



CRAFT IN AMERICA

EDUCATION GUIDE

The Sorrell Family: A Perfect Fit



"I think craft is empowering. I think when people have the ability to make something, or to fix something, they're completely empowered."

- Lisa Sorrell

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will learn about the artist Lisa Sorrell, her work as a boot maker, and the process of making leather cowboy boots by hand. Students will gain insight on how a family can contribute to the rich and purposeful life of the craftsperson. The studio portion of the "Instructional Strategies" is designed to give students the opportunity to craft a custom foot covering. These products can be prototypes, or fully realized handcrafted functional objects, depending upon time and resources.

Grade Level: 8-12

Estimated Time: Seven to ten 45 minute class periods

Craft In America Theme/Episode: FAMILY

Background Information

Lisa Sorrell began learning to sew clothing at age twelve. By the time she was fifteen she was both designing her own clothing and sewing clothing professionally. In 1990, when she was twenty, she moved from Missouri to Guthrie, Oklahoma.

Having left behind her sewing business, she began looking for work and by chance answered an ad in the paper for "stitching boot tops." Jay Griffith, who was nearing the end of a legendary career in boot making, had placed the ad. Lisa had never heard of a custom boot maker and had never worn cowboy boots. The craft fascinated and challenged her in a way clothing had never done, and she quickly decided she wanted to learn to be a custom cowboy boot maker.

Lisa opened her own business, Sorrell Custom Boots, in 1995. Her work is distinctive not only for the quality and precision of the inlay and stitching, but also for her graceful designs. "My boot designs often come to me in visions, brief flashes of a beautifully colored and designed boot," Lisa says. In addition to her own designs, she specializes in working from customer drawings, designs or photos.



Key Concepts

- One person can create beautiful, functional shoes.
- The ability to craft an object is empowering.
- The family of a craftsperson often participates in the “family business.”

Critical Questions

- How is leather used as an artistic medium?
- How is a pattern used in boot making?
- What kinds of support systems are needed to make a craftsperson successful?
- Why is a handmade object different than a machine made object?
- What does it mean to be empowered?

Objectives

Students will:

- View the Craft in America video segment featuring Lisa Sorrell and her family.
- Design and construct a hand-crafted foot covering, specific to one’s own feet.
- Utilize stitching techniques to sew together a pair of foot coverings.
- Contribute ideas while investigating the designs found on cowboy boots.
- Reflect upon the process of making a custom pair of shoes/boots.

Vocabulary

Inlay, Last, Pattern, Lining, Vamp, Upper, Contour

Interdisciplinary Connections

American History

National Standards for Visual Arts Education

Content Standard:

1. Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes
3. Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas
5. Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others



Resources and Materials for Teaching

Resources

- Craft in America DVD, *FAMILY*. Also viewable online at www.craftinamerica.org/episodes/family
- Craft in America website: www.craftinamerica.org
- Lisa Sorrell's website: www.customboots.net

Worksheet

- *Sizing It All Up*

Materials for Studio Production

- Heavy gauge needles for stitching
- Various threads and cording for stitching thick materials
- Paper
- Strong, sharp scissors
- Hot glue, fabric glue, or other non toxic adhesives
- Various sized utility knives
- Scrap leather and suede from an art supply vendor
- Collected materials such as those described in Investigation Activity #4
- Grommets, buckles, ribbons, laces



INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

“When I found boot making, it wasn’t like discovering what I wanted to be, it was like finding out who I had been all along.” - Lisa Sorrell

Investigation: Getting to the Sole of the Matter

View the video segment featuring the Sorrell family on the Craft in America: *FAMILY* episode DVD or online at www.craftinamerica.org/shorts/the-sorrells-segment.

After viewing the video, engage the students in a conversation about the technical aspects of boot making. Review terms such as last, inlay, and pattern. Consider the family dynamic, and the various roles of the members of the Sorrell family. In what ways is the Sorrell family a “perfect fit?”

One way to introduce students to the idea of constructing footwear is for students to deconstruct existing footwear. This will take some resource gathering on the part of the teacher by collecting a variety of shoes that can be dismantled by the students. Give the students a day to pull apart the shoes and create a collection of “parts” that can be used in helping to create templates for shoes. Ask students to make note of the stitching they undo, layers they find, and shapes they discover. Have students share observations about the inner workings of the shoes with peers.

Another way to engage students in the craft of shoemaking is to tie the craft to the lives of the students. Ask students to share a story about their favorite shoe from childhood, or their current pair of favorite shoes. Have them explain why they loved those shoes. Was it the activities they did in the shoe? Was it the look, color, or design on the shoe? Do they still have that pair of shoes?

