



An Introduction to the Navajo Culture

Denver Public Schools

In partnership with Metropolitan State College of Denver

El Alma de la Raza Project



An Introduction to the Navajo Culture

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Grades 4–6

Implementation Time
for Unit of Study: 5–6 weeks

Denver Public Schools
El Alma de la Raza Curriculum
and Teacher Training Program

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El Alma de la Raza Series

An Introduction to the Navajo Culture

Unit Concepts

- Geographical concentration of the Navajo
- Navajo customs and traditions
- Navajo weaving
- The Navajo language

Standards Addressed by This Unit

Reading and Writing

Students read and understand a variety of materials. (RW1)

Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences. (RW2)

Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. (RW4)

History

Students understand that societies are diverse and have changed over time. (H3)

Students understand how science, technology, and economic activity have developed, changed, and affected societies throughout history. (H4)

Geography

Students know how to use and construct maps and other geographic tools to locate and derive information about people, places, and environments. (G1)

Students know the physical and human characteristics of places and use this knowledge to define and study regions and their patterns of change. (G2)

Visual Arts

Students recognize and use the visual arts as a form of communication. (VA1)

Students relate the visual arts to various historical and cultural traditions. (VA4)

Foreign Language

Students acquire and use knowledge of cultures while developing foreign language skills. (FL2)

Introduction

The southwest United States is an area rich with the history of the Navajo, Pueblo and Spanish. The production of cotton can be traced to the Pueblo Indians who wove blankets, rugs, sashes, bridles and wall hangings. Despite the many economic, social and political hardships the Navajo have experienced, they have preserved their many crafts of jewelry making, blanket and rug weaving. The impact of sheep and goats brought by the Spanish in 1598 was significant in providing wool for making dresses, mantas and blankets.

Documentation of weavings by Navajos or as they call themselves, "Dineh," can be traced as far back as the 17th century. Early weavings depict a pattern of simple stripes arranged in various orders or in diamonds and zigzags. The stripe design continued through the 17th and 18th centuries, giving birth to the Classic Period (1800-1880). Even the earliest recorded textiles were known for their quality and watertightness.

Some of the more popular colors are red, white, blue, and black. The use of the upright loom can be traced back to 800 A.D. Navajo weavers were greatly influenced by the Pueblo Indians of the Rio Grande Valley.

Historians and scholars have divided the evolution of weaving by Navajos into chronological time periods classified as: Classic Period, Late Classical Period, Transitional Period, Revival Period and Rug Period. The evolution of these rugs goes from wearing blankets to floor rugs or hanging tapestries, as have the designs from traditional stripes, diamonds and zigzags to complex saltillos and eyedazzlers. Many Navajo rugs can be categorized into related subject matter such as animals, human and plant life. Stripes are grouped into zones and the Mexican serape is known to have influenced the designs of the Navajo. Other major influences were the contact with the Plains Indians, arrival of Anglo-European settlers who were linked to the Navajo through the railroad and trading posts. Some design restrictions existed which represented certain sacred plants and animals as well as various mythological or cosmological entities. There are hundreds of pictorial masterpieces today in private collections such as the Harmsen Collection of Western Americana and museums. Unfortunately, many weavings have been lost, stolen or destroyed.

In 1821, Mexico won independence from Spain opening travel routes with the United States. Travel on the Santa Fe Trail increased and impacted the transport of cloth and textiles. The evolution of Navajo weaving, with its influences and design developments, is a tapestry of sorts within itself. Woven into the history of Navajo weaving are major events and historical turning points which continue to make this ancient craft a life line that connects the past to the present.

The Four Corners region (New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Utah) remains a highly concentrated area for this beautiful craft that even predates the arrival of the Navajo. Weaving can be traced to the Mongollon culture centered in the forested highlands of Central Arizona and neighboring New Mexico. Other traces of weaving can also be traced to the Hohokan in the Sonoran Desert, the Pima Indians, and the Anasazi.

This instructional unit of study is a brief introduction to Navajo weaving and other customs and traditions of the Navajo. The unit touches briefly on the language of the Navajo and design elements of their art. It is by no means a comprehensive study, but serves to introduce students to this important indigenous group of people.

Implementation Guidelines

The entire unit can be infused into the fourth, fifth and sixth grade level Social Studies curriculums.

In fourth grade, it address key historical events in Colorado History, significant people and groups in Colorado history, as well as the effects of Colorado historical events on present and current issues. It is an excellent lead-in to the geographical concentrations of the Navajo in present-day United States.

In fifth grade, this unit addresses America's important historical dates, events, and people, Spanish exploration and the time line of American History.

