

Radial Basketry

Sarita Gurung-Birkey

Namaste! I came from the village of Pokhara, a valley in the heart of the Himalayan Mountains, the country of Nepal. When I was a little girl, I learned weaving from my grandma and my mother. I also learned how to weave baskets with my father. As a classroom teacher in Nepal, I always wanted to develop art lessons, but in Nepal at that time, art subjects were not highly encouraged. When I immigrated to the United States, I was very excited to develop a one-hour basket weaving lesson for my elementary students as part of the art curriculum.

The Radial Basket Lesson

The radial basket lesson utilizes the elements of art and principles of design, introduces weaving vocabulary, has multicultural themes, and incorporates math and literacy. The lesson is not only aesthetically pleasing, but also therapeutic for students' fine-motor skills and eye/hand coordination. Through weaving activities students are engaged and involved in the process of learning.

Preparation

I usually precut the basket patterns (see pattern also online) so students can finish both their weaving and marker decoration within a one-hour lesson. When cutting out the

basket pattern, it is critical to cut odd numbers of warps. Warps are usually vertical threads or yarns placed on a loom and stretched tightly so other threads can be woven across, but in this lesson the warp is a V-shaped cut in a round piece of heavy tag board. I use a five-warp basket pattern (6" diameter) for grades K-1, seven-warp for grades two and three, and nine-warp for grades four and five. Upper grades can use up to thirteen warps. Larger diameters—10" (25.5 cm) or 12"

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(30.5 cm)—will need more than a one-hour lesson to successfully complete because of the more complex patterns.

With the lower grades I give each student a ball of multicolored yarn to use as the weft so students don't need to keep adding different colored yarns to create a pattern. With upper-grade students I use various colored yarns, increasing the versatility and complexity of the lesson.

Procedures


Introduce multicultural baskets and have students compare and contrast baskets from a variety of countries and regions, such as Nepal, India, China, the Philippines, Africa, and the Americas. Call attention to the radial design of the baskets and explain that they all have radial balance, also called rotational symmetry. Have students suggest other examples of rotational symmetry.

The Process of Weaving

- Weave over and under (called tabby or plain weave) on each warp of the basket pattern with the weft yarn, leaving a short tail or end hanging from the first warp.
- Weave alternately, over and under, and clockwise on each warp. Don't skip the warps (two warps instead of one) because these have to be woven alternately.
- If adding new yarn, hang one-inch of yarn on the outside of the basket warps rather than the inside.
- Make sure to pull the weft (yarn) tightly while weaving to give the basket a three-dimensional form.
- Emphasize that each student is talented and creative in his or her own way. If mistakes occur then encourage students to become problems-solvers. I supervise and assist students that are having difficulty weaving their baskets with the proper tension with the wefts.
- Stop weaving $\frac{3}{4}$ " before reaching the top of the warps. Staple the last weft (yarn) to secure it. Leave $\frac{3}{4}$ " on the top of the warp to allow room for the design of a border with colored markers.
- If different color yarn is added several times in the basket then the hanging ends of the yarn should be cut off in order to create a clean finished basket.
- Students can fold the top warp of the basket outwards or leave it the way it is when embellishing the border with markers.
- Students can also draw a radial design with markers in the center of the basket. Students could also weave with beads or add a handle.
- Provide vocabulary handouts to the classroom teachers and students.



Stories and Music

I read or play a tape of the story *The Little Indian Basket Maker* by Ann Nolan Clark while students are weaving. It is very meaningful for students to listen to the Papago basketweaving story during the weaving process. Stories help students engage their minds and in working with patterns, colors, texture, and radial design while their process is reinforced with auditory information. Stories and music also create a wonderful learning environment and I find this helps students focus on their tasks. In the Papago weaving story, grandma explained to a little girl, "My grandmother told me the making of baskets is the work of our hearts as well as our hands." 

Sarita Gurung-Birkey is a fine arts teacher in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The artwork shown is from Marie Hughes Elementary School.

NATIONAL STANDARD

Students identify specific works of art as belonging to particular cultures, times, and places.

WEB LINK

www.nmai.si.edu/exhibitions/baskets/

Materials

- vocabulary chart
- Multilingual basket chart
- heavy weight tag board
- tag board paper basket pattern
- staplers
- assorted colors of yarn
- colored markers
- scissors
- pencils to write names