

Alaska Native Transition Skills

Introduction to Dene Athabaskan Beading

Rain Van Den Berg and Rochelle Adams
UAA Center for Human Development
2022 (Updated in 2025)

Developed for Interior Alaska school districts to show how traditional skills can be supported and integrated into transition planning for youth with IEPs. These materials are meant to be adapted and used throughout Alaska.

These materials were created through the Developmental Disabilities Act partnership of the Governor’s Council on Disabilities & Special Education and the Center for Human Development, with funding from the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority.

Land Acknowledgments: Rain Van Den Berg would like to acknowledge that this curriculum was written on the unceded territories of the Sheek’á Kwáan on Lingít Aaní, also known as Sitka, Alaska. She acknowledges that Lingít (Tlingit) peoples have been stewards of the land on which she works and resides since time immemorial, and she is grateful for that stewardship and incredible care.

Rochelle “Geh Gii Ch’adzaa” Adams currently resides in Anchorage, Alaska, and would like to say chin’an (thanks) to the Dena’ina people for their continued stewardship of the lands and waters, and all Alaska Native people across the state that have lived in balance and respect in their Indigenous homeland since time immemorial.

About the Authors

Rochelle “Geh Gii Ch’adzaa” Adams is from the Interior Alaskan villages of Beaver and Fort Yukon along the Yukon River. She was raised living a subsistence lifestyle with her family following the seasonal cycles of traditional hunting, fishing and trapping. These are the values and connections that make her who she is today and she proudly represents this in all parts of her life, art, activism, and work.

Rochelle currently works for Native Peoples Action, a statewide Native led non-profit as the Indigenous Engagement Director where she advocates to uplift the voices of Tribes and Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of life and promotes wellness in our communities through our traditional knowledge. She is also a cultural advisor, story writer, and co-creator for the PBS kids show Molly of Denali.

Through her many roles and actions, Rochelle has continuously sought to bring her perspective as an Indigenous woman with cultural knowledge and a positive vision of a healthy future for our people. For more biographical information about Rochelle, see the teacher resource in lesson 3 included in her artist profile.

Rain T. Van Den Berg is an education and training consultant with a background in education, health education, project management, and facilitation. She has a BA in Secondary Education, and a Master’s of Public Health in Community Health Education. Projects include the overall Alaska Native Transition Skills project and a culturally responsive transition tools developed for use in both rural and urban Alaskan communities for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

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Acknowledgements—

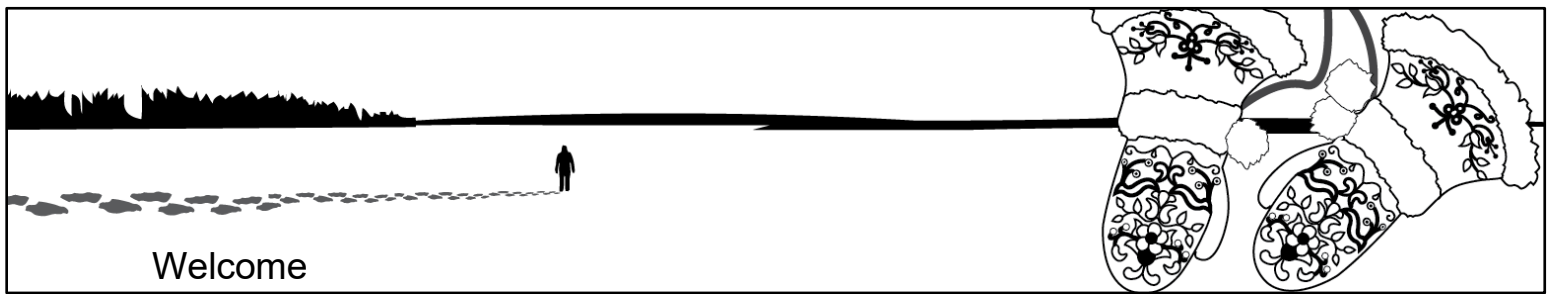
The authors would like to thank the following for their support and contributions to this curriculum:

Thanks to Allan Hayton for his help making connections to beading artists who assisted with this unit. Thanks to the beading artists who contributed to this curriculum: Deloole'aahn Erickson, Emma Hildebrand, and Angela Łot'oydaatlno Gonzalez.

Thanks to Amanda Race Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Coordinator/Counselor / Tanana Chiefs Conference for assisting with contacts on the Interior Units.

Thanks to Anne Applegate for her inspiration and support of this project.

Thanks to Karen Ward, UAA Center for Human Development, for her administrative support.



Neenjit doonch'yaa? How are you? This is our traditional greeting in my language of Gwich'in. I'm very happy to share some of my culture with you and I'm excited that you get to learn about it in your class. I am a life-long language learner and teacher, an artist, and a cultural bearer as I have been trained with my Elders for many years. I have always loved learning, sharing, and working in our beautiful cultures. Something that is very fun for me is creating beadwork and skin sewing to make items for my family, to share with my community, and to celebrate our culture. It took a lot of time and practice to get to where I am now, and I also had a lot of help to show me how to do things that work for me. In these lessons you will learn the basics of beading and you will also learn about the importance of this cultural practice to the Dene Athabascan people.

Within the Dene Athabascan groups, there are 11 in Alaska and the language family stretches all the way down to Mexico. So, we are related to many other Native cultures outside of Alaska. We do have some similarities, and also differences that make each of our Dene cultures unique. For example, I am Gwich'in and this is the Northern most Dene culture in the world. To give you an example of another Dene culture, the Navajo and Apache are some of our Southern relatives.

I hope that you have fun and enjoy learning about my culture. We put a lot of time, care, and thought into putting this together so that we can learn about one another. Everyone's culture is so interesting and I am always excited to learn about new ones!

Mahsi' (Thank you),

Rochelle "Geh Gii Ch'adzaa" Adams

2022



Introduction

The purpose of this curriculum project is to improve the quality of life, connection to local community, and increase work related skills for teens and young adults with disabilities who live in rural Alaska. It is meant to provide guidance in how traditional values and knowledge can be incorporated into Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for youth who experience disabilities as part of their required transition goals. The skills are meant to create options for youth with disabilities to engage in their communities and culture as they transition to adults. Though each chapter of this project ties to the cultural values and topics of a specific region of Alaska, the skills can be used and adapted more broadly. The project includes two curriculum units for each of the five regions of Alaska. Cultural stakeholders were involved in the selection of topics for each region. All content has been reviewed by culture bearers, and any cultural information shared is included with permission. The values and cultures of the indigenous peoples in each region are tied to all content. **For examples of transition plan goals and how to include these skills in an IEP transition plan, read the guidance for use section of the [2019 units](#) and the [Alaska Native Post-Secondary Transition Skills: Create Meaningful IEP Transition Plans](#) (2024, Rain Van Den Berg and Frances Gage). To access downloads of all units, visit <https://sesa.org/resources/educational/alaska-traditional-transition-skills/>.**

This unit provides an introduction to Dene Athabascan Beading. It is written to be adapted for a variety of learners with varying functional needs. Beading is an important way to connect to culture, family, community, and the Ancestors. Beading is a skill that with practice and focus can be developed to be a creative industry to supplement income. The second unit in this regional curriculum is *Winter Safety on the Land*.

Alaska Cultural Standards: Each lesson is tied to the Alaskan Cultural Standards developed by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. A summary document of these standards is included in the appendix.

Each lesson has these components:

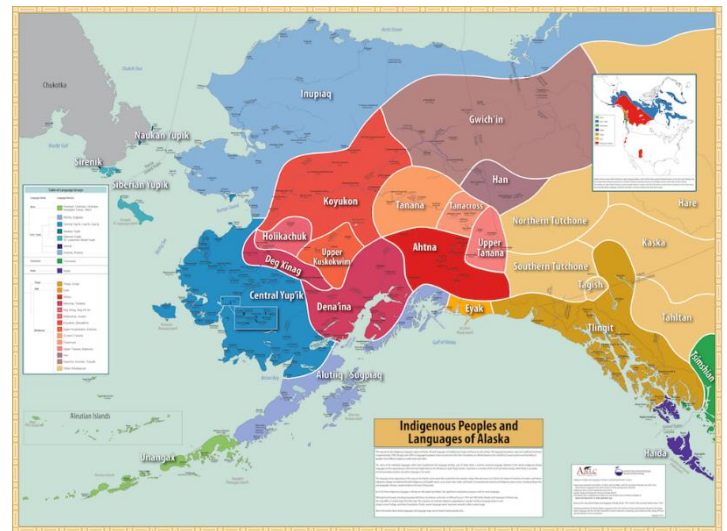
- Overview
- Link to Alaska Cultural Standards
- Link to Dene Athabascan values
- Learning objectives
- Materials including commercial resources (websites, videos, books)
- Vocabulary used in the lesson
- Activities (with adaptation ideas for different abilities)
- Learning stories
- Evaluation

- Additional resources for the teacher (links, references, videos)
- Student handout(s) and Instructor handout(s)/teaching tools

Dene Athabascan Values: Each lesson is tied to traditional values. Suggestions are made of which values to highlight, along with discussion points. These values are the foundation for learning the skills presented. The values can be discussed as they relate to the learning stories, how guest speakers model the values, or how the values motivate the learning of these skills. Incorporation of this aspect can help make connections to tribal values and traditions, and build more meaningful ties to their culture as the students move to adulthood. The values listed are those found on the Alaska Native Knowledge Network (University of Alaska Fairbanks): <http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/ANCR/Values/athabascan.html> created at the Denakkanaaga Elders Conference in 1985.

Traditional Lands of the Dene Athabascans

You can better understand the traditional native lands of Alaska through study of the Alaska Native Languages map. Here you can see the traditional lands of the Dene Athabascan peoples in red tones, which within themselves have a great deal of diversity in culture, customs, and language. Visit this interactive version of the map online: <http://www.alaskool.org/language/languagemap/index.html>



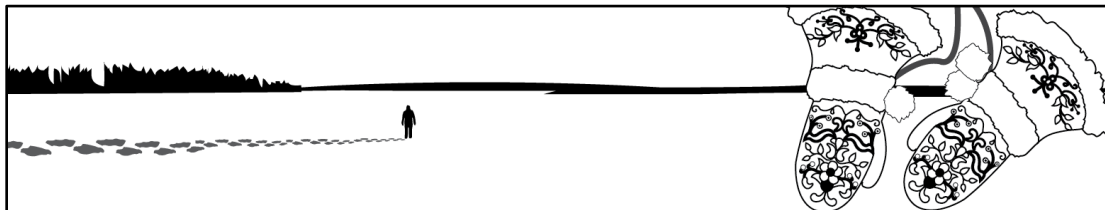
Related to beading, there are distinct styles, designs and techniques within the communities of Dene Athabascans. Experienced Dene Athabascan beaders can recognize where a piece of bead work originated, or the specific artist who made it, based on design, density of bead work, colors used, and symbolism. For example, the Gwich'in emphasize symbology and meaning in the designs, and fill the objects they are beading with more elements than beaders from other Dene Athabascan areas. This may be because historically the peoples of the more Northern regions had longer winters to fill indoors, allowing more time to dedicate to beading and skin sewing.

Social Skill Development: There are many opportunities through the lessons to intentionally practice social skills that will support developing skills of empathy, reciprocity, independence, and confidence. Practice how to speak respectfully to an Elder or culture bearer who comes as a guest, and practice helping each other during the activities. These are core skills to being part of a community, and will serve the student well in their adult years. [These skills relate to the Alaska Content Standards: Skills for a Healthy Life.](#)

Goal Setting: Goal setting and problem solving are key skills for young adults as they navigate transition. The steps of setting a goal, knowing the actions you will take to achieve it, and reflection on reaching the target are key to effective goal setting. Knowing how to set achievable goals is an important way to build self-efficacy, confidence, and independence. The structure of the lessons reinforces goal setting skills by being transparent to the students about the learning objectives and how the learning objectives will be met. Every lesson also contains a brief reflection on what they learned in the lesson, and if the learning objectives were met. The lessons always start by asking what the students already know so that the content can be tailored to build on the individual experience level of the students.

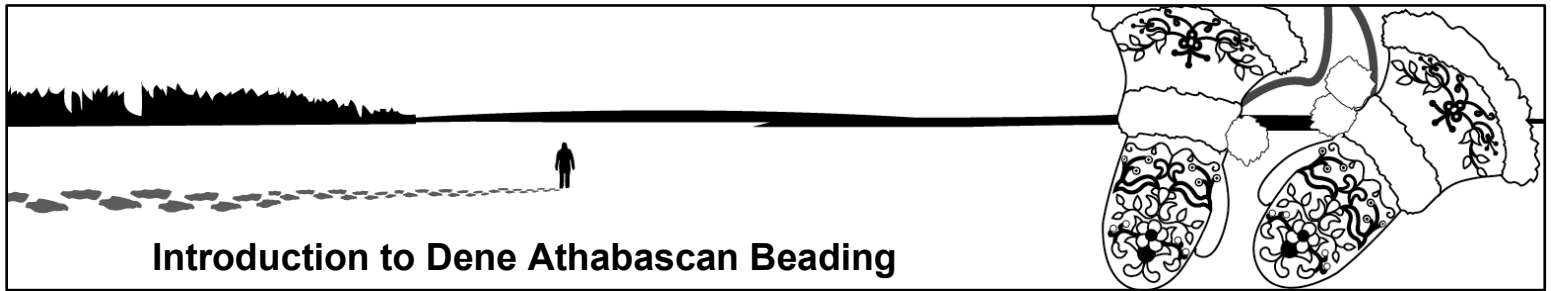
Learning Stories: Indigenous ways of teaching and learning depend on stories passed down from the Elders to the next generations. Bringing in culture bearers, Elders, and other kinds of experts can bring the content to life and make it more memorable. Having the students share stories can be important for connecting content to their personal experiences. You can find excellent guidance for how to invite an Elder or culture bearer in the classroom in the introduction to the *Predicting Weather* curriculum on page 3 (accessed 4/1/22): <http://ankn.uaf.edu/Curriculum/Units/PredictingWeather/PredictingWeather.pdf>

Note about the Header Image



This image represents the land in winter in interior Alaska and acknowledges the original Dene Athabascan peoples with the traditional moose skin beaded mittens. The mittens graphic was based on the Gwich'in mittens in the Smithsonian Arctic Collection (National Museum of Natural History; Museum ID Number: 161647.000)

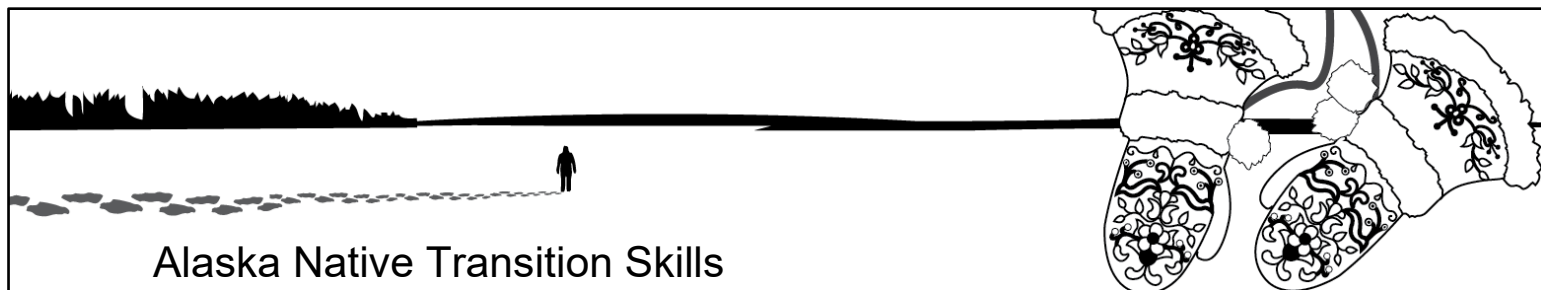
The image was created by Rain Van Den Berg for use in this curriculum.



Introduction to Dene Athabascan Beading

This unit introduces the traditional art of beading and its significance to the Dene Athabascan peoples of Interior Alaska.

Lesson	Related Handouts
1. Introduction to Dene Athabascan Beading	
2. The Importance of Beading in Dene Athabascan Cultures	<i>Historical Objects Beading Teaching Cards</i> (Teacher Resource)
3. Featured Artist: Rochelle Adams (Gwich'in)	<i>Artist Profile: Rochelle Adams</i> Presentation (Teacher Resource) <i>Artist Biography Rochelle Adams</i> (Teacher Resource)
4. Featured Artist: Emma Hildebrand (Koyukon)	<i>Artist Profile: Emma Hildebrand</i> Presentation (Teacher Resource) <i>Artist Biography Emma Hildebrand</i> (Teacher Resource)
5. Getting Started with Beads	<i>Getting to Know Beads</i> (Student Handout)
6. Beading Materials and Tools	<i>Beading Materials and Tools Matching Game</i> (Teacher Resource)
7. Dene Athabascan Designs	<i>Choose Your Design</i> (Student Handout) <i>Dene Athabascan Designs</i> Presentation (Teacher Resource)
8. Building Beading Skills	<i>Getting Ready to Bead</i> (Student Handout)
9. Practice: Let's Start Beading	<i>Let's Start Beading</i> (Student Handout)
10. Beading as a Creative Industry	



Alaska Native Transition Skills

Beading in Dene Athabascan Cultures

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about the different kinds of beading done in the Dene Athabascan cultures, through stories and video.

Alaska Cultural Standards

- A1, A6, B2, C3, D3, D5, E1, E4, E6, E8

Dene Athabascan Values Related to this Lesson

- Self-sufficiency and Hard Work
- Care and Provision for the Family
- Sharing and Caring
- Respect for Elders and Others
- Respect for the Land and Nature
- Practice of Native Traditions
- Honoring Ancestors
- Spirituality

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Define what beading means.
- Define what quill work is.
- Define what caribou tufting is.
- Describe at least three ways beading, quill work, and caribou tufting is used in Dene Athabascan communities.
- Describe the kinds of designs that are traditionally used in Dene Athabascan communities.

Materials

- Gather examples of items that have been beaded in Dene Athabascan designs to show to the students.

Vocabulary

Bead	A small piece of glass or similar material, usually a round shape with a hole through it to be strung as in an earring or necklace, or to be sewn onto fabric or leather.
Beading	Refers to the act of sewing beads to fabric or leather or stringing beads together.

Design	The arrangement of lines, color, and shapes to make a pattern.
Embroidery	Sewing designs onto fabric or material. Bead embroidery sews designs onto a background fabric using beads.
Geometric	Design using shapes like rectangles, squares, and straight lines to make a pattern. Early Athabascan artists focused on these kinds of designs using quills and in early use of beads. Contemporary artists may mix in geometric designs with floral or other designs.
Hair Tufting	A way of using caribou, deer, moose or sheep hair in designs that was developed in the Yukon Territory. The hair from these animals is hollow, which allows it to be cinched and tied tightly, creating the tuft. It involves sewing a tufting (small bundle) of hair down, and then trimming it to a desired shape. Tufted hair can be dyed different colors.
Material	Refers to what something is made from. Examples of different kinds of materials are shells, fabric, fibers, skins, fur, hair, and quills.
Pre-contact	A way to describe the times before the Athabascan peoples with outside cultures (Russian/European).
Quillwork	The use of porcupine quills in designs. Quills were used before seed beads were introduced, and continue to be used in designs. The designs of early work with seed beads were done to look like quills.
Sew, sewing	Join, fasten, or repair (something) by making stitches with a needle and thread or a sewing machine.
Technique	A specific way of doing something. Example: There are many ways to attach beads to fabric, but the Athabascan beaders used specific traditional techniques (ways). When you learn from a culture bearer, they will show you their techniques that were passed down to them.

Activities and Adaptations

- **Share the goal of today's lesson:** "Today we are going to start to learn about beading, and what the Dene Athabascan peoples liked to bead. To learn about this, we will watch some videos and share ideas. By the end of this lesson, you will be able to describe what beading, quill work, and caribou tufting are; describe at least three ways beading, quill work and caribou tufting are used in Dene Athabascan communities; and describe common designs used by Dene Athabascan artists."
- **Begin by finding out what students already know by asking the following questions:**
 - What are beads? What are they made from? (*Glass, stone, shell, plastic...*)
 - What are traditional Dene Athabascan things are decorated with beads? (*Moccasins, bags, mittens, parkas, jewelry*)
 - Before contact with Russians and Europeans introduced seed beads, what do you think Athabascans used for their designs? (*Shells, caribou fur "tufting", porcupine quills, seeds and more. Sinew was used instead of thread.*)

- How is beading done? (*Beads are sewn to fabric or leather using needles and a strong, thin thread. Beads can also be strung together or sewn together to make earrings and other jewelry.*)
- **Connect the Values of today's lesson with the objectives, pick at least two to highlight:**
 - Self-sufficiency and Hard Work: *Beading takes practice to build the skills needed to be a good beader. Learning the traditional techniques is an important way to show respect for the Ancestors that passed down their knowledge about beading.*
 - Care and Provision for the Family: *The people who make our moccasins and other special beaded objects are showing their love by making these objects for us.*
 - Sharing and Caring: *Making and sharing traditionally beaded objects is a special way to honor the ways that our Ancestors have taught us. This form of traditional art adds beauty to our everyday life.*
 - Respect for Elders and Others: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
 - Respect for the Land and Nature: *Many Dene Athabascan designs feature things from nature like flowers and leaves. Moose skin is commonly used in making moccasins, clothing, and other objects that are beaded. Beading artists need to respect the materials they use and where they come from. They do this by only taking and using what they need, and by caring for the land which provides the materials they use.*
 - Practice of Native Traditions: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
 - Honoring Ancestors: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
 - Spirituality: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading can be one way to connect to our Ancestors and our spirituality.*
- **Introduction/Teaching Points:**
 - Though materials, designs, and types of items made have changed, bead embroidery has long been the most important art form of the Dene Athabascan people. *Bead embroidery* is when designs are sewn using beads onto fabric or skins.
 - Before contact with people from Europe, called “pre-contact,” the Dene Athabascans were very good at sewing. They made beautiful clothing that kept them warm and dry throughout the changing seasons and cold conditions in interior Alaska. They decorated their clothing, bags, and other objects with quills, dentalium shells, seeds, and small stones. These designs made the clothing and objects more beautiful, and helped show the area you were from by the style and choice of designs. The quill work designs were more geometric, and the colors were limited to plants used to dye them different colors.

- Russian traders and other European people began trading with the Dene Athabascans and introduced glass beads. At first, the beads were larger, and mostly available in red, blue, and white. Dene Athabascans have been open to new ideas and quickly began using the beads in the way they had used quills and other decorations. The designs continued to be geometric.
- Over time, smaller glass seed beads in a large variety of colors were brought from Europe. Also, designs focusing on flowers and plants became popular.
- Beads were a sign of wealth, and were used as money. Leaders wore a type of necklace made of dentalium shells to show their status in the community.
- **Beading today**
 - Dene Athabascan beading continues to grow and change as new artists honor traditional designs and create new ones. Artists make many kinds of objects with beadwork, quillwork, and caribou hair tufting including clothing, regalia, moccasins, jewelry, rifle cases, bags, wallets, cell phone covers, credit card holders, and key chains.
 - Experienced beaders can look at a piece of beadwork and recognize the region or village it came from. They may recognize the work of an individual artist. They can tell this from the colors used, the types of designs used, the size of the beads used, the way fill work is done, or by signature design elements (an example of this is Rochelle Adam's grandmother Charlotte Adams always has a pop of orange in her pieces.)
 - **Watch the Indie Alaska video about Athabascan beading artist Angela Gonzalez 2021 (4:50):** <https://www.pbs.org/video/beaded-flowers-and-birds-are-a-cultural-link-for-this-artist-ie6mc8/>
 - **Watch the video of artist Selina Alexander demonstrating "Caribou Hair Tufting" (1:00)** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5brTHbTDWcw&t=4s>
 - **Watch the slide show narrated by the Koyukon Athabascan artist Emma Hildebrand (First 20 minutes of an hour long interview).** Emma Hildebrand uses a blend of traditional and contemporary designs, with traditional techniques. As you watch, pause to point out how the bead work, different kinds of quill work, and caribou tufting are used together in both traditional and contemporary designs.
https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=272293914389786
 - **Some things to share about beading as you look at examples** (From Athabascan Beading by Lilly Pitka, 1978).
 - Beaders start by deciding what they will make, and then what background they will be beading onto. Beaders usually use moose hide, felt or velvet. In the past, some beaders first sewed beads onto fabric, then attached that to moosehide moccasins or clothing, but now most artists bead directly onto the skins. If felt is used, they put brown paper on the back side to make the felt stiffer to work with. When using felt, most artists fill in with white beads or another color to hide the felt.
 - The design is marked onto the hide or felt with a marker. Many beaders prefer to use red for this. Some use little dots that are covered with the beads, as lines may show

and are hard to erase afterwards. In the past, designs were drawn on with a flour and water mixture drawn on with a sharp stick. After that, small stitches were made with thread to create the outline to be beaded.