In sixth grade, this unit can serve to identify and analyze the early indigenous cultures of the Western Hemisphere. In all three grades, this unit identifies some of the contributions of the American Indian to early United States history and culture.

Instructional Materials and Resources

- Lesson 1 *Songs from the Loom* by Monty Roessel
- Lesson 2 *Woven by the Grandmothers*. 19th century Navajo textiles from the National Museum of the American Indian. Navajo translations by Ellavina Perkins and Esther Yazzie. Published by the Smithsonian Institution Press in association with the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution. Edited by Eulalie H. Bonar
 - Navajo Wedding Day* by Eleanor Schick
 - Grandfather's Story of Navajo Monsters* by Richard Red Hawk
 - Monster Birds* by Vee Browne
- Lesson 3
 - Wool carders
 - Spindle
 - Navajo loom
 - Fleece
- Lesson 4 *A Rainbow at Night* by Bruce Hucko
- Lesson 5 *Little Herder in Autumn* by Ann Nolan Clark
 - Songs of Indian Territory*, from the American Indian Video Series

Lesson Summary

Lesson 1	Geographical Concentrations of the Navajo 5 This lesson reviews basic map skills and focuses on the areas occupied by the Navajo in the southwest United States.
Lesson 2	The Customs and Traditions of the Navajo 10 Students are introduced to various aspects of Navajo traditions and customs through videos and literature selections.
Lesson 3	Navajo Weaving Process 12 The basics of weaving are presented in this lesson followed by a weaving activity and field trips to local exhibits.
Lesson 4	Art Expressions 18 Students have the opportunity to compare and contrast on the key components of their own culture and some aspects of the Navajo culture.
Lesson 5	The Navajo Language 21 Students will focus on a literature selection <i>Little Herder in Autumn</i> by Ann Nolan for a brief introduction to selected translations of the language.

LESSON 1: Geographical Concentration of the Navajo

What will students be learning?

STANDARDS

Students read and understand a variety of materials. (RW1)

Students understand that societies are diverse and have changed over time. (H3)

Students know how to use and construct maps and other geographic tools to locate and derive information about people, places and environments. (G1)

Students know the physical and human characteristics of places and use this knowledge to define and study regions and their patterns of change. (G2)

BENCHMARKS

Students use comprehension strategies.

Students know how various societies have been affected by contacts and exchanges among diverse peoples.

Students know how to use maps and other geographic tools to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.

Students know the physical and human characteristics of places and use this knowledge to define and study regions and their patterns of change.

OBJECTIVES

Students will identify and locate the areas of occupation by the Navajo in the United States today through the use of a map.

Students will be familiar with map terms.

SPECIFICS

The Navajo Nation consists of around 15 million acres located in the states of New Mexico, Arizona, Utah and Colorado. The climate is primarily dry, with an occasional rain storm during the summer. The beautiful landscape of the Navajo Nation includes plains, mountains, mesas, and small streams.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

KWL chart

Discussion

Read in small groups

Map

Collaborative learning

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION

Review basic map skills, including parts of a map, the title, legend, grid system, direction and scale. Write the following map terms on the chalkboard:

Title — A word, phrase, or sentence used to designate a map.

Legend — The small, usually boxed area that shows the colors, patterns, or symbols used on a map and explains what they represent.

Grid system — A set of lines used to find the exact location of places on a map. There are several different grid systems. Most maps, however, use the latitude and longitude system called the geographic grid.

Direction — An arrow that points to the North. Another symbol on a map that show the direction is called a compass rose that shows North and the other three cardinal directions.

Scale — The relation between a unit of measure on a map and a unit of measure on Earth.

ACTIVITIES

Students will make a KWL chart on what they know, what they want to know and what they learned about the Navajo, and then share this information with the class.

Students will copy the vocabulary words the teacher has written on the chalkboard.

Students will read pages 8–13 in *Songs from the Loom* by Monty Roessel, in groups of four, taking turns reading. Students will share their opinions of the book.

With the same group, students will discuss how they will do the map of the Navajo reservation. Each student will be responsible for one state: Utah, Colorado Arizona, or New Mexico. Students can use the map on page 13 of *Songs from the Loom*, or atlases, maps, and encyclopedias the teacher will provide from the school library.

Students will draw a map of the Navajo Reservation on construction paper. Students need to include the following on their map: state's name, major cities, bodies of water (lakes and rivers), differentiate tribal and non-tribal land, and mountain ranges within or near the reservation. The legend on the map should include symbols for each physical designation, as well as a compass rose. When the map is completed, students will show it to the whole group and share what they learned from the reading and the map.

Students will keep adding information to the KWL chart.

