



STORYTELLING CROW BEADS

Written by **Charles Robinson**, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, in collaboration with the Native Resonance Cohort sponsored by the Native American Indian Association and the Tennessee Arts Commission.



CONTENT SCOPE

It is often believed that all Native Americans shared the same beliefs, lifestyles, foods, traditions, stories, etc. While many Tribes shared similar beliefs and values, each Tribe is different and independent. Through the engaging activity of storytelling with beads, students will learn to recognize and appreciate these unique tribal narratives. This hands-on project builds on students reflection skills and appreciation of Native cultures and histories.



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

- Assortment of colorful beads (Approx. 10 per student)
- Cord (Leather cord preferred)
- Scissors
- Animal Charms (Optional)

OBJECTIVES

STUDENTS WILL:

- Develop an appreciation for Native American culture and recognize each Tribe is unique.
- Improve their visualization and storytelling skills by creating meaning out of beads.
- Reflect on the significance of personalization.



WHO ARE NATIVE AMERICANS

The common misconception that all Native American tribes share identical beliefs, lifestyles, foods, traditions, and stories overlooks the rich diversity and complexity within Native American cultures. While there may be shared values and beliefs across many tribes, the reality is that each tribe possesses its own unique identity, shaped by a variety of factors including climate, access to food sources, spiritual beliefs, historical experiences, and social structures.

The diversity among tribes can be as pronounced as the differences between cultures around the world, such as those of the Japanese and Norwegian people. For instance, the diet of the nomadic lifestyle of the Plains tribes, who followed the vast herds of buffalo, differed significantly from the settled, village-based societies of the tribes in the Northeastern woodlands.

The oversimplification and homogenization of Native American cultures not only strip away the individuality and sovereignty of each tribe but also perpetuate stereotypes and misunderstandings. This lack of recognition for the distinctiveness of each tribe can lead to misrepresentation, cultural appropriation, and the erasure of specific tribal identities, contributing to the broader issues of invisibility faced by many Native Americans. Acknowledging and appreciating the diversity of Native American tribes, with their unique cultures, languages, and histories, is crucial for respectful and accurate representation and for supporting Native American communities.



INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Start the lesson by providing a concise overview of the vast diversity among Native American communities. Emphasize important historical moments, such as their forced displacement, remarkable resilience, and the ways in which they have prospered, with a special focus on Tennessee. It's crucial to communicate that tribes are distinct, challenging any myths that suggest Native Americans are a uniform group. Teachers should engage students with questions that check for understanding and prompt reflection. After grasping the importance of diversity and individuality within Native American cultures, students are invited to contemplate their own uniqueness and personal narratives by crafting a crow bead necklace or bracelet.



ACTIVITY

For this activity, the students will tell their own story using crow beads. Each bead will represent a different person, animal, object or activity that is special to them. The students will make a bracelet, placing the beads in a particular order to tell their story.



- 1 Choose an array of different beads that each symbolize something to you.
- 2 Arrange the beads in an order that helps tell your story.
- 3 Cut your cord to the appropriate length. Be sure to leave extra cord to tie the bracelet/necklace.
- 4 String your beads onto the cord according to your design.
- 5 Tie both ends of your cord together to make your bracelet/necklace. Once you have completed your piece, try it on!

EVALUATION

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

- Why did you choose these specific color beads in this specific order?
- How have you interpreted a color differently from a peer who used the same color? How is this similar to the diversity of Native American tribes?
- Why is it important that we recognize individualism and diversity in our own stories as well as for different Native American tribes?

