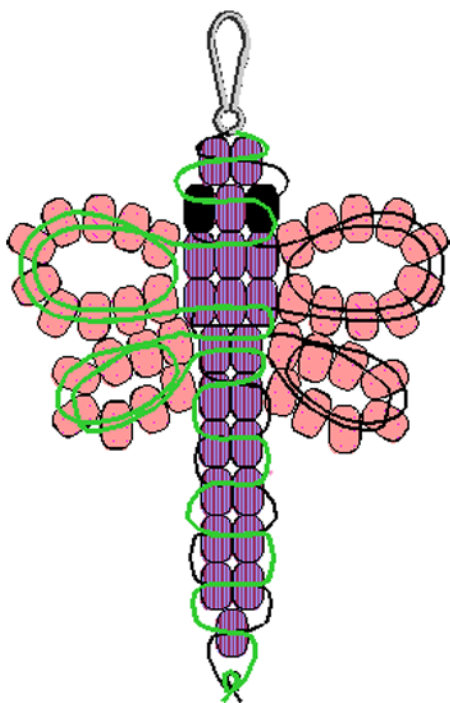
Lizard



How to start



Dragonfly



Skunk