VOCABULARY

Diné Man — Term that the Navajo people applied to themselves long before the term “Navajo” was used by non-Navajos.

Diné Bekayah — The land of the Diné people.

Kinaalda — Ceremony conducted for a Navajo girl when she reaches puberty. During the Kinaalda ceremony, female elders instruct the girl in what her duties and responsibilities as a Navajo woman will be.

Long Walk — The grueling 250-mile journey of more than 8,000 Navajos to the Bosque Redondo as a result of the war on the Navajo people.

Nalí — Father.

Reservation — A reserved area of land that the United States government designates to the Indian tribes.

Ya'at'eeh Schichei — Hello maternal grandfather.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

KWL chart

Construction paper

Colored pencils

Songs from the Loom by Monty Roessel

ASSESSMENT

Students need to correctly locate the states, reservation, rivers, and mountains on a map. They have to spell all the names correctly. Each student must participate, share and take turns in reading aloud.

Rubric Score

Description

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 4 | Student maps display all the correct names of cities, states, roads, and rivers. The map also has a good legend with all the information requested by the teacher. It is neat and clean. |
| 3 | Student maps are missing cities, states, roads, or rivers. The legend is not comprehensive. |
| 2 | The map only has a few required elements identified. The map legend is incomplete. |
| 1 | It is evident the student put very little or no effort on the assignment. A few locations may be listed and a legend may be listed, but neither is complete. |

KWL Chart

K: What I *Know* about the Navajo culture?

W: What I *Want* to know about the Navajo culture?

L: What did I *Learn* about the Navajo culture?

Name _____ Period _____

Map of the Navajo Reservation

Utah	Colorado
Arizona	New Mexico

LEGEND

X Mountain

LESSON 2: The Customs and Traditions of the Navajo

What will students be learning?

STANDARDS

Students read and understand a variety of materials. (RW1)

Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences. (RW2)

Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing. (RW4)

Students read locate, select, evaluate, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference, and technological sources. (RW5)

BENCHMARKS

Students will make connections between prior knowledge and what they need to know about a topic before reading about it.

Students will expand vocabulary development using a variety of methods.

Students will use reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing to gather data, define the problem, and apply problem-solving skills.

Students will paraphrase, summarize, organize, evaluate, and synthesize information.

OBJECTIVES

Students will preview five literary titles that contain vignettes or brief traditional aspects of the Navajo culture.

Students will compare and contrast similar practices specific to their cultural group from the material presented.

SPECIFICS

The southwest United States continues to thrive on the contributions and history of the many indigenous groups who shaped and sculpted the very essence of this unique corner of America. The traditions and ancient ways of the Navajo are rich with history and meaning. The Navajo (belief) teaches and promotes respect for nature and all living things. The purpose is that people must live in harmony with each other and nature. Ceremonies are performed for many reasons, such as: celebration of life, healing of mental, physical and spiritual illnesses, acknowledgment of accomplishments, rain, good will, etc. The cultural collisions sustained by the Navajo have made them one of the most resilient and immortal icons of the new millennium.

The Navajo are divided into clans. Sources on Navajo culture say that in the beginning, according to legend, there was one clan that divided and subdivided, each with its own legend and history. The Navajo are born into the mother's clan. The function of the clan is a very important element of social control and shared responsibility among the members of that particular clan. Clans are linked to others, thus extending the realm of obligation. The functions of the clan, with respect to social control, are to avoid marriage between clans that are closely related, to create a sense of close family relationship between clan members (both maternal and paternal), and to promote shared responsibility among the clan members.

What will be done to help the students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Read aloud

Vocabulary building

Compare and contrast

Writing process

Note taking

ACTIVITIES

Students will watch the video, *Woven by the Grandmothers* and take notes on key cultural elements.

Students will read *Songs from the Loom* by Monty Roessel, *Grandfather's Story of Navajo Monsters* by Richard Red Hawk, and *Monster Birds* by Vee Browne.

Students will write an essay on one of the following:

- Connection between the Navajo and nature, weaving, symbolic design representation in the blankets, the railroad and the source of wool using the writing process.
- Compare and contrast one aspect of the Navajo culture with their own.

VOCABULARY

Custom

Tradition

Canyon del Muerto

Dinetah

Symbolic

Clan

Myth

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

Woven by the Grandmothers, directed by Linda Lewett (30 minutes)

Songs from the Loom by Monty Roessel

Grandfather's Story of Navajo Monsters by Richard Red Hawk

Monster Birds by Vee Browne

Navajo Wedding Day by Eleanor Schick

ASSESSMENT

Students will be assessed on the completion of an essay in which:

- meaning is expressed precisely;
- organization and layout of written text is accurate and appropriate for purpose, situation and audience;
- argument, description and narrative are presented effectively and appropriately;
- vocabulary shows awareness of ambiguities and shades of meaning; and
- figurative language, such as metaphor, is used to convey meaning.

