

Classroom Lessons— Bags (Ozuha)

Ramona Kitto Stately

Materials: Map of Native America C. 1825 and C. 1900. Pictures of various types of bags/vessels used by the Plains Indians.

Learner Goal: The students will gain an understanding and an appreciation for the various types, sizes and styles of bags made and used within the plains Indians culture.

Learner Outcomes: The students will be able to 1) Locate the area where the Dakota lived on a map of Native America 2) Identify and explain in their own words at least two different styles of bags and what they may have been used for 3) Describe the materials that may have been used to assemble the bag 4) Describe some thoughtful ideas about the decorations used on the bag and their possible meaning.

Teacher Background Information

The Indians of the Plains lived seasonally and in semi-permanent homes. They followed the movements of the Buffalo and had to be ready in an instant to pack up and move on. They carried all of their belongings in bags of many styles, shapes and sizes depending on its purpose. Many of the materials used were taken from the buffalo.

The hide of the buffalo was used to make these bags. Through a tanning process, the hide of the buffalo was scraped and cleaned and turned into rawhide which was used to make parfleche bags which stored food. Rawhide is a thick and hard hide which is very sturdy like plastic today. A continuation of the same tanning process created softer end product—soft buffalo hide that can be as soft as cloth. This soft hide is used to make many of the bags and then ornately decorated with shells, beads, porcupine quills and many other material or animal part that was available. This made each bag unique.

The process of creating a handmade bag is therapeutic. Working with our hands expends our negative energy and allows us to relax. This relaxed state allows us to learn patience and helps to enhance our creativity. Beadwork and sewing circles are important social events where one can also practice the art of conversation.

Activities:

1. Students conduct research on various bags used by the Plains Indians and cut out one of their own.
2. Before assembling the bag, they would conduct research on the types of materials available for decoration and decorate their own.
3. Student will complete the activity and be able to describe their final product.

Special note: You can use paper or leather to complete this activity.

Ozuha – A Dakota word for a vessel that holds something. Instructions on how to make a simple Ozuha with no sewing involved.

Begin with a 6" x 2" strip of leather and a 15" long leather lace.

Fold the bottom up leaving 1" of leather exposed. This will be your flap used to close the Ozuha.



Holding the folded edges together, make 5 holes. Tip: Begin with the top and bottom hole, then the center, then center the top and middle hole and the bottom and middle hole. There is no need to measure them.

Tip: Do not make holes too close to top or bottom. Tip: Use a leather punch, awl or small scissors to make the holes. They won't show when you are done.



Fold Top flap over and make holes through all three layers of Ojuza at one time so they match.

Place leather lace inside the bottom of the Ojuza making sure the lace is even on both sides.



Begin lacing the leather lace on the right side beginning by going through the top of the bottom hole. Go through the top of the next hole and continue to the top.



Using the same lace, put it through the back hole,
And inside through the two pieces of the Ojuha, and
finally through the top flap from inside.

Tip: Keep the lace loose



It should look like this.

Repeat for the other side.



You are doing great!



Now you can pull the laces tight to close the flap.



Either tie together to close or use a bead to close. If your beads are too small for both laces, you can use one on each side.



You are all done! Congratulations!

He' waste! Well done!



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“MITAKUYE-OWASIN” I AM RELATED TO ALL THAT IS LIVING
Ramona Kitto Stately and Priscilla Buffalohead

“Mitakuye owasin” is a phrase often used by speakers of the Dakota language. Translated into English it means, “all my relatives”. To English speaking Euro-Americans, the phrase, “all my relatives” would mean those people related to one another through the connecting link of mothers and fathers. To a Dakota speaker, “all my relatives” is a much more encompassing phrase. It includes all human life and all forms of plant and animal life. The Dakota see all life as closely connected.

The idea of the close relationship between life forms is a part of the spiritual philosophy of all Native nations. This philosophy is reflected in the Native habit of addressing animals as brothers and sisters, acknowledging the natural world, the sky and earth; All life forms are considered sacred because each has a spirit and each fulfills a special purpose in an orderly world. Each life form is also seen as having an equal place in the scheme of things. Humans are not superior to other animals, and in fact humans are often seen as the last and lowest of creation. This is why Native hunters apologized to the spirit of the animal they hunted and honored the animal by using every single part of it. Plant life is also sacred. When birchbark was needed to make a canoe or a basket, the gatherer would say “Your leaves must feed me now, but someday my body will return to the soil to feed your roots.”

When making tools, bags or clothing, the Dakota would decorate items with information that important such as designs of medicines, which helps everyone know and remember what they looked like and what they were for. “There is no word for art in our language” says Ramona Kitto Stately of the Isanti Dakota Nation. “We made things beautiful to mirror the way the Creator made the beautiful landscape and to transmit knowledge to future generations.”

Modern scientists have just begun to appreciate what Native people have been saying for centuries. It was not until the 19th century that Western scientists like Charles Darwin, proposed the idea of biological evolution. Like Native spiritual philosophy, the theory of evolution also proposes that all life is related, and that each evolves out of a common parent form. In the 20th century, ecologists began to take a closer look at the relationships between life forms. They have learned that plants, animals, and people are not only related, but depend on one another in very special ways. One example of this relationship can be seen in the behavior of bees. Bees gathering honey fertilize flowers so they can bear fruit and seeds. The fruit and seeds are eaten by birds and other animals.

Through their excrement the seeds return to the earth to grow again.

While there is no term “ecology” in Native languages, Native spiritual philosophy expresses the same teachings. Native people tried to live in harmony with nature so that the delicate balance which exists between life forms would not be upset. Their efforts must have paid off. When European explorers reached the American continents they found vast lands with clean air and water, lush forests and grasslands and an abundant variety of plant and animal life.