- Most beaders use a two-thread technique. Two needles are threaded with double thread. One is used to hold the beads, and the second goes up and down to tack the beaded strand into place. In the past, beaders used moose sinew for the thread that the beads went on, sewed on with cotton thread. Now, most use a beading thread called Nymo thread, which is very sturdy and strong.
- Most beaders start by doing the main outlines of the design, then filling in color (such as outlining the flowers, then filling the petals), and then lastly they fill in the white beads that are the background of the design.
- If there are two matching items to be beaded, such as mittens or moccasins, symmetry is important. The artists take great care to make the designs match. One method of assuring a match is to bead one item, then take it and press it firmly into the skins of the second item to be beaded so that it leaves an imprint that can be drawn in.

Learning stories

- Ask the students to share if they have family members that bead, and what they make.
- Interview with Angela Łot'oydaatIno Gonzalez: Listen to this radio interview about why she loves to teach beading online (5:29)
<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/exploring-the-intersection-where-indigenous-tradition-and-technology-meet-1.5032894/why-angela-gonzalez-shares-her-beading-bliss-tutorials-online-1.5032895> Talk about why Angela feels beading is important, and why she enjoys sharing this art with others. Explore more about Angela through the other links and video clips in this blog entry on her blog: *Lessons from Beading 100 Pairs of Moccasins*: <https://athabascanwoman.com/?p=4549>
- Invite a local Alaska Native leader, Elder, or culture bearer who beads to share about what they like to bead and how they learned to bead. Ask them to bring examples that the students can see and feel.

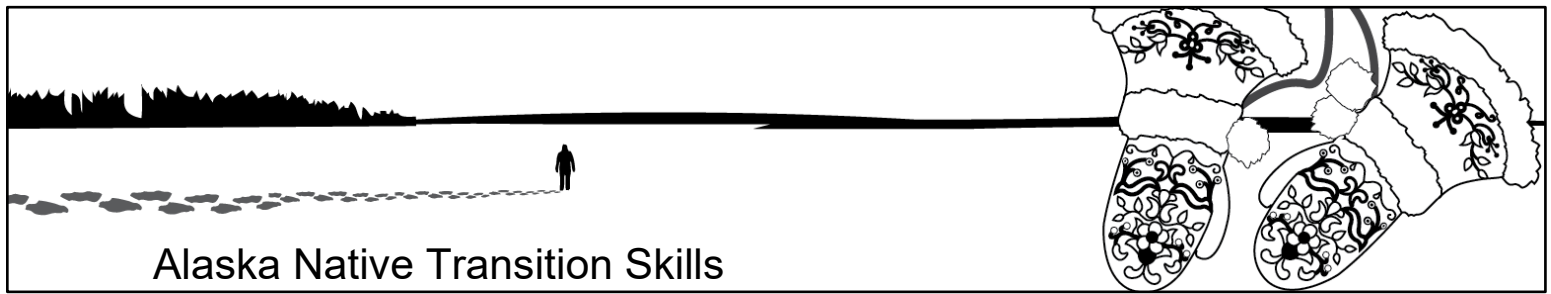
Evaluation

At the end of the lesson, ask the students these questions:

- What does it mean to bead or do beading?
- What is quillwork?
- What is caribou tufting?
- What are some things that may be decorated with beads, quills, and tufting, or made from beads? How do Dene Athabaskan peoples use beads?
- What are some popular designs seen in traditional Dene Athabaskan beading?

Additional Resources

- **Interview with Emma Hildebrand** (Koyukon Athabascan) (1:06:31): In this video, Emma shares slides about her work doing skin sewing, quill work, and caribou tufting: https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=272293914389786
- **A Special Gift: The Kutchin Beadwork Tradition** by Kate Duncan (1997) with beautiful pictures and information about Gwich'in beading.
- **Athabascan Woman Blog**: Angela Łot'oydaatlno Gonzalez is a beader, writer, author and photographer. Her blog has many entries about beading, with photographs. <https://athabascanwoman.com/>
This blog entry has many excellent links about Angela's work, and why she loves beading. *Lessons from Beading 100 Pairs of Moccasins*: <https://athabascanwoman.com/?p=4549>
- **Athabascan Moose Hide Tanning and Sewing** (Learning Lab by the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center) has some examples of beaded objects with information from Elders. <https://learninglab.si.edu/collections/athabascan-moosehide-tanning-sewing/5cU6LBY0YnYrcsso>
- **Creating Quillwork** Series: By the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center. This series of videos brought together three current quill work artists and shows exploration of techniques used traditionally and currently. The first video is an overview of the project, with some pictures from the Smithsonian collection: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfNC3R7ypI8&t=66s> . You can find the series on their Youtube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCNpC1tX-kqJaSU7ZSxUWAfA/videos>
- **Old Art of Athabascan Quillwork Rediscovered**, 2016 ADN Article by Shehla Anjum: <https://www.adn.com/arts/article/old-art-athabascan-quillwork-rediscovered/2014/04/12/>
- **Athabascan Beadwork** Blog Post (2019) from "Josie's Explorations into Art" shows some beautiful examples of beadwork, including a stunning caribou completed by her aunt Lucy Ridderbush: <https://jakwayi.home.blog/2019/04/18/athabascan-beadwork/>



Alaska Native Transition Skills

The Importance of Beading in Dene Athabascan Cultures, Past and Present

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about the different kinds of beading done in the Dene Athabascan cultures in the past and why beading has been important to the people, through stories and video.

Alaska Cultural Standards

- A1, A6, B2, C3, D3, D5, E1, E4, E6, E8

Dene Athabascan Values Related to this Lesson

- Self-sufficiency and Hard Work
- Care and Provision for the Family
- Sharing and Caring
- Respect for Elders and Others
- Respect for the Land and Nature
- Practice of Native Traditions
- Honoring Ancestors
- Spirituality

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Describe how beaded objects were used in everyday life in the past
- Describe the purpose and materials used in historic beaded objects in an activity.

Materials

- Teacher Handout: *Athabascan Beading Historical Examples Teaching Cards* **NOTE: These are made to be printed 2-sided, so that the back information matches the picture on front. If you read it in the document, it may look like the description is flipped from the object it describes. Note these are not tagged for accessibility as they are meant to be printed.**
- Gather physical examples or examples from online of Dene Athabascan beadwork.

Vocabulary

Bead	A small piece of glass or similar material, usually a round shape with a hole through it to be strung as in an earring or necklace, or to be sewn onto fabric or leather.
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Beading	Refers to the act of sewing beads to fabric or leather or stringing beads together.
Historic	Something that is from the past that was important and may continue to be important to people now. Something that was made by people that came before us.
Material	Refers to what something is made from. Examples of different kinds of materials are shells, fabric, fibers, skins, fur, hair, and quills.
Sew, sewing	Join, fasten, or repair (something) by making stitches with a needle and thread or a sewing machine.
Technique	A specific way of doing something. Example: There are many ways to attach beads to fabric, but the Athabascan beaders used specific traditional techniques (ways). When you learn from a culture bearer, they will show you their techniques that were passed down to them.
Tunic	A long shirt, usually worn over pants.

Activities and Adaptations

- **Share the goal of today's lesson:** "Today we are going to learn more about what earlier Dene Athabascan peoples liked to make and bead and why it was important to them. To learn about this, we will look at examples of pieces from the Smithsonian Arctic Collection. By the end of this lesson, you will be able to describe how beaded objects were used in everyday life in the past, and describe the purpose and materials used in historic beaded objects in an activity."
- **Begin by finding out what students already know by asking the following questions:**
 - Before there were stores, people had to make everything for themselves from the materials the land provided. Everything we needed was here, but it took hard work to make everything needed for hunting, dancing, eating, and playing. What kinds of things did the people make for themselves for living? *[Clothing, hunting/fishing tools, bags, baskets, items used in ceremonies like drums, dancing clothes...]*
 - What are traditional Dene Athabascan items that were decorated with beads? What are these things made out of? *(Boots/Moccasin, gloves, coats: Hide/Fur. Beads were made from glass, porcupine quills, and shells.)*
 - Why do you think the Dene Athabascan peoples liked to use beadwork on everyday items? *(To make them beautiful, to show status, to show family relationships, to connect to Ancestors, to connect to the land...)*
- **Connect the Values of today's lesson with the objectives, pick at least two to highlight:**
 - Self-sufficiency and Hard Work: *Beading takes practice to build the skills needed to be a good beader. Learning the traditional techniques is an important way to show respect for the Ancestors that passed down their knowledge about beading.*

- Care and Provision for the Family: *The people who make our moccasins and other special beaded objects are showing their love by making these objects for us.*
- Sharing and Caring: *Making and sharing traditionally beaded objects is a special way to honor the ways that our Ancestors have taught us. This form of traditional art adds beauty to our everyday life.*
- Respect for Elders and Others: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
- Respect for the Land and Nature: *Many Dene Athabascan designs feature things from nature like flowers and leaves. Moose hide is commonly used in making moccasins, clothing, and other objects that are beaded. Beading artists need to respect the materials they use and where they come from. They do this by only taking and using what they need, and by caring for the land which provides the materials they use.*
- Practice of Native Traditions: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
- Honoring Ancestors: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
- Spirituality: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading can be one way to connect to our Ancestors and our spirituality.*
- **Show and talk about the historical object cards with students.** For each card, ask the students questions and try to build on their ideas as you share the information about the objects. Talk about how the items are different or the same as what is used for the same purpose in present day.

Learning stories

- Invite a local Alaska Native leader, Elder, or culture to share a story that shows how important beading has been to the Dene Athabascan peoples.
- Watch these videos of Dene Athabascan dance and look for all of the ways beading is used in what people are wearing. Notice the quillwork and the beading. Compare what you see in these videos with the objects seen in the Historical Teaching Cards. What is similar? What is different?
 - Athabascan Indians Dancing (0:59): The video was taken during Grandma Evelyn Alexander's funeral potlatch in Minto, AK, in 2009.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KO2yZ4AhhYw&t=14s>
 - Athabascan dance group Ida'ina K'eljeshna at AFN convention in 2015 (0:30):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rJoVil7TQs&t=3s>

Evaluation

At the end of the lesson, ask the students these questions:

- What kinds of things were decorated with beads by Dene Athabascan peoples in the past?
- What were beads made from in the past?
- Why did the Dene Athabascan peoples like to bead their clothing and other objects?

Additional Resources

- **Athabascan Moose Hide Tanning and Sewing** (Learning Lab by the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center) has some examples of beaded objects with information from Elders. <https://learninglab.si.edu/collections/athabascan-moosehide-tanning-sewing/5cU6LBY0YnYrcsso>
- **Smithsonian Learning Lab:** There are many more examples of Dene Athabascan and Gwich'in traditional objects at this page: <https://learninglab.si.edu/collections/the-dene-athabascan-peoples-and-their-cultures/ymRj9afV0WUrRCA2>

Note: Photos and some text were used for the teaching cards from this collection as allowed for educational purposes.

<https://naturalhistory.si.edu/research/anthropology/collections-and-archives-access/rights-and-reproductions>



Baby Strap

tł'ôot'aïi "baby strap" (Gwich'in)

Image Credit: Museum of Natural History; Museum ID Number: E238534

Links: <https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=307>



Moccasins

kwaiitryqh ch'ok "pointed moccasins" (Gwich'in)

Image Credit: National Museum of the American Indian; Museum ID Number: 059549.000

Links: <https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=126>

Moccasins (Gwich'in)

Ask

- How are these the same or different to moccasins you have seen before?
- What does it look like it is made out of?
- What is the beading design?

About this piece

This pair of Gwich'in caribou-skin moccasins has pointed toes, wraparound ankles made of soft traditional tanned hide and black wool tongue panels. The floral designs were made with glass beads with fancy metal beads inserted at the tips of leaves and petals. Making moccasins begins with brain-tanned caribou or moose skin. Beadwork starts with an outline of the design, and the pattern is then filled in row-by-row, stitching the beads with sinew, nylon thread, or dental floss.

Significance

Women make moccasins and other beaded items for special occasions, including memorial potlatches, dances, festivals, and the birth of a baby.

Baby Strap

Ask

- What kind of object is this?
- What does it look like it is made out of?

About this piece

A baby belt supports a young child as she rides on her mother's or sister's back. This Gwich'in style belt has square ends and short ties. The beading is an "old style" open floral pattern on black velveteen. The beads are strung on sinew and tied down with thread. Beaded red wool tassels hang from the belt, which is backed with smoked moose hide. It was made from hide so it would hold the baby securely.

Significance

In the past, the beads would have been attached using Moose sinew they prepared.

[This picture shows a woman from Fort Yukon using a baby strap to carry a child.](#)





Moccasins

katreth “moccasins” (Lower Tanana)

Image Credit: National Museum of the American Indian; Museum ID Number: 233079.000 Link: <https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=302>



Summer Moccasins

set “footwear” (Dena’ina)

Image Credit: National Museum of Natural History; Museum ID Number: E072503 Link: <https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=600>

Summer Moccasins

Ask

- How are these the same or different to moccasins you have seen before?
- What does it look like it is made out of?
- Why does it have strings that hang off the back?

About this piece

These Dena'ina women's moccasins for summer are made from tanned caribou hide on which small round scars left by a common parasite of the animal – the warble fly – can be seen. Late nineteenth-century tall moccasins like these echo an even older style of “moccasin-pants” that rose all the way to the waist. They are decorated with bands of glass trade beads that resemble designs that before European contact were made with dyed porcupine quills.

Significance

Elders said that the fringes of sinew on the back of each moccasin were added to “mess up the trail,” erasing the wearer's passage as she walked.

*Historical Beaded Items Teaching Cards from the Alaska Native Transition Skills curriculum, 2022, Van Den Berg / Adams;
University of Alaska Anchorage Center for Human Development.*

Moccasins (Lower Tanana)

Ask

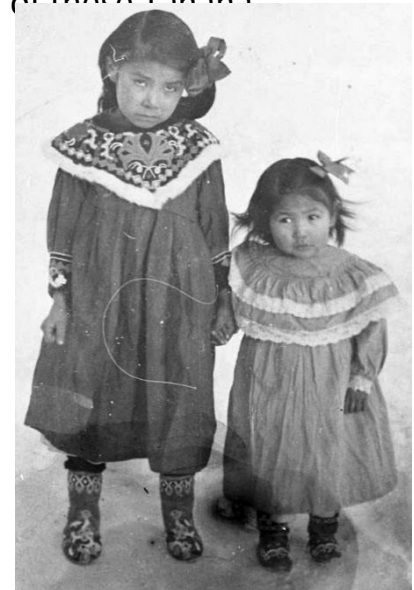
- How are these the same or different to moccasins you have seen before?
- What does it look like it is made out of?
- What do you notice about the designs?

About these pieces

Round-toed slippers, often trimmed with rabbit or other fur, are a popular contemporary fashion and often worn for dancing. Each of these Tanana slippers from the 1920s was stitched together from two pattern pieces of soft-tanned moose or caribou skin.

Significance

The beaded floral designs are in an “old-time” style, recognized in part by the way the stems connect to the flowers instead of being slightly separated.



[Girls wearing beaded moccasins.](#) Fort Yukon, c1941.

*Historical Beaded Items Teaching Cards from the Alaska Native Transition Skills curriculum, 2022, Van Den Berg / Adams;
University of Alaska Anchorage Center for Human Development.*



Moose Skin Mittens

dinjik dhah dzirh “moose-skin mittens” (Gwich'in)

Image Credit: National Museum of Natural History; Museum ID Number: 161647.000 Links: <https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=258>



Chief's Coat

deniigi zes dghaec “Chief's coat” (Ahtna)

Image Credit: National Museum of the American Indian (ID 214801.000)
Link: <https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=477>

Chief's Coat

Ask

- What kind of clothing is this?
- What does it look like it is made out of?

About this piece

At Athabascan potlatches and other special occasions, men of influence, wealth, and oratorical skill – “big, strong people,” in one Elder’s phrase – wear dentalium-shell necklaces and beaded moose-hide jackets known as chiefs’ coats. This example is from the Ahtna. The coats, usually trimmed with beaver or otter fur, are symbols of personal prestige and connection to ancestors.

Significance

Traditional Chief Dr Rev Trimble Gilbert said that when a young man is about to assume leadership in his community his grandmother will make him a jacket like this to put on in front of a gathering of the people, “so everybody will know he will be the chief.”

*Historical Beaded Items Teaching Cards from the Alaska Native Transition Skills curriculum, 2022, Van Den Berg / Adams;
University of Alaska Anchorage Center for Human Development.*

Moose Skin Mittens

Ask

- What kind of object is this?
- What is it used for?
- What does it look like it is made out of?

About these pieces

Moose-skin mittens, often beaded with leaf and flower designs, are designed for the deep cold of northern Athabascan country. These long, gauntlet-style Gwich’in mittens have wide tops to accommodate the sleeves of a parka. Bands of beaver fur encircle the cuff and wrist, and the braided yarn neck string is decorated with pompoms. Eliza Jones said, “When it’s windy, this beaver fur right here is good to hold against your face to warm it up.” Small glass and metal beads were used to work the intricate floral patterns.

Elder Quote

“Dinjik dhah dzirh [moose-skin mittens]. Dzirh tǵ’yàa [mitten strings]. Sometimes you put rabbit skin inside. But when there are no rabbit skins they use caribou hair; they cut it and put it inside. When they travel, they don’t get cold.”

-Trimble Gilbert, 2004

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Tunic

dag “parka, coat, shirt” (Deg Xinag)

Image Credit: Source: National Museum of Natural History (ID E064278)

Link: <https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=141>



Tunic

ch'adhah ik “skin dress” (Gwich'in)

Image Credit: National Museum of Natural History (ID ET001857A)

Link: <https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=4>

Tunic (Gwich'in)

Ask

- What is this?
- What does it look like it is made out of?
- What do you notice about the design of the bead work?

About this piece

This tunic (shirt) is made from moose hide, with a strip of caribou hide with beads and fringe around the bottom. Shells are incorporated into the beadwork, and those would have been traded with tribes living in coastal areas.

Significance

The beaded strap around the neck is a special piece worn by Elders and leaders for formal occasions. It would have been a special gift to pass down to younger people. “That’s a gift, just like beads, and like wisdom is given to you, so you can do something with it for the future generations. These are very special things. A lot of times a chief—Chief Andrew and Peter John I think—they handed it to another chief. That’s a special gift.”
—Trimble Gilbert

*Historical Beaded Items Teaching Cards from the Alaska Native Transition Skills curriculum, 2022, Van Den Berg / Adams;
University of Alaska Anchorage Center for Human Development.*

Tunic

Ask

- What is this?
- What does it look like it is made out of?
- What do you notice about the design of the bead work?

About this piece

This man’s tunic, made of moose hide with long fringes and colorful beadwork, is a style that Alaskan Athabascans stopped making around the end of the 19th century. Before glass beads became available from fur traders, women embroidered tunics with dyed porcupine quills.



[A Gwich'in man in traditional clothes.](#) C1879.

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University of Alaska Anchorage Center for Human Development.*



Beaded Hat

ts'eh nedenaalt'onee "beaded hat"
(Koyukon-Upper, Central & Lower)

Image Credit: National Museum of Natural History (ID E129336).
Link: <https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=236>



Moccasin Pants

vitl'o xelanh "trousers with attached soles/boots"
(Deg Xinag)

Image Credit: National Museum of Natural History (ID E064279)
Link: <https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=142>

Moccasin Pants

Ask

- What kind of clothes are these?
- What does it look like they are made from?
- What do you notice about the bead designs?

About this piece

This pair of summer moccasin trousers—pants with moccasin feet attached—is made of moose hide and decorated with bands of yellow, blue, white, and red trade beads.

Significance

In the past, men and women of all Alaskan Athabascan groups wore similar moccasin trousers and tunics.

Moccasin trousers often had tanned caribou skin leggings and moose hide soles. Hair was left on the caribou skins when making winter trousers, and turned to the inside. Upper Tanana people wore winter trousers made of mountain sheep skins and put rabbit fur inside to insulate their feet.

Beaded Hat (“Tin Hat”)

Ask

- What kind of clothing is this?
- What does it look like it is made from?
- What do you notice about the bead designs?

About this piece

“Tin hats” are beaded velvet caps with birch bark sewn inside for stiffening. They were the Athabascan version of men’s Victorian-era “smoking hats” that Scotch fur traders wore in the late 19th century. Shiny metal beads were often used, giving rise to the “tin” part of the name. Elders commented that the checkerboard medallion seen on this 1880s Koyukon hat represents a geometric style of beading that is no longer popular.



[Chief Van of Doyon and two other men. Tanana, circa 1900.](#)



Fire Bag

viqizdluyi “in it are things” (Dena’ina, Inland dialect)

Image Credit: National Museum of Natural History (ID E073048)

Link: <https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=606>



Bag

nołketl'e “bag” (Upper Koyukon)

Image Credit: National Museum of Natural History (ID E012372)

Link: <https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=32>

Bag

Ask

- What is this a picture of?
- What do you think it was used for?
- What does it look like it is made of?
- How is this different than bags we use to carry things now?

About this piece

A common style of bag that was used to carry special valuable items. This one is made from mink, with a moose hide strap.

Significance

The fringe is made from trade glass beads strung on linen thread. Linen thread used to be common for beading but isn't available now.

Fire Bag

Ask

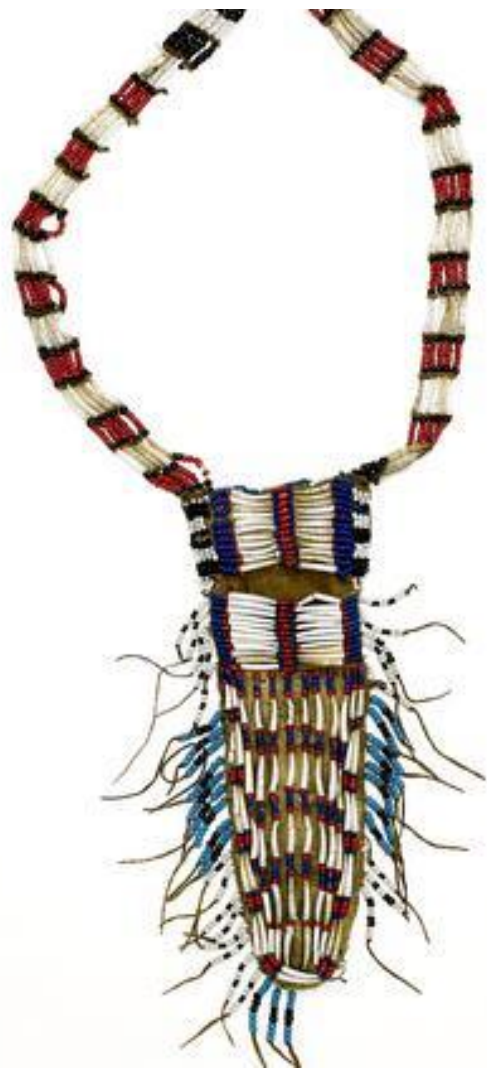
- What is this a picture of?
- What do you think it was used for?
- What does it look like it is made of?