LESSON 3: Navajo Weaving Process

What will students be learning?

STANDARDS

Students read and understand a variety of materials. (RW1)

Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. (RW4)

Students understand how science, technology, and economic activity have developed, changed, and affected societies throughout history. (H4)

Students recognize and use the visual art as a form of communication. (A1)

Students relate the visual art to various historical and cultural traditions. (A4)

BENCHMARKS

Students use comprehension strategies.

Students recognize, express, and defend points of view orally and in writing.

Students understand the impact of scientific and technological developments on individuals and societies.

Students identify and discuss how and why visual images, themes, and ideas communicate.

Students identify and compare the characteristics of works of art from various cultures, times, and places.

OBJECTIVES

Students will increase their knowledge about Navajo weavers.

Students will develop familiarity with Navajo art, especially weaving.

Students will draw their understanding of Navajo art.

SPECIFICS

Among the Navajo, women are the weavers, although men are the weavers in other Native American cultures, such as the Pueblo.

The process of weaving differs from culture to culture, but the basics are similar. The weavers must get the wool and the plants and flowers to dye the wool, and then card, spin, set the loom, and finally weave.

Wool is naturally black, brown, or white. Gray is made by blending white and black. Weavers have to dye the wool for the other colors. Plants and flowers can be used to dye the wool. The wool is put in boiling water with flowers or other parts of a plant. Onionskin, for example, dyes fibers orange. Many Navajos, however, now use artificial dyes.

Carding is an arduous task, it takes a long time and strength. Carding untangles the wool fibers and cleans the wool. The next step is to turn the wool into yarn by spinning, which is not as easy as it looks. Then they have to set the loom. The size of the loom depends on the size of the blanket or rug being made. Sometimes the loom is so big the weaver has to put a chair on top of a table to reach while she is weaving. Normally the weaver has the design in mind before beginning to weave, and often it is inspired by the Navajo Nation landscape. When the blanket is almost done, they weave what they call the spirit line — a thin line placed in the upper right corner which acts as a path of

escape for the energy and spirit put into a rug so the weaver can weave again. Navajos believe that when they weave the *spirit line*, the blanket is done and they are free to start another one. The *spirit line* is also known as the weaver's path.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Read aloud
Partner reading
Sequence
Field trip
Writing
Hands-on activity

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION

Call the Denver Art Museum and plan a guided field trip. The name of the tour is *American Indians*, and it is possible to request an exhibition on Navajo weaving. Call (303) 640-6591. Three-weeks advanced notice is required. Teachers should become familiar with the process of weaving and the basic idea of loom work.

The teacher should review the accordion paragraph, or develop a sequencing flow chart outlining the basic weaving process.

ACTIVITIES

In pairs, students will read pages 25–39 in *Songs from the Loom* and develop a flowchart, outlining step-by-step the process of making a Navajo blanket.

Students will go the Denver Art Museum and view the collection of Navajo blankets. A guide will give students more information about the Navajo, the blankets, and the materials that are used to make a blanket, and give a demonstration on how to weave.

Back at school, students will write an accordion paragraph about their experience in the museum. Taking turns while other students are working on the paragraph, students will weave. Everybody will work on a class blanket that will be displayed in the classroom.

VOCABULARY

Batten — A flat stick used to separate warp, using shed and heddle stick.

Spin — To stretch wool into strings of yarn.

Spindle — A tape stick that has a round disk a quarter of the way from the bottom. It is used to spin yarn or thread.

Spirit line — A thin line placed near the upper right corner of a blanket. This line offers a path of escape for the energy and spirit put into the rug so the weaver can begin a new blanket. This can also be called a weaver's path.

Weft — The horizontal threads of the yarn on a loom.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

Songs from the Loom by Monty Roessel

Sequencing chart

Accordion paragraph worksheet

Wool carders

Spindle

Navajo loom

Wool of different colors

Fleece

21-Step Weaving Process handout

ASSESSMENT

Students will be assessed on:

- Understanding of the 21-step flowchart outlining the weaving process.
- The accordion paragraph demonstrating proper sentence structure and grammar.
- Active participation is required.

21-Step Weaving Process

The rug-making process, from shearing the sheep to completing a rug, might take a month to make a 3' x 5' rug. It entails working on it daily, sometimes taking days to complete the first 12 steps.

