

Plains Indian Art of the Northern Plains Traveling Trunk Curriculum



Photo 1: NA.202.1139

**BUFFALO BILL
CENTER
OF THE WEST**

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Photo 2: NA.111.6



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Section 1

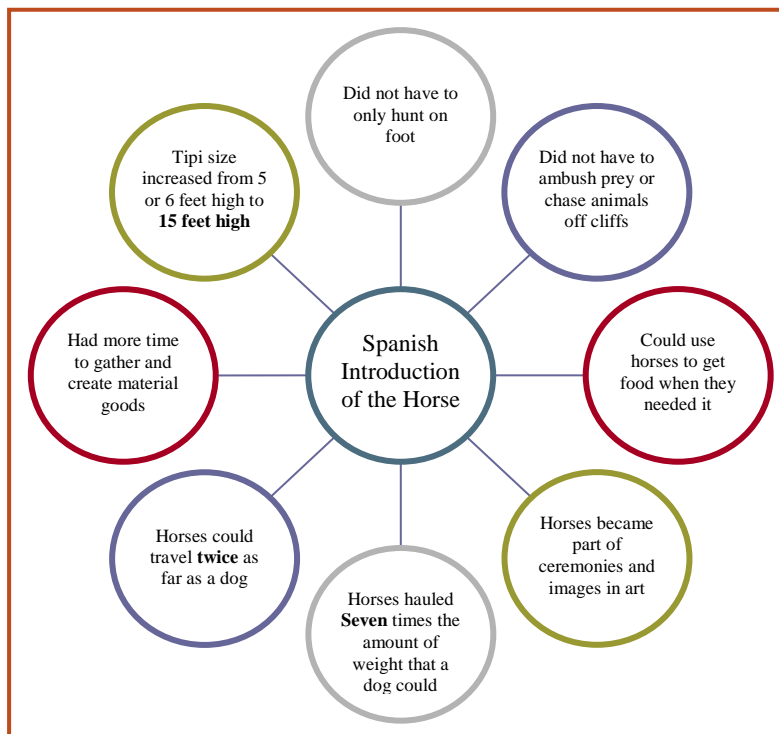
Introduction: Plains Indian Art of the Northern Plains

Background

Long before Christopher Columbus' arrival to the New World in 1492, Native Americans lived throughout this country, and inhabited areas that met their needs. These Native Americans lived on habitable land from the frozen Arctic to the southern tip of South America, settling into areas and regions. Here they developed advanced **cultures** using the materials and the environment around them.

The first people inhabiting the plains were hunters. They were nomadic people who moved from place to place following their sources of food, such as the bison or buffalo. At this time, millions of buffalo lived on the plains and prairies. The following are examples of how Native Americans or American Indians used the different parts of the buffalo:

- Meat for food
- Hide for clothing, footwear, tipis, and carrying cases
- Hooves for bells
- Hair for ropes
- Horns for spoons
- Bones for paintbrushes



The American Indians of the Northern Plains trailed the buffalo, or bison, on foot, carrying little with them. They owned only what they could carry on their backs or what their dogs could pull on a travois. A **travois** is an A-shaped sled made of long wood poles tied together.

The Spanish introduction of the horse changed how Plains Indians could hunt and live in the mid-1600s. This chart

shows how the horse changed their lives.

The introduction of the horse allowed Plains Indians more time in their everyday life to create art. Plains Indians decorated clothing, horse gear, buffalo robes, and tipis with great skill. Everyone was encouraged to create beautiful objects.

Plains Indian Art through History

Before establishing trade with Europeans, Plains Indians could not shop at stores as they do today. Each family was self-sufficient and obtained or produced all things necessary for survival. Plains Indians lived a **nomadic** lifestyle, so they were constantly on the move. Their belongings, including their art had to be:

- lightweight
- durable
- easy to transport
- functional

The items that received little artistic consideration wore out quickly and broke easily.

Plains Indian art forms had to have some level of practical function. Essential objects were worthy of transport. These included: food; clothing; shelter; eating utensils; and hunting equipment. Plains Indians also placed great importance on items related to religious or ceremonial rituals, such as painted shields, feather headdresses, and shirts and dresses reserved for special occasions or ceremonies. They decorated all of these objects, although they decorated some more lavishly than others.

Plains Indian artwork focused primarily on useful objects, such as clothing, carrying cases, and tipis. Prior to contact with Europeans, artists used materials from the environment around them. Examples include:

- shells, animal teeth, claws, bits of bone, and dried berries on shirts, necklaces, breastplates, and dresses
- horse hair and human hair in the designs of shirts and leggings
- paints made from plants and minerals, and porcupine quills on clothing, bags, and rawhide cases
- eagle feathers, animal skins, and horse hair on headdresses
- painted designs on horses and tipis

Plains Indians defined their art by gender. Men created **sacred** art and art related to storytelling or record keeping. They decorated most religious paraphernalia with art, because of its importance in sacred ceremonies and rituals. Women created household items, clothing, and horse gear. Women embellished with beads, porcupine quills, paint, or feathers. Young girls learned their skills from their mothers and other artists in their tribe. A woman displayed her devotion to her family through her creations. Women often gathered in groups to tan hides, bead clothing, or paint carrying cases. Individuals owned the items they made as well as their designs. Additionally, women usually owned the tipis and their contents. They

also belonged to art societies or guilds based on their artistic abilities. Membership was for privileged groups of talented and honorable women.

Photo 3: NA.108.13



The art of Plains Indian men also filled a social need. Men celebrated their status as hunters and warriors and proclaimed their power in religion through their creations. Women usually created **geometric** designs, while men incorporated realistic, or pictographic, images. Men's art could include battle scenes, great hunts, and symbols representing spiritual beings. Men also had art societies that prepared them for their changing roles and responsibilities in life.

Plains Indian artists took great pride in their craftsmanship. They gained prestige and honor based on their artistic ability. They praised individuals who endlessly created beautiful things.

Art was not identical among Plains tribes. Styles and ornamentation varied tremendously from tribe to tribe. Yet, within each individual tribe, artists adhered to defined standards and techniques for the most part. Traditional American Indian decoration fused both art and craft. For example, the creation of a shirt was a craft, and adhered to a set pattern. When they added decorative items to the shirt, such as colored quills, glass beads, or brilliant paints, they considered it art. Artistic beauty and symbolism of the decorated objects was more meaningful than the article itself.