A final suggestion is to have students take some time to consider the materials from which shoes are made. Ask students to list materials they have observed on footwear (for example, leather, rubber, fur, vinyl/plastic fabric, canvas). Record and post. Have students discuss where materials can be found or purchased. Leather and vinyl can be salvaged from worn out coats or discarded furniture; canvas can be repurposed from canvas bags, old paintings left behind in the art room; rubber soles can be made from dense foam mats often used in children’s play areas, or flip flops that are too large; synthetic fur can be salvaged from stuffed animals.



Studio Production

To begin, have students use paper or sketchbooks to explore designs they might want to include on a boot or other footwear. Look at the many decorative and narrative motifs found on the boots made by Lisa Sorrell through reviewing parts of the video. Many of Sorrell's boots can be found through an image search on the web or through her website. What are some of the images that you see? (For example: flowers, feathers, eagle, mountains, clouds, buildings.)

If students choose to create boots, have them make a template like described by Lisa Sorrell in *FAMILY*. Design and carry out the stitching decoration for the upper quarter before attaching it to the vamp. Without the machinery usually involved, students will need to make some creative adaptations.

Have each student trace his or her feet onto paper to serve as templates while constructing the sole of the shoe. Give students time to take measurements and take a close look at the unique shape of their feet.

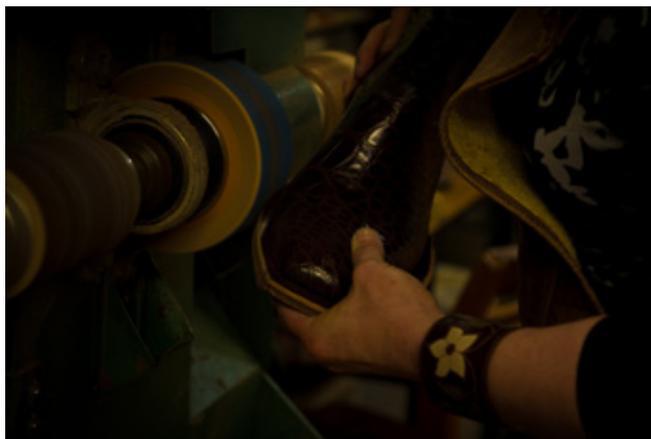
Using a chosen material for the sole of the shoe, have the students cut the material with an extra centimeter of space around the template made from tracing one's foot. Use examples from the Investigative Activity #1 to examine how much extra sole is needed to allow for the upper part of the shoe.

Have students consider adding extra space in the toe area for comfort and to define the look of the shoe. Students should also consider the arch and other curves of the foot and cut material to sculpt the inside of the shoe to meet the contours of the student's foot.

Remind students of the scene in the video when Lisa Sorrell described the purpose of the last and told how the leather is stretched and formed around it. Explain that the students will use their own foot as the last and they will pull and shape the material around it. Put forward the idea that the students are building a form-fitting sculpture around their foot.

Students will need to choose a lining material and an outer material that will work with the look and mood of the designed shoes or boots. Continue to build the shoes by molding the lining material around sections of the foot and cutting it to fit. The lining pieces can then be used like templates to cut the outer layer.

Teach students how to thread a needle and stitch. Suggest to students that, when fitting material around a foot, they will need to put pressure on that foot. Help them understand that the shoe will need to fit comfortably while standing and walking.



CLOSING STRATEGIES

Reflection

Does the Shoe Fit?

When the foot coverings are completed, provide students some time to reflect on the final product, and on the process involved. Have students spend some time wearing their shoes. As part of their reflection, suggest that they think of a title for their shoe. Students can complete the reflection worksheet provided or record a reflection in their sketchbooks.

Assessment

By the lesson's end, students should be able to:

- Describe how a template is used in boot making.
- Understand the labor involved in creating a custom foot covering.
- Explain how they designed and constructed a shoe with a perfect fit.

Additional Resources

The artist, Teri Greeves, is featured in the *ORIGINS* episode. Her narrative beaded sneakers could serve as an additional resource in creating a narrative design on footwear.

www.craftinamerica.org/artists/teri-greeves

www.craftinamerica.org/shorts/teri-greeves-segment

www.craftinamerica.org/teri-greeves-beadworking-belonging

Authors

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Worksheet: The Sorrell Family: Sizing It All Up

Title of your shoes/boots: _____
(In the spirit of Lisa Sorrell, try to choose a song title for your shoes/boots.)

1. I believe my hand-crafted shoes/boots are successful because... _____

2. If I could do this project again, I would change... _____

3. The easiest part of the process for me was... _____

4. The most challenging part of the process was... _____

5. I will wear my shoes because... _____

6. I will not wear my shoes because... _____
