



# CHOCTAW WOVEN FLAT MATS

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## CONTENT SCOPE

Students will engage with Choctaw culture and art by creating their own woven flat mat. This hands-on activity not only teaches students about weaving but also incorporates lessons in history, culture, and art technique.

## FOR TEACHERS

Subject & Topic: Social Studies (Native American History) and Art

Grade Level: K-12

Lesson Time: 1 Hour Class Period

Group Size: Regular Class Size (18 - 25 students)

## MATERIALS

- 3 Reams of Natural color ¼ inch flat reed
- 1 Ream of Green color ¼ inch flat reed
- 1 Ream of Purple color ¼ inch flat reed
- 1 Ream of Blue Color ¼ inch flat reed
- Spray bottles with water
- Scissors

## OBJECTIVES

STUDENTS WILL:

- Learn about the Choctaw people, focusing on their history, culture, and weaving techniques.
- Understand the significance of weaving in Choctaw society, including its uses and symbolic meanings.
- Develop weaving skills by creating their own woven flat mat using traditional Choctaw techniques.



## TRADITIONAL MATERIALS

River cane, or Uksi, a semi-aquatic grass indigenous to the southeastern United States, plays a pivotal role in traditional Choctaw culture. It serves as the primary material for Choctaw basketry, in addition to being utilized in the creation of some weapons and other cultural artifacts.

Historically, canebrakes thrived in the riparian zones across the Choctaw homelands, now known as Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana. In Oklahoma, where the Choctaw were relocated following the Removal, river cane continues to grow along streams and rivers in the southeastern part of the state, enabling the continuation of basket weaving traditions.

Today, Oklahoma Choctaw basket weavers continue the tradition of river cane basketry, but they face growing difficulty in finding healthy stands of cane. Agricultural and urban development of lands has greatly reduced the amount of river cane growing in Oklahoma. Concerns about water rights, climate change and other environmental factors further threaten to impact the traditional art.

(sourced from the Oklahoma Choctaw Nation Culture Traditional Basketry at <https://www.choctawnation.com/about/culture/traditions/basketry/>)



## CHOCTAW FLAT MATS

The flatmat was a precursor to baskets in many Southeastern tribes, including the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Flatmats would have been woven by Choctaws and be slept on atop of bedposts.

Basket weaving is among the oldest crafts practiced by Native North Americans, a testament to the ingenuity and resourcefulness of its people. Weavers skillfully transform materials such as grasses, bark, roots, and various plant fibers into baskets that serve diverse purposes. In Choctaw culture, the tradition of weaving was historically upheld by women, grandmothers, mothers and aunts teaching the younger generation.

After the Removal to Indian Territory, however, European influences on social structure and traditional gender roles impacted Choctaw life. Modifications were necessary to protect the passage of traditional knowledge and skills. Today, you will see both female and male weavers as a result of these changes. Basket weaving continues to be a valuable art among Choctaw people.

## INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Begin the lesson with a brief overview of the Choctaw people's connection to Tennessee lands. Highlight key historical points, including their forced removal, resilience, and how they have continued to thrive, particularly in Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. In connection with their long history, the teacher will bring in the significance of the Choctaw woven flat mats. Upon understanding the significance weaving plays in Choctaw culture and history, students will replicate their own Choctaw woven flat mat following instructions.



### ACTIVITY

Students will make individual woven flat mats (around 4"x4" each).

- 1** Arrange all of the Horizontal Strips together. Make sure all of the Horizontal Strips are centered and that the ends are aligned. Secure the strips with a brace.
- 2** Insert one strip of Vertical Strip and weave under two, over two, and repeat from the bottom. Make sure the Vertical Strip is centered.
- 3** Weave the second column with another Vertical Strip. Again, starting at the bottom, weave over one, under two, over two, under two, over two, under two, and over one.
- 4** After weaving the herringbone pattern flatmat, to keep the mat secure and from falling apart we will apply outside support.
- 5** After attaching the outside support, we will trim the reeds flush with the flatmat and tuck in the other reeds.
- 6** Attach the rim pieces to the edging of the flatmat.

