

Activity Plan

<i>Title</i>	Life of a Navajo Weaver
<i>Subject</i>	Dance: Connections
<i>Author</i>	ArtsEdge: Carol Tester <i>Original Writer</i> Carol Parenzan Smalley <i>Adaptation</i>
<i>Grade level</i>	Grades K-4
<i>Time duration</i>	60-120 mins
<i>Overview</i>	After learning about the role of Spider Woman in Navajo legend and watching a young male weave on a traditional loom, students experiment with interpretative dance as they recreate the weaving process (from sheep to rug) by “weaving” to Native American music.
<i>Objective</i>	Students will: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn about Spider Woman and the Navajo weaving legend.• Observe a young boy weave on a traditional Navajo loom.• Explore the art of Navajo weaving through a children’s picture book about the life of a young Navajo weaver.• Create and perform an original interpretative dance about Navajo weaving to the music of a Native American flutist
<i>Materials</i>	Materials Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Website• Rubric: Life of a Navajo Performance Assessment Required Technology <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 Computer per Classroom• Internet Access• Projector• Speakers

ENGAGE

1. Read *The Magic Of Spider Woman* by Lois Duncan. Ask students:

- Who was the Spider Woman? (*the individual in Navajo legend who taught the Navajo people how to weave*)
- Who are the Navajos? (*a Native American tribe in southwestern United States*)
- What lesson did she try to teach in the story? (*what is needed to weave, how to weave, how to have balance in life*)
- What is the first step in weaving? (*shearing the sheep to make yarn*)
- What gets trapped in the blanket in the story? (*the girl's spirit*)
- Does the spirit really get trapped? (*answers may vary*)
- What story does the illustrator tell by the choice of his colors and illustration style? (*answers may vary*)
- How does the illustrator reinforce the idea of an “escape for the trapped spirit” in his illustrations? (*the perfect rectangle is broken by a component of the illustration*)
- Who can be a weaver? (*answers may vary, but most responses will imply that females become weavers*)

Recommended Resources:

Book: *The Magic Of Spider Woman* by Lois Duncan

BUILD KNOWLEDGE

1. Without introduction, show the video: [Navajo Boy Weaving](#). Ask students:

- Were you surprised to see a young boy weaving? (*answers may vary*)
- What did you observe the boy doing? (*answers should describe the weaving process*)
- What does the boy use to weave? (*a vertical loom, yarn, a “threader” stick or shuttle, a comb or beater, pick up stick*)
- Is he making a pattern? (*not yet, he is just learning how to weave*)
- If he were to make a pattern, how might he do that? (*answers may vary, but may include design the pattern on paper first, ask an elder to help him, follow another pattern*)
- What is he weaving? (*answers may vary and include rug, blanket, “nothing yet”*)

2. Read *Songs from the Loom: A Navajo Girl Learns to Weave* by Monty Roessel. Note to teachers: You may want to limit your reading of the story to select passages if time is an issue. Ask students:

- What is the relationship between the two main characters in the book? (*grandmother and granddaughter*)
- Why did the author think it was important to show these two people working together? (*weaving is a traditional Navajo art passed down through the generations, there is a special relationship among the women in the tribe*)
- How is the author connected to the characters? (*Monty Roessel, the author, is the son of the grandmother and the father of the granddaughter*)
- In addition to weaving, what does the author share with his readers? (*the culture of the Navajo people*)
- What type of illustration is used in this book? (*The author is also the illustrator and he uses photo-illustration to help convey the information.*)

3. List the steps needed to weave a Navajo rug. On the board, ask students to outline the steps necessary to weave a rug, from shearing the sheep to the final product. Students can use the two books from this lesson to help them.

4. Explore [Navajo rugs and blankets](#). Ask students:

- What is similar about these designs? (*bold colors, similar colors, geometric designs, weave, etc.*)
- What is different about these designs? (*sizes, some tell a story using pictures, etc.*)

5. Revisit *Songs from the Loom: A Navajo Girl Learns to Weave* briefly. Ask students:

- Why do you think the author included the word “songs” in the title of the book? (*answers may vary, but the teacher should try to steer the discussion to answers such as weavings tell a story, the weaver develops a rhythm like a song as he or she works the shuttle back and forth, weavings have patterns like songs have patterns, weavers often sing as they weave, etc.*)

Recommended Resources:

Book: *Songs from the Loom: A Navajo Girl Learns to Weave*

APPLY

1. Introduce interpretive dance to students. Explain that interpretive dance is used to show or explain something without words by using body movement. For example, dance can be used to show how a caterpillar can become a butterfly, how a flower grows from a seed, how tiny raindrops can turn into a raging storm, etc. Take one of the above ideas and ask the class a series of discussion questions. For example, if you select the flower growing from a seed, the discussion might be something like this:

- How might we show how a flower grows from a seed? (*we could start as a tiny ball and slowly emerge, we could reach for the sky, etc.*)
- What kind of body movements might we make? (*slow movements for the seed growing, swaying movements if the wind is blowing, etc.*)
- Would we use one person or many? (*we could have many seeds growing at the same time or just one*)
- What supporting dance features might we need? (*the sun, raindrops, a bee to pollinate the flower, etc.*)
- What props might we use? (*a water can to represent rain, a big yellow ball to represent the sun, etc.*)
- How many ways could we show this? (*unlimited, interpretive dance takes on the perspective of the dancers*)

Using a blackboard or white board, show students how you might choreograph a growing flower dance on paper. Explain that there is no right or wrong way to do this. You may want to divide the paper into squares or frames to show the progress of the dance. Or, perhaps the paper will represent an aerial view of the dance with various dancers entering from different “edges.”

2. Have students create an interpretive dance to describe the art of Navajo weaving. Divide the class into dance teams of about 8 – 10 students each. Explain to students that they are going to create a modern “weaving” dance using the following props:

- Colored crepe paper streamers to represent yarn
- String to represent the strings on a loom
- Rulers to represent the shuttle
- Items found in classroom (as needed)

[Attach the streamers to the rulers with masking tape. Students may choose to have long streamers that actually wind through the loom strings or short streamers that represent the weaving process.]

The dance can show the entire process or part of the process. (You may choose to have each team dance a portion of the process and then combine them as a single production.)

The music for the dance will be traditional music by Navajo flutist R. Carlos Nakai.

Students can use unlined paper to choreograph their performances. Remind them that there is no right or wrong way to capture their dance on paper. It is simply there to help them organize their dance creativity.

3. Perform the dances. Ask students:

- What did the dances show? (*answers may vary*)
- Were the dancers successful? (*answers may vary*)
- Did they use their props well? (*answers may vary*)
- What role did the music play in setting the scene or telling the story? (*answers may vary*)

Conclusions

Teacher Background

To prepare for this lesson, teachers should:

- Obtain and Review a copy of *The Magic Of Spider Woman* by Lois Duncan
- Read article: [Art: The Spider Woman](#)
- Explore the illustration work and biography of artist [Shonto Begay](#)
- Obtain and review a copy of *Songs from the Loom: A Navajo Girl Learns to Weave* by Monty Roessel
- View video: [Navajo Boy Weaving](#)
- Review [Navajo rugs and blankets](#)
- Review [Navajo Weaving: Yesterday and Today](#)
- Find music of Native American (Navajo) flutist R. Carlos Nakai. Some possible sources include: library CDs, [last.fm radio](#), and [Pandora.com](#) (create station using Nakai as key artist).
- Review article: [Interpretive Dance](#)
- Be familiar with [shape poetry](#).

Prior Student Knowledge

General awareness and understanding of Native Americans and their crafts. Basic understanding of stories from different cultures. Familiar with shape poems.

REFLECT

1. Have students write shape or free-form poems. Using unlined paper, have students “weave a poem” to reflect on the dance

experience. For example, if the weaving dance was difficult for the student to perform, the poem may show disorganization of words and thoughts as they're scattered across the page. If the weaving dance focused on the sheering of sheep and the sheep did not cooperate, the words may be bold and forceful as other dancers had to hold the sheep in place. If the weaving dance interpreted the final product, perhaps a shawl, the poem can show the beauty of the final weaving. There is no right or wrong form or reflection. Encourage students to allow their creativity to take them on a journey.

Encourage students to abandon straight lines and traditional poetry formats, to use a free and loose format, to weave the words in and out of each other, or to use the words to form shapes that represent the weaving process, such as the animal that the wool comes from or the final finished woven product.

2. Display the poems in the classroom or hallway. Allow students to visit each other's forms and reflections.

ASSESSMENT

Use the [Performance Assessment](#) handout located under 'Resources in Reach' to assess your students' work.

Adaptations

Extending the Learning

Explore [Additional Navajo Children's Books](#).

Learn about other Native American arts/crafts.

Explore other [Native American legends](#).

[Note to editors: If you would additional lessons based on legends, I'd be happy to do them for you.]

Watch [traditional Native American dances](#).

Links and Websites