About this piece

One of a man's essential items was a small "fire bag" to hold chert and steel for striking sparks and tinder such as wood shavings and powered birch fungus. This fire bag – probably from the Dena'ina people – is made of tanned leather with a red wool strap, ornamented with white dentalium shells and with red and blue faceted glass beads.

Significance

Dentalium shells from the Northwest Coast were a prized trade item among Athabascan peoples, and their use on this bag may indicate wealth and status. It would have been worn on important occasions such as a potlatch.



Knife Sheath

saay let “knife sheath” (Upper Koyukon)

Image Credit: National Museum of Natural History (D ET001843)

Link: <https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=3>



Women's Clothing Set

chik'ish “head hood” (Dena'ina, Outer Inlet dialect); *lugech'* “finger mittens” (Dena'ina); *set* “footwear” (Dena'ina); *k'iyagi yes* “knife case” (Dena'ina, Upper Inlet dialect)

Image Credit: National Museum of the American Indian (ID 151481.000)

Link: <https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=457>

Women's Clothing Set

Ask

- What are all of the items in this picture?
- What do you notice about the beading designs?
- What does it look like they are made of?

About this piece

This complete set of summer ceremonial clothing, stylistically Dena'ina, is made of supple, brain-tanned caribou hide and includes a hood, tunic, moccasin boots, gloves, and knife sheath. A man's tunic usually came down to about the knee and was pointed on the bottom in both front and back; a woman's tunic extended to the ankles with a long point in back and a relatively straight hem in front, as on this example.

Significance

In the Athabascan tradition, young women took time away when they went through puberty to learn the skills she needed to be a wife and mother and female tribal member. It was a special time, and this clothing may have been worn by a young woman during that time.

*Historical Beaded Items Teaching Cards from the Alaska Native Transition Skills curriculum, 2022, Van Den Berg / Adams;
University of Alaska Anchorage Center for Human Development.*

Knife Sheath

Ask

- What is this?
- What is it used for?
- What does it look like it is made out of?
- What do you notice about the beaded designs?

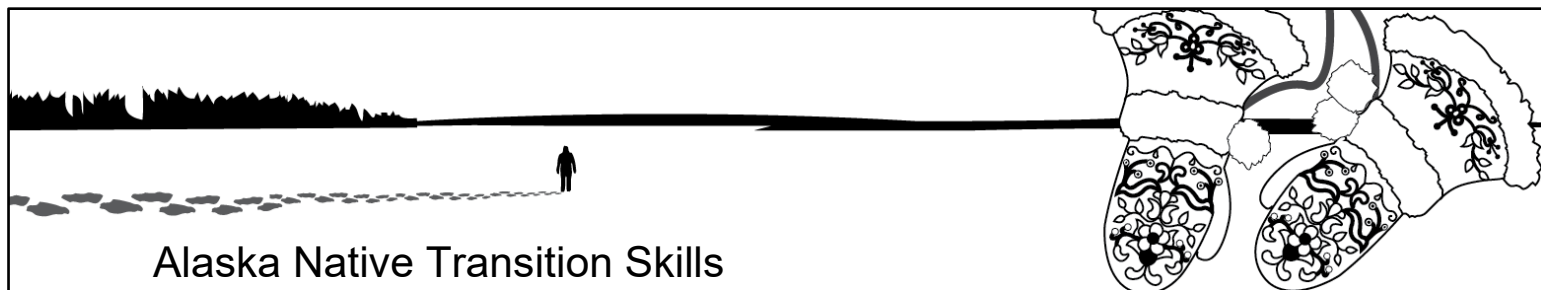
About this piece

This is a knife case that would have been worn during special ceremonies by a chief or leader. It is made of moose hide, with shell beads (called dentalia) which were very valuable. This held a special knife called a *Neetkk'aa tl'otl'eghe* [knife with the handle split and curled in opposite directions (double spiral)].

Significance

It was worn so that the knife would be on the side you pick up your knife from (for most people that is the left side). The people traded for beads and shell (dentalia) beads, which came from the coastal areas.

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Alaska Native Transition Skills

Artist Profile: Gwich'in Beading Artist Rochelle Adams

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about Gwich'in beading artist Rochelle Adams. The artist shares about how she started beading and what she loves about it, as well as advice for people who are starting to learn beading.

Alaska Cultural Standards

- A1, A2, A3, B2, D3, E1, E7, E8

Athabascan Values Related to this Lesson

- Self-sufficiency and Hard Work
- Care and Provision for the Family
- Sharing and Caring
- Respect for Elders and Others
- Respect for the Land and Nature
- Practice of Native Traditions
- Honoring Ancestors
- Spirituality

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Describe how Rochelle Adams learned to bead, and why she likes to work in her traditional ways.
- Explain the advice Rochelle Adams gives people who are learning to bead.

Materials

- Presentation: *An Interview with Gwich'in Artist Rochelle Adams*
- Teacher Resource: *Biography of Rochelle Adams*

Vocabulary

Bead	A small piece of glass or similar material, usually a round shape with a hole through it to be strung as in an earring or necklace, or to be sewn onto fabric or leather.
Beading	Refers to the act of sewing beads to fabric or leather or stringing beads together.
Linguist	Someone who studies languages. Rochelle is involved in the effort in Alaska to preserve, and promote the use and learning of Alaska Native languages.

Material	Refers to what something is made from. Examples of different kinds of materials are metal, fabric, fibers, plastic, fur, leather, and glass.
Quill work	The use of porcupine quills in designs. Quills were used before seed beads were introduced, and continue to be used in designs. The designs of early work with seed beads were done to look like quills.
Sew, sewing	Join, fasten, or repair (something) by making stitches with a needle and thread or a sewing machine.
Technique	A specific way of doing something. Example: There are many ways to attach beads to fabric, but the Athabascan beaders used specific traditional techniques (ways). When you learn from a culture bearer, they will show you their techniques that were passed down to them.

Activities and Adaptations

- **Share the goal of today's lesson:** "Today we are going to learn about Rochelle Adams, who is a Gwich'in artist, linguist, and cultural educator. We will read through an interview with Rochelle Adams about her beading and why she likes to work in her traditional ways. Learning about artists and how they work is one way to learn more about the art they make, and can inspire you to try it yourself. By the end of this lesson, you will be able to describe how Rochelle Adams learned to bead, and why she likes to work in traditional ways. You will get some advice for people who are learning to bead."
- **Begin by finding out what students already know by asking the following questions:**
 - How do you think artists get started and figure out what they like to make? *[By seeing Elders or family members making things, and wanting to try to make them too, or seeing a design or something that was made and wanting to learn to make it, to continue their culture...]*
 - What are traditional Dene Athabascan objects that are beaded? *(Beaded moccasins, moosehide gloves, rifle cases, clothing, jewelry...)*
- **Connect the Values of today's lesson with the objectives, pick at least two to highlight:**
 - Self-sufficiency and Hard Work: *Beading takes practice to build the skills needed to be a good beader. Learning the traditional techniques is an important way to show respect for the Ancestors that passed down their knowledge about beading.*
 - Care and Provision for the Family: *The people who make our moccasins and other special beaded objects are showing their love by making these objects for us.*
 - Sharing and Caring: *Making and sharing traditionally beaded objects is a special way to honor the ways that our Ancestors have taught us. This form of traditional art adds beauty to our everyday life.*
 - Respect for Elders and Others: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
 - Respect for the Land and Nature: *Many Dene Athabascan designs feature things from*

nature like flowers and leaves. Moose skin is commonly used in making moccasins, clothing, and other objects that are beaded. Beading artists need to respect the materials they use and where they come from. They do this by only taking and using what they need, and by caring for the land which provides the materials they use.

- Practice of Native Traditions: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
- Honoring Ancestors: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
- Spirituality: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading can be one way to connect to our Ancestors and our spirituality.*
- **Share the artist interview presentation, and discuss questions on last slide.** Take some time to look at the pictures of the things she has made that are on the slides. Discuss color choice and composition. What do they notice about the designs?
- **Depending on the students, check out the Molly of Denali Beading Game** on PBS Kids which gives a basic introduction to beading and design.
<https://pbskids.org/molly/games/beading>

Evaluation

At the end of the lesson, ask the students these questions:

- How did Rochelle Adams learn to bead?
- Why does she like to work in her traditional ways?
- What advice does Rochelle Adams give people who are learning to bead?

Additional Resources

- **Meet the Alaska Natives Who Gave ‘Molly of Denali’ an Authentic Voice:**
Article includes short biography of Rochelle’s involvement in the project.
<https://www.akbizmag.com/industry/media-arts/meet-the-alaska-natives-who-gave-molly-of-denali-an-authentic-voice/>
- **Molly of Denali Beading Game:** Look at simple designs and try designing your own. Rochelle Adams made the designs used in the game. Made for younger children.
<https://pbskids.org/molly/games/beading>
- **Article about Rochelle Adams residency with the Institute of American Indian Art:**
<https://iaia.edu/artist-in-residence/artist-in-residence-artists/>
- **Article about Gwich’in artist Elaine Alexie – Teet’it:** Angela Gonzalez of *Athabascan Woman Blog* (July 24, 2018) has a really good interview with photos of Elaine’s work and how she has developed as a beading artist.
<https://athabascanwoman.com/?paged=8>



Rochelle Adams

GWICH'IN ARTIST, LINGUIST, AND CULTURAL EDUCATOR

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Rochelle Adams

Rochelle “Geh Gii Ch’adzaa” Adams is an artist, linguist and cultural educator from the Interior Alaska villages of Beaver and Fort Yukon. She was raised living a traditional Athabascan lifestyle with her family following the seasonal cycles of hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering along the Yukon River.

[Click here to listen to Rochelle’s traditional introduction.](#)



Artist Rochelle Adams. Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

How did you learn to bead?

I grew up watching my great grandmother, Charlotte Adams, sewing and beading for our family.

When I was little, I remember crawling on the floor in my great grandma's house. She would sit in her recliner with her table by the window sewing. She was always sewing something. Beading, skin sewing, or sewing fur. She lived until she was 97, and she was always sewing or beading. It is how she cared for her family.

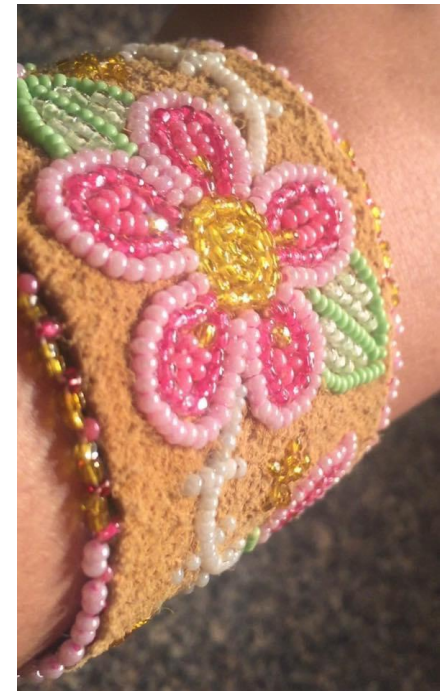


Brooch using tufting and beadwork.
Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

How did you learn to bead?

She made clothing and beautiful beaded pieces we still have today. Her caring for us was put into those clothes and things she made with every stitch. I learned from watching her.

When I was young, we had a bilingual program where we could learn language and cultural skills. We did some simple beading projects as part of that class.



Bracelet by Rochelle Adams. Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

How did you learn to bead?

I really got started when I was pregnant with my daughter, I felt this strong urge to start beading. Maybe it was my way of nesting.

I was self-taught. It takes a lot of patience. I would sometimes make a mistake and need to take out the whole piece. It takes a little bit of perfectionism.

My beading has improved over time with a lot of practice. Now, even the stitching on the back of the piece is beautiful.

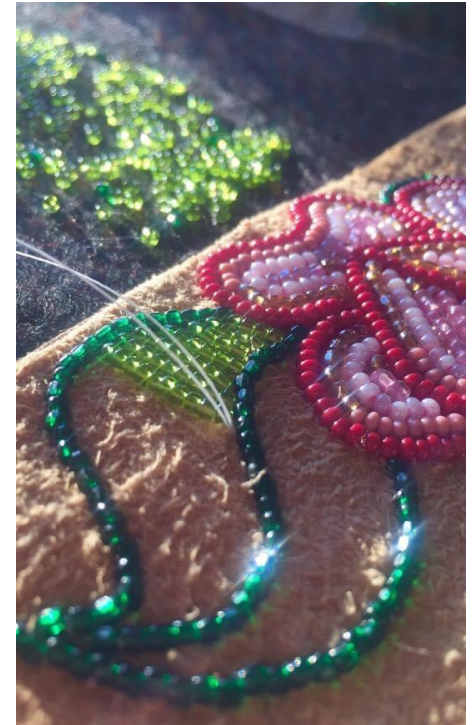


Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

What made you interested in beading?

It is such a powerful way to show your caring for my loved ones and family.

I was curious about my culture and beading is the top art form.

The Gwich'in have developed beautiful designs and ways of beading. I wanted to connect to my culture and heritage in this way.

I was fascinated by all the types of beads and how they can work together.



Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

What made you interested in beading?

Beading is an important way for me connect to my culture and to my identity as a Gwich'in woman.



Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

When did you start beading and developing your skills as an artist?

When I was pregnant with my first child I felt a strong urge to start beading. This feeling awakened within me.

I started teaching myself.

Over time, and with a lot of practice, I have developed my skills and have my own designs and signature style.

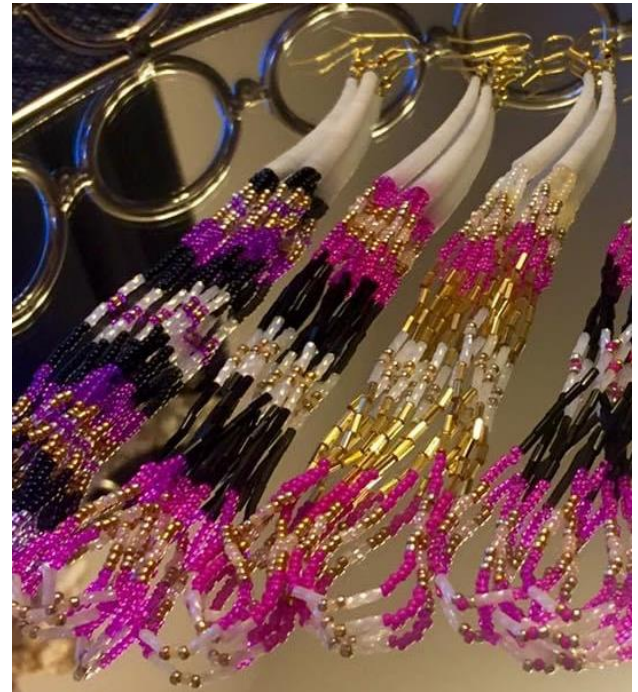


Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

When did you start beading and developing your skills as an artist?

I like to see early pieces I made. I can really see how my beading has changed over time.

Now that my children are older, I have more time to focus on my art.

I have been recognized for my bead work and received an honor to be an artist in residence at the Institute of American Indian Arts.

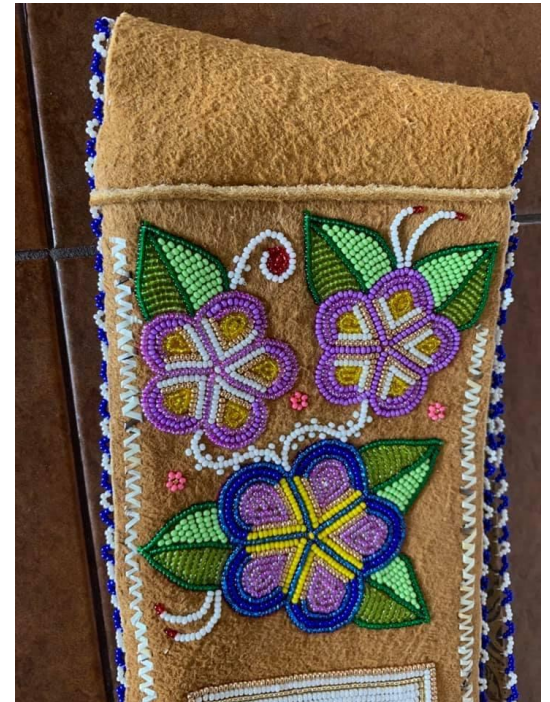


Artist Rochelle Adams with the beaded sash she made.
Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

What do you like about beading?

Beading connects me to the land.
When I am in nature, I look at the
plants and flower and colors and find
inspiration for my beading designs.

My work reflects my surroundings and
where I am from.



Beaded case by Rochelle Adams.
Photo provided by the artist and
used with permission.

Why do you like to work in traditional ways?

The beading connects me to my ancestors. My great-grandmother beaded, I bead, my children bead, and I hope to teach my grandchildren. Like a long chain of my ancestors and my culture going back and going forward.

I am proud of being Gwich'in, and the way our people developed this amazing art form.

Gwich'in beadwork is complex and full of beautiful symbology and forms.



Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

Why do you like to work in traditional ways?

I love to connect to the land through harvesting materials to use in my work. I harvest quills, salmon, moose, birch, spruce roots, and more.

It gives me peace and joy to harvest from the land with respect and stewardship as my people have for thousands of years.

It feels like a way to not just take, but give back when I make something that celebrates the beauty of the land.



Salmon skin. Photos provided by the artist and used with permission.

How do you decide what to make?

I make things for my children to make them something special to mark important moments in their lives. I made my daughter a beaded capelet to celebrate her graduation. I made my boys beaded vests.

I may make something when the inspiration hits, such as making jewelry.



Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

How do you decide what to make?

Sometimes I am inspired by the materials. For awhile I was making a lot of pieces on birch bark.



Beaded birch baskets by Rochelle Adams. Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

How do you pick your designs?

It depends on what you are making. If you are honoring a loved one who has passed, you use the colors they liked or an animal or design that had meaning for them.

My children are named for the elements, so my designs and color choices for their regalia reflect that.

When a piece is commissioned, I work with the person to choose the colors and designs.



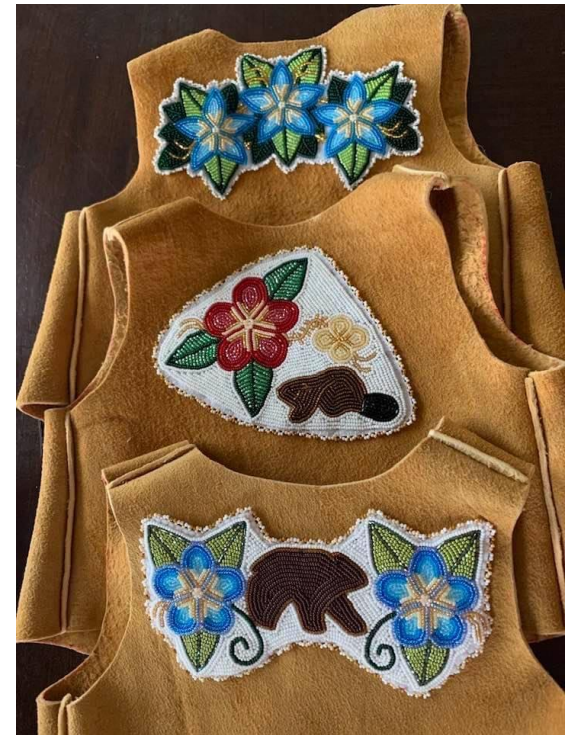
Necklace by Rochelle Adams. Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

How do you pick your designs?

Sharing patterns is a kind of love language.

Sometimes if you are thinking of someone, you can make something with one of their patterns as a way to connect to them and remember them. I have many treasured patterns that inspire me.

With the internet, you can always do a Google search to get ideas.



Regalia by Rochelle Adams. Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

How do you pick your designs?

I also find inspiration in nature. I go outside and look at the plants. I see what colors and shapes go together in nature, and then bring those ideas to my designs.

I attended art school which taught me about composition and design. My designs bring all of that together.

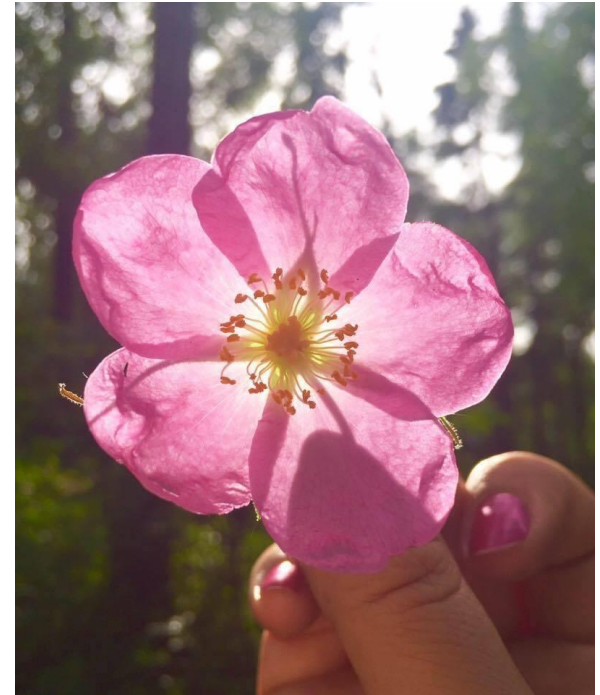


Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

What advice would you give someone who is starting to learn beading?

If you feel interested, and that art form is speaking to you, you should go for it.

As you learn, practice patience. Bead with love and good intentions. You put in your prayers and well wishes into it. All of this gets stitched into the work. This protects your loved ones.

If you aren't feeling good, set it aside until you feel positive again.



Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

What advice would you give someone who is starting to learn beading?

Keep learning. Look at beading of others online for ideas and inspiration.

When you are on the land, pay attention to the plants you see, and the colors. Think about what plants grow together. What are the landscapes that you love?

Be in tune with your surroundings and the colors that you love. This can be your inspiration.



Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

Molly of Denali

Rochelle served as a cultural advisor for the new children's show "Molly of Denali" featuring an Alaska Native family. She also designed a beading game for PBS that introduces beading to kids in an interactive way.



<https://pbskids.org/molly/games/beading>



Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

Your turn

Who in your family can bead?
How did they learn?

Why does Rochelle like to work
in traditional ways? What do you
do to connect to your ancestors
and culture?

Think about bead work you have
seen. What designs do you like?



Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

Artist Biography: Rochelle Adams “Geh Gii Ch’adzaa”

Shoozhri’ Rochelle Adams oozhii. Gwichyaa Zhee ts’à’ Tseeduu gwats’an ihtijj. Shiyehghan najj Angela Peter-Mayo ts’à’ Cliff Adams goovoozhrii. Shahan viyehghan najj Susie Lord Peter ts’à’ Johnny Peter. Shiti’ viyehghan najj Hannah “Babe” Adams ts’à’ Clifford Adams Sr. Shigii najj Amaya, Koso ts’à’ Łeeyadaakhan goovoozhrii. Mahsi’ choo!



Rochelle “Geh Gii Ch’adzaa” Adams is from the Interior Alaskan villages of Beaver and Fort Yukon along the Yukon River. Her parents are Angela Peter-Mayo and the late Cliff “Tuffy” Adams. Her maternal grandparents are Susie Lord Peter and Johnny Peter. Her paternal grandparents are Hannah “Babe” Adams and Clifford Adams Sr. She has three children, they are Amaya, Koso and Łeeyadaakhan. She was raised living a subsistence lifestyle with her family following the seasonal cycles of traditional hunting, fishing and trapping. Her favorite toy as a child was to play with beating fish hearts from the King Salmon as her parents cut them at the smokehouse after catching them in the fish wheel. In the winter she has fond childhood memories of riding with her Dad on the trapline through the snowy, frozen landscapes near the Arctic Circle. These are the values and connections that make her who she is today and she proudly represents this in all parts of her life, art, activism and work.