### EVALUATION

Evaluate students based on their engagement in discussions, the effort and creativity displayed in their flat mat creation, and their understanding and respect for Choctaw culture and weaving techniques as reflected in their final piece and participation in class discussions. This lesson plan not only educates students about Choctaw history and art but also encourages them to think critically about indigenous cultures and the importance of preserving such traditions.

- How does the practice of Choctaw weaving represent cultural preservation?
- What was the most challenging aspect of creating your flatmat and how did you overcome it? How does mastering this technique give you insight into the skill and creativity of Choctaw artisans?
- How does understanding the traditional materials, like rivercane, enrich the experience of creating traditional art?





## Goals, Learning Objectives, and Content :

**Goal 1:** Learn about the rivercane and traditional basketweaving significance.

Teaching Strategy	Learning Objective	Content	TN Content Standard
Read the following content from Aliyah Myers, Choctaw artisan, and the Oklahoma Choctaw Nation.	1a. Students learn from a Native Artisan sharing their perspective of history as a member of the Choctaw community.	1b. Rivercane serves as the primary material for Choctaw basketry, in addition to being utilized in the creation of some weapons and other cultural artifacts.	H,C,G,T
Read the following content from Aliyah Myers, Choctaw artisan, and the Oklahoma Choctaw Nation.	2a. Students learn from a Native Artisan sharing their perspective of history as a member of the Choctaw community.	2b. Agricultural and urban development of lands has greatly reduced the amount of river cane growing in Oklahoma. Concerns about water rights, climate change and other environmental factors further threaten to impact the traditional art.	H,C,G,T

**Goal 2:** Understand the significance of basketry in Choctaw culture and society.

Teaching Strategy	Learning Objective	Content	TN Content Standard
Read the following content from Aliyah Myers, Choctaw artisan.	1a. Students learn from a Native Artisan sharing their perspective of history as a member of the Choctaw community.	1b. Basket weaving is among the oldest crafts practiced by Native North Americans, a testament to the ingenuity and resourcefulness of its people.	H,C,G,T

**Goal 3:** Create a Choctaw woven flatmat.

Teaching Strategy	Learning Objective	Content	TN Content Standard
Use the following activity instructions to create a Choctaw woven flat mat.	1a. Students will develop skills to create their own Choctaw woven flat mat.	1b. Students will create a 4"x4" flat mat. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Arrange all of the Horizontal Strips together. Make sure all of the Horizontal Strips are centered and that the ends are aligned. Secure the strips with a brace.</li> <li>2. Insert one strip of Vertical Strip and weave under two, over two, and repeat from the bottom. Make sure the Vertical Strip is centered.</li> <li>3. Weave the second column with another Vertical Strip. Again, starting at the bottom, weave over one, under two, over two, under two, over two, under two, and over one.</li> <li>4. After weaving the herringbone pattern flatmat, to keep the mat secure and from falling apart we will apply outside support.</li> <li>5. After attaching the outside support, we will trim the reeds flush with the flatmat and tuck in the other reeds.</li> <li>6. Attach the rim pieces to the edging of the flatmat.</li> </ol>	C

## Cont. Goals, Learning Objectives, and Content :

**Goal 4:** Build an appreciation for Choctaw culture and weaving.

Teaching Strategy	Learning Objective	Content	TN Content Standard
Reflect on the history, story, and activity.	1a. Students will share personal reflections of the lesson.	1b. Reflection Questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How does creating this pinch pot make you feel connected to the Cherokee story of the Didanisisgi?</li> <li>2. What was the most challenging aspect of creating your pinch pot, and how did you overcome it? How does mastering this technique give you insight into the skill and creativity of Cherokee artists?</li> <li>3. How do stories, like that of the Didanisisgi (mud dauber), enrich the experience of creating traditional art? How important do you think storytelling is in preserving cultural heritage?</li> </ol>	H,C,G,T

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