

WEAVING A PATH

NAVAJO WOMEN AND THE FEMININE ETHOS

ON VIEW: December 9, 2017 – May 20, 2018

Exhibition Resource Guide

This exhibition will feature distinctive rugs and blankets of the Southwest United States. There will be a range of textiles created by Diné (Navajo) women, with geometric designs and patterns, all from Mingei International Museum's permanent collection.

EXHIBITION THEMES

Living Culture

Currently more than 200,000 Navajo reside in the Navajo Nation which encompasses more than 27,000 square miles in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. Traditional weaving is still practiced today.

Women's Work

The Diné society is female-focused. It is both matrilineal and matrilocal, which means the society is based on kinship with the mother or the female line. These are textiles woven by women, and woven of women.

Process

In the Diné society, weaving is more than just a craft, it is an expression of the culture. The weaving process is considered equally as important as the finished product. It is much more than aesthetics and techniques but rather it is tied to both the weaver's soul and economic survival.

Commercialization

Prior to Navajo blankets and other textiles becoming popular souvenirs for tourists, they were created for their own use and sold and traded to other Native American tribes and cultures. By the 1870s, The Diné experienced a forced shift in their weaving, as trading posts throughout the Southwest began dictating the popular designs most heavily sought after, while demanding



more product to sell. Soon, the Diné became economically linked to weaving and forced to create styles other than their original designs.

Tools and Materials

The Diné used upright looms, traditionally using sturdy wood often made from tree trunks. The main source of wool came from the Navajo-Churro sheep, of which the Navajo were longtime herders. The wool would be sheared, washed, carded, spun and potentially dyed.

VOCABULARY

Batten – a piece of wood used to hold the yarn in place on a loom

Card – to comb wool so that the curls straighten out

Diné – Navajo word meaning “the People,” which Navajos use to describe themselves

Diné Bekayah – the Navajo homeland, which lies between four sacred mountains in the Four corners area of Arizona, Utah, Colorado and New Mexico.

Folklore – Stories, customs and beliefs in a culture that are passed down from generation to generation.

Hogan – an eight-sided structure that is the traditional Navajo home

Ho’zho’ – Ho’zho’ is said to be the most important word in the Navajo language and is loosely translated as peace, balance, beauty and harmony. To be "in Hozho" is to be at one with and a part of the world around you.

Reservation – an area of land that Native American people kept through agreement with the United States government

Spindle – a round stick used to hold and turn wool as it is spun

Warp – the vertical threads of yarn on a loom

Weft – the horizontal threads of yarn on a loom

STUDENTS WILL EXPLORE

- How identity, heritage, and environment intersect to create complex works of art with layered meaning
- The dual nature of Navajo weavings as spiritual and commercial
- Materials, patterns and designs connected to specific regions
- The complex Navajo weaving process



Rug
Diné (Navajo)
1920-1930, USA
Wool
2013-18-003



Chief's Blanket
Diné (Navajo)
1920-1930, USA
Wool
1995-34-001



Blanket
Diné (Navajo)
1890-1910, USA
Wool
2000-08-001



Dragonfly Yeis Rug
Diné (Navajo)
c. 1920, USA
Wool, aniline dyes
2006-46-001

IN PREPARATION FOR YOUR VISIT

Schedule a Museum visit and Docent-led tour through the Education Department. Mingei offers free admission for all K-12th grade and college groups and transportation reimbursements for Title 1 schools.

Email: sfoley@mingei.org

Call: 619-704-7495

Complete an online tour request form: www.mingei.org/education/museum-tour-request

- Review the information in this hand-out with your students; build their knowledge, excitement and confidence before they arrive.
- Discuss museum etiquette and review the Tour Guidelines document that will be sent to you when your tour is confirmed.
- Explain to students that a Museum Docent will guide them through the exhibition. Explain that a Docent is a knowledgeable Museum-trained volunteer who will share valuable information with them.
- Explain that Mingei International is a museum of folk art, craft and design that shows work from all over the world, and that “*mingei*” is a Japanese word that means “art of the people.”

