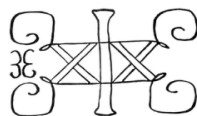
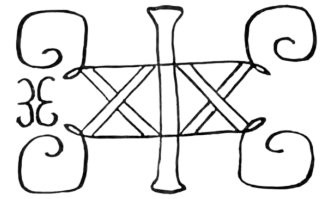


Wabanaki Studies

Prk-8 Art Educator Guide



Hello fellow art educators (and other educators as well)!

As you begin or continue your journey as an inclusive educator, I encourage you to think of yourself as a student, to be and stay open to learning with your students, and to share your success and learn from your mistakes together in your classroom.

Wabanaki culture belongs in your school and in your classroom. Though incorporating Wabanaki traditions, stories, and artistic practices into your curriculum, you provide students with a more inclusive and place based educational experience. Including Wabanaki Studies enriches students' understanding of the world and the place we all call home. Help your students connect with the people who have stewarded the land for the past 13,000 years and learn to foster a deep appreciation for their contributions and commitment to the plants, animals, and landscape of what we now think of as Maine.

All students deserve to see themselves in their curriculum. The art classroom is a safe space for many students and for some it is one of the few places where they feel like themselves. I would encourage you to watch Jeremy Frey's TED talk about the role that the arts played in his life. [📺 Saved by creativity | Jeremy Frey | TEDxDirigo](#)

Where to Start!

While learning about and creating lessons on Wabanaki studies, I frequently relied on several key resources:

I would encourage you to start with the [📖 Wabanaki Studies - Framework](#) and [📖 Wabanaki Studies - Culturally Responsible Art Education](#) especially if you are hesitant to teach Wabanaki studies because you are afraid you will do it wrong. Learning is a lifelong process, your students will grow from seeing you open yourself up to learning with them.


If you are hesitant to teach Wabanaki Studies by yourself, you might look at having a guest come into your classroom. Many Wabanaki knowledge sharers would love to engage with your students. Please review the following guidelines before asking a visitor to come to your classroom: [📖 Wabanaki Studies - Considerations for Inviting Indigenous Presenters](#)

As you continue your journey to learn more, you may find yourself with more questions than when you started. Check out some of the [📖 Wabanaki Studies - Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Guiding Questions:


- How do people communicate what is most important to their community or culture through visual art?
- How does connecting to a place influence the art we create?
- What skills can we build that will help us to create a world that is both beautiful, sustainable, and inclusive?

Lessons

 **Three Sisters Mandala** This lesson is best for students in grades PreK-2. You may need to purchase supplies you do not already have in your classroom like beans, popcorn, and pumpkin or squash seeds. You will also need air dry clay or modeling clay. Students can learn about companion planting through a science connection lesson if you choose. This is a great opportunity to collaborate with a general education teacher.

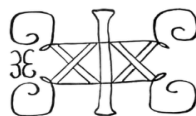
Lesson Essential Questions

1. How do the Three Sisters (corn, beans, and squash) demonstrate the concept of companion planting, and why is this important in Wabanaki culture?
2. How can we use art to represent the relationship between plants in a garden?
3. What can we learn about balance and cooperation by creating a mandala using different seeds and clay?

 **Wabanaki Artists Working Today** This lesson can be adjusted to fit younger students in first grade as a companion to this [social studies](#) lesson, or can be taught to students in grades 2-5. Students will explore how Wabanaki Artists work and sell their artwork today. Students will explore and learn about social interactions when purchasing and selling hand crafted goods. .

Lesson Essential Questions

1. How do Wabanaki artists blend traditional techniques with modern styles in their artwork today?
2. What are the social and cultural roles of art in Wabanaki communities?



3. How does the process of creating and selling handmade goods reflect the values and traditions of the Wabanaki?
4. How do we show respect to artists who are selling their handmade products?

Shaping Stories This lesson is best for students in grades 3-6. You can tailor this lesson to fit your classroom though using your choice of story and clay material. When I taught this lesson I was working on teaching students about kiln fired clay, but students may find this lesson easier when using a modeling clay. This lesson would be a great opportunity to work with a literacy teacher on a cultural stories unit.

Lesson Essential Questions

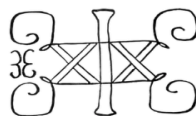
1. How can we use clay to tell stories from Wabanaki culture?
2. What are the key elements of Wabanaki stories, and how can they be expressed through art?
3. How does learning about Wabanaki stories help us understand their culture and history?

Plants: Vital Members of the Wabanaki Community This lesson is best for students in grade 5-8 who have some prior ceramics experience and are able to use a variety of ceramic tools responsibly.

1. How have the Wabanaki traditionally used plants for medicinal purposes, and how is this knowledge reflected in their art?
2. What techniques and tools are important for creating ceramic pieces that can represent Wabanaki medicinal practices?
3. How does the process of making ceramics help us appreciate the craftsmanship and cultural significance of Wabanaki medicine?

