

How to Build a Cardboard Loom and Basic Weaving

Fort Sumner Historic Site/Bosque Redondo Memorial

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Group of homeschool students and parents learning to weave at BRM – used with permission

Essential Question

Why was weaving important to Navajo history and today and how might I get started?

Using materials that you have at home you can make a cardboard loom and warp it as your first step towards learning to weave. In another video, I demonstrate how to use the loom to begin basic weaving. Once you have built your loom, you can watch the video on our YouTube Channel on how to begin weaving at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERgAoPMeQKk>

Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Understand the history of Navajo weaving before being interned at Fort Sumner
2. How weaving changed with the internment and is now

3. How to create a loom and begin basic weaving by following step by step instructions

Background

Weaving began for the Navajo when Spiderboy brought the loom to the people in which he created the loom's frame from the power of the sun, the lashing cords of lightning and the warp strings of rain. Then Spiderwoman taught the women how to weave. Spiderman gave the seeds of cotton to the people who grew it and then using spindles began to spin into thread.

When the Spanish arrived in the 1500's, they brought with them domesticated animals such as horses, sheep and goats. The Churro sheep does well in the southwest and the wool is high quality. Taking the spinning and weaving skills, the Navajo people quickly adapted the wool into their weaving. Owning many sheep soon became a sign of prestige and prosperity and the flocks of the Diné were some of the largest in the Southwest.

Spinning and weaving wool is a long-held tradition among the Diné and today they weave blankets, clothing, rugs, bedding, and saddle blankets. Weaving is also often a sacred activity. Religious stories, patterns, symbols, and color schemes can be woven into the weavings. These blankets then have certain sacred qualities and can be used as a tool to teach the younger generations about oral traditions and beliefs. Therefore, weaving was useful, cultural, educational, and sacred.

When the Diné were forced marched to Bosque Redondo on the long walk, many brought their sheep. Their flocks had been decreased by the Army during the campaign against the Navajo which include burning crops, killing livestock, poisoning water sources and burning hogans. At Bosque Redondo, the numbers of sheep did decrease as they were starving. They needed the wool and they also needed to eat

At Bosque Redondo, wool and weaving were more important than ever. Because wood was scarce, it was impossible to build a proper hogan (a 6 to 8 sided wooden structure with center fire pit exhausted through a hole in the roof). The Diné had to make do with rough shelters made from scraggly mesquite, which were poor protection from the elements. There also was not enough firewood to keep warm. Woven blankets and rugs were used to create and improve shelters, to stay warm, and to stay clothed under these rough conditions.

The army supplied them with old uniforms and army blankets and the women unraveled them and wove them into clothes and blankets. The army officers began to supply them with more wool from Germantown which was dyed in many colors. Captain McCabe reported that the women could "fabricate a strong and durable cloth and elegant blankets of a variety of patterns and brilliant colors, for which purposes the Navajoes (sic) value the wool they obtain from their sheep. These fabrics are made in hand looms of simple construction by the women of the tribe. One industrious female can finish a blanket in 3 weeks, which will wear for ten years, is perfectly waterproof, and will

command a price as high as \$50 to \$200” (Dec. 31st 1864). The new wool, with modern dyes, led to a dramatic increase in the brightness of the colors used in their weaving, though the traditional techniques and patterns usually remained.

After the Bosque

In the treaty between the U.S. Government and the Navajo was signed in 1868, the U.S. promised to grant every person (man, woman, and child) two sheep so that they could regrow their flocks and return to being self-sufficient. While it took until November of 1869 for the government to deliver on their agreement, the Diné eventually received 15,000 sheep and goats. Their head chief, Barboncito, said “Now you are beginning again. Take care of the sheep that have been given you, as you care for your own children. Never kill them for food. If you are hungry, go out after the wild animals and the wild plants. Or go without food, for you have done that before. These few sheep must grow into flocks so that we, the People, can be as we once were”

Weaving Now

Weaving was passed down from mother to daughter. Now weaving is more for commercial art than necessity and rugs can go from the hundreds to thousands of dollars. If you look at the top right hand corner of every rug, you will notice a single strand of yarn or contrasting color. This “mistake” is intentional and is called the weaver’s pathway. “This flaw is intentional, and the Navajo believe that this flaw allows the spirit of the blanket to have the freedom to roam, and for the blanket to never truly end.”

To see more about Navajo weaving in an interview with a Navajo weaver:

<https://www.inmaricopa.com/local-artists-explain-navajo-weaving-creative-processes-video/> Watch the first 7:43.

Activities

K-4 – Since this activity requires use of hobby knife, adult supervision is required

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9-12- The video shows building a loom with gaps of 1 cm, but for older students, try making the gaps (slits) 1/8th of inch apart so when you begin to weave on the loom, you will get tighter weave and can be more creative in color mixing. Also, if you want fringe, wrap your warp threads all the way around the loom.

New Mexico Content Standards

<https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/instructional-materials/new-mexico-content-standards/>

K-5th Grade Standards

STRAND: History

Content Standard I: Students are able to identify important people and events in order to analyze significant patterns, relationships, themes, ideas, beliefs, and turning points in New Mexico, United States, and world history in order to understand the complexity of the human experience.

K-4 Benchmark I-A—New Mexico: Describe how contemporary and historical people and events have influenced New Mexico communities and regions.

K-4 Grade Performance Standards

(2nd Grade) 1. Describe how historical people, groups, and events have influenced the local community.

(3rd Grade) 1. Describe how the lives and contributions of people of New Mexico influenced local communities and regions.

(4th Grade) 1. Identify important issues, events, and individuals from New Mexico pre-history to the present.

5th – 8th Grade Standards

STRAND: Geography

5-8 Benchmark 2-B: explain the physical and human characteristics of places and use this knowledge to define regions, their relationships with other regions, and their patterns of change:

5-8 Grade Performance Standards

5th Grade) 1. describe human and natural characteristics of places.

(6th Grade) 1. explain how places change due to human activity.

(7th Grade) 1. select and explore a region by its distinguishing characteristics; 2. describe the role of technology in shaping the characteristics of places.

(8th Grade) 1. describe how individual and cultural characteristics affect perceptions of locales and regions; and 2. describe political, population and economic regions that result from patterns of human activity, using New Mexico as an example.

9th – 12th Grade Standards

STRAND: History

Content Standard I: Students are able to identify important people and events in order to analyze significant patterns, relationships, themes, ideas, beliefs, and turning points in New

Mexico, United States, and world history in order to understand the complexity of the human experience.

9-12 Benchmark 1-A. New Mexico: analyze how people and events of New Mexico have influenced United States and world history since statehood:

9-12 Performance Standards

2. Analyze the geographic, economic, social and political factors of New Mexico that impact United States and world history, to include: d. role of the federal government (e.g., military bases, national laboratories, national parks, Indian reservations, transportation systems, water projects).