HANDS-ON WEAVING ACTIVITY

Why the Navajo Weave

The Navajo believe that Spider Woman taught them to weave on a loom made by her husband, Spider Man. The loom was made from sacred Navajo stones and shells such as turquoise, jet, white shell, and abalone, as well as with the earth, sun, rain, sky. Spider Woman weaves elements of the earth such as lightning, clouds, rainbows, and sunrays into her fabric. Spider Woman is often symbolized as a cross in Navajo weaving as a way to remember her teachings and wisdom.



Objectives

- Students will learn to create a unique woven panel
- Students will learn the significance of Spider Woman in Navajo legend
- Students will explore folklore and Navajo values
- Students will understand the elements of a loom, and how to use warp and weft yarn to weave

Materials

- Thick cardstock or cardboard
- Scissors
- Ruler
- Marker
- Masking tape
- Various colors of yarn
- Large-eye needle

NAVAJO LEGEND OF SPIDER WOMAN

Begin by reading your students the story of Spider Woman. Explore questions such as:

How is the story of Spider Woman different from the Spider Man we see in the movies and comics?

Why is telling stories important?

What is folklore, and how is it created?

What are some characteristics of folklore?

Why is folklore important?

What does this story tell us about values in the Navajo culture?

How does this compare to how other artists create art?

How is tradition and family important in this story?

HANDS ON WEAVING ACTIVITY

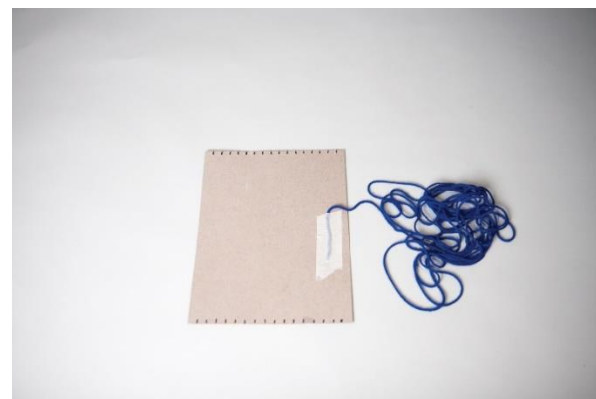
Prepare the Loom (can be done with students or prepared beforehand)

1. Measure and mark half-inch increments across the top and bottom of the cardstock.
2. Cut half-inch-long notches at each marked spot, perpendicular to the edge of the cardstock.



DIRECTIONS

1. Prepare the warp first (the warp is the set of lengthwise threads or yarns that are held in tension on a frame or loom).
2. Cut a piece of yarn long enough to wrap around the cardstock several times.
3. Tape the yarn down on one side of the cardstock, halfway down the side.
4. Wrap with some tension through each notch. (The yarn should not sag, and the cardstock should not bend.)
5. After the yarn is wrapped through each notch, tape the yarn down on the same side that it started on. (Keep the tape on the back of the loom.)



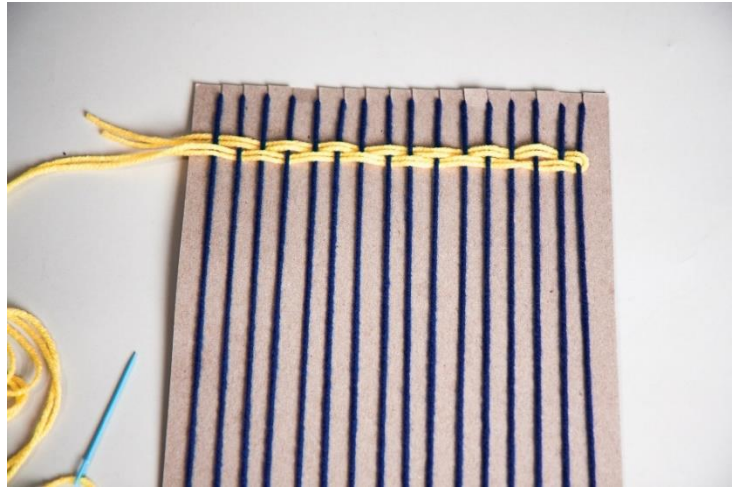
WEAVING TECHNIQUES

View the YouTube video “Weaving on a Cardboard Loom” to see demonstrations of the weaving processes described: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LbtKnvc_9No

Plain or Tabby Weave

With students, I call this “Over Under”. Begin by leaving a little extra yarn on one end, weave the needle and yarn over and under each warp string.