1. Shear sheep. This is not done every time a rug is made. Weavers will put aside enough wool to last all year.
2. Card wool.
3. Card black and white wool to make gray. Brown sheep wool is rare, so commercial or plant dye is often used. Sometimes black sheep wool will need additional coloring to get true black.
4. Gather white clay to whiten the white wool. See page 32 and 44 of *Songs from the Loom* for pictures showing a girl and grandparent collecting white clay.
5. Gather plants for various colors. It takes training to recognize plants to make the colors in mind. The dye plants are not always available in all areas of the reservation. Often times the Navajo women may have to collect or trade plants year-round and store for later use.
6. Spin wool for warp. Warp is the basis for making a rug. The value of a rug will depend on the strength of warping. Usually the spinning of wool into yarn will take two steps. First spin the carded wool in loosely spun yarn. When enough is done, roll the loosely spun yarn into balls. Second, spin the yarn into thinner and tighter spun yarn. It must be spun into tight and fine yarn in order to withstand continual tightening and handling. It is not necessary to color the warp.
7. Spin wool for weft. The weft is the yarn which is used to go back and forth between the warping. Usually, spinning is done in two steps like Step #6. The weft yarn is spun slightly tighter than store-bought yarn, but not as tight as warp. It is important to card and spin enough yarn to make a whole rug. The colors need to be consistent in texture, as well as color throughout the whole rug. This adds value to the rug.
8. Prepare spun yarn for coloring. They are made into skeins by looping the yarn round and round and putting a tie to keep them from falling apart. It is better to dye wool after it is spun. If wool is put in dye when using plants, sticks and other debris will entangle the wool, making it hard to clean and spin.
9. Prepare dye. Try to dye enough yarn at one time for one particular color. Place plant in a cheesecloth and cook to desired color (or use commercial dye according to directions). Remove bundle of plant and place spun wool in dye water. When wool is desired color, remove and rinse with cool water and then hang to dry.

21-Step Weaving Process (cont.)

10. Prepare white yarn for white bath. Wash yarn with wool soap and rinse. Soak white clay in enough water to create white water. Immerse wool until wool is whiter, rinse and hang to dry in the sun.
11. Prepare black and gray spun wool. Wash, rinse and hang to dry.
12. Prepare to set up loom by gathering two long boards and two beams. Tie beams to boards at opposite ends of each other. The loom will be set up while the frame is flat (horizontal), about 8 inches off the floor.
13. Set up the loom using warp yarn which by now have been rolled into balls. Loop warp yarn over and under one beam, then to the other side. Repeat until desired width is obtained. Loosen one of the two beams at one end. Using a double-spun yarn, lace each end all the way across width. Tie off. A Navajo rug is never cut.
14. Secure top and bottom of warp to upper and lower warp beams.
15. Set up loom frame and secure it.
16. Tie upper support beam to top of frame.
17. Secure tension beam to upper warp beam and lower warp beam.
18. Using tension cord (or rope) lace between upper support beam and tension beam. Leave loose until heddle stick is laced.
19. Lace heddle stick to warp and make sure shed stick is in place.
20. Using tension cord/rope, tighten the warping very tight.
21. Start weaving.

Name _____ Period _____

Accordion Paragraph

After going to the Denver Art Museum on _____,

I learned several things about the Navajo. First, _____

Second, _____

Third, _____

Finally, _____

LESSON 4: Art Expressions

What will students be learning?

STANDARDS

Students read and understand a variety of materials. (RW1)

Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. (RW4)

Students recognize and use the visual arts as a form of communication. (A1)

Students relate the visual arts to various historical and cultural traditions. (A4)

BENCHMARKS

Students use comprehension strategies.

Students recognize, express, and defend points of view orally and in writing.

Students identify and discuss how and why visual images, themes, and ideas communicate.

Students identify and compare the characteristics of works of art from various cultures, times, and places.

OBJECTIVES

Students will understand the concept of being an artist.

Students will select an item to read.

Students will compare their own society with the Navajo.

Students will increase their reading vocabulary.

Students will design a T-shirt.

SPECIFICS

A Rainbow at Night by Bruce Hucko is about Navajo children talking about their world. These children explain their world through paintings and poems, and with their own art. One great form of expressing ourselves is through art.

According to the *New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary*, an artist is a person who uses deliberate skills in making things of beauty or a person who uses skill and taste in any activity.

For this lesson the teacher should consider reading the biography of a famous artist like Pablo Picasso, Frida Kahlo, Henri Matisse, or R.C. Gorman. But it is important to remember that you do not have to be well known to be an artist. Even though the Navajo blankets are incredible pieces of art, not many people know the names of the artist.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Independent reading

Comparison chart

Hands-on activity

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION

Teacher should be familiar with *A Rainbow at Night* by Bruce Hucko. A video from the book is also available. The video is called *Have you Ever Seen a Rainbow at Night?*

ACTIVITIES

Students will choose a subject that interest, them from the following list and complete a comparative chart.

