



CRAFT IN AMERICA

BISKAKONE GREG JOHNSON: WHAT MAKES A PLACE HOME? EDUCATION GUIDE

Teaching *Biskakone Greg Johnson: What Makes a Place Home?*

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

(one 45 minute class period)

Before Viewing

Introduce the scope of the lesson to students, sharing the key concepts, critical questions, and objectives. Three questions may be helpful for the class to think about:

1. What traditions are shown in the video?
2. What traditional objects does the artist and/or members of his family create?
3. What cultural traditions are followed in your families or communities that are like those featured in the video?

Have students view the segment in the Craft in America HOME episode.

After Viewing

You may want to ask for students' general responses to the segments. Invite students to refer to their lists of traditions shown in the video segment (binding the rice, dancing on the rice, winnowing grain with handmade baskets, for example). Encourage students to share cultural traditions followed in their families or communities that are like those featured in the video. Ask for volunteers to describe other cultural traditions followed by their families or communities. Remind them of traditions associated with holidays such as Thanksgiving, 4th of July, birthdays, graduations, and so on.

Provide students with Worksheet 1: Exploring Traditions and Home. Explain that the artist's way of thinking of home includes special places, times, and people. Using these ways of thinking, students will make lists of their own personal associations with the idea of home. In anticipation of creating an artwork that includes their own imagery and symbols related to their ideas of home, students should complete the worksheet, listing ideas and feelings, as well as creating imagery that can represent their ideas.

Share the following comment made by Greg Johnson: "Birch bark is the most utilized possession in our culture. A gift to us from Creation." Based on the artist's quote, what did students notice in the video? In what ways do the artist's people make use of birch bark?

Direct attention to the process of birch bark etching. Remind students that as he worked, the artist said, "Etching reveals the summer bark." What did he mean by this? Invite students to describe the process. What tools did the artists use? How did they use them?

Review the etching materials, tools and techniques observed during the video segments.

View the full *Biskakone Greg Johnson* education guide at
craftinamerica.org/guide/home and pbs.org/craft-in-america/education/home



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Where does the artist get ideas for the imagery on the birch bark baskets and containers? You may wish to return to the segment in which artist Anungo Kwe Alexandria Sulainis talks about finding ideas in old photographs and old journals.

Johnson explains that the images are from the natural world, including tobacco leaves, four and five-petal flowers, squash blossoms, insects such as dragonflies and butterflies, and even rabbits and birds.

Help students understand why the artist uses these materials and imagery in his work and that he purposefully chooses to represent the natural world which is so important to him and his people.

Studio Production

(two or more 45 minute class periods)

Students will create an etching that can be used to express their idea about Home. They may choose to do an India Ink or crayon etching.

Have students practice etching techniques using a variety of tools and if possible, on scratchboard or scratchboard paper (a less expensive version of scratchboard), scratchboard made from India ink on clayboard, or crayon scratchboard made from one layer of crayon over another. They may also choose to bring in sticks or other materials from the natural environment to practice their etching.

Share with students that they will be working “in reverse.” Scratching away the India Ink or crayon to reveal the surface below. Like in the Ojibwe tradition of etching, they will be scraping away the top layer to expose the surface underneath.

Provide students with the following prompts, reminding them of the choices they will make.

- What imagery will you include? Ask students to refer to their worksheet where they listed places, special times, and people that they associate with their idea of home. Have them refer to the imagery they sketched in relation to their ideas.
- Will you feature one image or a combination? Suggest that students review their images and focus on one or a combination of more than one, remembering that their goal is to create a design that can represent their idea of home. Explain that they may wish to create several sketches before deciding on one as their final choice.

Once they've settled on an idea, have students sketch their idea as it relates to Home with notes about how they will represent Home. Encourage students to help each other determine the best way to create their image.

Remind them to explore possible ways to create marks, patterns, and shapes and to see how the parts of the image will fit together. Students will be scratching away the India Ink or crayon to reveal the clay or paper surface below. Discuss positive and negative space with the students and how it affects their designs. Their image will be the negative space. Provide scratchboard, India Ink, crayons, and scratching tools.



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As students work on their projects, ask:

- Do the elements of their design support the meaning?
- What elements will you repeat? How will you capture and hold the attention of your viewer?

Remind students that they need to be constantly aware of how the viewer will experience their artwork.

Remind students to think about the meaning/significance of Home.

Reflection

Provide students with Worksheet 2, Reflections on the Ideas of Home. Engage students in a discussion or have them write in their sketchbooks about their results. Are they pleased with how their image/representation turned out? What surprised them? Do they believe that the image contributes to its meaning?

You may wish to have students write an artist's statement to accompany the display of their scratchboard art. Suggest they include the theme and their inspiration for their design.

Ask them how they might display their own artwork and those made by their classmates.

You may also invite students to work in pairs to discuss each other's scratchboard art/image/message. Pairs should discuss what it is like to create a scratchboard etching and the techniques and tools. What were you hoping for that did not happen? How might you address this in future artworks?

Extensions

An additional lesson could feature looking at the work of other Native American artists, investigating traditions and materials used in the artworks they create. Suggest that they note the cultural significance of the forms, materials, and designs.

Assessment

By the end of this lesson students should be able to:

- Identify characteristics of and discuss the work of Biskakone Greg Johnson and how it connects with the idea of Home.
- Compare and contrast cultural traditions of the Ojibwe people and traditions associated with their own family and community.
- Create a scratchboard etching with personal meaning that communicates a message about their idea of Home.