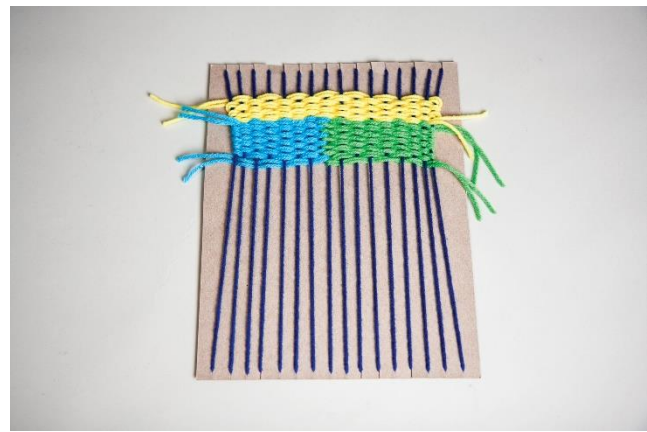
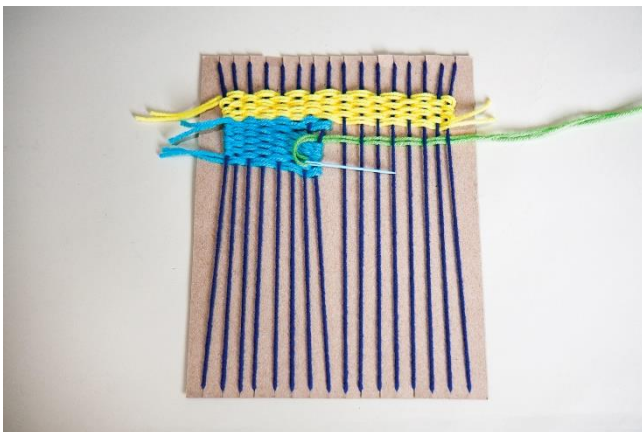
Turn the corner. Be sure to go around the last string and begin the pattern opposite of the first time through. For example, if you end up going under the final yarn you must start by going over that same yarn.



Plain or Tabby Halfway Weave

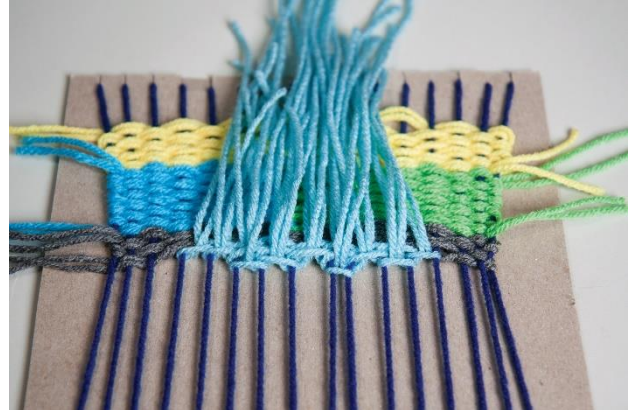
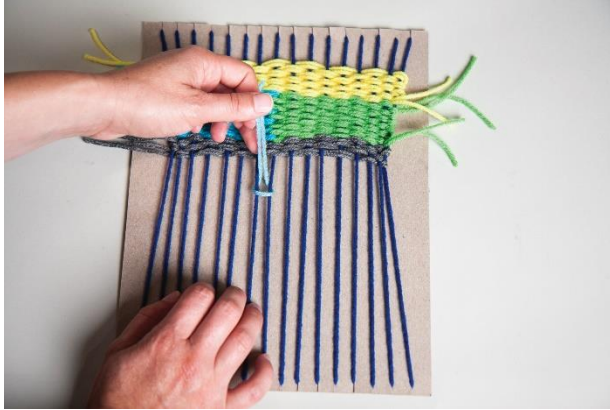
Spider Woman is often symbolized as a cross in Navajo weaving as a way to remember her teachings and wisdom. To create a cross, start another color in the same manner as the weave above, but this time only go halfway. Continue back and forth as many times as you wish.