Plains Indians did regard some artwork more for its prestige than its technical excellence. They prized objects made from rare and costly materials, because these materials symbolized wealth, influence, and standing within the community. A complex intertribal **trade network** evolved to secure access to unusual materials. Southwestern Indians traded basketry, corn, beans, and squash to the Plains Indians for dried buffalo meat and hides. American Indians on the Northwest coast exchanged mollusks and shells for the meat of the big game animals the Plains Indians hunted. Plains Indians also cherished necklaces, breastplates, and clothing decorated with dentalium shells. They obtained these shells through trade with American Indians on the Northwest coast. Through this complex network of trade, Plains Indians gained access to various materials that had a substantial impact on their culture and art.

Almost all traditional Plains Indian art incorporated patterns and designs that represented an aspect of a tribal culture. Representations included:

- triangular shapes symbolizing tipis or mountains
- square crosses symbolizing stars
- parallel lines depicting animal tracks or directional paths

Traditional Plains Indian art changed as contact with Euro-Americans increased throughout the nineteenth century.

Trade Item	Traditional Material
Woolen trade cloth	Leather for garments
Manufactured paint pigments	Vegetable paints and dyes
Glass beads from Venice, Italy	Porcupine quills

This table gives examples of trade items and the traditional materials they replaced. When Europeans introduced porcelain and glass beads in the early 1800s, they were costly, scarce, and available in limited colors. Plains Indians considered glass beads a prestige item. They highly valued objects adorned with the beads. As woolen cloth entered trade, it had a similar impact. Anyone who could afford this cloth used it in place of tanned deer hide.

Photo 4: NA.203.673

European traders introduced imported glass beads, metal knives, pots and needles, silver jewelry, commercial dyes and paints, and wool cloth to Plains Indians through the intertribal trade network and the fur trade. Plains Indians loved the bright new colors and unusual material the Euro-Americans introduced. They even competed with one another to acquire more.

While some of the trade goods were completely different from anything the Plains Indians had used, they incorporated some of the new materials into their preexisting art. For example, Plains Indians replaced or used commercially produced paints in combination with the older paints and dyes that originated in nature. Glass beads were also new to Plains Indians, and they used some traditional quilling techniques in combination with beaded designs. Over time, they developed new techniques and stitches to create designs that are more intricate. They had to learn new technologies for some materials like metals.



As Euro-American settlers forced American Indians out of their traditional lands and onto reservations, many old traditions began to fade. Prohibited from leaving the reservation to hunt, Indians no longer practiced traditional hunting ceremonies. Hunting gear, such as beaded quivers and gun cases, became less common. Religious practices also changed. The United States government attempted to ban American Indians from participating in some of their traditional religious rituals. Because they were not able to hold religious ceremonies, some of the practices involving songs, dances, and religious objects were either lost, or shared secretly.

The early reservation era (1870s-1920s) was also a time for tremendous creativity among American Indians. Although confinement to reservations was dispiriting for many Plains Indians, the reservation gave them greater access to materials, such as beads and paints. During the reservation era, artists combined traditional and modern techniques and materials to create new decorative art forms.

Plains Indians also had more time on reservations, because they were not following buffalo herds. They dedicated this time to the creation of art. Ornamentation became more elaborate on beaded vests, moccasins, cradleboards, and many other items.

Photo 5: NA. 403.203



The traditional gender division in art also began to break down. Men could no longer hunt or participate in warfare and religious rituals on the reservation. Instead, they engaged in art that was traditionally in the women's sphere. Men became expert beaders and proficient at creating beautiful everyday objects.

Today, American Indian art continues to be an important and vibrant part of native culture. Through art, American Indians gain respect and admiration in their communities. Artists express pride in their tribal *heritage*. Art is now a vehicle for American Indians to perpetuate tradition in spite of pressure to adopt Euro-American culture. The creation of art provides a lasting connection to the past and supports a rich tradition.

Section 2

List of Objects

Painting Objects

- Petroglyphs and Pictographs
- Parfleche
- Bonnet Case

Grass, Shells, Claws, and Hair Objects

- Hair Pipe Breastplate
- Dentalium Choker
- Man's Shirt

Quillwork Objects

- Quilled Wheel
- Quilled Wristband

Beadwork Objects

- Hide Dress
- Moccasins
- Beaded Belt
- Storage Bag
- Pipe Bag

Art Supplies

- Sample Paint Kit
- Ornamental Objects



Photo 6: NA.202.182 and
Photo 7: NA.106.156

Section 3

Descriptions of Art Forms and Objects

Painting Objects

Plains Indians painted their clothing, tipis, carrying cases, and even rocks before Europeans came to the New World. They dyed animal hair, feathers, and porcupine quills. They also painted their faces and bodies, and their horses for warfare and ceremonies. Plains Indians applied color as a paint, a dye, or a stain. They created paints by blending **pigments** with tallow, or fat, and steeping organic materials in a liquid to derive dyes. Stains were dyes that they applied to selected portions of a material.

The materials Plains Indians used for painting were readily available throughout the area. Examples include tree bark, berries, pinecones, clay, charcoal, flowers, and minerals. They used vegetable and root juice to make dyes. Plains Indians applied stains or dyes by rubbing color into a hide or by soaking the hide.

Plains Indians prepared paints by baking them over a fire and grinding them into a fine powder with a mortar and pestle. They stored each color in separate paint bags (small hide bags with leather drawstrings). Before use, artists mixed the pigments with hot water or glue (boiled water with a beaver's tail or hide scraping). They mixed paints in small bowls made from turtle shells, clamshells, wood, or stone.

Paint kits contained paintbrushes of differing sizes and textures made from chewed willow or cottonwood twigs, and the spongy hip or shoulder bone of a buffalo. Porous bone brushes absorbed paint well, allowing the paint to flow evenly onto the hide surfaces. Plains Indians broke or carved the pieces of bones and twigs into various shapes and widths to make different lines on the hide. They used thin, sharp points to outline figures or to paint fine lines, and thick pieces of bone to spread color over large areas. Most paint kits also included several straight, peeled willow branches (rulers or guides) to paint straight lines. Sometimes Plain Indians pressed patterns or designs into the hide with a flattened stick, and applied paint over the marked areas.

Southern Plains Indians generally painted or dyed their hides in solid colors, while northern Plains Indians created detailed geometric designs and realistic scenes inspired by real events and visions (dreams). The colors were sometimes symbolic, and varied from tribe to tribe. Red often suggested blood, warfare, or life. White symbolized purity and was often on ceremonial objects.

American Indians preferred the commercially manufactured pigments they obtained from traders in the late nineteenth century, because they were more brilliant, did not fade as quickly, were often easier to use, and came in many new colors. For example, jet-black was virtually impossible to create from plant materials, but traders provided Plains Indian artists with black paint. Traders also introduced paper and colored pencils to Plains Indians. During the reservation era they created ledger book art (drawings and paintings in small, bound notebooks).