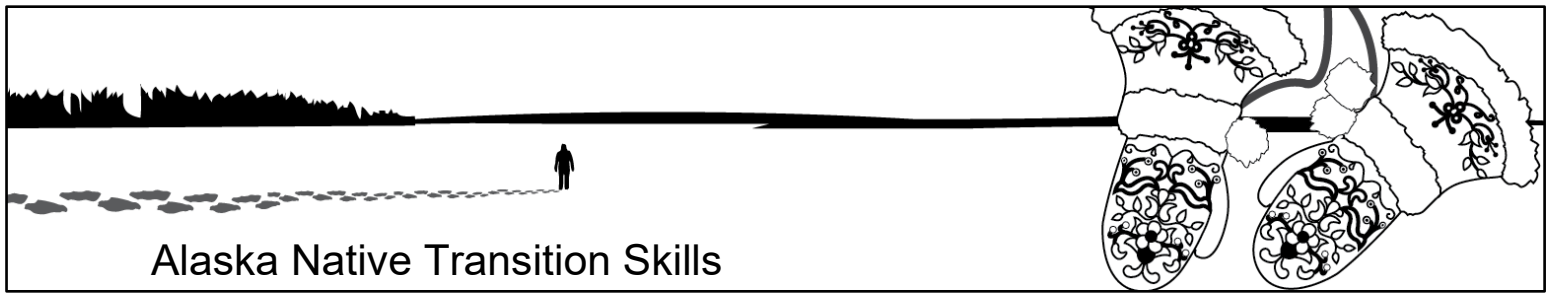
On her educational journey, Rochelle attended boarding school at Mt. Edgecumbe High School in Sitka, Alaska where she furthered her interest in the arts, languages and rich cultures from the many regions of Alaska. She continued her education at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico where she studied art and gained a larger perspective on Native communities while realizing the uniqueness of Alaskan villages. She received her BA from the University of Alaska Fairbanks focusing on Native Art and Native Language. She was working towards her MA in Applied Linguistics with an emphasis on technology to bridge the gap between learners and speakers but was not able to finish the program and works with Indigenous languages in many other ways.

Rochelle has always gravitated towards the arts and culture of Alaska including a passion for Native Language and the Indigenous lifestyle of living with the land and waters. She is a lifelong learner of her Native Language of Gwich’in, she also teaches and trains other Native Language teachers of all backgrounds while networking language programs and resources to continuously grow together towards a common goal. This cultural knowledge of being connected to the land, animals, fish and water through an Indigenous lens has given her an unshakeable grounding and clear vision of the future. She works very closely with the elders and youth of her own region to document and create many types of language learning materials and curriculum based on the collective Indigenous knowledge passed down through generations. She has dedicated much of her life, thus far, to the perpetuation and celebration of Indigenous language, art, lifestyle, culture and our relationship and stewardship with the lands and waters.

Rochelle currently works for Native Peoples Action, a statewide Native led non-profit as the Indigenous Engagement Director where she advocates to uplift the voices of Tribes and Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of life and promotes wellness in our communities through our traditional knowledge. She is also a cultural advisor, story writer and co-creator for the PBS kids show Molly of Denali.

Through her many roles and actions, Rochelle has continuously sought to bring her perspective as an Indigenous woman with cultural knowledge, born of the lands and waters, training from the elders with a positive vision of a healthy future for our people.

Provided by Rochelle Adams for use in this curriculum.



Alaska Native Transition Skills

Artist Profile: Koyukon Beading and Quillwork Artist Emma Hildebrand

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about Koyukon beading and quillwork artist Emma Hildebrand. The artist shares about how she started beading and learning quillwork and caribou hair tufting, what she loves about it, as well as advice for people who are starting to learn these traditional art skills.

Alaska Cultural Standards

- A1, A5, B3, B5, C2, C3, D2, D3, E1, E2, E3, E4, E5

Dene Athabascan Values Related to this Lesson

- Self-sufficiency and Hard Work
- Care and Provision for the Family
- Sharing and Caring
- Respect for Elders and Others
- Respect for the Land and Nature
- Practice of Native Traditions
- Honoring Ancestors
- Spirituality

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Describe how Emma Hildebrand learned to bead, and why she likes to work in traditional ways.
- Explain the advice Emma Hildebrand gives people who are learning to bead, do quillwork, and work with caribou hair tufting.

Materials

- Presentation: *An Interview with Emma Hildebrand*

Vocabulary

Bead	A small piece of glass or similar material, usually a round shape with a hole through it to be strung as in an earring or necklace, or to be sewn onto fabric or leather.
Beading	Refers to the act of sewing beads to fabric or leather or stringing beads together.

Hair Tufting	A way of using caribou, deer, moose or sheep hair in designs that was developed in the Yukon Territory. The hair from these animals is hollow, which allows it to be cinched and tied tightly, creating the tuft. It involves sewing a tufting (small bundle) of hair down, and then trimming it to a desired shape. Tufted hair can be dyed different colors.
Material	Refers to what something is made from. Examples of different kinds of materials are shells, fabric, fibers, skins, fur, and quills.
Quillwork	The use of porcupine quills in designs. Quills were used before seed beads were introduced, and continue to be used in designs. The designs of early work with seed beads were done to look like quills.
Sew, sewing	Join, fasten, or repair (something) by making stitches with a needle and thread or a sewing machine.
Technique	A specific way of doing something. Example: There are many ways to attach beads to fabric, but the Dene Athabaskan beaders used specific traditional techniques (ways). When you learn from a culture bearer, they will show you their techniques that were passed down to them.

Activities and Adaptations

- **Share the goal of today's lesson:** "Today we are going to learn about Emma Hildebrand, who is a Koyukon beading and quillwork artist. We will read through an interview with Emma Hildebrand about her beading and why she likes to work in traditional ways. Learning about artists and how they work is one way to learn more about the art they make, which can inspire you to try it yourself. By the end of this lesson, you will be able to describe how Emma Hildebrand learned to bead, and why she likes to work in traditional ways. You will get some advice for people who are learning to bead and do quillwork and caribou hair tufting."
- **Begin by finding out what students already know by asking the following questions:**
 - How do you think artists get started and figure out what they like to make? *[By seeing Elders or family members making things, and wanting to try to make them too, or seeing a design or something that was made and wanting to learn to make it...]*
 - What are traditional Dene Athabaskan objects that are beaded? *(Beaded moccasins, moosehide gloves, rifle cases, clothing, jewelry...)*
- **Connect the Values of today's lesson with the objectives, pick at least two to highlight:**
 - Self-sufficiency and Hard Work: *Beading takes practice to build the skills needed to be a good beader. Learning the traditional techniques is an important way to show respect for the Ancestors that passed down their knowledge about beading.*
 - Care and Provision for the Family: *The people who make our moccasins and other special beaded objects are showing their love by making these objects for us.*
 - Sharing and Caring: *Making and sharing traditionally beaded objects is a special way to honor the ways that our Ancestors have taught us. This form of traditional art adds beauty to our everyday life.*

- Respect for Elders and Others: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
- Respect for the Land and Nature: *Many Dene Athabascan designs feature things from nature like flowers and leaves. Moose skin is commonly used in making moccasins, clothing, and other objects that are beaded. Beading artists need to respect the materials they use and where they come from. They do this by only taking and using what they need, and by caring for the land which provides the materials they use.*
- Practice of Native Traditions: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
- Honoring Ancestors: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
- Spirituality: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading can be one way to connect to our Ancestors and our spirituality.*
- **Share the artist interview presentation, and discuss questions on last slide.** Take some time to look at the pictures of the things she has made that are on the slides. Discuss color choice and composition. What do they notice about the designs?
- **Revisit the interview (or parts of it) from lesson 1:** Emma Hildebrand uses a blend of traditional and contemporary designs, with traditional techniques. As you watch, pause to point out how the bead work, different kinds of quill work, and caribou tufting are used together in both traditional and contemporary designs.
https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=272293914389786

Evaluation

At the end of the lesson, ask the students these questions:

- How did Emma Hildebrand learn to bead and do quillwork?
- Why does she like to work in traditional ways?
- What advice does Emma Hildebrand give people who are learning these skills?

Additional Resources

- **Emma Hildebrand's Instagram:**
<https://www.instagram.com/ejhildebrand99516/?hl=en>
- **Emma Hildebrand: Art as a process of connection and care (article):**
<https://www.anchoragemuseum.org/about-us/stories-and-voices/anchorage-museum-blog/2021/emma-hildebrand-art-as-a-process-of-connection-and-care/>
- **2022 Cultural Capital Fellow for the First Peoples Fund:**
<https://www.firstpeoplesfund.org/cultural-capital-fellows/emma-hildebrand>
- **Creating Quillwork** Series: By the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center. Three current quillwork artists (including Emma Hildebrand) explore and share techniques. Project introduction: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfNC3R7ypI8&t=66s> . You can find the series on their YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCNpC1tX-kqJaSU7ZSxUWAfA/videos>



Emma Hildebrand

KOYUKON BEADING ARTIST AND EDUCATOR

All photos used in this presentation are subject to copyright and were provided by the artist or credited to original source for use in this presentation.

Emma Hildebrand

I was born in Northway, Alaska in the beautiful Upper Tanana Valley where I was raised in a semi-subsistence lifestyle. My mother, a Koyukon Athabaskan raised in a completely traditional subsistence lifestyle, taught me to bead and skin sew from the age of seven.



Artist Emma Hildebrand. Photo used with permission. Source: [Rassmuson Facebook page](#).

Emma Hildebrand

After my children were grown, I was able to start to focus on my work as an artist in a different way. I began work as an artist and teaching beading, caribou hair tufting, and quillwork more full time.

I take a lot of pride in my commitment to preservation and passing of culture. Native art and passing on the practices of traditional crafts are my passion.



Artist Emma Hildebrand. Photo used with permission. Source: [Rasmuson Facebook page](#).

How did you learn to bead?

My mother was an incredible beader. She adorned all of our mukluks and mittens with beautiful beadwork. My 5 older sisters all bead. My oldest sister, along with my mother, provided most of my beading and skin sewing instruction. Beadwork was all around me in the community as well.

My interest with beading started when I was 7. Beads were not so readily available then, so my mother gave me some of her spare beads to work with. The first thing I made was this beaded necklace.



Emma's first beadwork. Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

How did you learn to bead?

In grade school I gained additional beading instruction at community beading groups. We would share ideas and techniques.

In 1994 I learned caribou hair tufting and quillwork from Dixie Alexander and found that I loved to work with the traditional materials.

This opened up a new world of possibilities in my art work.



Scissors case by Emma Hildebrand.
Photo provided by the artist and used
with permission.

How did you learn to bead?

The largest project I completed was a traditional outfit to wear in the Miss WEIO competition in 1981. My mother tanned a moose hide, which we used to fashion a parka with beadwork adornment and beaver fur trim, with matching moose hide mittens and mukluks.



Emma Hildebrand (right) and friend Audrey Armstrong. [Source: Anchorage Museum](#). Photo used with permission by the artist.

What made you interested in beading?

I would watch my mother work and create such beautiful things for us. During the long winter months, there wasn't a lot to do. I didn't grow up with many other kids around. We didn't have a TV or smartphones. Learning about beading was a good way to spend the time.

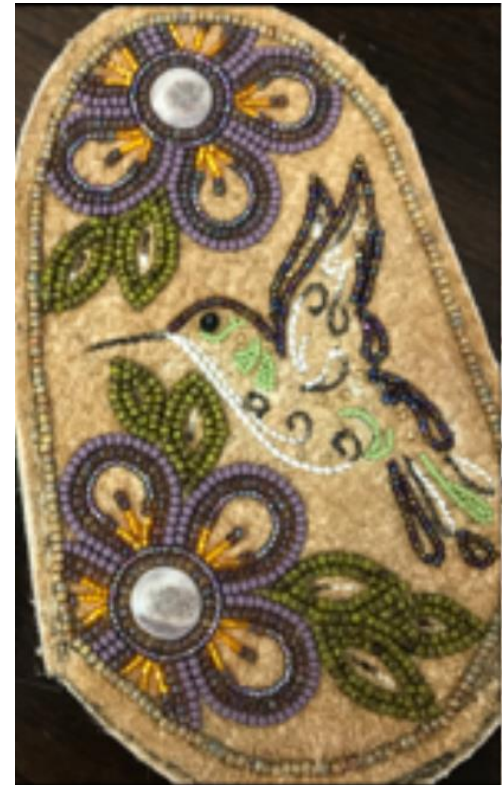


Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

When did you start developing your skills as an artist?

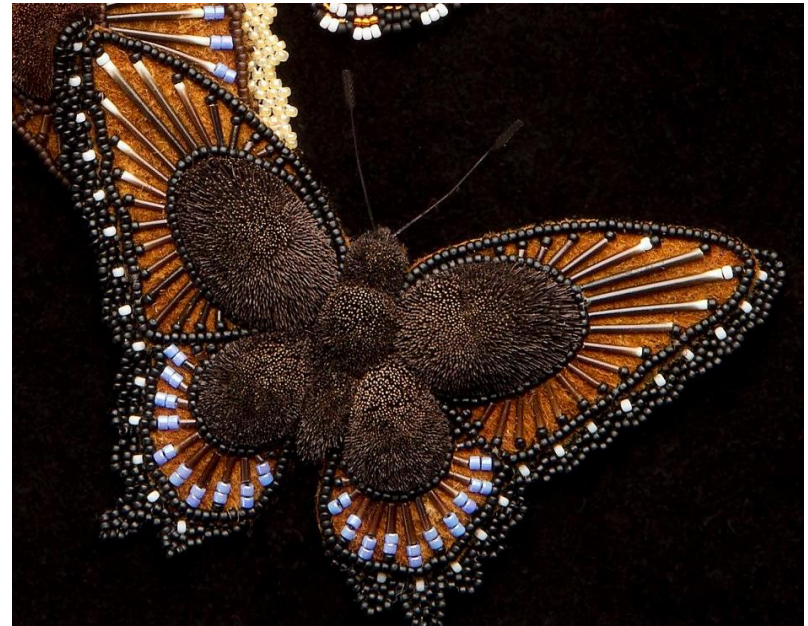
I have done a lot of Native art/crafts throughout my life making gifts for family members and to sell. However, it wasn't until recently that I considered myself an artist, a realization that came from being recognized as one by the Native art community.



Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

When did you start developing your skills as an artist?

My early work of medallion necklaces, beaded barrettes, baby and adult moccasins, and simple earrings, has progressed to a larger variety of items with beads, quills, and caribou hair.



Detail of butterfly brooch by Emma Hildebrand.
Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

When did you start developing your skills as an artist?

In the 1990s I started selling my work, mainly at the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) Convention, along with other Alaska Native artists. I only sold a few items back then, however, I have noticed that in recent years there is a lot more demand for indigenous art.



Skin bag with caribou hair tufting, quillwork, and beading by Emma Hildebrand. Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

When did you start developing your skills as an artist?

This newer demand includes purchase of Native art and instruction in Native art, which contributes to my income from art sales and from teaching classes.



Emma Hildebrand participates in the quillwork symposium at the Anchorage Museum. Photo used with permission from the artist.

What do you like about beading?

I love making things, and creating things.

When I am beading, it is like therapy. It is a quiet place where my mind is free to wander. It is very relaxing.

I love teaching and sharing this art with others.



Emma helps a student in one of her classes. Source: <https://uaaphotos.wordpress.com/tag/emma-hildebrand/>. Photo used with permission from the artist.

What do you like about beading?

Beading can be done alone, or in a group. I enjoy both. When you are in a group, you are sharing tips and it can be inspiring to look at the work of others. When alone, it is a relaxing healing space.

When I am beading, it is time to connect to my family and culture. I enjoy using techniques that have been with our people for a very long time.



Beaded dress with quillwork and caribou hair tufting by Emma Hildebrand. Source: [Rassmuson Facebook page](#). used with artist's permission.

Why do you like to work in traditional ways?

Beading is in my blood. I grew up in a semi-subsistence lifestyle. We used everything from the animals we harvested. These things made me feel closer to my ancestors.

I love practicing Alaska Native traditions and teaching and passing them on to others.



Hair barrette by Emma Hildebrand. Photo used with permission. Source: [Rassmuson Facebook page](#).

Why do you like to work in traditional ways?

I started learning with glass seed beads that came from Europe.

When I had the opportunity to learn with Dixie Alexander, I loved learning to work with the materials our people used before beads were introduced. They created beautiful designs using caribou hair tufting and porcupine quills. These were the natural materials from the land.



Caribou hair tufting and quillwork by Emma Hildebrand. Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

How do you decide what to make?

When I am making a gift, I think about the person it is for, what they like, or colors they like.

When someone requests a piece (to buy) , I can work with them to come up with a design and colors they like.

Sometimes I make examples for a class I am teaching of whatever the project will be.



Beaded flowers with quillwork leaves by Emma Hildebrand. Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

How do you decide what to make?

I often get inspired by the colors and the materials.

Sometimes, the piece I am working on makes other ideas and possibilities come into my head.

I get so excited, I may have to put down the project to do a sketch of my idea or start another piece.

Sometimes I have 10 pieces going at once!



Hair barrettes with caribou tufting, beads, and quillwork by Emma Hildebrand. Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

How do you pick your designs?

I enjoy traditional designs using flowers. I also like geometric designs. Sometimes I have a clear idea in my mind of the composition and the design, but struggle to decide the best colors. Sometimes, I have a clear idea of the colors I want to use, but struggle with getting the design. Sometimes the idea for the whole piece comes into my mind and I can see it clearly.



Butterfly brooches by Emma Hildebrand.
Photo used with permission.

How do you pick your designs?

I enjoy working in earth tones in my work, and I don't use as many bright colors.

I like working with the traditional materials of caribou hair and porcupine quills, together with beads.

The leaves and centers of the petals in this design were made with quills, used in two ways.



Flowers with quillwork leaves and stems by Emma Hildebrand. Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

How do you pick your designs?

I like to design pieces that use beads, caribou hair tufting, and quillwork. Sometimes, I use traditional techniques in new ways.

With this piece I designed, I used a pattern made for thread embroidery of a caribou. I used quillwork to create the outline. The design is more contemporary, but the materials and techniques are traditional.



Caribou done in quillwork for a moosehide vest by Emma Hildebrand. Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

What advice would you give someone who is starting to learn beading?

Get direction from a seasoned beader. They will help you get started.

Start small, and build your confidence and skills.

Practice, practice, practice!
It is the only way to improve and learn.



Student Liu Liu works on her barrette in a class taught by Emma Hildebrand. Source:

<https://uaaphotos.wordpress.com/tag/emma-hildebrand/>. Photo used with permission from the artist.

What advice would you give someone who is starting to learn quillwork?

Quillwork takes extra time to learn. It takes a lot of practice, and getting comfortable with the quills.

Take time and choose the quills carefully. I choose the quills differently depending on how I am using them.



Source: <https://uaaphotos.wordpress.com/tag/emma-hildebrand/>. Photo used with permission from the artist.

What advice would you give someone who is starting to learn caribou hair tufting?

One of the most important things with caribou hair tufting is taking great care in securing the hair on the project with a significant amount of tension and a secure knot. The hair must be held tightly in place so that it doesn't come loose once you have put a lot of time into trimming and shaping it.

It takes patience and careful attention to trim the hair. Don't get frustrated!



Detail of tufted flowers by Emma Hildebrand. Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

Your turn

Who in your family can bead?
Does anyone use quills or
caribou hair tufting in their art?
How did they learn?

Why does Emma like to work in
traditional ways? What do you
do to connect to your ancestors
and culture?

Think about bead work you have
seen. What designs do you like?



Caribou hair ready for tufting. Source:
<https://uaaphotos.wordpress.com/tag/emma-hildebrand/>.

Emma Hildebrand

The youngest of nine siblings, I was born in Northway, Alaska in the beautiful Upper Tanana Valley where I was raised in a semi-subsistence lifestyle. My mother, a Koyukon Athabascan raised in a completely traditional subsistence lifestyle, taught me to bead and skin sew from the age of seven. Early on, my crafts included medallion necklaces, barrettes, baby and adult moccasins, and earrings, most of which were gifted to family members on special occasions. The largest project I completed was a traditional outfit to wear in the Miss WEIO competition in 1981. My mother tanned a moose hide, which we used to fashion a parka with beadwork adornment and beaver fur trim, with matching moose hide mittens and mukluks.

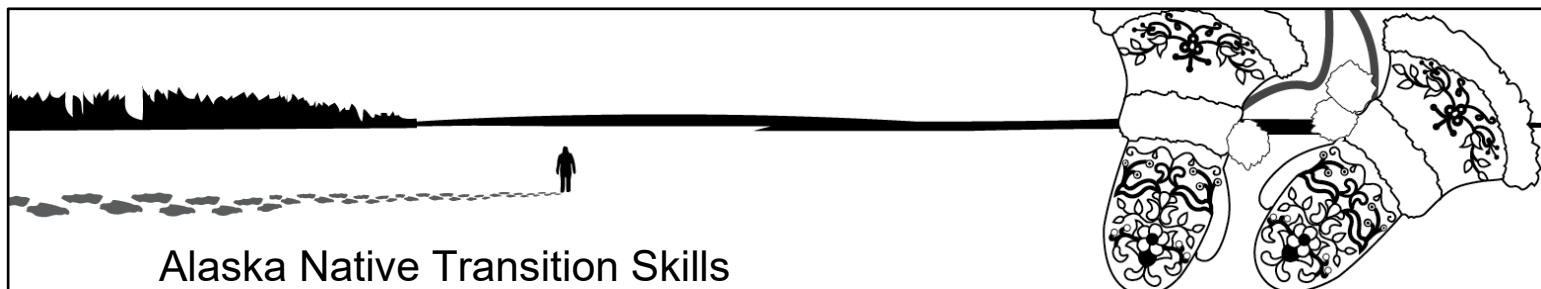


After high school I attended the University of Alaska in Fairbanks where I completed a BBA Degree in Business Administration in 1986. Soon after, I moved back to Northway to assume the position of CEO of Northway's ANCSA Corporation, Northway Natives, Inc. I held this position as well as President of the corporation's board of directors for 17 years during which time I also started a family. During this time I also committed numerous volunteer hours in the community, associated with cultural and athletic activities, and raised my four children.

In 1996 I began teaching Native Crafts intermittently through the University of Alaska. I continue to teach one-credit courses several times during the school year, often traveling to rural locations for 2-3 days for a 14-hour class. Most often, my classes entail caribou hair tufting, which I learned from Dixie Alexander in 1994, as well as porcupine quill techniques, most of which I learned from a Quillwork symposium I attended at the Anchorage Museum in 2011.

I transitioned to partial self-employment in 2005 and moved to Anchorage, but retained my involvement with both the non-profit and for profit corporations in Northway, traveling there regularly for these commitments as well as to visit siblings. Starting in 2006, sales of my Native artwork began to provide a large portion of my income, along with increased contracts and part time employment teaching classes related to Native crafts and art, which I have been doing for 25 years. I take a lot of pride in my commitment to preservation and passing of culture. Native art and passing on the practices of traditional crafts are my passion.

Provided by the artist and used with permission. Photo from Rasmuson Foundation Facebook post 9-18-2020. <https://www.facebook.com/rasmusonfoundation/posts/congratulations-to-visual-artist-emma-hildebrand-of-northway-on-being-selected-f/10158671779958162/>



Alaska Native Transition Skills

Getting Started with Beads

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about the different kinds of beads used in traditional Dene Athabascan beading through pictures, learning stories, and video.

Alaska Cultural Standards

- A1, A3, A6, B2, C3, D5, E1, E4, E5, E6, E7, E8

Dene Athabascan Values Related to this Lesson

- Self-sufficiency and Hard Work
- Care and Provision for the Family
- Sharing and Caring
- Respect for Elders and Others
- Respect for the Land and Nature
- Practice of Native Traditions
- Honoring Ancestors
- Spirituality

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Describe the most common *kinds* of beads used in traditional Dene Athabascan beadwork.
- Describe the most common *sizes* of seed beads used in traditional beadwork.
- Describe the importance of beads to Dene Athabascan peoples and when beads started being used.

