

## Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about basket making through the Pomo basket weaver Corine Pearce in the CALIFORNIA episode. Students will inspect and analyze the materials and functions of a wide variety of baskets. They will learn about the practical and ceremonial importance of baskets and basket making to people living in communities around the world and over time. Students will consider how people traditionally create baskets with materials available to them in their natural environment, how materials often influence the forms of the baskets made, and how materials used to make baskets can convey meaning. Students also will learn that basket makers sometimes work with alternative materials— materials that are made by humans rather than found in nature. Students will engage in the process of basket making, making decisions about their basket's function, the materials they will use, and the basket making techniques they will employ. With support from the instructor, students will determine materials to which they have access and prepare those materials for weaving. Working individually or in small groups, students will construct a woven basket and evaluate how successful the basket is for the practical or ceremonial purpose it was created.

## Key Concepts:

- Around the world and throughout time, people have used baskets to store and transport food and other goods, to mark important life events, to symbolize significant meanings in celebrations and ceremonies, and for commercial trade.
- People traditionally create baskets from materials found in their local environment.
- Basket making traditions vary from place to place depending upon available materials and the specific functions that baskets serve within the community.
- Basket forms, as well as their materials, patterns and designs, hold meaning and cultural significance.

## Critical Questions:

- Why do people make and use baskets?
- How do the forms, materials and techniques used in basket making connect to the time and place in which baskets are made?
- How do baskets convey meaning?

## Objectives

Students will:

- Understand how and why people have made and used baskets throughout the world and over time.



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- Consider how baskets are used in their daily lives.
- Compare and contrast the form, materials, basket making techniques, decorative features and possible functions of selected baskets.
- Speculate about artistic, geographical and cultural origins of baskets, supported by description and analysis of the form, materials, techniques, decorative features, and possible functions of selected baskets.
- Create a basket intended for a practical or ceremonial function, using materials gathered and prepared for basket weaving.

## National Standards for Visual Arts Education

This lesson addresses the following standards. The performance standards listed here are directly related to the lesson's goals.

- Anchor Standard #1. CREATING: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- Anchor Standard #8. RESPONDING: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
- Anchor Standard #10. CONNECTING: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
- Anchor Standard #11. CONNECTING: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.

## Student Worksheets

- *Examining Basketry*
- *Meaning in Materials*

## Interdisciplinary Connection

- Environmental Science: Collaboration with Environmental Science teachers can bring further depth into the study of basketry. Science classes can harvest and investigate properties of the natural resources in the local environment that might be used as “stakes” or “weavers” in basketry. Science classes can also consider materials in the environment that could be repurposed rather than going to the landfill if used in this art making process. Students may want to learn more about the connection between the environment and harvesting materials for traditional basket making. See the article, Addressing the Threats Facing Traditional Basket Making Materials on the American Craft Council website, which refers to Craft in America artist, Mary Jackson, and her efforts to preserve sweetgrass, [craftcouncil.org/post/addressing-threats-facing-traditional-basketmaking-materials](http://craftcouncil.org/post/addressing-threats-facing-traditional-basketmaking-materials)
- History/Social Studies: Students may investigate the history of basketry within their own geographical region, addressing such questions as, “What cultural groups made and used

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baskets in this region?" "What purposes did baskets serve?" Students also may seek information about how the basket forms, materials and functions are related to the geography and cultural traditions of the region. See the documentary, "A Measure of Earth" on the National Basketry Organization website, for its focus on basketmakers from several different regions of the country and how they use materials found in their geographical regions. Teachers may wish to emphasize these same questions with regard to contemporary life in the region, noting that many of the functions originally served by baskets are now served by objects made from materials such as plastic. At the same time, however, we find baskets in homes, stores, and other places in our contemporary world. [nationalbasketry.org/a-measure-of-the-earth-2](http://nationalbasketry.org/a-measure-of-the-earth-2)

- Teachers might have students consider why we still find baskets in our world today and what purposes baskets serve in contemporary life. For example, baskets are often sold as tourist items, used as decoration, or collected as beautiful objects. They may still be used for storage and transportation, but the items stored and transported may be different from items held in baskets in the past. Some baskets are handcrafted, such as those shown in the video, while other contemporary baskets are made by machine. Basket making traditions travel with people as they move from one part of the world to another. Basket makers may need to adapt basket making when traditional materials are not available. The sweetgrass basket making tradition in North Carolina, for example, has its origins in the communities on the West Coast of Africa. Enslaved people from the West Coast of Africa continued their basket making tradition using the grasses they found in the Low Country of South Carolina. The Craft in America segment about Mary Jackson, a contemporary sweetgrass basket maker, references the history of this basket making tradition, [craftinamerica.org/shorts/mary-jackson-segment](http://craftinamerica.org/shorts/mary-jackson-segment).

### Materials

- Collection of baskets from thrift shops or borrowed from community members that can be handled and inspected closely by students. The goal here is to have a diverse group of baskets that serve several different functions. Some examples used for everyday functions include picnic, laundry, bicycle, fishing, shopping, fruit, egg, and gathering baskets. Some baskets have special or ceremonial functions. An Easter basket is an example of such a basket. Other examples include Navajo wedding baskets and the ceremonial basket hats and caps of the Native people of the Pacific Northwest.
- A variety of Pomo baskets and baskets of various cultures: [www.craftinamerica.org/object/baskets](http://www.craftinamerica.org/object/baskets)
- Stakes and Weavers – two weights of weaving materials. Stakes are a heavier weight used to form the structure of the basket. Weavers are lighter weight materials woven over and under the stakes or coiled around the stake material.
- Traditional, school-grade materials for weaving baskets consisting of cane, reed, sweetgrass, rattan, raffia palm, and straw.

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- Alternative materials such as plastic bags, zip-ties, string, malleable wire, old VHS or audio tapes, and any other materials found in the students' environment that could serve as strands or structural supports for basket weaving.
- Natural materials to be collected by students on school grounds or from home. Thin branches, long grasses, vines, corn husks.
- Buckets or basins of water to soften materials, if necessary.
- Strong scissors, side cutters, round-nosed pliers, and a bodkin or a strong knitting needle.
- Work gloves, which are especially useful when preparing natural materials
- Hand sewing needles
- Threads: embroidery floss, sewing thread, and quilting thread
- Yarn, string, and other assorted fibers
- Knitting needles, especially larger sizes of 6 and up.
- Quilt batting: polyester batting, flannel, or other soft fabric for the filling between the quilt's face fabric and backing fabric.
- Optional: A small table loom to try weaving. These are available online.
- Optional: A flat-bed knitting machine is another mechanical way of creating fabric, and not often found in an art class. You may want to add one to outfit a textile studio in the art room. These vary from featuring one basic stitch (stockinette) to mechanical punch card machines, which imitate the jacquard looms of The Oriole Mill and create automatically patterned designs (though the process is actually knitting, not weaving as in the jacquard looms.)

### About the Artist

I like to teach basketry because it connects us all as humans...I realized, it doesn't matter what tribe on the planet you are from, you all still made baskets. Everyone already has a basket in them, and I am just helping them bring it out. – Corine Pearce

Corine Pearce is a Pomo basket weaver from Redwood Valley, CA. Throughout the history of the Pomo people, baskets were the essential tool of life and Pomo baskets are among the best in the world by fact of their sheer technical virtuosity. Corine has dedicated her life to sharing her specialized knowledge and abilities with people throughout the world as well as by teaching her community at the Redwood Valley Education Center.