

Totem Poles from Recycled Materials

Diane Lufrano

The Haida, Tlingit, and Kwakiutl nations that stretch from Alaska to British Columbia believed that the totem is like a person born into a family, except that instead of a brother or sister, he is the storyteller. The traditions and family history outline the story that is reflected in the meaning of the pole.

Getting Started

I began this sculpture lesson by telling stories and showing colorful visuals of the diverse and beautiful artwork made by Native American Indians. Students researched the history of totems online to find an assortment of pictures from www.totempoles.info. I also made handouts with line drawings of actual totems from the book *Looking at Totem Poles* by Hillary Stewart. We discussed artistry, ingenuity, and richness of legend.

The Assignment

Each sculpture was to include two or three figures—wolves, dogfish, hawks, killer whales, beavers, frogs, bears, thunderbirds, ravens, etc. I demonstrated drawing techniques and how to create symmetry in the work. We used 12 x 18" (30.5 x 46 cm) tracing paper to design our figures. Students sketched a 5 x 13" (13 x 33 cm) rectangle centered on the tracing paper. A line of symmetry was drawn down the center of the rectangle. Horizontal lines were used to divide up the animals and figures. Faces and bodies were placed with the line of symmetry directly down the center. This darkened line drawing became the pattern for the totem.

A clean soda bottle was covered with narrow vertical strips of Kraft paper, using a paste of diluted white

glue. Next, layers of the strips of paper were glued in a horizontal direction. The next day, a line of symmetry was drawn with a ruler down the center of the bottle. Students carefully taped their sketches, with the pencil lead side down, to their form. They matched the lines of symmetry on both the tracing paper and the bottle. Students transferred their designs to the bottles by tracing over the drawing using a lot of pressure on their pencils.

We used a wide assortment of found materials to embellish the totem form—cardboard scraps, old buttons, pipe cleaners, packing peanuts, egg cartons, paper towel rolls, meat trays, and anything stu-

dents wanted to bring in from home. We used glue guns and masking tape to attach the parts such as wings and appendages. When all three-dimensional features were firmly

attached, students covered the entire form with two layers of small pieces of torn Kraft paper and glue or wheat paste.

I demonstrated acrylic painting techniques—color mixing, blending, highlighting, and shadowing. Students carefully applied paint, paying attention to details observed in traditional totems. Some students added beads and feathers.

Assessment

We used class critiques and a self-evaluation sheet for learning assessment. Rubrics were determined during the introduction of the lesson, and reviewed as each part was completed. The class held a group "powwow" and lined the totems up in a long row. We discussed imagination, originality, attention to detail, the resourcefulness of using recycled materials, and saving a little bit of the earth as well. 🌀

Visit www.davis-art.com/SchoolArts to download the self-evaluation sheet.

Diane Lufrano is an art teacher at Thomas Grover Middle School in West Windsor, New Jersey. DMLgraphics@aol.com



Student work, grade eight.

WEBSITE

www.totempoles.info

Name_____Period_____

Totem Pole Self-Evaluation

1. Why did the Native American Indians make totem poles?

2. How tall were they?

3. What were they made from and with what tools?

4. What figures did you sculpt on your totem pole?

5. What parts of the figures did you make three-dimensional?

6. What materials did you use to build them?

7. Is there anything you could have done differently to make your totem better?

8. What is sculpture in the round?

*Rate the following questions on a scale of 1–10 with 10 being the best

1. How well did you sculpt the added pieces?_____

2. Do your add-on pieces follow the shape of the parts you were sculpting?_____

3. Is your totem symmetrical, or are some figures off center?_____

4. Do the animals and figures look like what you intended them to look like?_____

5. Can other people tell what they are?_____

6. Is your painting neat and carefully done?_____

7. Did you paint any designs on your wings or on the totem pole?_____

* Total possible points for totem is 100 points which equals an A.

Fill in what you feel you deserve on your totem. Be Honest!

	possible points	rate yourself	teacher points_____
A) Sketch/design of totem pole	20		
B) Correct technique	20		
C) Demonstration of sculpture in the round with added sculptural pieces	20		
D) Choice of colors/careful paint application and touch up	20		
E) Overall look/artistry			
Total possible points	100=A		Final Grade _____