

Lesson – The Role of Traditional Art in Culture

[using CD-ROM of Folk & Traditional Artists of Washington]

Learning Objectives

Students will demonstrate an understanding of the role a specific traditional art form (such as music or storytelling, or basket making) will play in the cultural community where that art form is practiced.

Lesson Summary

Students use CD-ROM to explore a wide diversity of cultural artistic traditions that can be found in Washington state. In reviewing the traditional artists' bios, photos and samples of their art work found on the CD-ROM, they try to determine the role that a specific traditional art form plays in a specific cultural community.

Lesson Outline

1. Individual students or small groups of students (or 2 or 3) are given a copy of the CD-ROM, which they open on computer. [It's also possible to do this activity as a full class if there is a projector available for presenting the CD-ROM on a screen].
2. Students select a specific traditional artist on the CD-ROM list and open the page for that artist. They then read the artist bio, look at their photo, artistic genre, ethnic community, and any artist samples that are included (which will be slides or audio samples).
3. They are then asked to see if they can determine the role that the specific artists' art form plays in their particular culture. Where and how would that art form be performed or displayed and why? Examples would be a traditional fiddle player who would play for social dances for his cultural community, or a basket maker who provides baskets for gathering berries or clams or serve some other function in the culture. Each student is asked to either write down on paper what that role is or to discuss it in class.
4. Students are then asked to select a completely different artist from a completely different ethnic or occupational community, who practices a different genre or kind of art (it could also be an artist from a very different location in Washington). For instance, if the first artist they selected was a Korean musician from Seattle, the next artist they select might be a Mexican-American saddlemaker from Walla Walla.
5. The students then go back and repeat steps #2 and #3 in this outline for that new artist.
6. Students are then asked to select a third traditional artist from the CD-ROM who is also different from the first two artists' selected (as in step #4) and they again repeat steps #2 and #3. The idea is that the students will have a chance to consider traditional artists from 3 different cultures, practicing 3 different artistic genres (such as storytelling, dance and craft). This will help to give a broader sense of the different kinds of roles that traditional art can play in culture.

Questions for Discussion:

Do you think that the role that a specific art form has played in a given cultural community might have changed over time? For instance, are the baskets that Native American artists make today used for the same thing they were used for 100 years ago? If not, why not? And why are still made today?