



# MOHICAN PRINTMAKING

Written by **Justin M**, Stockbridge-Munsee  
Mohican, in collaboration with the Native  
Resonance Cohort sponsored by the  
Native American Indian Association and the  
Tennessee Arts Commission.



## CONTENT SCOPE

Students will engage with Mohican culture and engage with nature by sourcing natural materials to create relief prints. This hands-on activity not only teaches students about printmaking 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

- Cardstock
- Craft Paint
- Sponges
- Leaves and other Natural Materials

## OBJECTIVES

STUDENTS WILL:

- Learn about the Mohican people, focusing on their history, culture, and art.
- Engage with nature by listening to birdsong and gathering natural materials to create prints.
- Develop printmaking skills and appreciation for natural elements in Native art.



## WHO ARE THE MOHICANS?

The Mohicans are a nation of people whose original homelands are what is now known as the Hudson River Valley, stretching from Lake Champlain in Vermont to Manhattan in New York State. They named the river the Mahicannituck and themselves the Muh-he-conneok, "the People of the Waters That are Never Still."

The Mohican people chose to build their homes near the rivers where they would be close to food, water and transportation. They lived in multi-family housing called long-houses - sometimes as long as a hundred feet. The roofs were curved and covered with bark and included smoke holes which allowed smoke from fire pits to escape.

The Mohicans' lives were rooted in the woodlands in which they lived. These were covered with red spruce, elm, pine, oak, birch and maple trees. Black bear, deer, moose, beaver, otter, bobcat, mink and other animals thrived in the woods, as well as wild turkeys and pheasants. The sparkling rivers teemed with herring, shad, trout and other fish. Oyster beds were found beneath the river's overhanging banks for some distance up the Mahicannituck. Berries and nuts were abundant.

It is a common European misconception that this abundance simply existed in the region as a sort of paradise untouched by human hands, that the people living there -for millenia- were simply disordered "primitive" people, perhaps with good luck. However, modern research shows us that Indigenous people were in fact very "hands-on" with the natural world - the key distinction being that they had an advanced and benevolently ordered understanding of complex relationship with the natural world as opposed to simple, short-sighted extraction based "relationship".



### STOCKBRIDGE-MUNSEE MOHICANS IN THE PRESENT

Today The Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohicans is a federally recognized tribal nation residing on 25,000 acres of land in Northern Wisconsin. Despite several forced removals and resettlements the Mohican Nation remains a vibrant community and culture. Traditions like painting, beading, quillwork, music and storytelling are passed down from generation to generation to communicate and instill the Mohican values of endurance and good relationship to all things.

### WORKING WITH NATURE

For many Native American tribes, it is important to show gratitude and give thanks to the Earth. There is an inherent relationship between the natural world and humanity. The Mohicans have always seen themselves as part of the natural world, not separate from or dominant over it.

Moreover, the knowledge of how to work with natural materials—whether for crafting, building, or healing—is a living heritage, passed down through generations. This includes the artistic techniques with natural materials, the medicinal properties of plants, music of the land, and much more.

# INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Start the lesson with a concise overview of the Mohican people's historical ties to their traditional territories, emphasizing their enduring connection despite challenges. Discuss significant moments in their history, such as displacement, their remarkable resilience, and the ways they have continued to flourish, now primarily based in Wisconsin. Teachers are encouraged to take their students on a brief walk in nature and ask the students to collect materials that will be used for the printmaking. On this walk, it is important that students listen to sounds of nature. Once they are back in the classroom, the teacher will supervise students on printmaking with their natural elements. The teacher should lead discussions on the importance of preserving nature, working with nature, and respecting nature. Upon understanding the significance nature plays in Mohican and many other Native arts, students will work with their materials to create cards.



## ACTIVITY

A good size pinch pot is made from a ball of clay about the size of a tennis ball.

- 1** Gather materials for printing. Lead class through a walk to gather leaves, flowers, and grass for printing.
- 2** Decide on the paint colors and pattern for your card.
- 3** Fold your paper in half (hotdog) to make a card.
- 4** Lightly paint over the flower or leaf, be sure to not over saturate with paint.
- 5** Press the card face down on top of your element. Slowly peel back the paper to reveal a relief print.



## EVALUATION

Evaluate students based on their engagement in discussions, the effort and creativity displayed in their card creation, and their understanding and respect for Mohican culture and Earth elements as reflected in their final piece and participation in class discussions. This lesson plan not only educates students about Mohican history and art but also encourages them to think critically about indigenous cultures and the importance of working with natural elements.

- How does working and printing with natural materials, such as leaves or flowers, differ from drawing them?
- What was your method in choosing your natural materials? Why did you pick those specific pieces?
- How does working with the natural world enrich the experience of creating traditional art? How important do you think nature is in Native arts and culture?