Photo 8: NA.202.839



Photo 9: NA.202.839

Petroglyphs and Pictographs

Before trading with Euro-Americans, Plains Indians painted and carved **petroglyphs** and **pictographs** on the walls of cliffs and caves. Plains Indians carved or scratched petroglyphs into stone with a harder stone or antler point. They created pictographs or rock paintings with red, brown, black, or white paints they made from natural dyes. They applied the paint with brushes made from twigs, bundles of fibers, or even their fingers.

Most of the petroglyphs and pictographs that exist today are representations of game animals, **abstract** symbols, shields, people, or spirits and mythological creatures. Scientists approximate much of this artwork is hundreds and even thousands of years old. Anthropologists believe that this early rock art provides evidence that American Indians occupied the New World long before Europeans arrived.

Some of the earliest American Indian rock art has simple line drawings and designs, but petroglyphs and pictographs grew into a highly developed art form among American Indians. Petroglyphs and pictographs grew more complex as figures became more life-like. Only the artists knew the message they were portraying. This makes interpretation hard. Another difficulty is that American Indians lived

very differently than we do today. They lived in a world filled with symbolism, ritual, and **ceremony**. They may have created some rock drawings in conjunction with ceremonies and regarded the sections of decorated stone as special places to pray and converse with spiritual beings. American Indians carved and painted their prayers as designs and symbols on the stone for others to view.

Plains Indians may have intended other rock art to record their history. Before the Europeans arrived, American Indians did not have a written language. They passed down history, legends, and stories orally. Rock art allowed Indians to record ideas, stories, and records of time. They also commemorated important events, such as a great battle or an outbreak of a deadly disease through their drawings.

Over time wind, rain, and vandalism have damaged these ancient art works. The United States government has authorized the creation of protected areas and state parks in an effort to preserve rock art sites, and to provide a reminder of the American Indian's ancient occupation of the Americas.

Photo 10: Dinwoody Panel



Painted Robe (not included in trunk)

Plains Indians used animal hides, such as buffalo, to fashion their clothing, tipis and tipi liners, carrying cases, moccasins, and warm, soft beds. They also wrapped unshaped buffalo hides around their shoulders for warmth. Plains Indians decorated these robes with quillwork, beaded bands, or paint. Both men and women decorated their robes. Some artists decorated smaller skins to practice their painting skills. The decorative designs they painted or quilled onto buffalo robes often displayed their social standing. Women painted representational figures, but wives of important warriors could occasionally wear robes depicting their husbands' successes in battle.

Plains Indians painted buffalo robes with brushes made from willow tree twigs. They chewed the end of the twig until it frayed, and soaked the brush in paint. Then they applied designs to the hide. After completion, they sized, or stiffened, the robe by covering it with glue. Glue protected the pigments in the paint from wind, rain, and sun. Buffalo robes that Plains Indians painted and sized over 200 years ago retain their beautiful colors today.

Photo 11: NA.702.30



Parfleche

A **parfleche** is a suitcase that American Indians used to protect clothing, small tools, and food when traveling. Made of rawhide, parfleches were about two feet by three feet in size. Smaller ones held paint kits, mirrors, or personal items. Plains Indians placed items inside the parfleche in the middle of the rawhide, folded the four sides over, and tied them in place with leather thongs.

Plains Indian women typically made parfleches from damp rawhide. As the rawhide dried, it became stiff and sturdy. The side flaps snapped right back into place when opened and kept food and clothing contained when traveling on tough terrain. If the parfleche became wet, the case maintained its shape and its contents stayed dry.

Plains Indian women usually made parfleches in pairs and decorated them with the same designs and colors. Decoration varied from tribe to tribe, but the designs were generally simple. Women laid out geometric patterns on the flat stretched hide using willow stick rulers and filled in the design with brilliant red, yellow, blue, and green paint. When completed, they could hang their parfleches from the high pommel of their saddles or secure them to a travois pulled by a horse.

Photo 12: NA.106.148



Photo 13: NA.106.150



Bonnet Case

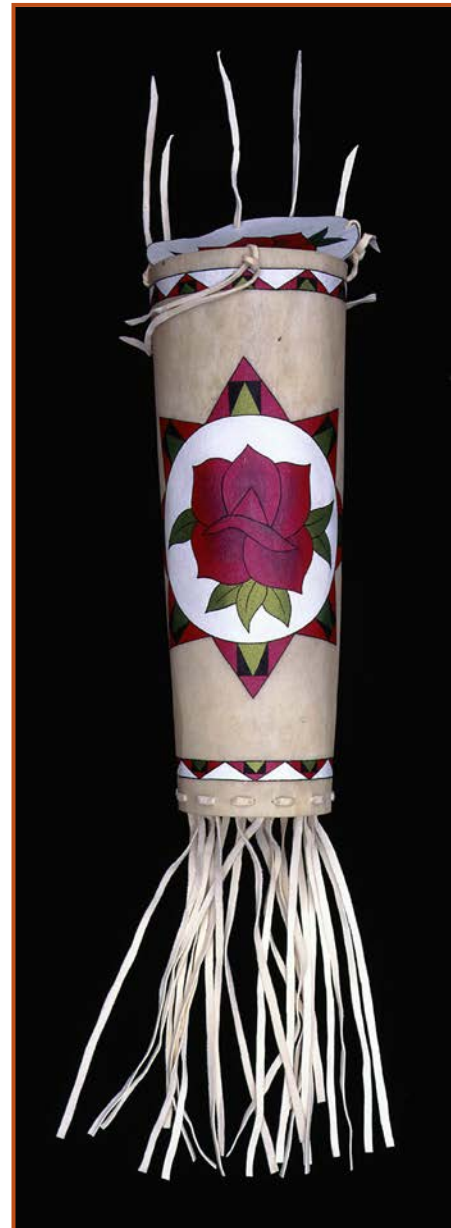
Plains Indians used rawhide to create other types of storage besides parfleches. Rawhide could bend without cracking and was waterproof. They manufactured smaller, rectangular, and tubular cases to hold household tools, such as stone-headed berry mashers and hide scrapers. These cases also protected sacred ceremonial objects, such as feather bonnets. Plains Indians made the small rectangular carrying cases similar to parfleches.

Plains Indians decorated the tubular rawhide cases with colorful, painted designs. They also added long fringes along the sides and bottoms of cases that they used to hold sacred or ceremonial objects. Plains Indians often stored feather bonnets in these fringed tubular cases by rolling them into a cylindrical shape and inserting them into the case. They suspended the case from a lodge pole in a tipi or from a saddle while traveling.

