

MÉTIS CULTURE • SYMBOLS, VALUE SYSTEM, ART AND MUSIC • BEADWORK

Learning goal: Students will understand the importance of Métis beadwork.

Suggested timeline: 2 x 75-minute periods

Subjects: Visual Arts, Canadian History

Lesson opener

See it:

“...culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs...”

— *United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization. UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2003)*

“My people will sleep for one hundred years, but when they awake, it is the artists who will give them their spirit back.”

— *Louis Riel*

Strategy/Lesson activity

Feel it:

Show students examples of Métis beadwork, using images from firstpeoplesofcanada.com/fp_metis/fp_metis5.html

Know it:

Background:

The Métis were famous for their floral beadwork and were often called the ‘Flower Beadwork People.’ Métis artists blended European floral embroidery, First Nations quillwork, and European beads to create a style of floral beadwork that continues to be recognized as distinctly Métis. Many Métis communities would have distinct beading patterns reflecting the plants of the region and the influences of the beader. Beadwork was added to jackets, moccasins, bags, leggings, gloves, vests, pouches, etc. In Métis beadwork, there is often a “Spirit Bead.” This is one bead that is identifiably the wrong colour, in an otherwise perfect pattern. Including a “Spirit Bead” is an act of humility before the creator, and a reminder that imperfection is ok. Beadwork continues to be produced today in traditional and contemporary forms and many Métis wear it with pride. It is considered a spiritual exercise that offers time for reflection and for elders to tell stories that pass Métis culture on to young people.

Discussion:

What are the original influences on historic Métis floral beadwork? How did Métis beadwork differ historically from First Nation beadwork? How does Métis floral beadwork reflect Métis society and the individual cultural expression of the artist? What are some common characteristics/elements of Métis floral styles? How was/is the artwork impacted by local resources, local plant life, and the availability of European goods? Why was Métis beadwork often misnamed as First Nation beadwork? How has beadwork evolved from the past to the present? How is Métis beading a spiritual exercise? What items were traditionally decorated with beads? Why do Métis continue to bead today?

Assessment

Do It:

Use beads, stones, etc. to create floral patterned artwork. Students explain their work—what were they feeling when they were beading? What was their inspiration?

Extension:

Study Christi Belcourt's dot art, a contemporary form of Métis beadwork. Create art work using dot art.

Suggested Resources:

Métis Women's Traditional Arts: Gabriel Dumont Institute:
gdins.org/product/metis-womens-traditional-arts-series

Métis Nation of Ontario Website—Culture and Heritage:
metisnation.org/culture-heritage/who-are-the-m%C3%A9tis

Métis—The Canadian Encyclopedia: thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/metis

Wâpikwani: A Beginner's Guide To Métis Floral Beadwork
by Gregory Scofield and Amy Briley

Christi Belcourt christibelcourt.com

Metis Legacy
by Lawrence Barkwell, Leah Dorion and Darren Préfontaine

Metis Legacy II
by Lawrence Barkwell, Leah Dorion and Audreen Hourie

Expressing Our Heritage: Métis Artistic Designs
by Cheryl Troupe (Gabriel Dumont Institute)

Beadwork: First Peoples' Beading History and Techniques
by Christi Belcourt

metismuseum.ca (Métis Virtual Museum)

Métis Beading—Briony Goddard youtube.com/watch?v=QCQTUTNAj78

Métis Beading—Barbaranne Wright youtube.com/watch?v=DH89wr_vu4U

lisashepherd.ca

Christi Belcourt youtube.com/watch?v=JwNHNm9dw6Y

creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/arts/are-dot-paintings-traditional-aboriginal-art#axzz3yrHu9NfZ

Our Legacy; Métis Culture: scaa.sk.ca/ourlegacy/exhibit_metisculture

Aboriginal Beliefs, Values and Inspirations (student textbook)—ISBN:978-0-13-510651-8 Co-published by Pearson Education Canada and GoodMinds.com

The Flower Beadwork People youtube.com/watch?v=54ipBLZJ6L4

Floral Beadwork: A Métis Cultural Heritage to Rediscover (Encyclopedia of French Cultural Heritage in North America): ameriquefrancaise.org/en/article-476/Floral_Beadwork:_A_M%C3%A9tis_Cultural_Heritage_to_Rediscover_.html

Métis Beadwork, Quillwork and Embroidery (Métis Virtual Museum):
www.metismuseum.ca/media/document.php/00715.BeadworkQuillworkEm.pdf

Beadwork: The Métis Decorative Arts (Scribd):
scribd.com/collections/3133507/Beadwork-The-Metis-Decorative-Arts

The Flower Beadwork People
by Sherry Farrell Racette