Materials

- Student Handout: *Getting to Know Beads*

Vocabulary

Bead	A small piece of glass or similar material, usually a round shape with a hole through it to be strung as in an earring or necklace, or to be sewn onto fabric or leather.
Beading	Refers to the act of sewing beads to fabric or leather or stringing beads together.
Hank	A bundle of multiple strands of beads tied together. Seed beads are usually purchased in a hank, or loose in a small tube container.

Material	Refers to what something is made from. Examples of different kinds of materials are shells, fabric, fibers, skins, fur, hair, and quills.
Pre-contact	The time before outside peoples such as the Russians and Europeans came to Alaska and began trading and interacting with the indigenous people of Alaska.
Sew, sewing	Join, fasten, or repair (something) by making stitches with a needle and thread or a sewing machine.
Technique	A specific way of doing something. Example: There are many ways to attach beads to fabric, but the Athabascan beaders used specific traditional techniques (ways). When you learn from a culture bearer, they will show you their techniques that were passed down to them.
Trade beads	Decorative glass beads used as a type of money to exchange for goods and services.
Traditional	The holistic, practical, and common knowledge that has been gathered over thousands of years of observation and interaction with the land; it is passed on from generation to generation through practice, oral stories, dance, and art.

Activities and Adaptations

- **Share the goal of today's lesson:** "Today we are going to learn about beads. We will start by learning about beads in general, and then focus on the kinds of beads preferred by Dene Athabascan beaders who are working in traditional ways. To learn about this, we will look at a handout and watch a video. By the end of this lesson, you will be able to describe the most common kinds and sizes of beads used in traditional Dene Athabascan beadwork, and when beads started to be used."
- **Begin by finding out what students already know by asking the following questions:**
 - What kinds of beads are usually used in Dene Athabascan beading? *[Glass seed beads or quills that have been dyed...]*
 - What kinds of things do Dene Athabascan artists like to bead? *(Moccasins, gloves, jewelry, cases and bags, things to use during ceremonies, things to decorate...)*
 - When did Dene Athabascans start to use beads? *(Pre-contact, quill work was used where beads are used today. After contact with Russians and Europeans, seed beads and other glass beads became popular. They were traded at trading posts or traded between villages.)*
- **Connect the Values of today's lesson with the objectives, pick at least two to highlight:**
 - Self-sufficiency and Hard Work: *Beading takes practice to build the skills needed to be a good beader. Learning the traditional techniques is an important way to show respect for the Ancestors that passed down their knowledge about beading.*
 - Care and Provision for the Family: *The people who make our moccasins and other special beaded objects are showing their love by making these objects for us.*

- *Sharing and Caring: Making and sharing traditionally beaded objects is a special way to honor the ways that our Ancestors have taught us. This form of traditional art adds beauty to our everyday life.*
- *Respect for Elders and Others: Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
- *Respect for the Land and Nature: Many Dene Athabascan designs feature things from nature like flowers and leaves. Moose hide is commonly used in making moccasins, clothing, and other objects that are beaded. Beading artists need to respect the materials they use and where they come from. They do this by only taking and using what they need, and by caring for the land which provides the materials they use.*
- *Practice of Native Traditions: Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
- *Honoring Ancestors: Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
- *Spirituality: Using traditional designs and ways in beading can be one way to connect to our Ancestors and our spirituality.*
- **Introduction:** Glass beads came to Alaska with Russian and other Europeans. Before contact with these outside people, the Dene Athabascans used quills, seeds, small stones, and shells to embellish clothing and other objects. Pre-contact, they also traded with indigenous groups living in coastal areas for dentalium shells. These were worn by chiefs and conveyed status within the community. These shells, and later beads, were used as currency (like a type of money). Read more about trade beads in the article mentioned under learning stories, below.
- **Watch this overview video about seed beads.** This is not specific to Athabascan beading, but gives a good overview on the types of seed beads and how they are sized. ***An Overview of Seed Beads*** with Designer Julie Bean (7:35)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmMgUDqiVos&t=239s>
- **Dene Athabascan beading:**
 - Dene Athabascan artists like to use a large range of sizes, finishes, and types of beads. Designs may include quill work and tufting as well. The most common size of bead is size 11, which means that roughly 11 beads will fit in an inch when strung.
 - Go over the student handout, and discuss the difference between size, finish, and shape of seed beads. Discuss why an artist might want one over another.

Learning stories

- Invite a local Alaska Native leader, Elder, or culture bearer who is a beader to share. They could share a traditional story about beads, or share how they select the beads to use for a project based on the desired color, design, or other factors.
- **Read and discuss this article about trade beads, *The Importance of Beads at Kijik*:**
<https://www.nps.gov/articles/beads-at-qizhieh.htm>

- Ask the students to share their experiences with beads. Does anyone in their family work with beads? What kinds of beads do they like to use? What sizes and colors?

Evaluation

At the end of the lesson, ask the students these questions:

- What are the most common *kinds* of beads used in traditional Dene Athabascan beadwork?
- What are the most common *sizes* of seed beads used in traditional Dene Athabascan beadwork?
- When did Dene Athabascan artists start using beads in their work?

Additional Resources

- ***A Special Gift: The Kutchin Beadwork Tradition*** by Kate Duncan (1997) with beautiful pictures and information about Gwich'in beading.
- ***Athabascan Woman Blog*** by Angela Gonzalez: Angela Gonzalez is a beader, writer, author and photographer. Her blog has many entries about beading, with photographs. <https://athabascanwoman.com/>
- **Blue Beads in the Tundra:** Article sharing about blue glass trade beads that made their way to Alaska in the 1400s, before contact brought beads to the interior. <https://news.uaf.edu/blue-beads-in-the-tundra/>
- **Beadaholique.com** (<https://beadaholique.com/collections/instructional-beading-videos>) has a large selection of videos of beading skills and use of beading tools. It is a good general beading resource, not specific to traditional beading. There are pop-ups and coupons but if you watch the videos in the YouTube channel, you can avoid some of this. <https://www.youtube.com/c/beadaholique/videos>
- ***Introduction to Seed Bead - Beaducation.com*** (28:18): Clear video of the basics of tools, threads, and beads. Not specific to traditional beading, but a good primer. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JxojJ7BzT9A>
Beaducation has other videos that may be a good resource at their Youtube channel as well. <https://www.youtube.com/user/beaducation/videos>

Getting to Know Beads

Beads come in many sizes, shapes, finishes, ages, and colors.

Size—

- Seed beads are sized by about how many fit in an inch when strung in a line. This is not exact.
- The smaller the bead, the larger the number.
In this example, you can see the size 5 is bigger than the size 11.
- Beads are not completely standard. A size 11 of one kind of bead may not be exactly the same size as another size 11, but they will be similar.
- The most common size seed bead used in Dene Athabascan bead work is size 11. Artists may use bigger or smaller. They may use a mix of sizes in their work.

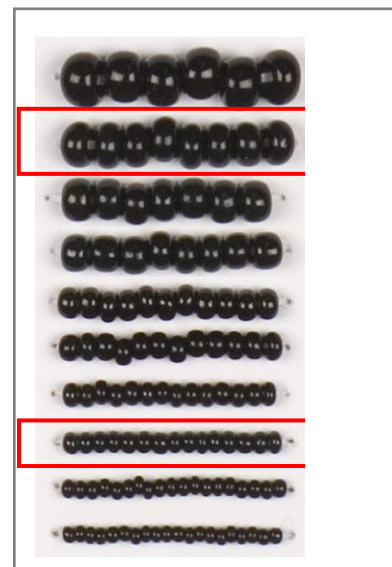


Photo credit: 8beads.com/en_seed_bead_sizes.html

Shapes—

- Some seed beads are **regular** (shape is more exact from bead to bead).
- Some are **irregular** (bead shape varies more).
- Some have **cuts on the sides**, which give them a sparkle like a gem.
- Some are **square/cubes**, which makes them good for geometric designs.



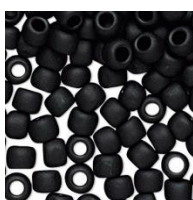
Finishes—

A finish is what the surface of the bead looks like.

- It can be shiny or matte (dull).
- It can be clear (you can see through it), or opaque (you can't see through), or like the pink beads here, they are clear with a silver lining inside.



Shiny



Matte

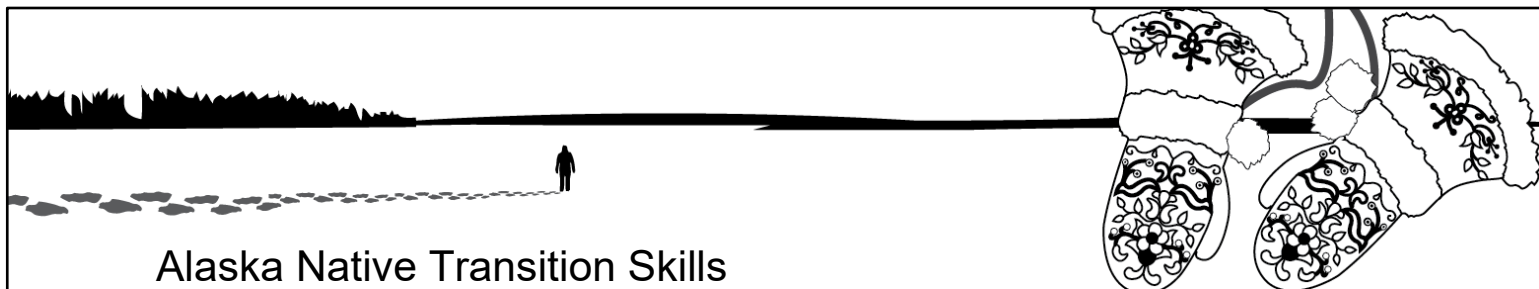


Clear / Opaque
(with rainbow finish)



Clear
(silver lining)

All bead photos except top image from firemountaingems.com.



Alaska Native Transition Skills

Beading Materials and Tools

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about the different kinds of tools and materials used in traditional Dene Athabascan beading through pictures, video, and a matching game.

Alaska Cultural Standards

- A1, A3, A5, A6, B2, D4, D5, E8

Dene Athabascan Values Related to this Lesson

- Self-sufficiency and Hard Work
- Care and Provision for the Family
- Sharing and Caring
- Respect for Elders and Others
- Respect for the Land and Nature
- Practice of Native Traditions
- Honoring Ancestors
- Spirituality

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- List at least three tools needed for traditional beading.
- Explain what each beading tool is used for.
- Describe the different kinds of thread used in traditional beading.
- Describe the materials used in beading.
- Use the Gwich'in language for the tools and materials in a matching game.

Materials

- Teacher Resource: *Tools and Materials Cards*. Print the cards two sided, and cut them out. See instructions for ideas for how to use them. **Note these are not tagged for accessibility.**
- Examples of tools and materials to show students: Moose hide, thread, needles, pliers.

Vocabulary

Bead	A small piece of glass or similar material, usually a round shape with a hole through it to be strung as in an earring or necklace, or to be sewn onto fabric or skins.
Beading	Refers to the act of sewing beads to fabric or skins or stringing beads together.

Hair Tufting	A way of using caribou, deer, moose or sheep hair in designs that was developed in the Yukon Territory. The hair from these animals is hollow, which allows it to be cinched and tied tightly, creating the tuft. It involves sewing a tufting (small bundle) of hair down, and then trimming it to a desired shape. Tufted hair can be dyed different colors.
Hank	A bundle of multiple strands of beads tied together. Seed beads are usually purchased in a hank, or loose in a small tube container.
Hide	Moose or caribou skins are the traditional materials to bead, tuft, or quill. The terms hide and skin are both used.
Material	Refers to what something is made from. Examples of different kinds of materials are shells, fabric, fibers, skins, fur, hair, and quills.
Needle	A small tool, usually made of metal, with a sharp point on one end and an “eye” or hole on the other end where you put thread through. Needles are used in beading to sew beads to hide or fabric, or to string beads together.
Pliers	A tool with parts that pinch together, usually used in beading for gripping and pulling needles or bending wire.
Quills	Porcupine quills are dyed and processed to use in traditional and contemporary designs. Quills were one of the main materials used before seed beads were introduced.
Sew, sewing	Join, fasten, or repair (something) by making stitches with a needle and thread or a sewing machine.
Scissors	A tool used to cut and trim. Beaders usually use a small type of scissor that is very sharp.
Sinew	Used traditionally as thread. Originally made from the muscle fibers of animals. Today, an artificial kind is more commonly used.
Thimble	A cap worn on the tip of the finger, usually made from metal, plastic, or a hard leather, used to push a needle through material. It also protects the fingers from needle pokes.
Thread	A long, thin strand of cotton, nylon, or other fibers used in sewing or beading. Dene Athabascan beaders usually use Nymo, size D, for size 11 seed beads.
Wax	Used to keep the thread in beading from tangling. Beaders run the thread over the block of wax, and then it goes through fabric easier and is less likely to tangle and knot.

Activities and Adaptations

- **Share the goal of today’s lesson:** “Today we are going to learn about the tools and materials used in beading. We will start by learning about common tools and materials used in beading, and then focus on the kinds of materials and tools preferred by Dene Athabascan beaders who are working in traditional ways. To learn about this, we will

watch a video and play a matching game. By the end of this lesson, you will be able to list at least three tools needed for traditional beading, explain what each beading tool is used for, describe the different kinds of thread used in traditional beading and describe other materials used in beading.”

- **Begin by finding out what students already know by asking the following questions:**
 - What kinds of tools are usually used in Dene Athabascan beading? *[needles, scissors, thimbles...]*
 - What kinds of materials do Dene Athabascan artists like to work with? *(sinew or thread, moose skins/hide, fabric, felt, quills, shells ...)*
- **Connect the Values of today’s lesson with the objectives, pick at least two to highlight:**
 - Self-sufficiency and Hard Work: *Beading takes practice to build the skills needed to be a good beader. Learning the traditional techniques is an important way to show respect for the Ancestors that passed down their knowledge about beading.*
 - Care and Provision for the Family: *The people who make our moccasins and other special beaded objects are showing their love by making these objects for us.*
 - Sharing and Caring: *Making and sharing traditionally beaded objects is a special way to honor the ways that our Ancestors have taught us. This form of traditional art adds beauty to our everyday life.*
 - Respect for Elders and Others: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
 - Respect for the Land and Nature: *Many Dene Athabascan designs feature things from nature like flowers and leaves. Moose hide is commonly used in making moccasins, clothing, and other objects that are beaded. Beading artists need to respect the materials they use and where they come from. They do this by only taking and using what they need, and by caring for the land which provides the materials they use.*
 - Practice of Native Traditions: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
 - Honoring Ancestors: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
 - Spirituality: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading can be one way to connect to our Ancestors and our spirituality.*
- **Watch this overview video about tools and materials used with seed beads.** This is not specific to Athabascan beading, but gives a good overview on the types of tools and materials used in working with seed beads. The first section is about tools and thread. It is important to share that their tools may look a little different, but these are the kinds of things bead makers use. ***Introduction to Seed Bead - Beaducation.com*** (28:18): Watch until 6:34 to just focus on the tools. The content about seed beads will repeat some of the content from previous lesson on sizing and selecting seed beads.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JxojJ7BzT9A>

- **Watch this video of how porcupine quills are sorted and dyed to use in quill work:** *Dyeing Porcupine Quills* (8:24) Shows how quills are dyed a color to use in quill work. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eh5sfiiZWbw&t=1s>
- **Materials and Tools Cards:** After watching this, go over the tools and materials cards, and play the matching game. These are more specific to Dene Athabascan beading. Gwich'in vocabulary is paired with the terms for the tools and materials.

Matching game: Once the students are familiar with the tools and materials, they can play a matching game by matching the words to the cards. Place all the cards face down, and draw a pair of cards. If they do not go together, place them back where they were. If they match, they can be pulled to the side by the person who found the match. Each player takes turns until all cards have been matched.

Alternately, you can use just the picture cards to play “Who am I” by reading the clue of what it is used for, and have the student guess which tool or material is on the card. Once they guess, you can turn the card to show the picture.

Learning stories

- Invite an Alaska Native culture-bearer or Elder who is a beader to share. They could share a traditional story about beads, show how they use the materials and tools they like for beading, or about what they have made using traditional beading techniques.
- Invite a Gwich'in speaker to go over the vocabulary pronunciation on the *Tools and Materials* vocabulary cards.
- Watch some of the video of Angela Gonzalez making beaded tops for moccasins, and notice the tools and materials she likes to use: *Beading Slipper Tops* (12:21): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awDgNnQJs0E&t=339s>
- Ask the students to share their experiences with beading. What have they made?

Evaluation

At the end of the lesson, ask the students these questions:

- What are at least three tools needed for traditional beading? How is each tool used?
- What kinds of thread are used in Dene Athabascan beading?
- What other materials are used in Dene Athabascan beadwork?
- What are the Gwich'in terms for the tools and materials we talked about?

Additional Resources

- ***A Special Gift: The Kutchin Beadwork Tradition*** by Kate Duncan (1997) with beautiful pictures and information about Gwich'in beading.
- ***Athabaskan Woman Blog*** by Angela Gonzalez: Angela Gonzalez is a beader, writer, author and photographer. Her blog has many entries about beading, with photographs. <https://athabaskanwoman.com/>
 - Lessons from 100 pairs of moccasins blog entry Athabaskan Woman blog: <https://athabaskanwoman.com/?p=4549#more-4549>
 - How to bead moccasins by Angela: <https://athabaskanwoman.com/?p=2348>
- ***Dyeing Porcupine Quills*** (8:24) Shows how quills are dyed a color to use in quill work. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eh5sfiiZWbw&t=1s>
- ***Creating Quillwork*** Series: By the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center. This series of videos brought together three current quill work artists and shows exploration of techniques used traditionally and currently. The first video is an overview of the project, with some pictures from the Smithsonian collection: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfNC3R7ypl8&t=66s> . You can find the series on their YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCNpC1tX-kqJaSU7ZSxUWAfA/videos>
- ***Material Traditions: Athabaskan Moosehide Tanning & Sewing Series*** (23 in the series): In this series from the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Collection, learn step by step how moose hide is prepared and used for sewing. Traditional methods are demonstrated, and many Elders share their memories, skills, and tips for the process. This link takes you to the first one, and the rest will follow: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTPWADw6OI8>



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Clue: A tool used to cut and trim.



Clue: A small piece of glass or similar material, usually a round shape with a hole through it to be strung as in an earring or necklace, or to be sewn onto fabric or skins.



Clue: Used in traditional designs, where it is stitched on and then trimmed to look like a sculpted velvet.

Photo: Used with permission by Emma Hildebrand.



Clue: A bundle of multiple strands of beads tied together.



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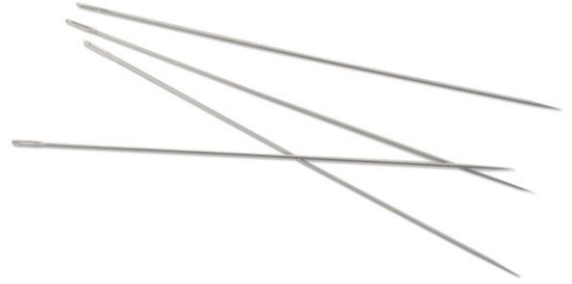
Photo provided by Rochelle Adams, used with permission.



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Clue: The traditional material to bead, tuft, or quill.



Clue: A small tool, usually made of metal, with a sharp point on one end and an “eye” or hole on the other end where you put thread through. These are used in beading to sew beads to hide or fabric, or to string beads together.



Clue: A tool with parts that pinch together, usually used in beading for gripping and pulling needles or bending wire.



Clue: These are processed from an animal to use in traditional and contemporary designs. A material used pre-contact before beads were introduced. They can be dyed different colors.



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Clue: A cap worn on the tip of the finger, usually made from metal, plastic, or a hard leather, used to push a needle through material. It also protects the fingers from needle pokes.

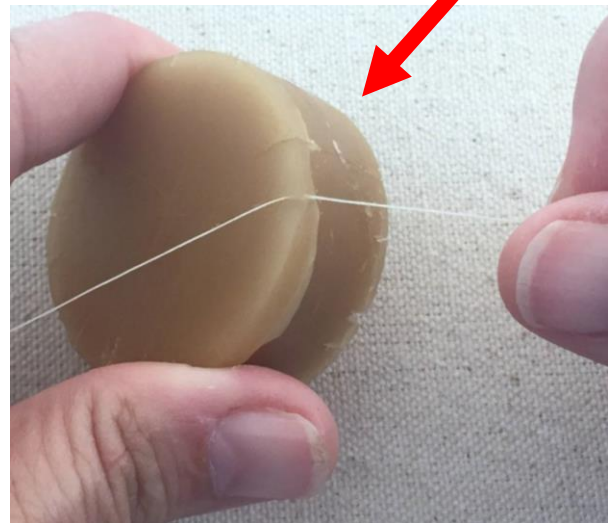
Photo: ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=thimble



Clue: A long, thin strand of cotton, nylon, or other fibers used in sewing or beading. Most beaders use a type of this called "Nymo."



Clue: Used traditionally as thread. Originally made from the muscle fibers of animals. Today, an artificial kind is more often used.



Clue: You run the thread over this to keep it from getting tangled when you are beading or sewing.

Source: thesprucecrafts.com/how-to-stretch-and-wax-nylon-beading-thread-340189



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Ch'iitsii da'al
(Scissors)

Naagajj
(Bead)

Vadzaih Ddhaa
(Caribou Fur)

(Hank)



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Dinjik Ddhaa
(Moose
Skin/Hide)

Tthah Tsal
(Needle)

ch'iitsii vaa
tr'on'al
(Pliers)

ts'it ch'oo
(Quill)



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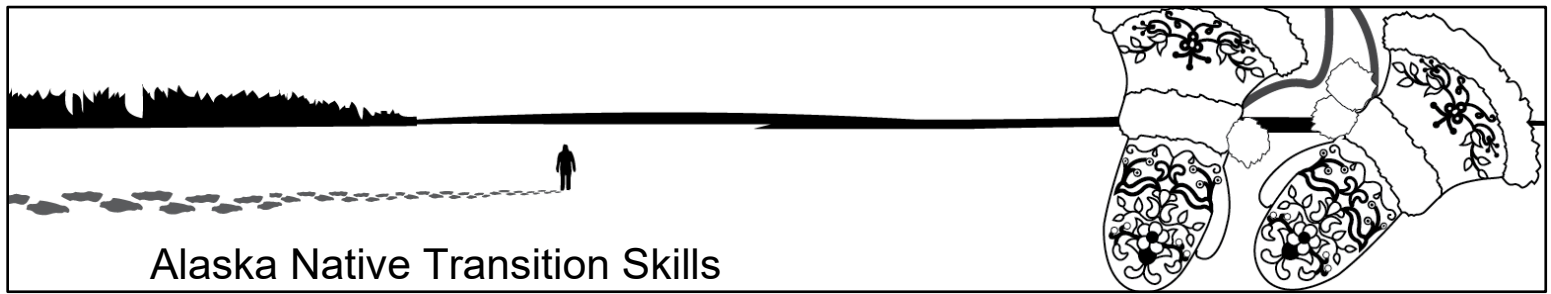
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nileetth'aii'ee
(Thimble)

khajjindoo
(Thread)

K' ih
(Sinew)

(Wax)



Alaska Native Transition Skills

Dene Athabascan Designs

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about different kinds of designs used in traditional Dene Athabascan beading and how beading artists choose their designs through pictures, stories, and a design activity.

Note to teacher: It is good to discuss the various traditional and contemporary designs used by Dene Athabascan beaders. The art form is dynamic and fluid, with new themes and motifs being used with traditional beading techniques. Remember that both traditional designs and contemporary designs are current and relevant. Traditional materials and methods honor the traditions even when the design choices reflect current artists' experiences. The availability of different kinds, colors, cuts and sizes of beads has expanded the palette artists can choose from. Be aware of how you talk about the traditional and contemporary designs, it is not "old vs. new" or "traditional vs. modern"...current artists dance between those worlds.