Vocabulary

Wabanaki Studies Vocabulary



Wabanaki - The Wabanaki confederacy is made of of the Panawahpskek (Penobscot), Peskotomuhkati (Passamaquoddy), Mi'kmaq (Micmac), Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet), and Abenaki. Their homelands are located in what we now think of as Maine and parts of Canada.

Indigenous - Native to a particular region or environment.

Culture - The customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social groups.

Tradition - Customs or beliefs passed down from generation to generation.

Heritage - Valued objects and qualities such as cultural traditions passed down from previous generations.

Ecosystem - A biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment.

Sustainability - The ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level, especially without depleting natural resources.

Stewardship - The responsible overseeing and protection of something considered worth caring for and preserving.

Knowledge Keepers - Individuals who have the responsibility to pass on traditional knowledge and cultural practices.

Art Vocabulary

Mandala - A geometric figure representing the universe in Hindu and Buddhist symbolism, often used as a spiritual and ritual symbol in art.

Etching - An art technique that involves using acid to cut into the unprotected parts of a metal surface to create a design.

Modeling Clay - A pliable material used for shaping and sculpting.

Kiln - An oven used for firing ceramics or bricks.

Aesthetic - Concerned with beauty or the appreciation of beauty.

Texture - The feel, appearance, or consistency of a surface or a substance.

Radial Design - A design that radiates from a central point, often used in mandalas.

Mural - A large painting or artwork created directly on a wall or ceiling.

Cultural and Environmental Vocabulary

Companion Planting - The practice of growing different plants together for mutual benefit.

Seed Saving - The practice of saving seeds from vegetables, grains, herbs, and flowers for use in future seasons.

Native Plants - Plants that are indigenous to a given area in geologic time.

Pollinators - Animals that move pollen from the male anther of a flower to the female stigma of a flower to accomplish fertilization.

Birchbark - The bark of birch trees, traditionally used by Native Americans for making containers, canoes, and as a canvas for etching.

Natural Dyes - Dyes or colorants derived from plants, invertebrates, or minerals.

Educational Terminology

Inclusive Education - An educational approach that focuses on including all students, with a particular emphasis on those who might otherwise be marginalized.

Place-Based Education - Educational philosophy that uses the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts.

Culturally Responsive Teaching - An approach that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning.

Gen Ed Connections

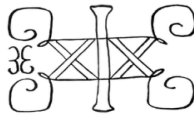
As a specialist focused on teaching the arts, you have the freedom to concentrate exclusively on arts education. However, if Wabanaki studies are not widely covered in your school, it might be beneficial to collaborate with classroom teachers by offering resources for joint projects.

Below you will find a list of standards aligned social studies and science lessons that you could bring to your general education teachers for collaboration.

Grade	Gen Ed Standard Aligned Lesson	Visual Art Standard	Lesson Extension Ideas for Collaboration
Elementary	☰ K- Plant/ Anim...	Fine motor control, balance, relationships, telling a story through art	The general education part of this lesson focuses on plant and animal relationships. You could use this idea in the art room to create sculptures that show motion and balance. Use this lesson idea, but instead of organic shapes have students draw animals that share a habitat. ▶ Calder Kinetic Art Mobiles
Elementary	☰ Three Sisters (...)	Fine motor skills, radial design, color combinations, shapes	Three sisters air dry mandala If you have a garden club or class that is already planting a 3 sisters garden consider making plant identifiers out of ceramic or another weatherproof material with the names of these plants in a Wabanaki language
Elementary	☰ K- Plant/ Anim...	Collaboration, painting, fine motor, presentation	Create a mural that represents a local habitat with plants and animals labeled with their Wabanaki language names.
Elementary	Notable Wabanaki Citizens	Museum vs. other buildings, artist as a job,	☰ Wabanaki Artists Workin... Wabanaki Winter Market- who are some of the artists and craftspeople at the Wabanaki Winter Market ☑ Let's Explore the Waban...

Elementary	Protecting Polli...	<p>Working collaboratively, clay skills, using art as a way to spread awareness of an important cause</p>	<p>Do a mural with your students that shows a variety of pollinators and the plants that would attract them</p> <p>Bee portraits: Did you know you can use dandelion to create a paint, check out this grade 2 lesson about using natural pigments. If I were doing this with my students I would start with drawing the bees with a sharpie, then use the dandelions and a hammer to add abstract color!</p> <p>Can Natural Materials Dy...</p> <p>If you have a kiln, create some bee water cups. If your students can make a pinch pot they should be able to do this!</p>
Elementary	Protecting Polli...	<p>Research, presenting information,</p>	<p>Seed saving - design seed packets with information about Wabanaki uses of plants</p>
Elementary	Birchbark (3) S...	<p>Positive and negative space, utilitarian functions of aesthetic objects, line width, texture</p>	<p>There is so much to learn and do with birch bark, there is a whole guide for it!</p> <p>Can Natural Materials Dy...</p> <p>Learning about Birch bark is so cool because it is such an easily identifiable tree the students will be so familiar with it.</p> <p>Explore birch bark baskets and the difference between</p>