Photo 14: NA.106.595.1



Photo 15: NA.106.715



Grass, Shells, Claws, and Hair Objects

Plains Indians decorated leggings and shirts with shells and bones, made necklaces with animal teeth and claws, and adorned dresses with beads made from dried berries. They incorporated horsehair and human hair into designs on shirts and leggings. Artists even braided natural fibers, such as grasses, because of their beautiful smell.

Plains Indians treasured scarce and non-indigenous materials. They prized objects made from rare and costly materials, because they attested to an individual's wealth, influence, and standing within the community. Plains Indians also cherished necklaces, breastplates, and clothing decorated with dentalium shell. The tubular, tusk-like shells were the home of saltwater animals.

Plains Indians also valued materials that they accumulated through displays of bravery. Examples include grizzly bear claws and scalp locks. Bears symbolized strength and courage. The huge, sharp claws of the grizzly bear represented strong medicine or power. Garments decorated with bear claws provided visible evidence of success in battle. War parties returning from battle with scalps prompted great celebrations in communities. Warriors proved their prowess on the battlefield and elevated their social position within the tribe by ornamenting their clothing with hair.



Photo 16: NA.203.45

Hair Pipe Breastplate

In the early nineteenth century, Euro-Americans traders searched for special objects that Plains Indians would exchange for their hides and furs. Traders designed small pipes that Plains Indians refused to smoke. They considered the pipes too small with no ceremonial value. Instead, they broke the bowls from the stems and strung the ceramic stems together in long rows. Perceptive traders stopped producing pipes for trade and created stems, or "hair pipes," from the leg bones of buffalos or cows. This new trade good became an increasingly important unit of exchange as Plains Indians fashioned earrings, breastplates, and necklaces out of hair pipes.

Created with long tubular beads, American Indians first made breastplates from the central column of a conch shell (large ocean snail). They fashioned breastplates from ceramic and glass. They used bone hair pipes as they became available. Traders also experimented with silver and brass pipes. However, metal pipes were unpopular because of their expense and weight.

Photo 17: NA.203.116



Plains Indians strung hair pipes on strips of sinew and tied them together with thick hide straps. They created several different styles of breastplates. These styles had more ornamentation, such as glass beads, seashells, and colorful silk ribbons. Plains Indians tied the top of the breastplate around their neck with a leather thong. If it was especially long, additional thongs attached to the bottom of the breastplate securing it around their waste.

Since hair pipes were difficult to obtain and expensive, the number of bones in a breastplate often indicated the wealth of the wearer. Some warriors wore breastplates into battle as evidence of their prestige and courage. They usually used breastplates as a decorative or ceremonial item, because an arrow or bullet could easily pierce the breastplate.

Dentalium Choker



Photo 18: NA.203.227

On the Plains, dentalium shells were especially important additions to traditional art forms. Plains Indians used these shells as decoration on clothing, ritual objects, breastplates, and **chokers** (necklaces). Sometimes they attached disks cut from a clamshell for a more ornate choker. When the sun shone through the clamshell, it made subtle changes in the delicate tone of the shell.

Eventually the stems of ceramic pipes replaced the use of dentalium shells among many Plains Indian groups, such as the Osages, Otoes, and southern tribes. The Western Sioux, or Lakota, and some of their northern neighbors continued to create dentalium chokers.

Man's Shirt

Plains Indian men of honor wore shirts gained through leadership, warfare, or knowledge. They made shirts from deer, elk, or antelope hides and decorated them with beadwork, porcupine quills, feathers, paints, and human and horse hair. The hair was usually from female family members who made the shirt as a token of good luck. They might also have attached hair from a favorite horse to the shirt. The shirt represented the wearer's importance in his family and tribe.

Only Plains Indian men who had distinguished themselves in battle or had gained influence within the tribe could wear these garments for special occasions. When men were no longer active in warfare during the reservation period, they wore shirts at ceremonies or social events.

Photo 19: NA.202.598



Quillwork Objects

For centuries, American Indian women used natural and dyed porcupine quills to adorn garments, robes, and bags. Quillwork required great skill. The applied quills made a smooth and even surface. Quillwork was well suited to the geometric design that was common in the Plains area.

Porcupine quills are smooth, round, hollow tubes with sharp, barbed points at their ends. They are white with a brown tip and are approximately one to four inches in length. The length, thickness, and stiffness of the quills depend on where they grow on the porcupine. A porcupine's tail quills are much larger than the slim, delicate ones on their underside.

After removing the quills, artists washed and dyed the quills with natural dyes made from roots, berries, and tree bark. They died most red or yellow, because these were the easiest colors to obtain. They also used quills without dyes.

Quills easily absorbed the intense colors from commercially manufactured dyes, available through trade toward the mid to late 1800s. Fur traders also introduced a wool cloth, called **stroud**, in both red and blue, and Plains Indians used the dye from the cloth to color their quills.

Artists sorted and stored their dyed quills in rawhide containers. Before applying them to an object, they softened the quills in warm water or in their mouths. They flattened the quills by pulling them out between their teeth or by using a bone tool called a quill flattener.

Plains artists generally attached quills to objects by wrapping, braiding, sewing, or weaving. They wrapped the colored quills around objects, such as small bundles of hair, or thin strands of hide. This was the easiest method to use.

Photo 20: NA.202.199



Plains Indians sewed quills into objects, such as clothing and moccasins. This resulted in geometric bands of brilliantly colored quills. Quill weaving was relatively rare on the Plains, because it was difficult, and time consuming. Quillworkers created geometric designs with patterns inspired by dreams or visions. Others could not copy the patterns, because each pattern was the property of the artist. Some Plains tribes had

quillworking societies for women. They earned membership through artistic skill, number of pieces completed, and good standing in the community. Plains Indians

believed some designs provided protection. They placed these designs on objects depending on their need. For example, they often decorated cradleboards, or baby carriers, with protective symbols.