Alaska Cultural Standards

- A1, A3, A4, A6, B2, C3, D5, E1, E2, E4, E5, E6, E8

Dene Athabascan Values Related to this Lesson

- Self-sufficiency and Hard Work
- Care and Provision for the Family
- Sharing and Caring
- Respect for Elders and Others
- Respect for the Land and Nature
- Practice of Native Traditions
- Honoring Ancestors
- Spirituality

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Describe examples of *traditional* designs used by Dene Athabascan beaders.
- Describe some examples of *contemporary* designs used by Dene Athabascan beaders.
- Describe how an artist chooses the design they want to use on a piece.
- Demonstrate choosing a design for a beading project.

Materials

- Student Handout: *Choose Your Design*
- Teacher Resource: Dene Athabascan Designs Presentation

Vocabulary

Appropriation	Taking something for one's own use, usually without the owner's permission.
Bead	A small piece of glass or similar material, usually a round shape with a hole through it to be strung as in an earring or necklace, or to be sewn onto fabric or leather.
Beading	Refers to the act of sewing beads to fabric or tanned skin or stringing beads together.
Contemporary	Something that started more recently. An example of a contemporary design in beading is to use a favorite sports team logo on moccasins, or a cartoon character on a credit card holder.
Design	The arrangement of lines, colors, symbols and shapes to make a pattern.
Geometric	Design using shapes like rectangles, squares, and straight lines to make a pattern. Early Athabaskan artists focused on these kinds of designs using quills and in early use of beads. Contemporary artists may mix in geometric designs with floral or other designs.
Hair Tufting	A way of using caribou, deer, moose or sheep hair in designs that was developed in the Yukon Territory. The hair from these animals is hollow, which allows it to be cinched and tied tightly, creating the tuft. It involves sewing a tufting (small bundle) of hair down, and then trimming it to a desired shape. Tufted hair can be dyed different colors.
Material	Refers to what something is made from. Examples of different kinds of materials are shells, fabric, fibers, skins, fur, hair, and quills.
Quills	Porcupine quills are processed to use in traditional and contemporary designs. Quills were one of the main materials used before seed beads were introduced. Quills can be dyed different shades of colors to use in designs.
Technique	A specific way of doing something. Example: There are many ways to attach beads to fabric, but the Dene Athabaskan beaders and skin sewers used specific traditional techniques (ways). When you learn from a culture bearer, they will show you their techniques that were passed down to them. With that being said, everyone has a slightly different technique that works for them.
Traditional	The holistic, practical, and common knowledge that has been gathered over thousands of years of observation and interaction with the land; it is passed on from generation to generation through practice, oral stories, dance, and art.

Activities and Adaptations

- **Share the goal of today's lesson:** "Today we are going to learn about the designs used in Dene Athabaskan beading. We will start by seeing both traditional and contemporary designs used in beading, talk about how artists pick a design for a project, and then pick a design ourselves. ("Contemporary" means a design based on something that started more recently.) To learn about this, we will look at pictures of designs, discuss how to choose, and then choose a design. By the end of this lesson, you will be able to describe both traditional and contemporary designs used by Dene Athabaskan beaders, describe how an artist chooses the design they want to use on a piece, and show that you can pick a design for a beading project."
- **Begin by finding out what students already know by asking the following questions:**
 - What kinds of things do beaders make? (*beaded mittens, beaded clothing, beaded rifle cases, jewelry*).
 - What is a "design?" [*The arrangement of lines, color, and shapes to make a pattern.*]
 - What kinds of designs have we seen in the examples of Dene Athabaskan beading created by ancestors? [*plants and flowers, geometric shapes, bright colors, fringe, quillwork, caribou hair tufting...*]
 - What other newer designs have you seen used by Dene Athabaskan beaders? [*Different color choices or bead choices, different subjects like sports team logos, individual interests, designs that use a blend of traditional and contemporary elements like combining beads with quillwork or caribou hair tufting.*]
 - What kinds of beading designs have you seen used in your family, or in our community?
- **Connect the Values of today's lesson with the objectives, pick at least two to highlight:**
 - Self-sufficiency and Hard Work: *Beading takes practice to build the skills needed to be a good beader. Learning the traditional techniques is an important way to show respect for the Ancestors that passed down their knowledge about beading.*
 - Care and Provision for the Family: *The people who make our moccasins and other special beaded objects are showing their love by making these objects for us.*
 - Sharing and Caring: *Making and sharing traditionally beaded objects is a special way to honor the ways that our Ancestors have taught us. This form of traditional art adds beauty to our everyday life.*
 - Respect for Elders and Others: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders, teachers, and Ancestors.*
 - Respect for the Land and Nature: *Many Dene Athabaskan designs feature things from nature like flowers and leaves. Moose hide is commonly used in making moccasins, clothing, and other objects that are beaded. Beading artists need to respect the materials they use and where they come from. They do this by only taking and using what they need, and by caring for the land which provides the materials they use.*

- Practice of Native Traditions: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
- Honoring Ancestors: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
- Spirituality: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading can be one way to connect to our Ancestors and our spirituality.*
- **Look at the presentation *Dene Athabascan Beading Designs* showing traditional and contemporary beaded items. Point out the different designs, materials used, and if they can see how the stitching was done. For each item, ask the students:**
 - What kind of item or object is this?
 - What designs did the artist choose? Why do you think they chose that design?
 - What colors did they use?
 - What materials did they use in this item?
- **How do artists choose a design?**
 - **Listen to Lakota artist and quill worker Germaine Garnier describe how she picked the design for her daughters dancing crown.** The Lakota also use quillwork, but it looks very different than Dene Athabascan designs. Ask the students what they notice about the Lakota quillwork, and how it is similar or different from quillwork they have seen. You can watch from the beginning until minute 4:52, or to just focus on how she picked her design, watch the clip from 2:55 to 4:52. *Quilling Workshop* (Lakota technique) (1:10:14): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nB796FQMSdk>
 - Using the student handout, discuss how artists choose a design for a project.
- **Brief discussion on appropriation and replicating designs:**
 - Discuss the importance of getting permission to use certain patterns and designs. Show respect to the artists and teachers who share their work by learning about where their designs come from. Before copying a design, find out its origin, and if it is a family or tribal design that shouldn't be used outside of those communities. If you have a family member or teacher who shares their patterns with you, this is a special gift for learning. If you are replicating a design that appeals to you as part of your learning of beading, acknowledge the original source of the design when you share it.
 - It is important to respect the work of other artists. Patterns and designs may belong to a family, a community, or an individual artist. If you want to use a specific design you have seen, it is important to get permission to use it. If you are not able to get permission, then make a different design.
 - It is part of the traditional way of learning to observe and try to recreate what you see, and to share ideas with other beaders. As you explore this art form, and join in the beading community, be respectful of other artists as you learn.

- When looking for ideas online, you can be inspired by how an artist has used color, or how they filled in a shape. You may like the composition they used. This is different than copying.
- Also, it is not respectful to use the work and designs of an indigenous group if you are not indigenous, especially if used in a business.
- **Information on Dene Athabascan designs** from *Athabascan Beading* by Lilly Pitka (1978):
 - Before contact, the Dene Athabascans used porcupine quills to decorate clothing. Designs were more geometric, as the lines of quills tend to make straighter lined designs such as blocks, triangles, and crosses. Early beadwork resembled the geometric patterns of quills, before other design ideas brought more curving floral and plant-based designs in the 1800s and 1900s. Some historians think the early floral designs were based on French embroidery patterns or European fabrics with floral designs. These designs were embraced by the Athabascan people and soon became the main types of designs used.
 - Artists may use patterns handed down from their families or teachers, or can make their own. The patterns, the way the designs are filled in, the colors used, the size of the beads used, all give a clue about who the artist was, or at least what community they come from. If you want to replicate a design you have found, find out more about its origins, if it belongs to a group or family, and if it is appropriate for you to use the design.
 - Flowers, leaves, and stems make up the most common Dene Athabascan traditional designs. Leaves are usually pointed, ending in one bead, and flower petals can be rounded or pointed. Flowers can be based on those found in Alaska (such as the forget-me-not or the wild rose) but do not have to be realistic.
 - Other inspiration for designs can come from anywhere. In villages with an army base, beading an eagle onto carrying bags and gloves was a popular choice. The five-pointed star from army uniforms also was used in beading.
 - Artists have freedom in coming up with designs. They may be inspired by what they see in nature, patterns that they have seen other beaders use, or even a Google image search. The artist's imagination is the only limit to the designs they may make.
- **Choose a design activity:** Explore designs online or from teacher resources and have them choose and draw a design they would use for a pair of beaded moccasins on the student handout. Discuss the difference between copying and getting ideas by seeing the work of others. Include examples and discussion of geometric designs used more commonly in quillwork, as well as floral and plant types of designs. Include discussion of how they chose their design to reinforce understanding that process.

Learning stories

- Invite a local Alaska Native leader, culture-bearer, or Elder who is a beader to share about the designs they like to use, where they find their designs, and how they choose a design for a project. They could bring examples to share with the students if possible.
- Tell the story of how early Athabascan artists used quills to make designs, which naturally lend themselves to geometric designs.

Evaluation

At the end of the lesson, ask the students these questions:

- What are some examples of traditional designs used in Dene Athabascan beading?
- What are some examples of more contemporary designs used in Dene Athabascan beading?
- How does an artist choose the design they want to use for a project?

Additional Resources

- ***A Special Gift: The Kutchin Beadwork Tradition*** by Kate Duncan (1997) with beautiful pictures and information about Gwich'in beading.
- ***Dena'ina Artist Maria D.I. Coleman*** has a couple of web pages that show her designs, as well as the use of quill work with beading. <https://like-the-wind.com/2007/mariasbeading/>
- ***Athabascan Woman Blog***: Angela Łot'oydaatIno Gonzalez is a beader, writer, author and photographer. Her blog has many entries about beading, with photographs. <https://athabascanwoman.com/>
This blog entry has many excellent links about Angela's work, and why she loves beading. *Lessons from Beading 100 Pairs of Moccasins*: <https://athabascanwoman.com/?p=4549>
- ***Photos from UAA Caribou Tufting Workshop with Koyukon Athabascan artist Emma Hildebrand*** (2012): <https://uaaphotos.wordpress.com/2012/11/15/caribou-hair-tufting-workshop/>
- ***Explore traditional and contemporary designs done by Angela Gonzalez on her Instagram site***: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CHIG4gmDL2c/>

Choosing a Design

Decide what you want to make. Will it be a barrette? Card holder? A magnet? A beaded bag? Regalia? The type of item you want to bead will determine the shape and size of the space to be beaded. In the beginning, start with small projects that you can finish while you build your skills.

Decide who it is for. It is traditional to give your first beaded items as a gift. This honors the Ancestors by showing you are sharing what you learn. When you make something for someone else, think about the colors they like, or things you know they are interested in.

Find your inspiration:

- Look at shapes and colors in nature.
- Study the beadwork of other artists.
- Look at beadwork that was done by your family members.
- Use a pattern you have permission to use.
- Look online for the way artists put together shapes and colors.

Draw your design ideas. It may take a few tries of drawing it out before the design comes together.



Moccasin tops by Angela Gonzalez

Practice time: Let's say you wanted to bead moccasin tops to sew onto moccasins. Use the spaces here to draw some different design ideas

Who would you make them for? What colors do they like? What kind of design would you do?

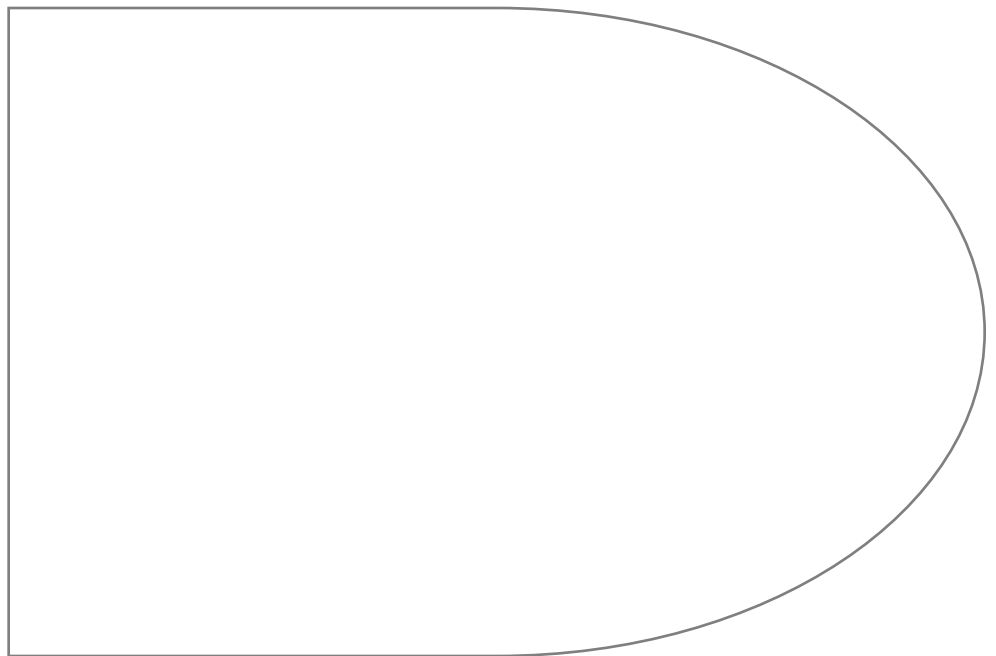
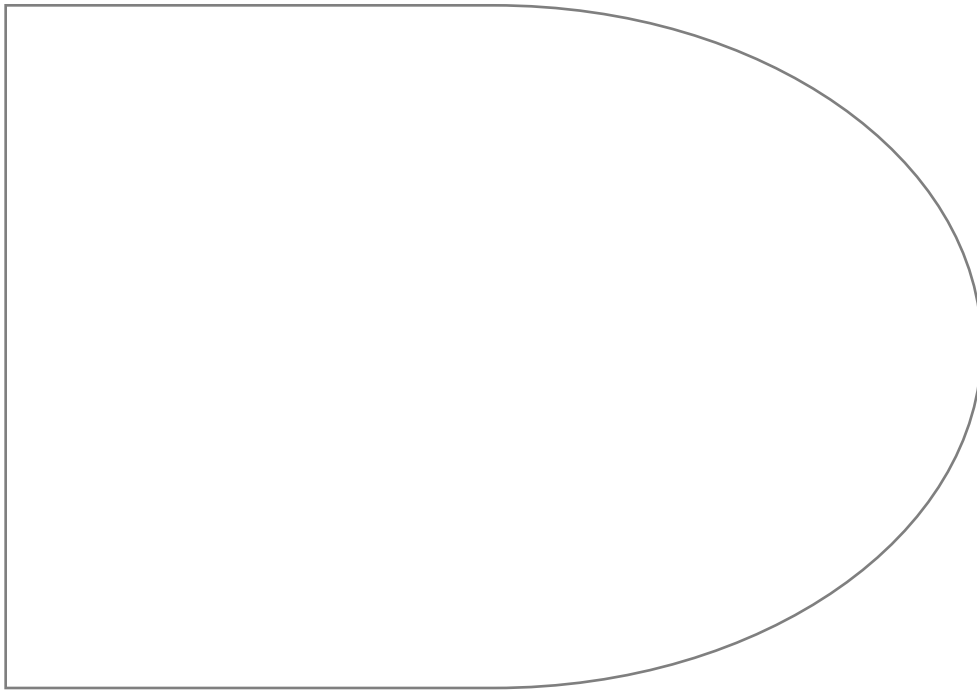


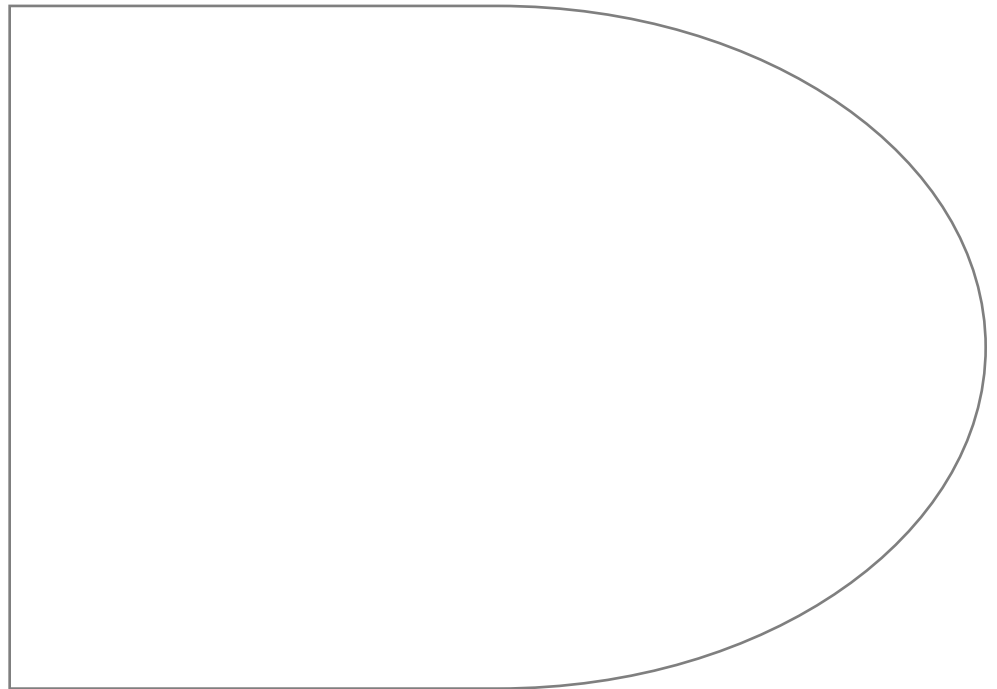
Photo source: <https://athabaskanwoman.com/?tag=beadwork>. Used with permission.

Alaska Native Transition Skills, Dene Athabaskan Beading, *Choosing a Design* Student Handout, 2022 (rev 2025), Van Den Berg / Adams, UAA Center for Human Development

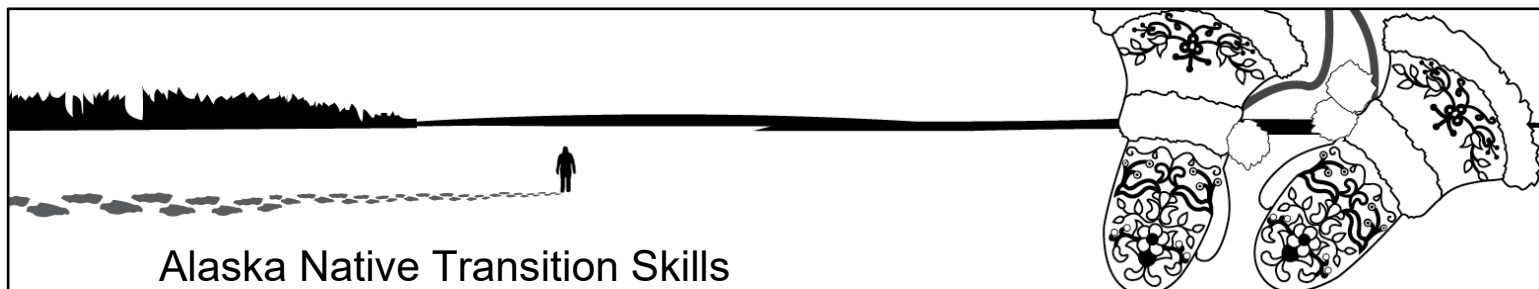


What colors
would you use?

Start with simple
shapes and
patterns until you
feel more
comfortable with
beading.



Tip: Make a paper shape the actual size of the item you plan to bead, to try designs in. This will help you see how big the shapes will be on the actual piece. If you are using a pattern, you can place the pattern on to see how it will fit.



Alaska Native Transition Skills

Building Beading Skills

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn key skills to start beading including threading a needle, tying a knot, and learn about the two-thread technique. It is important that this introduction is a positive experience, where students feel successful.

Alaska Cultural Standards

- A1, A2, A4, B1, B3, B4, B5, C2, C3, D2, D3, E1, E2, E3, E4

Dene Athabascan Values Related to this Lesson

- Self-sufficiency and Hard Work
- Care and Provision for the Family
- Sharing and Caring
- Respect for Elders and Others
- Respect for the Land and Nature
- Practice of Native Traditions
- Honoring Ancestors
- Spirituality

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Demonstrate how to thread a needle
- Demonstrate how to tie a knot in the beading thread
- Demonstrate having the tray ready with all of the tools and supplies
- Describe the two-needle beading technique

Materials

- Student Handout: *Beading with Two Needles*

Vocabulary

Bead	A small piece of glass or similar material, usually a round shape with a hole through it to be strung as in an earring or necklace, or to be sewn onto fabric or skins.
Beading	Refers to the act of sewing beads to fabric or skins or stringing beads together.
Eye (needle)	The “eye” of the needle is the hole in one end that the thread goes through. Note that the eyes are punched through, so one side may be bigger than the other side. If you are struggling to thread it, turning the needle around may help.

Hank	A bundle of multiple strands of beads tied together. Seed beads are usually purchased in a hank, or loose in a small tube container.
Knot	Fastening together. Knots are made at the end of a thread to keep it from pulling through the material, or made to secure the end of the thread after beading before cutting the thread. Knots also refer to tangles in the thread that were not wanted.
Material	Refers to what something is made from. Examples of different kinds of materials are metal, fabric, fibers, plastic, fur, skins, and glass.
Sew, sewing	Join, fasten, or repair (something) by making stitches with a needle and thread or a sewing machine.
Technique	A specific way of doing something. Example: In this lesson, the one-thread and two-thread techniques are shown. In the one-thread technique, one needle is used, looping back through beads to tack them into place. In the two-thread technique, one long needle and thread is used for the beads, and a second shorter needle and thread is used to tack down the beaded strand.
Tension	Pulling gently on the thread with the beads keeps the thread straight and helps the beads lie in the right place to stitch them down. If you pull too hard, it will make the beads buckle and they won't lie flat against the backing. Too loose, and the thread will show and the beads won't lie close to each other. It takes a lot of practice to learn how to keep the right amount of tension on the beading thread as you bead.
Traditional	The holistic, practical, and common knowledge that has been gathered over thousands of years of observation and interaction with the land; it is passed on from generation to generation through practice, oral stories, dance, and art.
Wax	Natural wax made by bees is used to help keep the thread from tangling as you work. Bees make the wax in their hive to put the honey in (called honeycomb). The wax is harvested and used for many products such as candles, salves, wood polish, and more.