Now, fill in the other half starting from the opposite side. Be sure to overlap the warp yarn where the two colors meet, otherwise you will have a hole. Notice how the black weft yarn is moved out of the way to make room for the white weft yarn to thread around the same warp yarn. After it's complete you can slide everything back into place. You may use this technique to create a cross symbolizing Spider Woman.



Loose Weave

Cut a few shorter pieces of yarn to prepare for this next technique. Wrap the yarn around two warp threads, and pull both ends through the middle. Pull to the top and tighten, repeat, and trim as needed. Continue your design.



Diagonal Weave

Use the halfway technique in a diagonal manner. Tie off any loose threads.



CONTENT STANDARDS

California Common Core Standards – English Language Arts

Grade 3: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.2

Grade 4: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2

Grade 5: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2

California Visual and Performing Arts - Visual Arts Content Standards

Grade 3: 2.0, 3.4

Grade 4: 2.4, 3.2, 4.4

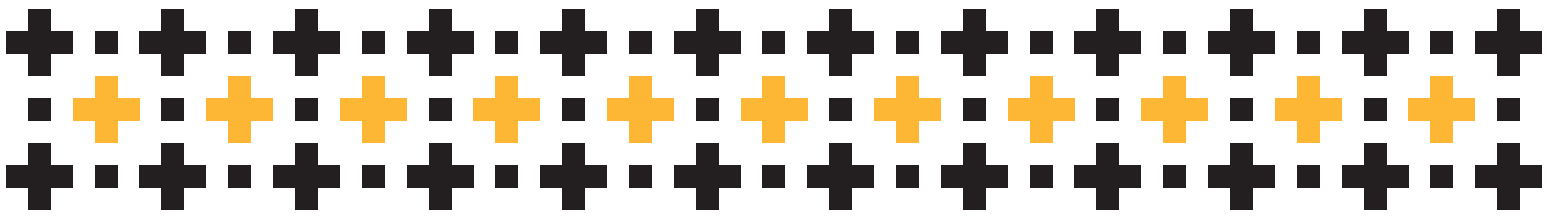
Grade 5: 3.4, 4.2

National Core Arts Standards

Grade 3: VA:Cr1.1.3, VA:Cr1.2.3, VA:Cr2.1.3, VA:Cr2.2.3

Grade 4: VA:Cr1.1.4, VA:Cr1.2.4, VA:Cr2.1.4, VA:Cr2.2.4

Grade 5: VA:Cr1.2.5, VA:Cr2.1.5, VA:Cr2.2.5



THE STORY OF SPIDER WOMAN

A long time ago, right after we emerged into Fourth World—the Glittering World—there was a Holy Person named Changing Woman. She had twin boys: their names were Monster Slayer and Child Born for Water.

The twins decided to plan a secret trip. To make sure that their mother did not hear about it, the twins only discussed their plans away from the Hogan. One evening while they were walking, they heard a voice. They couldn't tell where it came from. Upon hearing it the fourth time, they saw a tiny hole in the ground. They both kneeled down and looked into the hole.

All of a sudden, they were in a room with beautifully designed blankets all around them. An old woman's voice quietly said, "It is dark, my children, you shouldn't be out this late." The boys looked at her and asked her name. She told them she was Spider Woman. They told her about their secret plan, and they asked about the blankets. They had never seen anything like them before – they only knew about buckskin. They were amazed that the old Spider Woman had made them.

When they returned home, their mother asked where they had been. The boys only said they had visited an old lady who made beautiful blankets. Changing Woman was suspicious, but she became fascinated with the story of the weaver and didn't ask any more questions.