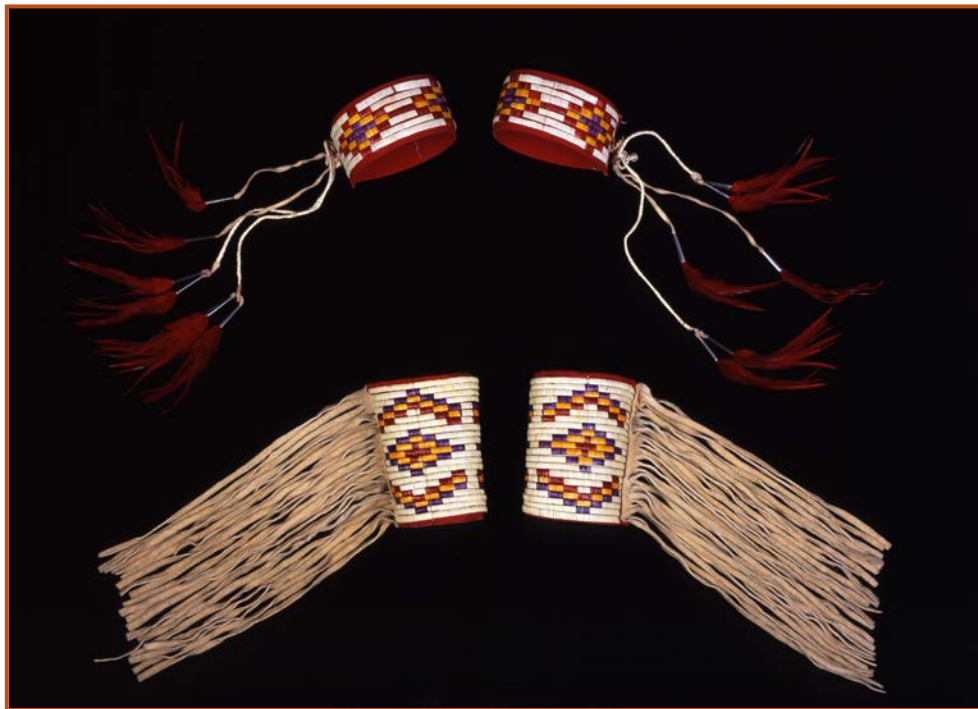
The amount of quillwork Plains Indians made rapidly decreased as Euro-Americans introduced glass beads in the mid nineteenth century. Today, quillwork is experiencing a revival among American Indians.

Quilled Wheels and Wristbands

The Plains Indians also created various ornaments, like this brightly colored quilled wheel or hoop. They could have used ornaments on headdresses, as hair decorations, on tipis, or cradles. The cross design can represent a star, or the four directions of the earth. Hair decorations were very personal, because they were the product of a dream or vision. Sometimes Plains Indians attached small objects, such as feathers, bones, claws, or beaded strips to the wheels as a reflection of an important vision. They were symbols of power and authority. Plains Indians braided the quilled wheels into hair on the side of their head. They used great care to create harmony and balance between the clothing and jewelry they wore.

Plains Indians wore quilled or beaded wristbands or armbands for ceremonies, for battle, or for special occasions and dances. They fashioned wristbands from strips of rawhide or stiff leather that tied together with leather thongs. Arm and wristbands eventually became an important part of men's attire as ceremonies and dances merged into gatherings called Powwows.

Photos 21 and 22: NA.203.1311. and NA.203.1310



Beadwork Objects

Prior to contact with European traders, American Indians created beads using materials from the environment around them.

- Arctic Inuits made beads from mammal teeth and walrus ivories.
- Northeastern Indians created wampum beads from clamshells.
- Southwestern Indians made turquoise beads.
- Plains Indians made beads from dried berries and small stones.

Traders and trappers introduced glass beads imported overseas from Venice, Italy to Plains Indians. Beads rapidly became a prestige item on the Plains, because the glass beads were expensive and difficult to obtain. Their beaded objects showed a family's ability to acquire the costly beads. As clothing or moccasins wore out, women removed beads and reapplied them to new objects.

Plains Indians called the earliest trade beads **pony beads**, which were much larger than the seed beads commonly used today. Plains Indians readily adopted pony beads and incorporated them into their traditional art forms. Pony beads were expensive to manufacture, so traders only offered Plains Indians colors that were cheapest to produce—white, black, or dark blue. The first Plains beadwork had bold, geometric designs in these colors. The patterns probably originated with traditional quillwork.

By the 1840s, traders made more unusual trade items available, such as smaller glass beads or **seed beads**, to Plains Indians in exchange for their hides. These beads were cheaper than pony beads and came in a wide variety of colors. Prior to 1900, traders offered Indians over eighty colors of seed beads. Plains Indians replaced pony beads with seed beads, allowing them to create designs that were more intricate, and to cover entire objects with beads.

Plains Indians applied beads to clothing and other objects by sewing the beads directly onto the item or by sewing beads onto hide strips that they later attached to the object. They used sinew, or tendon, from along the buffalo's spine, as thread. Women poked holes in pieces of hide or skin with a smaller bone or metal **awl** until they obtained metal needles through trade.

The Woodland Indians of the eastern United States generally made floral designs patterned after European embroidery. Plains Indians preferred geometric patterns. They continued using many of the patterns common to traditional quillwork. Triangles, squares, diamonds, and arrows were common in Plains beadwork. The meaning behind the shapes and the colors varied from tribe to tribe.

As the United States government forced American Indians from the East and from the Great Lake region onto reservations in the West, they introduced floral-patterned beadwork to Plains Indians. Plains Indians experimented with this style and gradually incorporated floral designs into their art. Some groups, such the

Blackfeet, Crees, Crow, and Eastern Sioux (known as the Dakota) developed their own distinctive floral designs.

Confined to reservations and banned from much of their traditional lifestyles, Plains Indians devoted their free time to art. People began to bead just about everything they could, including handbags, baby bonnets, vests, and gloves. Artists continued to use traditional geometric and floral designs on heavily beaded items. Plains Indians also incorporated new images into their art. They beaded scenes of men, horses, the American flag, and various animals onto garments and household objects. This legacy continues today, and artists create beautiful objects that merge traditional patterns and practices with modern aesthetics.

Photo 23: NA.109.19



Beaded Buckskin Dress

Long before encountering European explorers, Plains Indian women wore hide dresses. The earliest dresses were simple hide wraps. As clothing became more sophisticated, they made dresses from two and even three hides. Women fashioned their hide dresses from deer and elk hides. They typically did not use buffalo hide, because it was too thick and heavy for everyday clothing.

The earliest style of dresses were the wraparound dress, a strap dress with removable hide sleeves, and the side fold dress. All of these came before the most commonly known style of Plains dresses, the binary or two-skin dress.

Many women favored dresses made of two hides. The shape of the animal's hide determined the cut of the women's dresses. They used one hide for the front and one for the back, sewing the two hides along the seams, and leaving an opening for the neck. Women left the animal's tail on the hide on very early dresses. This was often the only decoration on the yoke. Sometimes they decorated the **yoke** of the dress with dentalium shells, animal claws, deer hooves, and dried berries. They also

fringed excess hide on some dresses. Dresses adorned with elk teeth demonstrated the wearer's social standing. Since they only used the two back teeth of the elk, called the ivories, a woman's husband or father had to be an excellent hunter or influential leader to provide her with enough teeth to decorate a dress.