Activities and Adaptations

- **Share the goal of today's lesson:** "Today we are going to learn a couple of skills to get ready to start beading. We will start by watching videos and practicing how to thread a needle and knot the thread. We will get our project area ready to start beading. By the end of this lesson, you will be able to: show you can thread a needle and tie a knot in the thread; and describe the two-needle beading technique."
- **Begin by finding out what students already know by asking the following questions:**
 - What does it mean to "thread a needle" and how is it done? *[In order to sew, you need a needle and thread. The needle makes a hole through the material for the thread to follow. To thread, you put thread through the eye of a needle and pull it through...]*

- What is a knot? When are knots used in beading? *(A knot is made after you thread the needle to stop the thread from pulling right through. A knot is made after you finish beading, before you cut the thread so your beading stays in place and doesn't fall off...)*
- What do you need to get ready to bead? *(A felt mat or towel to work on, something to hold your beads, needles, thread, scissors, and the material you will use. In other projects, you may need additional tools.)*
- What does it mean to have a positive attitude? *(A feeling of hope and expecting good things to happen. Feeling good about what you are doing. Thinking happy thoughts about what you are doing. Putting good energy into your project.)*
- How does learning Dene Athabascan beading honor the Ancestors that developed this beautiful art form? *(It carries forward the ways the Ancestors shared. The images on the bead work remind us of our Ancestors and what they have passed down to us. It shows how we are connected to those that came before us.)*
- **Connect the Values of today's lesson with the objectives, pick at least two to highlight:**
 - Self-sufficiency and Hard Work: *Beading takes practice to build the skills needed to be a good beader. Learning the traditional techniques is an important way to show respect for the Ancestors that passed down their knowledge about beading.*
 - Care and Provision for the Family: *The people who make our moccasins and other special beaded objects are showing their love by making these objects for us.*
 - Sharing and Caring: *Making and sharing traditionally beaded objects is a special way to honor the ways that our Ancestors have taught us. This form of traditional art adds beauty to our everyday life.*
 - Respect for Elders and Others: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
 - Respect for the Land and Nature: *Many Dene Athabascan designs feature things from nature like flowers and leaves. Moose hide is commonly used in making moccasins, clothing, and other objects that are beaded. Beading artists need to respect the materials they use and where they come from. They do this by only taking and using what they need, and by caring for the land which provides the materials they use.*
 - Practice of Native Traditions: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
 - Honoring Ancestors: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
 - Spirituality: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading can be one way to connect to our Ancestors and our spirituality.*
- **The two-needle technique:** Dene Athabascan beaders usually use a two-needle technique to bead onto skins or felt. One needle and thread holds the beads on top of the skin, and the second needle and thread goes up and down to tack down the thread that the beads are on. Watch this demonstration of the two-needle

technique: ***Two needle Flat stitch beading [filling in] #1*** (Total length 13:28) by Mona Cliff: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TiRZ4oMQigU&t=94s>

- **Learning a new skill:**

Set a positive expectation for beginning to practice beading. Remind students that any time you try something new, it can feel awkward. The beading may not look like what you expect, or what you picture in your mind. When you see the work of experienced beaders, the work is beautiful because they have learned and practiced. Their first pieces were not perfect either. The early work helps you see your progress, and should be celebrated as part of your learning of a new skill, and also learning about the traditions of the first people of Alaska.

- **Positive attitude:**

An important part of learning to bead is having a positive attitude. If you are in a good mood, and keep a positive attitude, that will go into your work. If you are making something for someone else, think of them and your love for them, and that feeling will go into the work. If you are getting frustrated, set it aside until you feel ready to practice again with a positive attitude. Remember that through the learning of this skill you are honoring the Ancestors who developed this beautiful art form. You are honoring the plants and flowers in your designs by beading them into a beautiful pattern. You are honoring the moose by making a beautiful design on its skin. All of these things go into your work. ***As students begin to practice, and encounter the usual obstacles of learning a new skill, remind them it is normal, and help them reframe any frustration. Encourage breaks if needed, to maintain a positive experience and feeling of success.***

- **Getting ready to bead:** Start by talking through getting the work space ready. All students should have a piece of felt or small towel laid out in front of them. They will need two lengths of thread and a long and a short needle to start. For the beading practice, they will need a 4" x 4" piece of beading felt or felt stitched to paper, and a small plate of seed beads, ideally from a hank, and still on the string. (If only loose beads are available, that is fine as well.) One to two colors will work well for the project.
- **"Steps to Complete Beadwork"** by Lilly Pitka from her book *Athabascan Beading* (1978)
 1. "Decide what the beadwork will be for (dress, gloves, jewelry, etc.)
 2. Choose the type of pattern (floral patterns, straight or curving lines, geometric patterns, etc.) you think would fit best as a design.
 3. Consider colors and choose your beads accordingly.
 4. Draw the basic patterns on the material you choose. If the material is lightweight, use a backing such as a brown paper bag or pellon [interfacing]. The beads will then lay more uniform and neat.
 5. Plan the direction the beads will lay in regard to the outline.
 6. Complete beading the outline, then fill it in."

- **Watch these beading tips:** Angela Gonzalez Beading Tips: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z04ZLZM8dQ0> (2:24) has tips for threading a needle, putting beads on directly from the hank, how to wax your thread, and more.
- **Practice threading a needle:**
 1. Flatten the last ½ inch of one end of the thread by lightly wetting it with your tongue and lips, then pinching it and running it between the fingernails of the pointer finger and thumb. This makes it a little flatter at the end, and the saliva helps it slide through easier.
 2. Hold the thread between your thumb and pointer finger of your non-dominant hand, allowing just a couple millimeters to extend past your fingers. Then, slide the needle over the thread (putting the needle on the thread is usually easier than thread to needle as is more commonly done).
 3. If the thread isn't going through easily, try flipping the needle around. The hole is a little bigger on one side than the other. If it still is difficult, you can try a different needle, or step up the size of needle (making sure it still fits the beads).
- **Tie a knot at the end of your thread:** *Thread both needles to get them ready to bead.*
 1. Start by pulling one end of the thread through until about half way, put the two ends of the thread together and pinch between your fingers while you gently tug the needle into the exact middle.
 2. There are many ways to make the knot. If you have a guest beader present, they can show their favorite way. If not, here are some options students can try.
 - Wrap the end of the threads around the pointer finger, pinch the wrap between the thumb and pointer finger, and roll. Pinch the thread just above the loose knot, and slide in the direction of the knot to cinch it down. This can make a messier knot.
 - You can use the needle to wrap onto and then pull through as demonstrated in this video: **How to Tie a Knot in Thread : Sewing for Beginners** (4:04): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PowkA9Bojlo> This knot is neater and more compact, also referred to as the "tailor's knot." This is similar to the knot Angela Gonzalez makes.
- **Wax the thread:** Running the thread over natural bee's wax helps keep the thread from getting tangled or snarled. Press one end of the length of thread on the wax and press it hard with your thumb. Pull the thread through while pressing it into the wax until it is coated. Do this with both lengths of thread. (This was demonstrated in the tips video by Angela Gonzalez.)

Learning stories

- Invite a local Alaska Native leader, culture-bearer, or Elder who is a beader to be present during the lesson to share and help students get started. They can share a traditional story about beads, a story about how they learned to bead, or about the person who taught them to bead. They can also share how they get ready for a project, how they keep tension on the thread as they work, and how they tie knots.

Evaluation

At the end of the lesson, ask the students these questions:

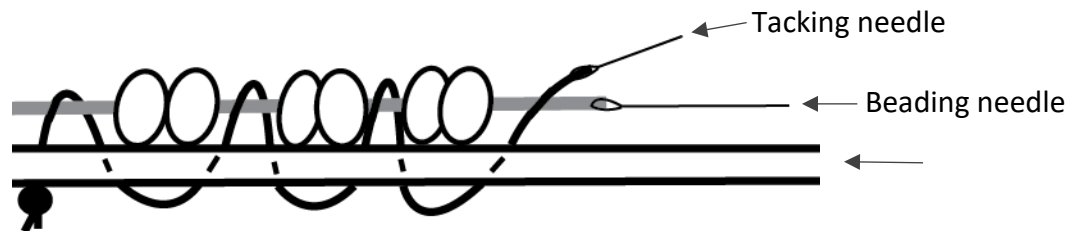
- How did you get ready to bead?
- How did you thread your needle?
- How did you tie a knot on your thread to get started?
- What does it mean to use a “two-needle technique” for beading?

Additional Resources

- ***A Special Gift: The Kutchin Beadwork Tradition*** by Kate Duncan (1997) with beautiful pictures and information about Gwich'in beading.
- ***Athabaskan Woman Blog*** by Angela Gonzalez: Angela Gonzalez is a beader, writer, author and photographer. Her blog has many entries about beading, with photographs. <https://athabaskanwoman.com/>
- ***Getting Started with Seed Beads*** by Dustin Wedekind (2007) is a good basic introduction book with clear pictures. This is a good general resource, not specific to indigenous beading.
- **Beadaholique.com** (<https://beadaholique.com/collections/instructional-beading-videos>) has a large selection of videos of beading skills and use of beading tools. It is a good general beading resource, not specific to traditional beading. There are pop-ups and coupons but if you watch the videos in the YouTube channel, you can avoid some of this. <https://www.youtube.com/c/beadaholique/videos>
- **Beading artist Mona Cliff** (A'niih/Nakota/Eastern European) demonstrates the one-needle flat stitch and the two-needle (overlay) technique in several videos:
 - Beading for beginners. 2 needle flat stitch technique (26:45): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQz-p2yys74>
 - 1 needle & 2 needle flat stitch beading techniques (16:03): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smrfuN-fBT4>
 - Two needle Flat stitch beading [filling in] #1 (13:28) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TiRZ4oMQjgU&t=94s>
 - Two needle flat stitch beading [filling in] #2 (31:35) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYXgZrF_rvM

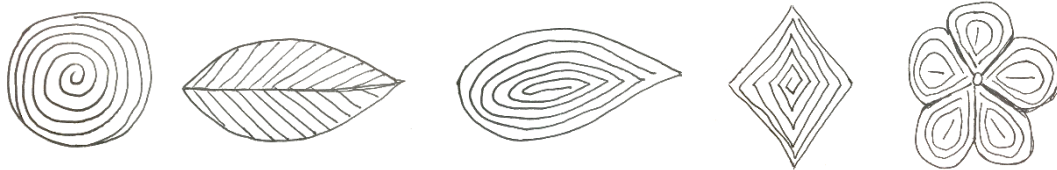
Two-Needle Technique for Dene Athabascan Beadwork

Dene Athabascan beaders usually use a two-needle technique to bead onto skins or felt. One needle and thread holds the beads on top of the skin, and the second needle and thread goes up and down to tack down the thread that the beads are on.



“Steps to Complete Beadwork” by Lilly Pitka and Kate Duncan *Athabascan Beading* (1978)

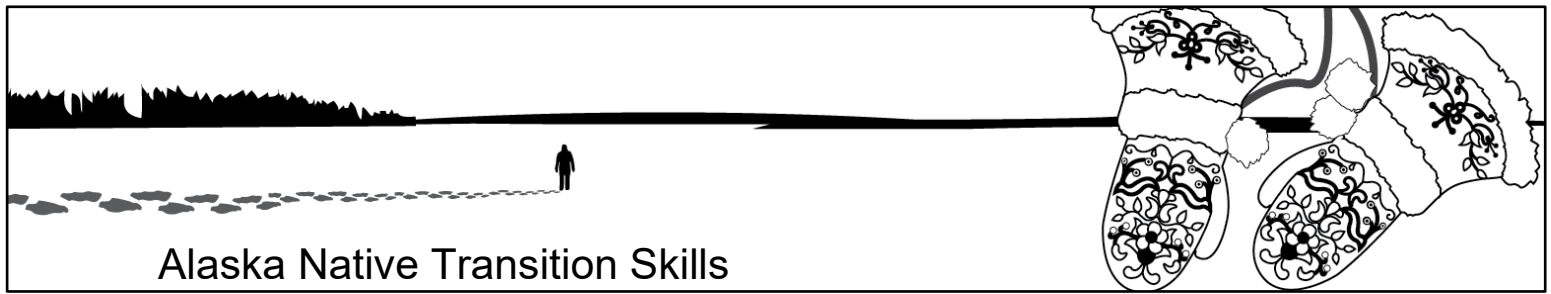
1. “Decide what the beadwork will be for (dress, gloves, jewelry, etc.)
2. Choose the type of pattern (floral patterns, straight or curving lines, geometric patterns, etc.) you think would fit best as a design.
3. Consider colors and choose your beads accordingly.
4. Draw the basic patterns on the material you choose. If the material is lightweight, use a backing such as a brown paper bag... The beads will then lay more uniform and neat.
5. Plan the direction the beads will lay in regard to the outline.



6. Complete beading the outline, then fill it in.”



Photo by Rochelle Adams and used with permission.



Alaska Native Transition Skills

Practice: Let's Start Beading

Overview

In this lesson, students will practice using the two-thread technique to bead a leaf shape. This lesson could be done over two or more sessions, depending on the ability and experience level of the students. Emphasize a positive attitude and how beading takes practice to learn. The bead work of a beginner won't look like the work of a person who has a lot of experience, and that is normal! It is brave and beautiful to begin to learn a new skill. It is important that this introduction is a positive experience, where students feel successful.

Alaska Cultural Standards

- A1, A3, A6, B2, C3, D5, E1, E4, E8

Dene Athabascan Values Related to this Lesson

- Self-sufficiency and Hard Work
- Care and Provision for the Family
- Sharing and Caring
- Respect for Elders and Others
- Respect for the Land and Nature
- Practice of Native Traditions
- Honoring Ancestors
- Spirituality

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Demonstrate how to thread a needle
- Demonstrate how to tie a knot in the beading thread
- Demonstrate having the tray ready with all of the tools and supplies
- Demonstrate keeping tension on the bead thread while working
- Demonstrate sewing beads in a leaf shape using the two-needle technique

Materials

- Student Handout: *Let's Start Beading!*
- For the project, each student will need a piece of felt or small towel, two lengths of thread (Nymo size D recommended, 20" long each) and a long and a short needle to start (size 11 recommended, you can go bigger if students have dexterity challenges).

- For the beading practice, they will need a 4" x 4" piece of beading felt or felt glued to paper, and a small plate of beads in three colors, ideally from a hank, and still on the string (size 11 recommended, bigger if students have dexterity challenges). Have a block of beeswax for the class, and run the thread through it before they start to avoid frustrating tangles.

Vocabulary

Backing	The material you are sewing the beads to. Traditionally, this would be moose skin, but it can also be felt. Unless you are using a beading felt (which is stiff), both skin and regular felt need brown paper stitched behind them so they lie flat and are sturdy to bead.
Bead	A small piece of glass or similar material, usually a round shape with a hole through it to be strung as in an earring or necklace, or to be sewn onto fabric or skins.
Beading	Refers to the act of sewing beads to fabric or skins or stringing beads together.
Eye (needle)	The "eye" of the needle is the hole in one end that the thread goes through. Note that the eyes are punched through, so one side may be bigger than the other side. If you are struggling to thread it, turning the needle around may help.
Hank	A bundle of multiple strands of beads tied together. Seed beads are usually purchased in a hank, or loose in a small tube container.
Knot	Fastening together. Knots are made at the end of a thread to keep it from pulling through the material, or made to secure the end of the thread after beading before cutting the thread. Knots also refer to tangles in the thread that were not wanted.
Material	Refers to what something is made from. Examples of different kinds of materials are shells, fabric, fibers, skins, fur, hair, and quills.
Sew, sewing	Join, fasten, or repair (something) by making stitches with a needle and thread or a sewing machine.
Technique	A specific way of doing something. Example: In this lesson, the one-thread and two-thread techniques are shown. In the one-thread technique, one needle is used, looping back through beads to tack them into place. In the two-thread technique, one long needle and thread is used for the beads, and a second shorter needle and thread is used to tack down the beaded strand.
Tension	Pulling gently on the thread with the beads keeps the thread straight and helps the beads lie in the right place to stitch them down. If you pull too hard, it will make the beads buckle and they won't lie flat against the backing. Too loose, and the thread will show and the beads won't lie close to each other. It takes a lot of practice to learn how to keep the right amount of tension on the beading thread as you bead.

Traditional	The holistic, practical, and common knowledge that has been gathered over thousands of years of observation and interaction with the land; it is passed on from generation to generation through practice, oral stories, dance, and art.
Wax	Natural wax made by bees is used to help keep the thread from tangling as you work. Bees make the wax in their hive to put the honey in (called honeycomb). The wax is harvested and used for many products such as candles, salves, wood polish, and more.

Activities and Adaptations

- **Share the goal of today's lesson:** "Today we are going to start beading. We will use a handout to practice the two-needle way to bead a leaf shape onto felt. By the end of this lesson, you will be able to: show you can thread a needle and tie a knot in the thread; show you have everything you need to start a project; and show how to bead a leaf shape using the two-needle technique."
- **Begin by finding out what students already know by asking the following questions:**
 - What does it mean to "thread a needle" and how is it done? *[In order to sew, you need a needle and thread. The needle makes a hole through the material for the thread to follow. To thread, you put thread through the eye of a needle and pull it through...]*
 - What is a knot? When are knots used in beading? *(A knot is made after you thread the needle to stop the thread from pulling right through. A knot is made after you finish beading, before you cut the thread so your beading stays in place and doesn't fall off...)*
 - What do you need to get ready to bead? *(A felt mat or towel to work on, something to hold your beads, needles, thread, scissors, and the material you will use. In other projects, you may need additional tools.)*
 - What does it mean to have a positive attitude? *(A feeling of hope and expecting good things to happen. Feeling good about what you are doing. Thinking happy thoughts about what you are doing.)*
 - How does learning Dene Athabascan beading honor the Ancestors that developed this beautiful art form? *(It carries forward the ways the Ancestors shared. The images on the bead work remind us of our Ancestors and what they have passed down to us. It shows how we are connected to those that came before us.)*
- **Connect the Values of today's lesson with the objectives, pick at least two to highlight:**
 - Self-sufficiency and Hard Work: *Beading takes practice to build the skills needed to be a good beader. Learning the traditional techniques is an important way to show respect for the Ancestors that passed down their knowledge about beading.*
 - Care and Provision for the Family: *The people who make our moccasins and other special beaded objects are showing their love by making these objects for us.*

- *Sharing and Caring: Making and sharing traditionally beaded objects is a special way to honor the ways that our Ancestors have taught us. This form of traditional art adds beauty to our everyday life. It is traditional to offer your first beaded item that you make as a gift to a family member or Elder.*
- *Respect for Elders and Others: Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
- *Respect for the Land and Nature: Many Dene Athabascan designs feature things from nature like flowers and leaves. Traditional tanned moose hide is commonly used in making moccasins, clothing, and other objects that are beaded. Beading artists need to respect the materials they use and where they come from. They do this by only taking and using what they need, and by caring for the land which provides the materials they use.*
- *Practice of Native Traditions: Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
- *Honoring Ancestors: Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
- *Spirituality: Using traditional designs and ways in beading can be one way to connect to our Ancestors and our spirituality.*
- **Giving your first beadwork as a gift:** It is a traditional practice that whenever you make your first item using traditional skills and knowledge, that you give it away as a gift. This shows the passing on of tradition and honors the Ancestors. It also recognizes you as a beader. Discuss with students why this is an important practice. Who would they want to share their beading with?
- **Review learning a new skill:** Set a positive expectation for beginning to practice beading. Remind students that any time you try something new, it can feel awkward. The beading may not look like what you expect, or what you picture in your mind. When you see the work of experienced beaders, the work is beautiful because they have learned and practiced. Their first pieces were not perfect either. The early work helps you see your progress, and should be celebrated as part of your learning of a new skill.
- **Review having a positive attitude:** An important part of learning to bead is having a positive attitude. If you are in a good mood, and keep a positive attitude, that will go into your work. If you are making something for someone else, think of them and your love for them, and that feeling will go into the work. If you are getting frustrated, set it aside until you feel ready to practice again with a positive attitude. Remember that through the learning of this skill you are honoring the Ancestors who developed this beautiful art form. You are honoring the plants and flowers in your designs by beading them into a beautiful pattern. You are honoring the moose by making a beautiful design on its skin. All of these things go into your work. ***As students begin to practice, and encounter the usual obstacles of learning a new skill, remind them it is normal, and help them reframe any frustration. Encourage breaks if needed, to maintain a positive experience and feeling of success.***

- **Getting ready to bead:** Start by talking through getting the work space ready. All students should have a piece of felt or small towel laid out in front of them. They will need two lengths of thread and a long and a short needle to start. For the beading practice, they will need a 4" x 4" piece of beading felt or felt stitched to brown paper, and a small plate of beads, ideally from a hank, and still on the string. (If only loose beads are available, that is fine as well.) One to two colors will work well for the project. Have them thread and knot the two needles with about 17" of thread, doubled (cut a length about 32" long, thread the needle, pull it to half way, knot the two ends together.)
- **"Steps to Complete Beadwork"** by Lilly Pitka from her book *Athabascan Beading* (1978)
 1. "Decide what the beadwork will be for (dress, gloves, jewelry, etc.)
 2. Choose the type of pattern (floral patterns, straight or curving lines, geometric patterns, etc.) you think would fit best as a design.
 3. Consider colors and choose your beads accordingly.
 4. Draw the basic patterns on the material you choose. If the material is lightweight, use a backing such as a brown paper bag or pellon [interfacing]. The beads will then lay more uniform and neat.
 5. Plan the direction the beads will lay in regard to the outline.
 6. Complete beading the outline, then fill it in."

- **Tension:**

Before you begin, talk a little bit about tension in beading. Keeping tension on the thread with the beads on it as you work helps make sure the beads will lie flat and close to each other when tacked down. You keep the right tension on the thread by wrapping the end of the beaded thread around your hand. Wrapping it on your hand also helps keep it out of the way so it doesn't get tangled together with the tacking thread. If you pull too tight, it will make the beads buckle and the backing will bend. If it is too loose, the beads won't sit next to each other and the thread will show.



A good demonstration of how to hold the thread and keep tension on it can be found by watching from 6:15 to 7:30 on this video **Two needle Flat stitch beading [filling in] #1** (Total length 13:28) by Mona Cliff: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TiRZ4oMQjgU&t=94s>. She does use a single rather than doubled thread for the needle that is tacking down the work, which can vary. Many Dene Athabascan beaders use a double thread needle for both the lead/bead needle and the tacking needle.



The only way to learn this fine balance of tension is to practice, be patient, and not get frustrated. It will likely feel awkward at first. This is normal when learning and trying anything new.

- **Beading Practice:**

Follow the steps on the student handout to bead a leaf shape onto felt. The leaf is a common element in Dene Athabascan bead work. It is important that the teacher has practiced making a leaf before teaching this lesson. If the example looks less than perfect, just know it models the learning the students are also doing.

- **Tie a knot at the end of your beading:** This is a second important knot to know. It helps make sure your beading will stay put and won't come loose and fall off. There are several ways to do this. If you have a guest beader present, they can show their favorite way. If not, here is a short and clear video that shows how to do this:

Quick Tip: How to Tie Off Threads in Bead Embroidery (2:27) (By Beadaholique):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GuD7hePMT84&t=75s>

- **Ideas for what to do with the leaf:** You can carefully cut around the felt or skin and use the leaf as a decoration on something else (either stitched or glued on).

You can add a brooch clasp to the back to make it into a pin. (Search "Brooch clasp jewelry making" to find examples for purchase. A bag of them is not very expensive). You can also make a magnet out of it by gluing a strong magnet to the back. Beaders recommend using E6000 or Gorilla Glue.



- **Tips for beginning beaders** (Adapted from *Athabascan Beading* by Lilly Pitka, 1978)
 - Rather than using loose beads or taking beads from the hanks off the threads, use your needle to thread the beads on from the line and then pull them off. On the hank, they are already lined up and can be quicker to get on your needle.
 - Use short lengths of thread for beading. It is less likely to tangle, and if it comes undone, you won't have as long of a strand to fall off.
 - As with regular sewing, it is easy to make mistakes. Rather than trying to hide the mistake, just start again.
 - Pull the beaded strand tight so that the beads are close together (though not so tight that they bunch up). The closer the beads are together, the more beautiful the design.

Learning stories

- Invite a local Alaska Native leader, culture-bearer, or Elder who is a beader to be present during the lesson to share and help students get started. They can share a traditional story about beads, a story about how they learned to bead, or about the person who taught them to bead. They can also share how they get ready for a project, how they keep tension on the thread as they work, and how they tie knots. Having experienced beaders in the classroom during the project will help students get the guidance they need and have a positive experience.

Evaluation

At the end of the lesson, ask the students these questions:

- How did you tie a knot on your thread to get started?
- How did you do the two-thread method for beading that you did in today's project?
- How did you keep tension on the thread as you beaded?

Additional Resources

- **Beading artist Mona Cliff** (A'niih/Nakota/Eastern European) demonstrates the two-needle (overlay) technique in several videos:
 - Beading for beginners. 2 needle flat stitch technique (26:45):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQz-p2yzs74>
 - Two needle Flat stitch beading [filling in] #1 (13:28)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TiRZ4oMQjgU&t=94s>
 - Two needle flat stitch beading [filling in] #2 (31:35)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYXggrF_rvM
- ***A Special Gift: The Kutchin Beadwork Tradition*** by Kate Duncan (1997) with beautiful pictures and information about Gwich'in beading.
- ***Athabaskan Woman Blog*** by Angela Gonzalez: Angela Gonzalez is a beader, writer, author and photographer. Her blog has many entries about beading, with photographs. <https://athabaskanwoman.com/>
- **Beadaholique.com** (<https://beadaholique.com/collections/instructional-beading-videos>) has a large selection of videos of beading skills and use of beading tools. It is a good general beading resource, not specific to traditional beading. There are pop-ups and coupons but if you watch the videos in the YouTube channel, you can avoid some of this. <https://www.youtube.com/c/beadaholique/videos>

Let's Start Beading!