One day, Changing Woman visited Spider Woman. She wanted to see the blankets for herself. She also wanted to learn to weave. Spider Woman agreed to teach her, with one condition. Changing Woman would have to teach other Navajo women. She agreed.

The first thing Changing Woman wanted to learn was how to make those beautiful colors and designs. Spider Woman told her the colors came from the earth. "From the east I get white, from the south I get blue, from the west I get yellow, and from the north I get black. These colors come from white shell, turquoise, abalone, and jet. But these same colors, and more, can also be made from plants.

"The designs come from the earth. Clouds, lighting, sunbeams, and mountains. The bottom of the loom to the frame represents lightning. The warp represents the falling rain. This is why you must never weave during rain and lightning. You also must never sketch your rug before you start. The weaving must come from your mind and heart."

After Spider Woman had taught Changing Woman how to weave, she gave her one last instruction. Every rug that has a border must have an opening, a small break – usually nothing more than a light-colored piece of yarn, woven into the dark border that goes to the edge of the blanket. It is sort of like an escape from the middle of the blanket. "If you don't leave an opening," she said, "you will close in your life and thoughts. You will be unable to learn any more."

Then the Changing Woman went away and began to teach other women what she had learned.

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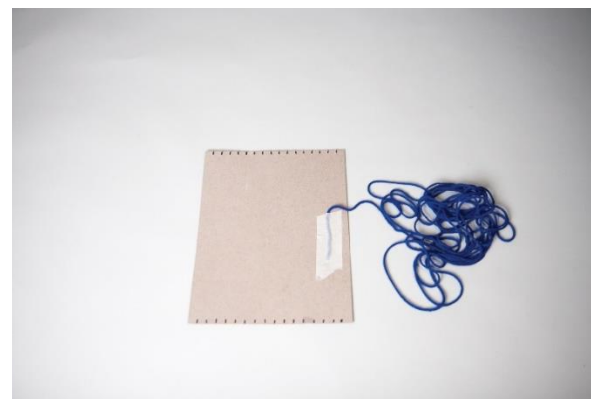
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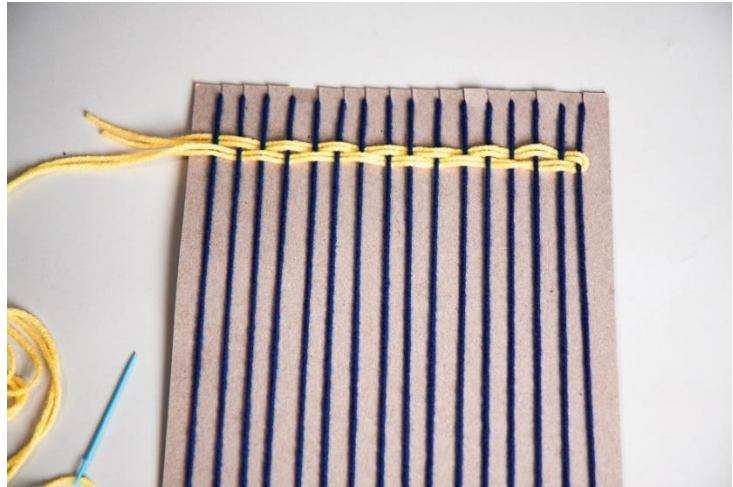
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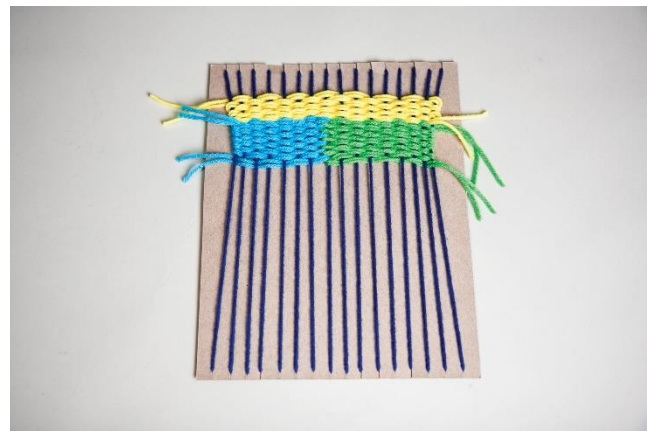
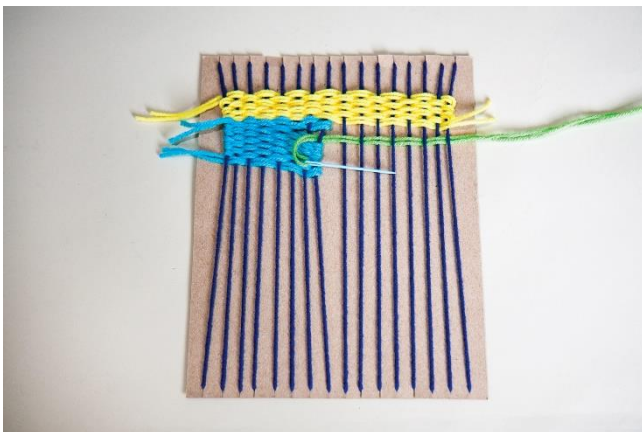
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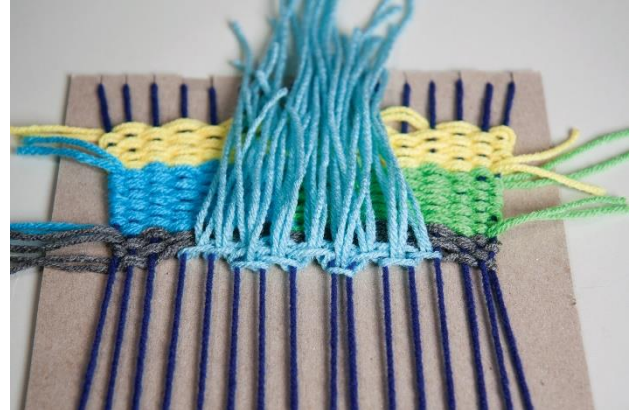
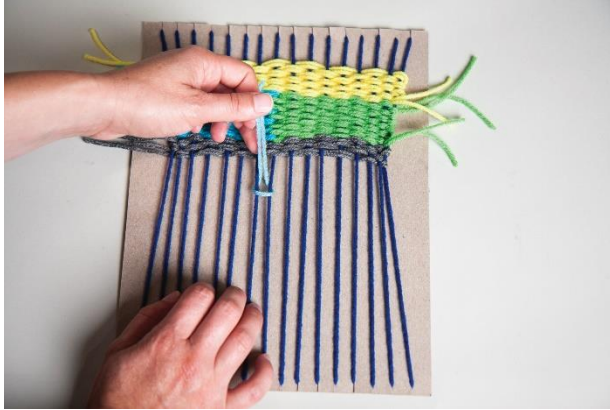
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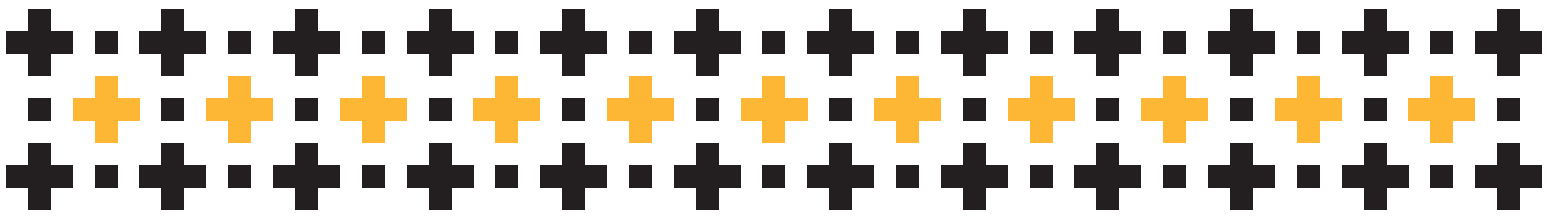
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