As trade goods became more common, ornamentation on women's dresses changed. Tin cones, ribbons, bells, and buttons appeared on hide dresses. Women covered the entire yokes of their dresses with intricate patterns in glass trade beads. Traders introduced manufactured cloth in the early 1800s, and hide dresses became more common, or popular. Women fashioned dresses from cotton or Stroud cloth. Stroud, or blanket, cloth was a scratchy wool fabric manufactured in Stroudwater, England. Women favored Stroud cloth in dark blue, black, green, and red. They decorated these cloth dresses with ribbons, elk teeth, dentallium shells, and glass beads. Sometimes they sewed beaded hide yokes onto cloth dresses.



Photo 24: NA.202.63



Photo 25: NA.202.70

Moccasins

Plains Indians made unique and beautiful footwear. The earliest skin wrap-around moccasins were simple and plain. Moccasins evolved into a sophisticated art form by the mid-1800s. Their footwear retained a practical function. Plains Indians shaped their moccasins to fit the right and left feet. Europeans were still suffering in stiff leather shoes that were identical for both feet. Plains Indians also made moccasins with buffalo hair inside to keep their feet warm and dry.

Both soft-soled moccasins and moccasins with a hard, rawhide sole were common among Plains Indians. Most Plains Indians favored hard-soled moccasins, because they were constantly travelling. Women outlined the foot of the intended wearer, and then cut and sewed pieces of raw elk or buffalo hide onto a soft, upper hide.

Some tribes fastened tough, rawhide soles onto moccasins made entirely of buckskin. Sometimes they added leather to the cuff so that it reached well above the ankle.

Tribes had distinctive cuts or shapes to their moccasins. A well-trained Plains Indian scout could often determine a man's tribe by studying his moccasin tracks.

Plains Indians generally did not decorate everyday moccasins. However, they often covered the leather uppers of dress moccasins with porcupine quills, paint, or glass beads. By the end of the 1800s, beads almost completely replaced quillwork and paint on Plains moccasins. Some women also created entirely decorated footwear. They always completed any bead or quillwork before they sewed the sole of the moccasin onto the upper.



Photo 26: NA.202.889



Photo 27: NA.202.763

Beaded Belt

Plains Indian dress and lifestyles demanded belts for both men and women. Belts held up a man's leggings, carried his knife and sheath, and held his war club. Plains Indian men also tucked their pipe bags under their belts and fastened small bags or pouches to them. Their bags included strike-a-light bags (pieces of flint and steel for starting fires), and bags for personal items. Women also wore belts and attached awl (sharp-pointed tool) cases, strike-a-light bags, and other small household tools to them.



Photo 28: NA.203.1331

Early Plains Indians wore rawhide belts. During the reservation era (after 1870) belts made from commercially tanned leather were common. Plains Indians decorated the leather belts with beads and smooth brass tacks. Most of the belts on

the Plains tied in front with a leather thong connecting a pair of small holes. Some belts fastened with the buckle from a horse's harness.

Storage Bag

Plains Indians created an incredible assortment of small pouches and bags that were suited for many purposes, such as storing their material goods for safe and easy transportation. They made:

- Small bags for personal items
- Bags to store items such as plants for medicinal use
- Paints sacks to hold pigments and painting bones
- A variety of small bags fastened to a belt, which held bits of flint and steel for starting fires

Plains Indians made many styles and sizes of beaded pouches and bags to hold household goods, personal adornments, and dried foods. While these bags had a functional purpose, they usually had beautiful decorations. They fashioned small bags and pouches from soft, tanned leather that they frequently adorned with quillwork or beadwork. Plains Indians usually decorated one side of the bag, because they typically hung their bags from a saddle while travelling or on the lodge pole of a tipi. If they did decorate both sides with beads, they used the same colored beads or quills and made designs that complimented one another. These designs were unique from each other.



Photo 29: NA.106.14A



Photo 30: NA.106.128

Pipe Bag

American Indians kept their pipe stems and pipe bowls in special beaded or quilled bags. They carried tobacco in the bottom of the bag, and inserted the pipe bowl and stem into separate sections of the bag. Some bags had a completely separate pouch that held the pipe stem. Others had one larger divided bag with a narrow pocket for the stem.

Plains Indians attached a leather thong to the top of the tanned hide bag to close the pouch and secure its contents. Tribes adorned most pipe bags with quilled slats, thin strips of rawhide decorated with colorful quills, and beadwork. They also fringed the bottoms of their pipe bags.

Photo 31: NA.504.322



Art Supplies

Sample Paints Kit

Plains Indians made paint and tools using the supplies around them in the environment. The following examples are in the Sample Paints Kit:

- Bone
- Charcoal
- Wood brushes
- Lichen
- Sinew
- Yellow ochre

Refer to previous sections to review the influence of trade with fur traders and Euro-Americans on Plains Indian paint supplies.

Ornamental Objects Kit

Plains Indians decorated their art and belongings with many different objects. The following examples are in the Ornamental Objects Kit:

- Glass seed beads
- Glass pony beads
- Bells
- Dentalium shells
- Dewclaw (deer)
- Elk teeth
- Jingles or tin cones
- Porcupine quills

Refer to previous sections to review the influence of trade with fur traders and Euro-Americans on Plains Indian ornament use.



Photo 32: NA.109.119

Section 4

Plains Indian Art Curriculum

Activities

Make a Parfleche

Materials:

- Parfleche template (included in trunk)
- String
- Crayons, colored pencils, or paint
- Paper
- Scissors
- Hole Puncher
- Pencil

Time: 20-30 minutes

Grade Level: K-8

Use template included. Remind students that a parfleche was like today's suitcase. Engage students in a discussion comparing a parfleche to a suitcase. Refer to pages 12 and 13.

K-5th Grades:

Help students make a t-chart listing the items they carry in their suitcase and the items Plains Indians might have carried in their parfleche. Then ask students to write or draw three objects that they would pack in their parfleche. Explain that women made and decorated the parfleches. They could not paint or etch figures, so they usually decorated with geometric shapes. Have students use the template with the geometric designs to make their parfleche.

Assembly directions:

1. Decorate parfleche with colored pencils, crayons, or paint. Allow time to dry if using paint.
2. Cut out parfleche
3. Punch two holes at the short end of each parfleche.
4. Fold parfleche along dotted and dashed lines to create shape of parfleche.
5. Thread string through holes and tie together to close the parfleche.

6-8th Grades:

Ask older students to design a large parfleche using the template provided in the trunk. Ask them to prioritize what items they would pack in their parfleche. Have older students create their own designs, reminding them to paint geometric shapes.

