



## Grade Three

# Native Americans

### Goal

To increase awareness and understanding of various Native American cultures through reading and discussing *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush*; viewing and discussing *Totem Pole*; participating in a studio activity.

**Book:** *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush*, Tomie dePaola, Putnam & Grosset Group, New York, 1979.

**Focus Art Works:** *Totem Pole*, 1990, Reg Davidson (Haida, born 1954)  
Red cedar, 103 x 32 inches

**Art Productions:** Totem Cans  
Sandpaper Sunsets

*Alabama Course of Study Social Studies* (Bulletin 1998, No. 18), third grade—  
The land of the early Native Americans  
*Start with Art* lesson plans were produced by Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, AL.

## Focus Art Work

# Totem Pole

### Looking at the Work of Art

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- The artist Reg Davidson spent a lot of time carving this sculpture. He is carrying on an important tradition of the Native American people who once thrived on the northwest coast of Canada. Not only has he continued this tradition, but he has created a piece of art appreciated by non-Native Americans as well. Discuss the role of artists in your community. Have students think about where they see art every day (in fountains, at school, on TV, at museums). Have students name other people in their community who make their life better.
- Look at the totem pole. What do you see? How many animals do you see? (Three.) What animals do you think they are? (Eagle on top, frog in the middle, and killer whale on the bottom.) Do the animals look real or not so real? Why?
- What do you think the totem pole was before it was a totem pole? (A tree.) What did Reg Davidson, the artist, have to do to the tree before he could start to carve the figures? How big do you think the tree was before it became this totem pole? How could you get the tree out of the forest? Many years ago—before there were trucks and tractors—Northwest Coast artists carved totem poles. How do you think they removed a big cedar tree from the forest? (The back of the log has been hollowed out.) Why do you think this was done to the log before it was carved?
- What kinds of tools do you think the artist used to cut down the tree? (Adzes [a trimming tool with a thin, curved blade set at a right angle to the handle] and axes to trim the bark and hollow out the back; chisels and mallets; fine adzes, and curved knives for the final cutting and sculpting of the animal figures.)



**Totem Pole**, 1990,  
Reg Davidson (born 1954), Haida people, Masset,  
Queen Charlotte Islands, British Columbia, Canada  
Red cedar  
Collection of Birmingham Museum of Art; Museum  
purchase with funds provided by the Museum Day  
Lecture Committee in honor of the Museum Store  
founders, Mrs. Lloyd Bowers and Mrs. William  
Rogers; Mrs. Bernard S. Steiner; The General  
Acquisitions Fund; The Committee for the Traditional  
Arts Acquisition Fund; and donations from Museum  
visitors 1994.115  
[103 x 32 inches]

- Look closely at the totem pole. What shapes did the artist use when creating the animal figures?
- Look again at the totem pole. If you drew a line down the center of the pole, each side would appear to be the mirror image of the other. This is called “symmetrical,” and is one of the characteristics of Haida sculpture. Look around the room and find other things that are symmetrical.
- Look at a map of North America. Can you find the northwest coast of Canada and the province called British Columbia where the artist Reg Davidson lives? How far away is it from Gloucester, Massachusetts, where Childe Hassam painted *Building a Schooner, Provincetown* (found in lesson plan *People Who Enrich Our Lives*)? What is the name of the ocean that touches the coast of British Columbia? Take a string or a ruler and measure the distance from Birmingham, Alabama, to both places. Which place would take longer to get to by car from Birmingham (or your school location)?
- If you made a totem pole to represent your family clan, what animal figures would you use? Why would you use those animal figures? What kind of story would your totem pole tell?

### **LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE ARTIST AND THE WORK**

In 1990 Reg Davidson, a Haida artist, carved the totem pole that you see in the focus art work. He was born in 1954 in the Haida-Gwaii village of Massett on Queen Charlotte Islands, British Columbia. Mr. Davidson is now an internationally recognized artist of sculpture, prints, and jewelry. He is also known for singing and dancing with the Rainbow Creek Dancer, a Haida dance group.

Reg Davidson began traditional woodcarving as an apprentice to his older brother, Robert Davidson, who is also a highly regarded artist. Both have been influential in keeping the art of the Northwest Coast alive.