			<p>summer birch and winter birch. You can create a similar experience to birch bark etching using oil pastel and paint.</p> <p> How To Make Your Own ...</p> <p>Check out this lesson on birchbark maps from the Abbe Birchbark Maps</p> <p> Story Baskets of David M...</p>
Middle School	 6-8 Wabanaki...	Texture, Painting skills, Living artists	<p>This Geography lesson is a great place to connect with a classroom teacher!</p> <p> Journey Along along the ...</p> <p>Explore the art of James Francis. Painting fish is a great way to explore media and create texture with paint.</p> <p>Create some place based painting while learning about Wabanaki place names.</p>
Middle School	 PK-12 Ash Educ...	Natural Materials, Techniques, Generational skills, Traditions, advocacy and activism	<p>The ash tree is what many Wabanaki Baskets are made from, and there is a looming threat to the health of the ash trees in what we now think of as Maine. This is a great opportunity to pair up with a science teacher and really explore how an invasive species can have such a</p>



			<p>devastating effect on a forest and an artform that goes back generations.</p> <p>Spread awareness for about the Emerald Ash Borer, <input type="checkbox"/> Emerald Ash Borer</p> <p>This 'wanted poster' worksheet could be used as an example for students to create their own wanted posters, or could be used as a worksheet for them to color and fill out! <input type="checkbox"/> EAB Wanted Poster</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Let's create a poster!</p>
Middle School	<p>ELA: Wabanaki Poetry</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 6-8 ELA Educa...</p>	<p>Mood, art techniques, using color to show an emotion or feeling, imagery, connection between words and images</p>	<p>Explore Wabanaki Poetry in <u>The Activist Art of Wabanaki Poetry</u> lesson from the MOOSE module <u>The Wabanaki and the Environment: Learning to Use My Voice Through Activism Today</u></p> <p>With older students who already have a wide depth of art techniques to call upon try letting students interpret <input type="checkbox"/>  September Morning by S...</p>
Middle School	<p>Wabanaki Homelands: Culture & Identity MOOSE</p>	<p>Symbolism, importance of accurate documents, visual literacy</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Wabanaki Homelands Ma...</p> <p>In this lesson students can learn about map mapping and create their own map of the Wabanaki homelands. You</p>

			<p>could also use this document as a jumping off point to use a map as an art piece by adding drawings of Wabanaki Landmarks or resources. (Katahdin would be an example of a landmark, blueberries or sweetgrass might be examples of resources.)</p> <p>Let's Create a Map of wh...</p>
--	--	--	---

Additional Lessons and Resources:

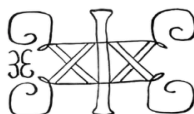
[Wabanaki Children's Book Authors](#) Learn about Wabanaki Children's book authors with links to their work and ideas for activities to use with your students. This lesson was originally created for first grade students but will be useful for students in grades k-4.

[Wabanaki Studies: Getting Outdoors!](#) Check out some of the art activities in this Wabanaki Studies Guide! If you have students who are big Hockey fans they will love

[Crafting Cultural Connections: Designing Wabanaki-Inspired Symbolism on Hockey ...](#)

[Printable Journal](#)

[9-12 Art Educator Guide](#) This guide is recommended for high school students and teachers, but you may be able to adapt lessons to be a fit for a younger audience.



☐ **Make your message stick: Creating stickers to spread awareness** Creating stickers can be a fun way to show your creativity and live your allyship for the Wabanaki.

☐ **Use their name- Mik'maq** This lesson can be used with any age of student (image examples are from grade 2-4), and is a great way to start the conversation about Wabanaki language and the importance of showing respect to others by calling them what they call themselves.

☐ **Mi'kmaq Color Walk** This lesson for younger students is a great way to get outdoors, practice observational skills, learn a little bit about color theory, and learn some Mi'kmaq language!

☐ **Learning About Cultural Appropriation in the Art Classroom** Cultural Appropriation can be difficult to address, but the younger students feel comfortable reflecting on how they interact with other people's culture the more room they have to grow into people who are kind and respectful to those around them.

☐ **Art Lessons and Resources from around the Web** Check out some resources that would be great starting points for a lesson or opportunity for you to learn more about Wabanaki Culture.

Standards:

This guide covers a broad spectrum of art standards, with a particular emphasis on those focusing on creating and responding to artworks.

Though this work students will:

Create!

- Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
- Refine and complete artistic work.

Present!

- Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.
- Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.
- Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

Respond!

- Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

Connect!

- Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
- Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

These standards aim to cultivate students' abilities to create, present, respond to, and connect with visual art in a comprehensive and meaningful way. In addition to the visual arts standards there are many opportunities to connect to social studies, science and english language arts standards.



Updated: February 2026