Assembly directions:

1. Using a pencil, draw geometric designs on the parfleche. Note that the flaps should be symmetrical to each other.
2. Decorate parfleche with colored pencils, crayons, or paint. Allow time to dry if using paint.
3. Cut out parfleche
4. Punch two holes at the short end of each parfleche.
5. Fold parfleche along dotted and dashed lines to create shape of parfleche.
6. Thread string through holes and tie together to close the parfleche.

Natural Dye Art Project

Materials:

- Flowers
- Berries
- Vegetables
- 3 pots
- Water
- Stove or hot plate
- Paint brushes
- Coffee filter
- Paper

Time: 60 minutes

K-8th Grades:

Bring various examples of flowers, fruits, and vegetables that are easy to obtain. If you do not use native flowers, fruits, or vegetables, explain to students at the beginning of this activity that Plains Indians used plants that grew in the environment around them.

Set up a hot plate or use a stove for boiling water. This portion must be teacher led for younger grades and teacher supervised for older grades. Ask students to predict what will happen when they boil water with each of the flowers, fruits, and vegetables. Record younger students' responses on the board. Ask older students to record their predictions in their notebooks.

Choose one flower, one fruit, and one vegetable. Boil each in a pot of water or steep a small amount of water for 30 minutes. Students can observe and record the progress during the 30 minutes. Students can measure progress by placing the plant/dye materials in the coffee filter to mash, or they can look at the color by dipping the coffee filter in the water. Help younger students record their observations. Note that you may need to mash up

some of flowers, fruits, and vegetables to achieve optimal color. Students can experiment with the paints by creating their own individual artwork after the paints have cooled.

Important Note: Before setting up a hot plate in your classroom, teacher's should check their school's policy on use of this appliance. If a school does not permit the use of a hot plate or if there is not enough class time to prepare dyes, teachers can prepare them ahead of time. Explain to students what you did to prepare and make the natural dyes before they begin their art project.

Section 5

Suggested Readings

- Berlo, Janet C., and Ruth B. Phillips. *Native North American Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Ballantine, Betty, and Ian Ballantine, eds. *The Native America: An Illustrated History*. Atlanta: Turner Publishing, 1993.
- Conn, Richard. *A Persistent Vision: Art of the Reservation Days*. Denver: Denver Art Museum, 1986.
- Dubin, Lois Sherr. *The History of Beads from 30,000 B.C. to Present*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987.
- Editors of Time-Life Book. *The Buffalo Hunters*. Alexandria: Time-Life Books, 1993.
- Hail, Barbara A. Hau, Kola! *The Plains Indian Collection of the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology*. Bristol: Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, 1980.
- Hansen, Emma I. *Arts, Cultures, and Lives of Plains Indian People: Memory and Vision*. Cody, WY: Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 2007.
- Hansen, Emma I, Rebecca T. Manlove, Anne Marie Shriver, and Rebecca S. West. *Plains Indian Museum: Curator's Notes*. Cody, WY: Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 2003.
- Her Many Horses, Emil, and Horse Capture, George, eds. *A Song For the Horse Nation: Horses in Native American Cultures*. New York and Washington, D.C.: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution in association with Fulcrum Publishing, Golden, CO, 2006.
- Heth, Charlotte, Ed. *Native American Dance: Ceremonies and Traditions*. Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution with Starwood Publishing, 1992
- Hoxie, Frederick E., ed. *Encyclopedia of North American Indians: Native American History, Culture, and Life from Paleo-Indians to the Present*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1996.
- Keyser, James D. *Art of the Warriors: Rock Art of the American Plains*. Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2004.

Penney, David W. *Art of the American Indian Frontier: The Chandler-Pohrt Collection*. Seattle and London: The Detroit Institute of Arts, 1992.

Torrence, Gaylord. *The American Indian Parfleche: A Tradition of Abstract Painting*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994.

Viola, Herman J. *After Columbus: The Smithsonian Chronicle of North American Indians*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 1990.

Section 6

Suggested Children's Literature

Fiction

Blood, Charles L. *The Goat in the Rug*. New York: Parents Magazine Press, 1976.

A goat name Geraldine describes the steps of how her friend and owner, Glenmae, weaves a traditional Navajo rug.

Cohlege, Terri. *Quillworker: A Cheyenne Legend*. New York: Macmillan, 1990.

A wise girl with a remarkable ability to quill follows her dreams to find her brothers.

DePaola, Tomie. *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush*. New York: Putnam, 1988.

Little Gopher follows his destiny to become an artist when he is unable to become a warrior. He wants to paint the colors of the sunset down to the earth to share with his people. Supernatural beings give the boy the colors to paint the sunset. His brushes are into the flowers call paintbrush.

Friskey, Margaret. *Indian Two Feet and the Grizzly Bear*. Chicago: Children's Press, 1974.

A young Indian boy tries to awaken a sleeping bear because he wants it furry skin to keep him warm throughout the cold winter.

Larrabee, Lisa. *Grandmother Five Baskets*. Tucson: Harbinger House, 1993.

An American Indian woman teaches the young girls of her tribe to create baskets in the traditional way and in the process teaches them about life, love, and the importance of family.

Sandoz, Mari. *The Story Catcher*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986.

Young Lance, a young Sioux warrior, records the history of his people by painting the images of important events on skins with charcoal and paint sticks. After many adventures and trials, Young Lance is renamed the Story Catcher.

Highwater, Jamake. *I Wear the Morning Star*. New York: Harper and Row, 1986.

Sent to live in a foster home, Sitko's classmates and teachers taunt his American Indian heritage. Sitko finds refuge in the beautiful pictures he paints.

Non-Fiction

Andrews, Elaine. *Indians of the Plains*. New York: Fact on File, 1992.

Explore the traditional culture of the Plains Indians by learning about their origins, their religious rituals, and their way of life. There is also a discussion on contemporary American Indians.

Bernstein, Bonnie. *Native American Craft Workshop*. Carthage: Fearon Teacher Aids, 1982.

Bernstein supplies instructions for recreating Indian art, including pouches, baskets, and musical instruments. There is also information about tradition Plains games and recipes.

Blackfeet Gallery Committee. *The Story of the Blackfeet People: Nitsitapiisinni*. Ontario: Firefly Books, 2002.

Compilation of history and artifacts for Grades 6 and up.

Bruchac, Joseph. *Native American Stories*. Golden Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 1991.

Glubok, Shirley. *The Art of the Plains Indians*. New York: Macmillan, 1975.

Glubok explains the importance of the buffalo to the Plains Indians.

Hofsinde, Robert. *Indian Arts*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1971.

An examination of how early American Indians created art using materials from the environment around them. Commentary on contemporary American Indian art forms.

MacDonald, Fiona. *Plains Indians*. New York: Barron's, 1993.

Macdonald describes family life, the relationship with nature, hunting and gathering, and Plains Indian art.