The Canadian government outlawed the “potlatch,” a ceremonial feast of the Northwest Coast Native Americans that was marked by the host’s lavish distribution of gifts. After the Native Americans stopped giving potlatches, all areas of their cultural lives were affected. Many of the groups lost the structure and meaning of their art entirely. It is through artists like Robert and Reg Davidson that not only the art but also the memories and the traditions of singing, dancing, feasting, and potlatching are returning to these peoples.

**TOTEM POLES** have traditionally been monumental carvings commissioned by a clan (a group of families) and designed to sit in front of the clan’s house to commemorate a special event, to mark a grave, or to serve as a welcoming figure. Usually the carver, who is always from another clan, is told what family crest or figures to put on the pole but is free to create the designs. Each clan has crests that are special to the family and tell something about the family background. The crests on the totem pole in the focus art work represent the clans of the artist Reg Davidson. His mother’s crest is the eagle carved at the top. Emerging from the eagle’s tail feathers is a frog, a sub-clan of the

eagle. On the bottom is a killer whale with the end of its tail curled up under its chin; it represents his father's clan. A totem pole is like a family tree. It tells other people who you are.

## SOURCE

Christian F. Feast, *Native Arts of North America* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., updated edition, 1992).

# Totem Poles

## OBJECTIVE

- The students will view and discuss the Museum focus art work and will discuss the Native American tradition of carving totem poles. The students will each create a totem and will combine it with others in the class to create a pole.

## VOCABULARY

Totem poles  
Carving  
Native American art forms

## MATERIALS

- Large vegetable cans (lunchroom)
- Brown construction paper cut to fit within the top and bottom rims of the can
- Crayons and glue
- Black electrical tape
- Poster board (optional)



## PROCEDURE

- A. Look at the Museum focus work and discuss the features of a totem pole (animal-like). Discuss how each totem represents a person in the tribe.
- B. Activity
  1. Draw the features of the totem with a black crayon (snout, beak, teeth, and eyes) on the construction paper. Using the traditional color schemes of red, yellow, and white, add a small amount of color.
  2. Glue the totems securely around the cans.
  3. Fill the bottom can with sand or gravel. Tape the cans together with electrical tape.

4. Optional: fold a piece of poster board in half and design a top piece for the pole. Cut two slots in the bottom to fit opposite sides of the top can and slide the poster board down onto the top can.

## **EVALUATION**

The teacher will evaluate the totem pole based on its originality and on students' recognition of vocabulary words.

## **EXTENSIONS**

- Have students choose Indian names for themselves (Running Deer, Eagle Eye, etc.).

*Alabama Course of Study Visual Arts* (Bulletin 1998, No. 17), third grade

#8-Describe how artists express ideas in works of art

#10 Describe how art reflects and records history in various cultures

#20-Identify and discuss the relationships among works of art, individuals, and the societies in which they are created.

#39-Produce art with a variety of three-dimensional media and processes

## **Sandpaper Sunsets**

### **OBJECTIVE**

- The students will become familiar with warm colors (red, yellow, and orange) and cool colors (blue, green, and purple) while producing crayon drawings of a sunset on sandpaper.

### **VOCABULARY**

Warm colors

Cool colors

### **MATERIALS**

- 9" x 12" sheets of sandpaper, fine grain, one per student
- Wax paper
- An iron
- Newspapers
- 9" x 12" sheets of white drawing paper, one per student

### **PROCEDURE**

A. Read and discuss *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush*. Discuss warm and cool colors, emphasizing what colors are seen in a real sunset. Use illustrations from the book as examples.

B. Activity

1. On the sandpaper, the students will use crayons, applying heavy layers of wax, to create drawings of sunsets.

2. The teacher will place each sandpaper drawing face down on a sheet of white drawing paper and will iron over the entire area of the back of the sandpaper, melting the crayon colors and transferring the image to the white paper. The iron should be set on low to medium heat, and the drawings should be ironed on a stack of several layers of newspaper.
3. Display the original artwork on the sandpaper along with the image transferred onto the white paper.

## **EVALUATION**

The teacher will evaluate based on individuality and students' recognition of vocabulary terms.

*Alabama Course of Study Visual Arts* (Bulletin 1998, No. 17), third grade

#36-Recognize color schemes

#38-Produce art using different two-dimensional media and processes.