- Nature
- Culture/History
- Landscape
- Home
- Work
- Animals
- Beliefs
- Medicine
- Ceremonies
- Dances
- Art
- Language
- Being a Navajo/Asian/Hispanic

Students will read about the Navajo child who shares the same interests in the book *A Rainbow at Night* by Bruce Hucko. Students will work in groups of five with each student choosing a different subject. Each student will explain to the group what they read about on their subject. In the group, students will compare the differences of the subjects between the Navajo and their own culture, and will complete the comparative chart with the five subjects. Students will design and paint a T-shirt about the subject they chose at the beginning, and they will decide if the design will be from the point of view of the Navajo or their own.

VOCABULARY

Chiindi — Ghost, evil, spirit of a dead person

Hozho — Beauty, happiness, harmony and goodness

Maii — Coyote

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

A Rainbow at Night by Bruce Hucko

Have you Ever Seen a Rainbow at Night (video) directed by Bruce Hucko (Optional)

Comparative chart

White cotton T-shirts

Permanent markers of various colors

ASSESSMENT

Students will be assessed on the development of the comparative chart activity. Assess quality of the T-shirt based on effort and creativity.

Name _____ Period _____

Comparative Chart

Subject: _____

Navajo	My Culture

LESSON 5: The Navajo Language

What will students be learning?

STANDARDS

Students read and understand a variety of materials. (RW1)

Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences. (RW2)

Students recognize and use the visual arts as a form of communication. (VA1)

Students acquire and use knowledge of cultures while developing foreign language skills. (FL2)

BENCHMARKS

Students use comprehension strategies.

Students prepare written and oral presentations using strategies.

Students identify and discuss how and why images, themes, and ideas communicate.

Students apply knowledge of cultural practices when communicating in a foreign language.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be introduced to two music selections of Navajo music.

Students will be introduced to some Navajo words.

Students will select one Navajo word and draw a representation of that concept.

SPECIFICS

One of the most important aspects of a culture is the language. The language can reflect many things about the way people live. Not every language has the same vocabulary because not everybody sees things the same way or uses the same things. If we are going to know a little bit about the Navajos, it is important to learn about their language.

Due to the influence of the Spaniards, there are a number of words interpreted into the Navajo language whose origin was Spanish.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Read aloud

Repetition

Listening

Vocabulary cards

Crossword

Predicting

Writing poetry

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION

To become familiar with the Navajo language, the teacher should read from pages 85–89 from *Little Herder in Autumn*, a compilation of Navajo grammar by Ann Nolan Clark.

ACTIVITIES

Students will listen carefully to the teacher when she or he is reading the basics of the Navajo grammar and pronunciation from the book *Little Herder in Autumn*. Students will repeat vocabulary after the teacher, and they will translate simple sentences. Students will write the words from the vocabulary on cards the teacher will provide. Students will translate the words and write the meaning in English on the back of the card. In front of the card students will draw a picture that reminds them of the meaning of the word. After learning the selected words from this lesson, students will work on the crossword. While working on the crossword, students will listen to *Songs of Indian Territory*. Students will choose one of the poems from *Little Herder in Autumn*. Students will create their own poem in Navajo and share it with the rest of the class.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