1) Get your mind ready—

Begin by starting with a positive mind set. Know that you are learning something new. This work honors the Dene Athabascan artists, family members, Elders, and Ancestors who shared this beautiful art form with us.

2) Get your work space ready—

- Lay out a piece of felt or small towel on your desk or table.
- Thread a short and a long needle, and make a knot at the end of each.
- Run the thread of both needles over wax to keep it from tangling.
- Get the one or two colors of seed beads for your leaf ready on a plate.
- Get your piece of backing ready. In this project, you need a 4" x 4" piece of felt or moose skin with brown paper stitched on the back side.

3) Tension is important—

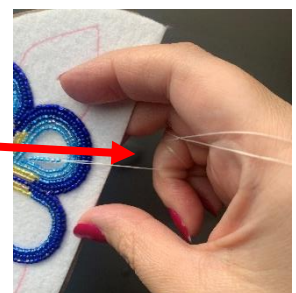
One skill that takes practice to learn, is how to keep the right amount of tension on the bead thread while you are tacking it down.

Pulling gently on the thread with the beads keeps the thread straight and helps the beads lie in the right place to stitch them down. If you pull too hard, it will make the beads buckle and they won't lie flat against the backing. Too loose, and the thread will show and the beads won't lie close to each other.

First, you wrap the thread around your fingers and hand.

Then, you can hold the work and control the tension with the finger that the thread is wrapped around.

Note: Rochelle is left-handed. If you are right-handed, your left hand holds the thread as the pictures show.

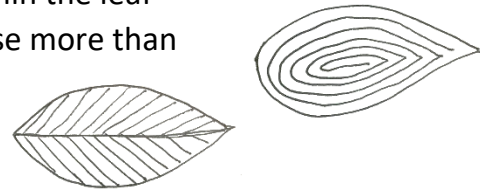


4) Your design—

- Pick one of the leaf shapes from the pattern page, or draw your own that is a similar size (2 inches to 2.5 inches).
- Transfer the pattern to the felt by making little dots around the pattern. This shows the outline that will be covered by the beads.



- Think about the direction the fill beads will lay within the leaf shape. Do a small sketch of your idea. If you will use more than one color, decide where the different colors will g



5) Bead the outline using a two-needle technique.



6) Fill in the outline using a two-needle technique. Add a stem if you like.



Leaf pattern

You can use the leaf pattern here, or make your own in the box provided.

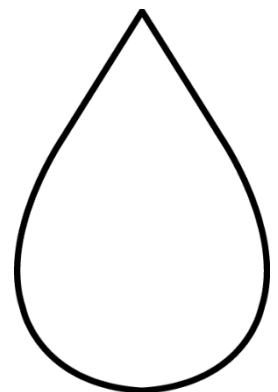
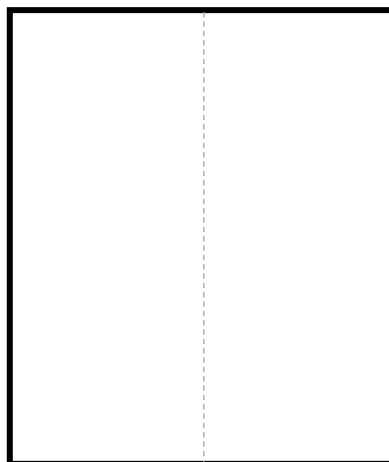
To make your own:

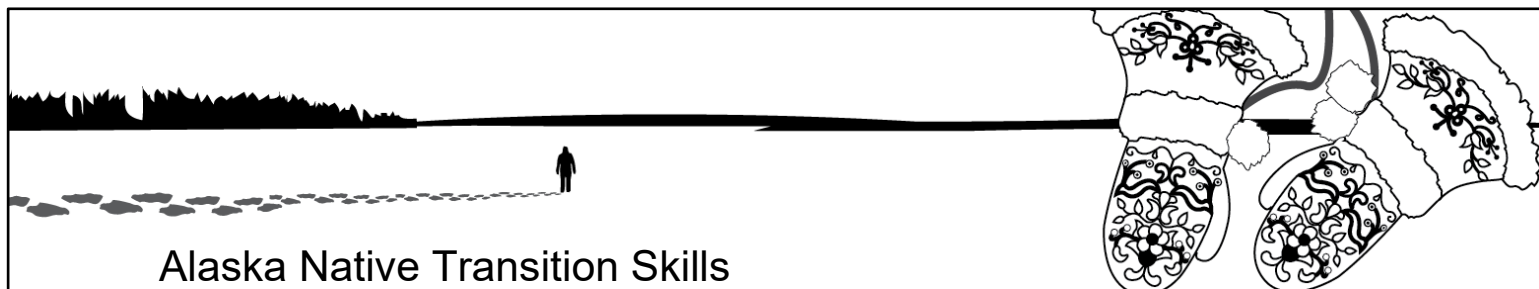
Cut out this square. →

Fold it in half on the dotted line.

Draw half of the leaf on the fold.

Cut it out and open it up.





Alaska Native Transition Skills

Beading as a Creative Industry

Overview

This lesson is for advanced students who are more accomplished beaders, and who are interested in selling their beadwork. The lesson provides some ideas for why a beader may want to sell their work and how to get started.

Alaska Cultural Standards

- A1, A4, A6, B2, B3, C3, C4, D3, E1, E7, E8

Dene Athabascan Values Related to this Lesson

- Self-sufficiency and Hard Work
- Care and Provision for the Family
- Sharing and Caring
- Respect for Elders and Others
- Respect for the Land and Nature
- Practice of Native Traditions
- Honoring Ancestors
- Spirituality

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- List three reasons a beader may want to sell their work.
- List three ways beading artists sell their work.
- List three common challenges artists face when trying to sell their work.

Materials

- No additional materials needed.

Vocabulary

Advertisement/Ad	A message that promotes your product or services to potential customers.
Brand	A name, logo, design or feature that makes your product or service unique. This can help a business stand out and be successful if people have a positive feeling about it.
Creative Industry	Businesses based on a creative/artistic product. Making and selling traditional beadwork and beaded jewelry can provide supplementary income.
Customer	The person who buys goods or services.

Logo	A picture that symbolizes a business to use in marketing. A logo is part of the brand a business has.
Market	A system where people exchange goods or services for money.
Market research	Research to better understand your potential customers, and other businesses that are similar to yours. Studying other businesses in the same market as yours can help you know what has helped make them successful, or what challenges to expect or avoid.
Marketing	The act of communicating the value of your business so that potential customers will buy your products or services.
Messaging	Choosing ways to talk about your product or service in order to better reach target customers.
Reputation	The beliefs or opinions generally held of someone or something.
Target Customer	People in a group most likely to need or buy your product or services.

Activities and Adaptations

- **Share the goal of today's lesson:** "Today we are going to discuss how experienced beaders sell their work, and why they like to do that. By the end of this lesson, you will be able to: list three reasons beading artists may like to sell their work, where they might sell their work, and three common challenges they might face."
- **Begin by finding out what students already know by asking the following questions:**
 - Where have you seen people selling beadwork or beaded jewelry they made? *[Tables at craft fairs, online, at gatherings...]*
 - Why do beaders like to sell their art? *(To share their traditional crafts, to make extra money...)*
 - What challenges do you think an artist might have when trying to sell their work? *(It may be difficult to find the right buyers, it might be hard to get the price the artwork is worth unless people understand the time and skill needed to bead, as well as the cost of materials...)*
- **Connect the Values of today's lesson with the objectives, pick at least two to highlight:**
 - Self-sufficiency and Hard Work: *Beading takes practice to build the skills needed to be a good beader. Learning the traditional techniques is an important way to show respect for the Ancestors that passed down their knowledge about beading.*
 - Care and Provision for the Family: *The people who make our moccasins and other special beaded objects are showing their love by making these objects for us. Selling beadwork is one way some artists provide for their families by making extra income.*
 - Sharing and Caring: *Making and sharing traditionally beaded objects is a special way to honor the ways that our Ancestors have taught us. This form of traditional art adds beauty to our everyday life.*

- Respect for Elders and Others: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
- Respect for the Land and Nature: *Many Dene Athabascan designs feature things from nature like flowers and leaves. Traditional tanned moose hide is commonly used in making moccasins, clothing, and other objects that are beaded. Beading artists need to respect the materials they use and where they come from. They do this by only taking and using what they need, and by caring for the land which provides the materials they use.*
- Practice of Native Traditions: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
- Honoring Ancestors: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading shows respect for our Elders and teachers and Ancestors.*
- Spirituality: *Using traditional designs and ways in beading can be one way to connect to our Ancestors and our spirituality.*
- **Using the vocabulary above, discuss some terms associated with marketing and selling art/creative work.**
- **Discuss the reasons an experienced artist may want to sell their beadwork:**
After a good amount of practice and learning, beading artists may choose to find ways to sell what they are making. They may want to share their culture and traditions with others. They may want to honor their family by carrying on a tradition. They may want to make money to buy more supplies so they can keep beading. They may want to bring in extra income to provide for their family.
- **Discuss ideas for where beading artists sell their work:**
Where have you seen artists sell their work? What were they selling? If at a gathering, how did they set up their table to show their work? If online, how did they share the pictures of their work?

At gatherings, craft fairs, and other places where Alaska Natives are sharing the art work they made, artists display their work on a table for potential customers to see. They lay out their work so there is space to see the work, and so it looks appealing. Jewelry may be on cards or hung on a display to make them easy to see. They may have fabric underneath to make a certain color below their work, and to hide the table.

Some artists prefer to sell online. They may have a page on Facebook or Instagram with pictures of their work that are for sale. They take good pictures that are clear and that highlight the beauty of the work. They may show a picture of a model wearing the work, so a person can picture what it would look like or how big it is. Some artists have an online store, such as Etsy, where people can see what they are selling. As an activity, look at Etsy sites related to beadwork and talk about what different artists do to make their site more appealing.

- **Marketing:**

Artists advertise to direct potential customers to their work. This takes practice, to build a business where people know about the work, and know how to find it. For more specifics on this, check out the lesson on *Marketing* in the Traditional Transition Unit on Self-Employment and Financial Literacy Skills 2020 at:

https://sesa.org/resources/educational_resources/alaska-traditional-transition-skills/

Business skills: Having even a small business takes financial (money) and marketing skills. Talk to other artists to get tips on how they sell their work and find their customers. Notice what you like to buy and how artists display and photograph their work. For many Alaska Natives, marketing their work does not come naturally, as self-promotion is not usually encouraged within Alaska Native cultures. It may help to think of marketing as a way to share your culture and reach more people for that purpose. You can create a professional looking brand based on the quality and skill of your work. You can ask others to help by posting comments and why they like your work, rather than saying those things yourself.

- **Potential challenges for artists—**

- Finding a market: It may be difficult to find customers to buy. After all of your family and friends have pieces of your work, you have to expand to your community. If you have a small community, it may be good to go online, to expand your customer base even more.
- Pricing your work: You have to find a price for your work that values the time you spent, your experience level, the cost of the materials and still is a price people will pay. There is advice and guidance on how to find a price for what you have made in Lesson 7, *Exploring Business Ideas* in the Traditional Transition Unit on Self-Employment and Financial Literacy Skills 2020 at:
https://sesa.org/resources/educational_resources/alaska-traditional-transition-skills/

Learning stories

- Invite an Alaska Native culture-bearer or Elder who sells their work to share about their journey from learning to bead to selling their work. If they are willing, have the students prepare questions related to a) why they like to share their work by selling it, b) where they like to sell their work, and how they display or market it, and c) what challenges they have faced in selling their work.

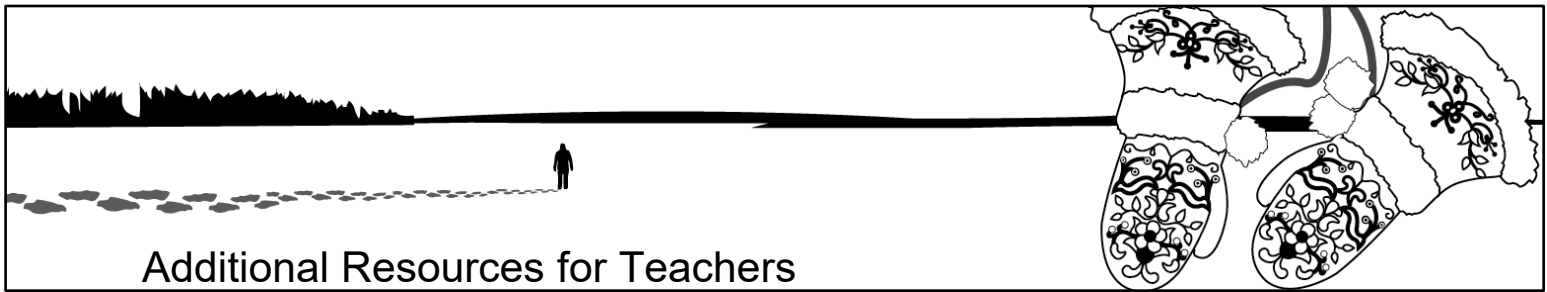
Evaluation

At the end of the lesson, ask the students these questions:

- What are three reasons a beader may want to sell their work?
- What are three ways or places beading artists sell their work?
- What are three common challenges artists face when trying to sell their work?

Additional Resources

- ***Alaska Native Artist Resource Workbook*** by the Alaska State Council for the Arts. A very detailed guide for Alaskan Native artists to develop their art as a business. Access it online: http://thecirifoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/ALASKA-NATIVE-ARTIST-RESOURCE-WORKBOOK_2015.pdf
- **Traditional Transition 2020: Financial Literacy and Self-Employment Skills:** For students with learning disabilities and less functional support needs who are interested in self-employment and creating a traditional art business or other business. Includes basic financial literacy taught with learning stories and regionally specific examples. https://sesa.org/resources/educational_resources/alaska-traditional-transition-skills/
- **Teaching Kids Business** has teacher resources to build business skills. <https://www.teachingkidsbusiness.com/>
- **How to design a logo:** This site has good tips for designing a logo. It is a blog, so it does have ads. <https://99designs.com/blog/logo-branding/how-to-design-logo/>



Additional Resources for Teachers

These were resources we found as we developed the curriculum that may be helpful. These links were accessed 5-2025.

Tips for Non-Alaska Native Teachers who want to invite an Elder in to speak:

This is part of a unit on weather, and also has good guidance on incorporating traditional knowledge systems into lessons. See page 3 for information on how to appropriately invite an Elder or culture bearer into the classroom:

<http://ankn.uaf.edu/Curriculum/Units/PredictingWeather/PredictingWeather.pdf>

Alaska Native Knowledge Network: More curriculum and other resources related to Alaska Native ways of knowing. <http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/>

Interview with Adeline Peter Raboff – Author and Historian by Angela Gonzalez: Blog entry March 13, 2021, Athabascan Woman Blog. Interview with historian who studied and mapped the distribution of Koyokon, Inupiat, Lower Tanana and Gwich'in in 1800. It is a powerful lesson in how mobile the people were before contact. <https://athabascanwoman.com/>

Alaska Native Language Center: Great resources on incorporating indigenous language into lessons: <https://www.uaf.edu/anlc/index.php>

Alaska Digital Library: Find more historic images of Dene Athabascan cultures and people (and other Alaska Native peoples) for use in the classroom: <https://vilda.alaska.edu/digital>

Smithsonian Arctic Studies Collection: Search the site by region/culture to find artifacts and historic photographs for use in the classroom: <https://learninglab.si.edu/org/sasc-ak>

Alaska Cultural Standards

A: Culturally-knowledgeable students are well grounded in the cultural heritage and traditions of their community.	B: Culturally-knowledgeable students are able to build on the knowledge and skills of the local cultural community as a foundation from which to achieve personal and academic success throughout life.	C: Culturally-knowledgeable students are able to actively participate in various cultural environments.	D: Culturally-knowledgeable students are able to engage effectively in learning activities that are based on traditional ways of knowing and learning.	E: Culturally-knowledgeable students demonstrate an awareness and appreciation of the relationships and processes of interaction of all elements in the world around them.
<p>A1: Assume responsibilities for their role in relation to the well-being of the cultural community and their lifelong obligations as a community member;</p> <p>A2: Recount their own genealogy and family history;</p> <p>A3: Acquire and pass on the traditions of their community through oral and written history;</p> <p>A4: Practice their traditional responsibilities to the surrounding environment;</p>	<p>B1: Acquire insights from other cultures without diminishing the integrity of their own;</p> <p>B2: Make effective use of the knowledge, skills, and ways of knowing from their own cultural traditions to learn about the larger world in which they live;</p> <p>B3: Make appropriate choices regarding the long-term consequences of their actions; and</p> <p>B4: Identify appropriate forms of technology and anticipate the consequences of their</p>	<p>C1: Perform subsistence activities in ways that are appropriate to local cultural traditions;</p> <p>C2: Make constructive contributions to the governance of their community and the well-being of their family;</p> <p>C3: Attain a healthy lifestyle through which they are able to maintain their social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual well-being; and</p> <p>C4: Enter into and function effectively in a</p>	<p>D1: Acquire in-depth cultural knowledge through active participation and meaningful interaction with Elders;</p> <p>D2: Participate in and make constructive contributions to the learning activities associated with a traditional camp environment;</p> <p>D3: Interact with Elders in a loving and respectful way that demonstrates an appreciation of their role as culture-bearers</p>	<p>E1: Recognize and build upon the interrelationships that exist among the spiritual, natural, and human realms in the world around them, as reflected in their own cultural traditions and beliefs as well as those of others;</p> <p>E2: Understand the ecology and geography of the bioregion they inhabit;</p> <p>E3: Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between world view and the way knowledge is formed and used;</p>

<p>A5: Reflect through their own actions the critical role that the local heritage language plays in fostering a sense of who they are and how they understand the world around them;</p> <p>A6: Live a life in accordance with the cultural values and traditions of the local community and integrate them into their everyday behavior.</p> <p>A7: Determine the place of their cultural community in the regional, state, national, and international political and economic systems.</p>	<p>use for improving the quality of life in the community.</p>	<p>variety of cultural settings.</p>	<p>and educators in the community;</p> <p>D4: Gather oral and written history information from the local community and provide an appropriate interpretation of its cultural meaning and significance;</p> <p>D5: Identify and utilize appropriate sources of cultural knowledge to find solutions to everyday problems; and</p> <p>D6: Engage in a realistic self-assessment to identify strengths and needs and make appropriate decisions to enhance life skills.</p>	<p>E4: Determine how ideas and concepts from one knowledge system relate to those derived from other knowledge systems;</p> <p>E5: Recognize how and why cultures change over time;</p> <p>E6: Anticipate the changes that occur when different cultural systems come in contact with one another;</p> <p>E7: Determine how cultural values and beliefs influence the interaction of people from different cultural backgrounds.</p> <p>E8: Identify and appreciate who they are and their place in the world.</p>
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This handout was created from the Alaska Cultural Standards. Source: <https://kpbsd.org/departments.aspx?id=6834&transitionUi=1>

Dene Athabaskan Values—

From the Alaska Native Knowledge Network: <http://ankn.uaf.edu/ancr/values/athabaskan.html>

- Self-sufficiency and Hard Work
- Care and Provision for the Family
- Family Relations and Unity
- Love for Children
- Village Cooperation and Responsibility to Village
- Humor
- Honesty and Fairness
- Sharing and Caring
- Respect for Elders and Others
- Respect for Knowledge & Wisdom from Life Experiences
- Respect for the Land and Nature
- Practice of Native Traditions
- Honoring Ancestors
- Spirituality

Source: **DENAKKANAAGA ELDERS CONFERENCE- 1985**

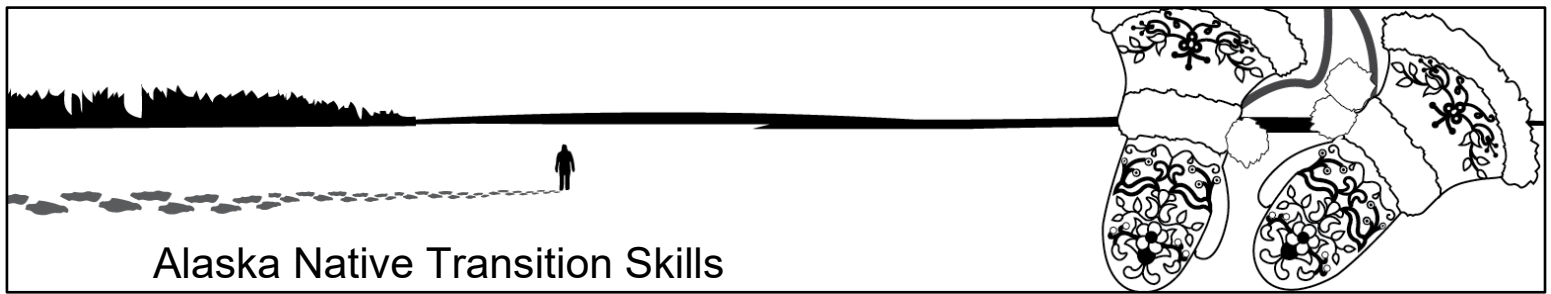
MINTO FLATS: DENE ATHABASKAN VALUES

Every Athabaskan Is Responsible To All Other Athabaskan For the Survival Of Our Cultural Spirit, and the Values and Traditions Through Which it Survives. Through Our Extended Family, We Retain, Teach, and Live Our Athabaskan Way.

With guidance and support from elders, we must teach our children Athabaskan values:

- Knowledge of Language
- Sharing
- Respect for Others
- Cooperation
- Respect for Elders
- Love for Children
- Hard Work
- Knowledge of Family Tree
- Avoid Conflict
- Respect for Nature
- Spirituality
- Humor
- Family Roles
- Hunter Success
- Domestic Skills
- Humility
- Responsibility to Tribe

Our Understanding of Our Universe and Our Place In It Is A Belief In God and a Respect For All His Creations



Alaska Native Transition Skills

Art Unit Structure

This unit can be adapted for other art forms and regions, by following the basic structure of the lessons. Introducing traditional art forms provides a way for students to connect to their culture and community for a more meaningful life. Here is a simple structure to consider when introducing a traditional art form, with the example of beading.

1. Introduce the art form and show examples.	Describe the types of bead work that are important in _____ communities. Describe the kinds of materials that are traditionally beaded in _____ communities
2. Introduce the history and significance of the art form for the indigenous people.	Describe how beaded objects were used in everyday life in the past. Describe how beaded objects are used in everyday life now.
3. Featured Artist	Learn about an artist who is recognized for their work in this art form, and what motivated them to learn. Invite an artist who works in the art form to visit with the class.
4. Featured Artist	Learn about an artist who is recognized for their work in this art form, and what motivated them to learn. Invite an artist who works in the art form to visit with the class.
5. Introduce the basic tools	Show the basic tools used in the art form. Play a vocabulary game to learn about the tools. Bring in the tools if possible so students can get a feel for them directly. Discuss modern tools vs. traditional tools used.

6. Introduce the materials	Show the basic materials used in the art form. Play a vocabulary game to learn about the materials. Discuss why these materials are used. Bring in the tools if possible so students can get a feel for them directly. Discuss modern materials vs. traditional materials used.
7. Basic skills projects	Use videos to introduce the basic skills. Beading has elements of design, as well as skills to attach the beads. Pick projects that promote a feeling of success and that are not frustrating.
8. More advanced skill projects	As appropriate and safe, students can try a project using the traditional materials and tools.
9. Next steps for interested students	Support connecting a student with a mentor who can guide them to learn the art form with additional practice projects and skill building sessions.