NW Native Artsy Artifacts and Potlatch Party

Students are involved in hands-on activities to illustrate the history and people that first inhabited Washington state.

**Curriculum/State Standards**
WA state learning standard requires fourth grade students to use artifacts and primary/secondary sources to describe and draw conclusions about an issue or event. Social studies learning standards encompass Washington’s history including Northwest native tribal people and how they shaped WA state history and government.

**Overview**
Our studies included a presentation of the NW Native people that engaged students in a series of hands-on activities. The final project culminated in two separate events which simulated both daily and ceremonial activities carried out by the natives.

**Objectives**
The students will gain new knowledge of Northwest native people by viewing museum artifacts. The students will gain an understanding of how Northwest native people used their hands and basic tools to create everyday objects necessary for basic needs and ceremonial purposes. The students will increase vocabulary through introduction to the cultural artifacts of Northwest native people (potlatch, bentwood box, button blanket, haida basket; etc.). The students will gain an understanding of how the native Northwest native people governed. The students will learn to express an appreciation of nature by creating a written poem in the style of the Northwest native people. The students will gain public speaking skills by presenting their poetry to peers. The students will use their imagination and hands to create their own depictions of tribal objects. The students will learn cooperation and division of labor by working in groups to accomplish an assigned project.

**Materials**
recycled cylindrical containers, ruled paper, pencils, and construction paper
museum artifact boxes from the Burke Museum of Natural History
cotton balls (2 bags)
fiberfill (1 bag)
burlap (2 yards)
microsuede fabric (2 yards)
assorted colors felt squares (135 squares)
suede laces (25 yd roll)
cedar fence boards (six 6’ x 4’’)
copper flashing (10’’ x 20’ roll )
black sharpie markers
hydrogen peroxide (two bottles)
muratic acid (1 bottle)
beads (2 bags)
pvc pipe (2 pipes,10’ x 4’’)
exterior paint quart (three colors)
sandpaper
buttons (10 bags of 200)
tacky glue (3 bottles)
acetone
bag of cement
smoked salmon (4 pkgs)
scissors (3pk)
berries (2 pks)

**Readiness Activity**
During this social studies unit, students studied scenery of the NW coast in pictures to understand the environment and available resources. They created a

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**THIS WINNING PROJECT IDEA SUBMITTED BY:**

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character that would be part of a clan to understand the dynamics of a tribe including jobs. They read the story “Cheyenne Again” and “The Raven.” In response to the read-aloud stories, students made written responses as journal entries to reflect on their feelings. Students also learned nouns and adjectives in language arts through the use of chants and songs to enforce appropriate vocabulary.

**Strategies/Activities**
Because the oral tradition was an important part of native culture, students listened to several read-aloud stories about Northwest natives and create a six line nature poem in the style of Northwest native people. Students presented their poems orally at our potlatch party. Students used their imaginations to create mixed media poster board depictions of the NW Coastal setting using colored paper, fiberfill, cotton, and fabric to represent trees, snow, clouds, mountains, bodies of water and animals. These creations remained on display in the classroom during the entire unit of study.

During a NW Coastal Art Day, students observe artifacts from three museum boxes and make observations about the tools and objects from the NW Coastal people. Students drew conclusions about the types of materials and tools available to the Northwest natives. This leads to a discussion about the environment and manner in which the native people lived. Students also created a necklace or bracelet using suede strips and beads. They had a station to create a button blanket using felt squares onto which they glued buttons and a native design felt cutout template which was pre-cut by parent volunteers. Another project for the art day was to put to use their knowledge about the colors and shapes used in the highly stylized designs of Northwest native art. Students created a group totem pole from PVC pipes. The PVC pipe was sanded first, had acetone applied to remove the sheen, then painted brown by an adult art docent. Working in small groups, students decided on an animal to pencil sketch on a section of the PVC pipe. The students used paints to finalize their designs. Adult volunteers cement set the totem poles into the school grounds as permanent fixtures so that all students may enjoy them for years to come. The students made “house posts” from cedar fence boards in the style of NW Coastal art using paint as the medium. The students learned that cedar was an important element for Northwest natives. The cedar boards were mounted for permanent displays onto a chain link fence located on the school grounds by adult volunteers.

They made a copper etching. Students drew NW Native designs or important animals on pieces of copper flashing with a Sharpie. Outside of the classroom, adult art docents submerged their pieces of copper in an acid solution (hydrogen peroxide and muratic acid), and the students’ drawings became etched onto the copper. These etchings were important trading pieces in the culminating potlatch ceremony.

Students took part in a potlatch ceremony. The students were able to trade their previously made button blankets, copper etchings, and bracelets as part of the ceremony to simulate tribal economics. The traditional ceremony was accompanied by music. In particular, the Northwest natives had individual drum playing rather than one player for the group, so students created and then “played” drums during the potlatch. Students previously made drums using recycled cylindrical containers, suede strips, and beads. During the potlatch, students enjoyed a small sampling of typical foods: salmon, a variety of berries and water.

**Culminating Activity**
The students participated in both a NW Native Coastal art day and a Potlatch Party.

**Evaluation Method**
Informal assessment was made based upon engagement in the various craft activities that took place during this unit of study. Formal assessment was made through journaling about experiences and, also, the use of graphic organizers to create NW Coastal style nature poems.