

The Resilient Thread: Arapaho Beading Grades 6-12

Knowledge Holder

This lesson was created by Ace Samuels (Cheyenne and Arapaho, Choctaw).



Materials

- Size 11 and 12 needles
- Size A Nymo thread – Black and white
- Size 11 Czech seed beads
- White and black hard Pellon material
- Buckskin
- Elmers Glue
- Lighter (with supervision)
- Beaders beeswax
- Sewing scissors
- Craft scissors
- Thin cardboard – cereal box

Objective

This lesson teaches the significance of beadwork and how it translates to the stories of our communities. It explores the history, the techniques, but most importantly, the spiritual side of beadwork. This lesson will guide you through the patient practice of Arapaho beadwork, teaching you how to design with intentionality and find good medicine through connection with the natural world. Through this creative practice, we will examine how cultural sovereignty and environmental care are deeply intertwined acts of resilience.

Survivance Message

Beadwork is a way of staying resilient. It brings color to our dances and ceremonies, and it shows the world exactly who we are. When we bead, we aren't just making art; we are practicing peace. It takes patience to bead with a good heart and a clear mind. Whatever you are feeling while you work goes right into the beads and out into the world. When you bead with prayer, you are spreading peace.

- Tribal nations practice a vast diversity of distinct beading styles that reflect their specific culture. Certain styles of beadwork talk about the artist and what Nation they come from. It is important to know these differences to show recognition and respect to the artist and the traditions of their people. To truly understand the technique, rhythm, and spirit of this art, we must listen to the knowledge holders who have kept this fire burning.
- Myths about beadwork are that beads were traded for land, it is primitive, it was born from the new colonial era, and they are easy to create. The art of beadwork itself is a call of activism and sovereignty. It is a symbol that “We Are Still Here” and can be used to raise funds for community support.
- Beadwork has always been practiced throughout Turtle Island. Traditional beadwork was created out of bones, shells, wood, stones, and different kinds of plant seed. The colors were made from plants, insects, and earth minerals. Today, these old ways are still practiced, but through colonization, we have turned to beads made from Europe such as Czech seed beads and glass beads.
- The colors are symbolic of life and other universal and natural processes, depending on the Tribe or Nation. Medicine wheels show the symbolism of this. These can be the 4 directions, the 4 seasons, the 4 stages of life, spirit relatives, and the 4 sacred medicines.



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Standards

This lesson aligns with national Art, Social Studies, and History frameworks by:

- Exploring how traditional beading acts as a living, contemporary expression of Tribal identity and sovereignty.
- Examining the spiritual and intentional practice of creating art for our communities.
- Comparing how traditional beading practices use both natural materials and trade materials to adapt to our changing world.

Braiding Knowledge: Curriculum Standards

This lesson is part of a broader framework that weaves together the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITECK). We teach Western science through a localized, relational lens to honor the history and sovereignty of the land and its caretakers. For a detailed breakdown of how this lesson aligns with specific NGSS benchmarks, ITECK guidelines, and UNESCO climate action goals, please visit our [story map](#).

Beadwork and Climate Change: When we step outside to clear our minds during our practice, the birds we hear, the snows that feed our rivers, and the native plants that once provided our traditional beads and dyes are all facing shifting climate patterns. Just as our ancestors adapted to massive historical changes while keeping these artistic traditions alive, modern climate stewardship is a part of that same resilience. Protecting the health of the earth is how we ensure that future generations can still go outside to find their balance, listen to the wind, and keep our natural medicine strong.

Activities

Beadwork is simple but challenging; there is no wrong or right way to do it. The main goal is that it is done with good medicine. The challenging part about beadwork is that it is tedious and requires patience and thought. Both patience and technique require extensive practice for some, while others may catch on quickly.

10 Min: Feel! Introduce the materials and the repetitive, grounding nature of the work. In this activity, we will start with a rosette (medallion).

“Look at the blank canvas of your medallion backing. Beadwork is simple and, at most times, highly repetitive. What you want to bead, the design, and the colors will come from your visions and personal inspirations. Feel the textures of the beads in front of you. How does slowing down your hands shift your focus away from the fast-paced distractions around you?”

15 Min: Connect! Focus on the intentionality behind the colors and geometry, prompting students to think about family and nation.

“For the design, think about your community and your family. What designs represent your Tribe or Nation? Some Tribes practice geometry and symmetry in their designs while others display scenery or an event. What colors will you choose? This is a step that could be the most difficult to decide, even for experienced beaders. The purpose here is to think of what is important to you such as the favorite color of your family members, your own favorite color, or a vision of what you see—and know why it is important. Beading has to be done with intentionality.”

20 Min: Play! Students begin threading their first rows on the rosette, actively confronting the mental and emotional discipline required for the craft.

“This is a time for practice in your patience. When you start having negative thoughts such as anger, annoyance, failure, or quitting, the medicine for this is to go outside and let the spirits speak to you. Listen to the wind, the grass, the birds, the water flowing; feel the sun or the



Arapaho Vocabulary

Ceeyowniisi3oono (pron. Jay-oh-nees-ih-thoo-noh): art

ceeneeteeyou'u (pron. Jay-nay-tay-yoh-oo): beads

wohononook (pron. Wah-hoo-nah-nohk): thread

Biixot (pron. Bee-haht): buckskin

Neeceenohoo (pron. Nay-jay-nah-hoo): gift

English Vocabulary

Intentionality, rosette, altruistic, communal, contemporary, identity, seed beads, settler-colonialism

Resources

[Beaded Medallion Part 1](#)

[Beadwork Tutorial for Beginners: One Needle Method](#)

[Beaded medallion tutorial- How to start](#)

[How to Assemble Beadwork](#)

[Beaded Rope Necklace Tutorial](#)

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rain, watch the clouds, or look at the stars. Think about the prayers your ancestors prayed for you to be here in this space today. Beadwork is a resilient practice, just like the prayers of your ancestors. Both have gotten through generations of oppression and colonization of our people, and we are still here to practice these traditions. Nature is our medicine."

Reciprocity through Stewardship

Let the land guide you in choosing your colors, such as the shifting shades of the sky at sunrise, and listen closely to the stories and language of the earth that you can share through your beadwork. Always remember that the land is medicine for all Native people. As you weave your pattern, think about what food sovereignty means and how you can translate that relationship into your art. For example, stitching yellow beads moving up and down can resemble rows of corn, while blending deep black with different hues of red, orange, yellow, and white can represent fire—which is essential for cooking, community, and staying warm. Let all natural elements guide your needle.

Adaptations & Extensions

Beadwork is how we show the world who we are today. When we wear our work, we aren't just honoring the past, we are proving that we are vibrant, living communities with knowledge systems that have survived for generations. We aren't figures of history; we are here, right now, creating beauty.

After completing this initial rosette activity, continue practicing these techniques to deepen your skills. This foundational experience gives you the technical knowledge to branch out into different structural styles of beadwork on other mediums, such as embellishing moccasins, making earrings, or creating elaborate dance regalia. As you advance, you can research and experiment with various traditional techniques, including Peyote stitch, Flat stitch/Lazy stitch, Whip stitch, Brick stitch, Running stitch, and Loom beadwork.

This craft helps our people represent themselves and should fundamentally be viewed as an altruistic art form. This means you willingly give your time, energy, money, prayers, pain, and knowledge to create a finished piece that ultimately benefits the community. Capitalism was never the Native way because it only prioritizes individual profit, whereas all our Tribes are communal people. As an extension, think deeply about the natural materials that were utilized before colonization and how those raw elements were gathered directly from the earth. Honor the resilience of this art, carry it forward for your community, and always use your knowledge to help others.