

Native American Crafts

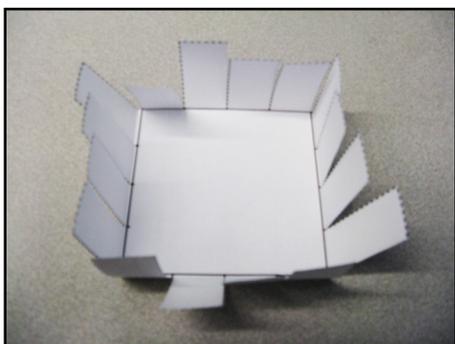
Basket Weaving

Basket weaving is one of the oldest and most practiced traditions of Native American people. Archaeologists have discovered baskets that are around 8,000 years old. Native Americans used baskets for numerous daily activities such as cooking, storing food and handmade items, and carrying their children from place to place. They also used baskets to carry dirt to build earthen mounds that can still be seen throughout Mississippi. With each tribe, weaving techniques and style varied. Weaving materials were often made of dried swamp cane and natural materials, such as berries, roots, flowers, and bark, were used to stain the weaving materials. Today Native American baskets are still made using traditional weaving techniques and are considered art by collectors.

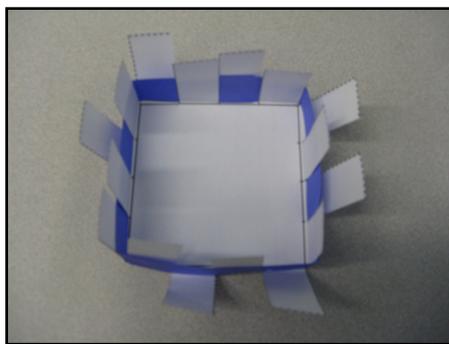
Materials: basket template; construction paper (any color); scissors; ruler; pencil; tape or glue.

Directions:

1. On basket template, cut along the dotted lines (discard the gray boxes). Next, fold along the solid lines.
2. Cut the construction paper into one inch strips.
3. Weave construction paper strips over and under the cut strips on the basket template. To help secure the construction paper strips, tape or glue the first strip at its starting and ending point.
4. Continue to weave construction paper strips until all the walls of the basket are completed. **Tip:** When rounding a corner, slightly crease the construction paper strip to ensure the basket keeps its shape.
5. Take another construction paper strip and fold in half along its long side. “Cap” the basket rim with the folded strip to finish the basket, securing it as needed with tape or glue.



Step 1: Cut and fold.



Step 3: Weave over and under.



Step 4: Weave until walls are completed.



Step 5: “Cap” the rim.