National Museum of the American Indian, *Do All Indians Live in Tipis? Questions and Answers from the National Museum of the American Indian*. Washington, DC.: Smithsonian, 2007.

This book debunks the myths and answers common questions about American Indians.

Wolfson, Evelyn. *American Indian Tools and Ornaments*. New York: McKay, 1981.

Explanation of how Native Americans made objects from shell and bone.

Section 7: Photograph Descriptions

Photo 1: NA.202.1139

Dress, Eastern Shoshone, Swallow-Moradi, Sandra, Swallow, Vivian Louise, and Swallow, Wilma Jean, Wyoming
Native tanned elk hide, glass beads, imitation hair and bone

Photo 2: NA11.6

Cradle, Crow, Northern Plains, Montana, ca. 1900
Tanned deer hide, glass beads, cloth, wood

Photo 3: NA.108.13

Shield Cover, Sahnish, Northern Plains, ca. 1875
Muslin, pigments, feathers

Photo 4: NA.203.673

Blanket, Sioux, ca. 1900
Wool cloth, glass beads

Photo 5: NA.403.23

Beaded Saddle, Northern Arapaho, 1997
McClellan saddle, glass beads, metal, wool cloth, brass tacks

Photo 6: NA.106.156

Flat Bag, Crow, ca. 1900
Tanned hide, wool

Photo 7: NA.202.182

Moccasins, Sioux, Northern Plains, ca. 1930
Tanned deer hide, seed beads, lazy stitch, rawhide soles

Photos 8 and 9: NA 202.839

Buffalo Robe (feather-circle or feather-bonnet design), Mandan, Northern Plains
Tanned buffalo hide and hair, pigments

Photo 10: Dinwoody Panel

Petroglyphs at Legend Rock, Wyoming

Photo 11: NA.702.30

Buffalo Robe (successful buffalo hunt), Hidatsa, Northern Plains, ca. 1879
Tanned buffalo hide and hair, dyed porcupine quills, pigments

Photo 12: NA.106.148

Parfleche, Cheyenne, 1890
Rawhide, pigment

Photo 13: NA.106.150

Open Parfleche
Rawhide, pigment

Photo 14: 106.5951

Cylinder case, Crow, ca. 1885
Rawhide, buckskin, pigment

Photo 15: NA.106.715

Feather bonnet case, Bob Spoonhunter, Northern Arapaho, 1994
Rawhide, pigment, buckskin

Photo 16: NA.203.45

Hair pipe necklace with vertically arranged hair pipes
Leather, beads, coins, hide fringe

Photo 17: NA.203.116

Breastplate, Northern Plains, ca. 1880
Bone, porcupine quills, deer hide, tin cones, feathers, glass and brass beads, trade cloth

Photo 18: NA.203.227

Choker, Northern Plains
Buffalo hide, dentalium shells, glass beads

Photo 19: NA.202.598

Shirt, Sioux, South Dakota, ca. 1870's
Deer hide, pigment, wool, glass seed beads, horsehair, human hair, porcupine quills

Photo 20: NA.202.199

Shirt, Sahnish, North Dakota, ca. 1885
Tanned deer hide, dyed porcupine quills, ermine hide and fur, wool cloth

Photos 21 and 22: NA.203.1311 and NA.203.1310

Man's Cuffs and Arm Bands, Sioux, 1971
Tanned hide, dyed porcupine quills, rawhide, feathers, tine cones

Photo 23: NA.109.19

Blue Purse, Northern Plains, ca. 1905
Hide, metal, glass beads, cotton cloth

Photo 24: NA.202.63

Dress, Crow, Northern Plains, ca. 1885
Blue and red wool trade cloth, tan cloth, lazy stitch, imitation elk teeth, white seed beads

Photo 25: NA.202.70

Lakota Dress, Northern Plains, ca. 1890's (early reservation)
Tanned hide, deer hide, glass beads, tine cones

Photo 26: NA.202.889

Man's Winter Moccasins, Shoshone, Northern Plains, ca. 1870
Buffalo hide and fur, rawhide, pigment

Photo 27: NA.202.763

Moccasin, Salish, Montana, 1915
Deerskin, seed beads (white, blue, dark blue, clear green, clear blue, clear red)

Photo 28: NA.203.1331

Belt and Bag, Eastern Shoshone, 1993
Tanned hide, glass beads

Photo 29: NA.106.14A

Storage Bag, Cheyenne, Northern Plains
Tanned buffalo hide, glass beads, tin cones, horsehair

Photo 30: NA.106.128

Storage bag, Sioux, Arapaho, Northern Plains, ca. 1890
Tanned deer hide, seed beads, tin, horsehair

Photo 31: NA.504.322

Pipe bag, Plains
Deer hide, seed beads

Photo 32: NA.109.119

Paint bag, Gros Ventre, Northern Plains, ca. 1880
Leather, ochre, glass beads

Section 8

Glossary

Abstract: does not depict a known or recognizable thing

Awl: bone needle used by Plains Indians

Buckskin: skin of a deer or elk

Ceremony: a formal act, such as a wedding, carried out according to tribal or social procedure

Choker: a short necklace worn very closely around the throat

Culture: the beliefs, objects, and behavior of a certain group of people, such as a religious or social group

Geometric: marked by designs such as bands, triangles, zigzags, etc.

Heritage: something passed on from a previous or older generation

Nomadic: having no fixed home but roaming from place to place, usually seasonally, to hunt and gather food

Paraphernalia: items used by Plains Indians during religious ceremonies

Parfleche: a folded rawhide carrying case for food, clothing, and other items

Pictograph: a painted symbol or picture on a material such as a rock

Petroglyph: a carving upon a rock

Pigment: something from a plant or animal that colors or dyes an object

Pony Beads: earliest trade beads; large in size. Were carried on the backs of the traders' ponies or horses.

Rawhide: an animal hide that has been soaked in water, scraped of hair, dried, and allowed to become hard and stiff

Reservation: area of public land set aside by the government for the use of American Indians

Sacred: religious, holy

Seed beads: small glass beads that fur traders introduced to the Plains Indians (name comes from the beads' small size, which is similar to a seed)

Stroud: red and blue wool cloth that fur traders introduced to the Plains Indians

Trade Network: system of routes traveled by traders, making it possible for people living on the Plains to acquire goods from as far away as the Northwest Coast

Tradition: a practice accepted from the past; something done by previous generations, such as a ritual

Travois: an A-shaped sled made out of long wood poles, pulled by Plains Indian horses and dogs

Winter Count: robe on which Plains Indians painted symbols for each year that has passed; creates a pictorial timeline for the tribe

Yoke: garment fitted around the neck