Little Herder in Autumn by Ann Nolan Clark

Songs of Indian Territory

Cards

Colored pencils

Crossword worksheet

ASSESSMENT

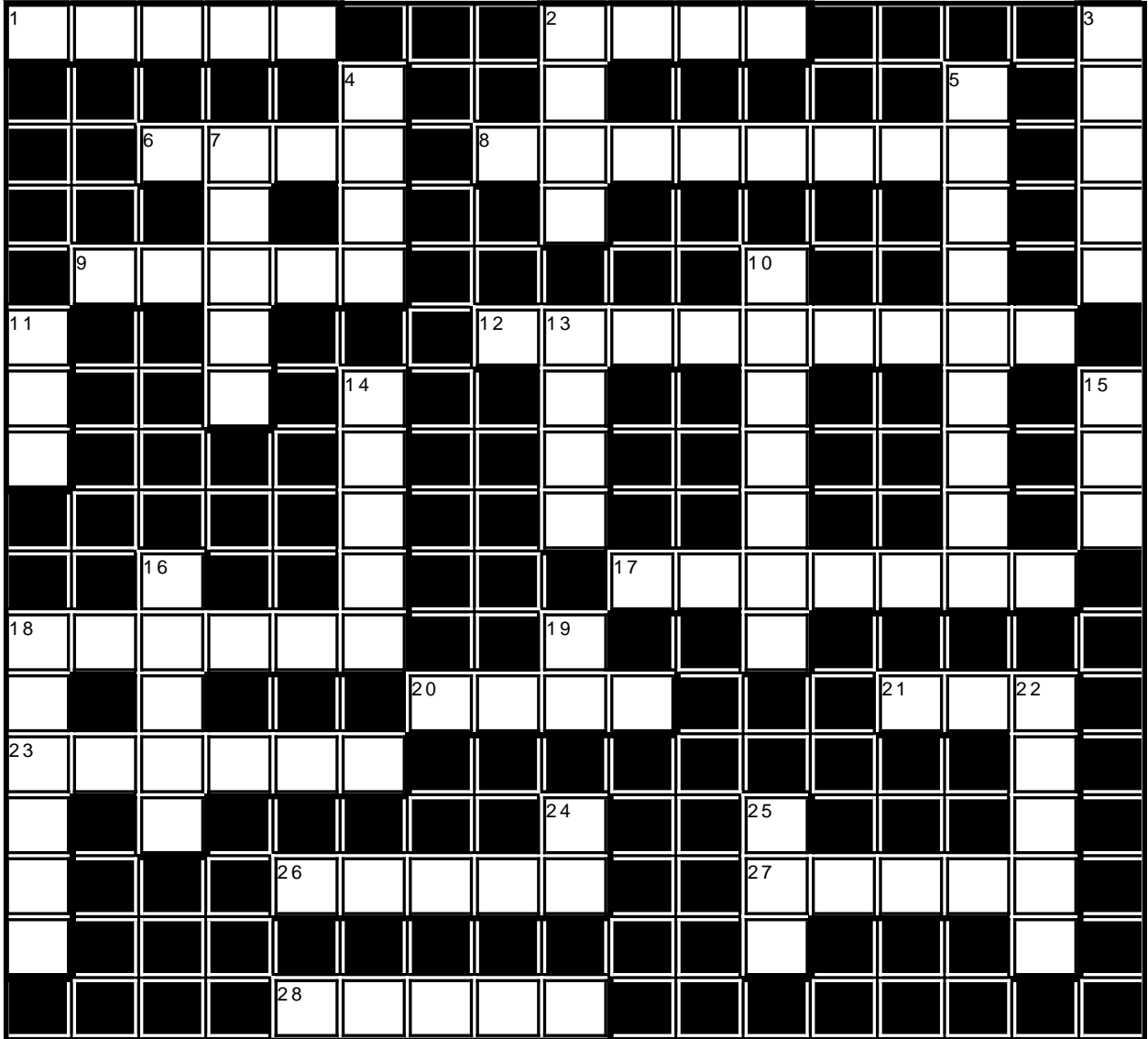
Use the crossword key to evaluate the crossword. Students will be assessed on effort, product, and performance on the vocabulary cards and poem. Students have to participate and share their work.

Navajo Vocabulary

NAVAJO	ENGLISH
Abe'	Milk
Abid	Stomach
Agaan	Arm
Aghaa'	Wool
Ahéhee'	Thank you
Ajéí	Heart
Akéé'	Foot
Ála'	Hand
Alóós	Rice
Aoo'	Yes
Ashkii	Boy
Atiin	Road
Awéé'	Baby
Azhé'é	Father
Béeso	Money
Beildléí	Blanket
Bilasáana	Apple
Chaha'oh	Shadow
Dooda	No
Doodzas	It will snow
E'e'aah	West
Géeso	Cheese
Hágo	Come here
Ha'at'íí	What
Hóla	I don't know
Jó	Well
Ké	Shoe
K'ad	Now
Naashnish	I am working

Name _____ Period _____

Navajo Crossword



DOWN

- | | |
|-----------------|----------|
| 2. Heart | 15. Milk |
| 3. Money | 16. West |
| 4. I don't know | 18. Boy |
| 5. Apple | 19. Shoe |
| 7. Rice | 22. Arm |
| 10. Shadow | 24. Well |
| 11. Yes | 25. Now |
| 13. Stomach | |
| 14. Father | |

ACROSS

- | | |
|------------------|------------|
| 1. Chicken | 21. Hand |
| 2. Foot | 23. What |
| 6. Come here | 26. Cheese |
| 8. Blanket | 27. Wool |
| 9. No | 28. Road |
| 12. I am working | |
| 17. It will snow | |
| 18. Thank you | |
| 20. Baby | |

TEACHER'S COPY

Navajo Crossword

TEACHER: Use this as an answer key. Please note that some accents on characters may be incorrect where letters overlap. Refer to the vocabulary list on page 23 for the correct accentuation of words.