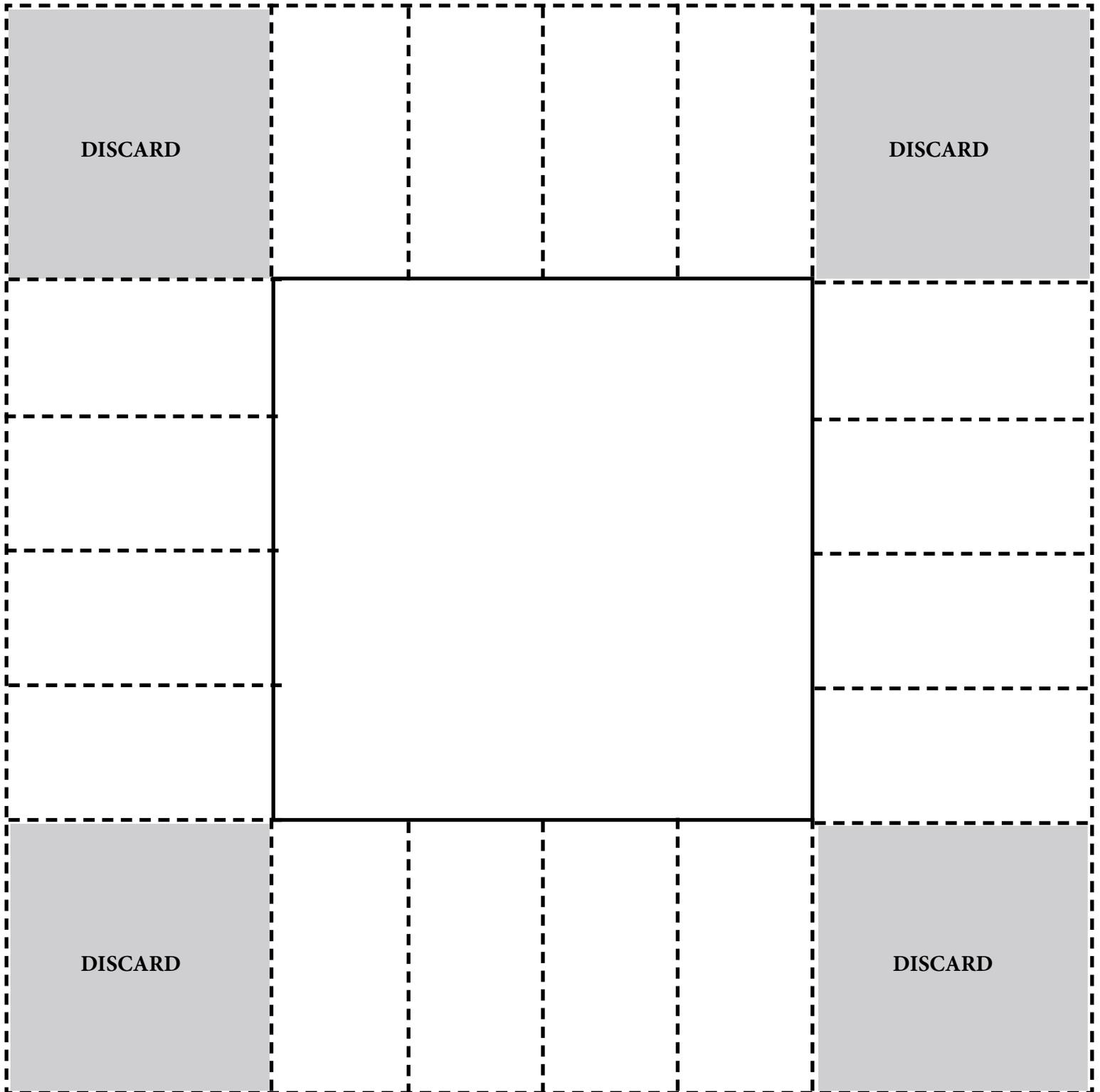


Enjoy your basket!



Choctaw basket made of swampcane and natural colors, 1973. MDAH Museum Division Collections.

Basket Weaving Template



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Beadwork

Native American men and women often wear decorative beadwork on clothing. Sewn onto clothes, belts, sashes, and combs, beads also appear in jewelry. For centuries, beads were made of natural materials such as wood, bone, semi-precious stones such as turquoise, and shells. Sometimes as small as 3/16 of an inch, Native Americans used a stone drill to create a hole in the center of the beads, allowing them to be sewn onto clothing or other materials. Beads were highly prized by Native Americans and were often found inside burial chambers. They were regularly traded between members of different tribes and when Europeans arrived in the New World they also desired the beads and began trading western-made beads of metal, glass, and silver to Native Americans. Beadwork is still a common form of art with Native American people today and more ceremonial effigy beads (ones that are in the image of a person) have been found by archaeologists in Mississippi than in any other state.

Materials: beads (of any materials, shapes, colors); thread or yarn.

Directions:

1. Determine the length of bracelet or necklace to make and cut a piece of thread or yarn slightly longer than desired. Tie a knot at one end.
2. String beads onto thread or yarn.
3. When completed, tie two ends of the thread or yarn together and wear.



The three glass trade beads to the left date from between 1492 and 1560. Originally from Peru and Boliva, they are typical of those brought by Hernando de Soto to the Southeast and traded by the European explorers to the Native Americans. Shown enlarged here, the circular beads are approximately 3/16 inches in diameter while the rectangular bead is 1/4 inches wide and 1 3/4 inches in length. MDAH Museum Division Collections.



Top: Beaded Chickasaw baldric (a belt that is worn diagonally from the shoulder to the hip), 1830. **Bottom:** Beaded Choctaw belt, circa 1975-1984. MDAH Museum Division Collections.

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Pottery

For thousands of years, early Native Americans have used natural resources around them to create beautiful and functional objects. Many Native American groups would have individuals who created pottery on a daily basis and who became masters of their craft. Using clay dug from the Earth and mixed with stabilizing materials such as crushed shells, grass or sand to add strength, potters would then stamp, pinch, incise, or paint the pottery. Pottery was used in everyday life for tasks such as cooking and storage. But pottery was also used in sacred ceremonies and of such value that it was buried with people so it could be used in the afterlife. It was also a commodity highly valued by European traders. Today the best examples of Native American pottery can be found in museums around the world.

Materials: modeling clay; pencil or pointed object for decorating; newspaper.

Directions:

1. Pinch off a piece of modeling clay about the size of a small fist (sizes may vary). Knead or pinch the clay to eliminate air bubbles that may be in the clay.
2. Roll the clay between the palms of both hands in a circular motion until completely rounded.
3. Once rounded, press one thumb in the center of the ball of clay; this will begin the forming process.
4. Once the thumb print is formed, begin to pinch around the hole in the clay with both hands. The thumb will be on the inside of the pot and the forefinger and middle finger will be on the outside walls of the pot. Continue pinching the sides until you have formed the shape and depth of the object you want.
5. Once you have the overall form, smooth the inside as well as the outside of the pot by wetting your fingers and running them along the object. This will give it definition.
6. Decorate the pot by using a pencil or the end of a sharp, pointed object to create symbols or images.
7. When complete, place the pot in a sunny, dry spot on a sheet of newspaper to dry. Allow to dry for 24-48 hours before moving or handling the pot.



Choctaw cooking pot made of clay mixed with burned mussel shell and incised for decoration. Made completely by hand in 2014 in the style of pots fashioned 800 years ago in the Southeast. MDAH Museum Division Collections.