¹ J	Í	K	I	I				² A	K	É	É'				³ B
					⁴ H			J						⁵ B	É
		⁶ H	⁷ A	G	Ó		⁸ B	É	I	L	D	L	É	I	E
			L		L			Í						L	S
	⁹ D	O	Ó	D	A						¹⁰ C			A	O
¹¹ A			Ó				¹² N	¹³ A	A	S	H	N	I	S	H
O			S		¹⁴ A			B			A			Á	¹⁵ A
O'					Z			I			H			A	B
					H			D			A'			N	E'
		¹⁶ E'			É'				¹⁷ D	O	O	D	Z	A	S
¹⁸ A	H	E'	H	E	É			¹⁹ K			H				
S		A				²⁰ A	W	É	É'				²¹ Á	L	²² Á
²³ H	A'	A	T'	Í	Í										G
K		H						²⁴ J			²⁵ K'				A
I					²⁶ G	É	E	S	Ó			²⁷ A	G	H	A
I												D			N
					²⁸ A	T	I	I	N						

UNIT ASSESSMENT

How will students demonstrate proficiency?

PERFORMANCE TASK

Each student will be assessed on the following:

- Identification of the geographical concentrations of the Navajo.
- Comparative essay on a custom, tradition or the language of the Navajo.
- Completion of a flowchart outlining the weaving process.
- Completion of one drawing, painting or poem that depicts one aspect of the Navajo culture.

SCORING RUBRIC

<u>Rubric Points</u>	<u>Description</u>
4	Complete and accurate information. Contains supporting information, facts and details. Essays were indicative of correct grammar, spelling, punctuation and capitalization.
3	General information presented. Some mistakes in the writing process.
2	Little or no information. Significant writing process deficiencies.
1	Incomplete assignments. Inaccurate information. Limited usage of details and facts. Consistent grammar, spelling, punctuation and capitalization errors.

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Videos

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The Navajos. American Indian Video Series: Museum of Northern Arizona, 1982. 15 minutes.

Navajo. American Indian Video Series. Produced by Tellens. Museum of Northern Arizona. 15 minutes.

Songs of Indian Territory. Full Circle Communications: Tulsa. 38 minutes.

Weavers. Contemporary Navajo Weaving. Nicolas DeSciuse and Denver Art Museum. Durango, 1992. 15 minutes.

Woven by the Grandmothers. 19th Century Navajo Textiles. Produced and directed by Linda Lewett. Home Vision Arts: Washington, D.C., 1998. 30 minutes.

About the Author

Conxita Domènech was born in Barcelona, Spain, where she grew up bilingual in Spanish and her own language, Català.

After finishing high school, Conxita earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in anthropology, winning a scholarship to finish her masters at the University of Oxford, where she lived for two years.

After England, Conxita spent several years travelling around Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, working different jobs, even picking mangos in a kibbutz. Her love for travelling sent her to the United States, where she met her husband and followed him to Colorado.

Conxita works at West High School, two colleges, and several hours each month at the Denver Art Museum. She is still studying, and hopes to finish her doctorate degree in the future.

About the Contributor

Bessie Smith (Dine') from the Navajo Nation was born and raised 25 miles north of Leupp, Arizona. She is of the *Hashk'aahadzohi* – yucca fruit-strung-out-in-a-line and born for *Biih Bitoo'nii* – deer spring clans. Her maternal grandfather is *Tl'izilani* - many goats, and her paternal grandfather is *Kinyaa'aanii* - towering house people clans. During Bessie's early years, she lived a traditional, Navajo life-style: herding sheep, learning to weave, and acquiring the necessary life skills to become a customary mother and wife.

From first to 12th grade, Bessie attended various Indian boarding schools far away from home where she was separated from her family nine months out of each year. From the minute she started school at the age of eleven, she was forbidden to speak the only language she knew, Navajo, and forced to cut off her long hair in order to conform to European style. Despite the federal government's effort to change her identity and assimilate her to European values and traditions, Bessie maintained a strong connection to her Navajo culture. After attending Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado, she moved to Denver where she raised 5 children. As a result of these experiences, Bessie has become a strong advocate for the emphasis and continuation of traditional, Native culture as an integral component of effective education.

Bessie's experience, education, and dedication to her family, work, and community have been the cornerstone of each of her life's accomplishments; her invaluable insight and contribution to the Alma Project by authenticating this unit of study has proven to be indispensable.