

# Drawing Pacific Northwest Coast Native American Traditional Designs

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**Grade:** 3rd

**Medium:** paper

**Learning Objective:** Students will:

- Observe Northwest Coast Native American designs.
- Add traditional details to a traditional image.
- Use art vocabulary.
- Use good craftsmanship.

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## Elements of Art

**Line:** a point moving in space. Line may be straight or curved. Contour lines define edges of shapes.

**Shape:** A two-dimensional (height/width, flat) area enclosed by a line: **geometric** (symmetrical, except for circles and hearts, straight edged) or **organic** (with irregular, curved edges). This lesson uses organic shapes.

## Principles of Design

**Rhythm:** created by movement, implied through the repetition of line in a non-uniform but organized way to show 2 & 3-dimensions.

**Symmetrical Balance:** arranging the parts equally on both sides of the composition.

**Unity:** the connecting of parts of a work of art, creating a feeling of peace and a sense of completeness. All parts should work together. Not enough unity is chaotic to the viewer, while too much unity is boring.

## Additional Vocabulary

**Craftsmanship:** A way of working that includes following directions, demonstrates neatness and the proper use of tools.

**Formlines:** the special organic shapes repeated in this style: ovoids, U-forms & S forms.

**Tradition:** the passing on of customs or beliefs from generation to generation.

## Materials & Supplies

- 6" x 8" Pre-printed salmon templates, see Advanced Preparation for how to make them
- Cardstock, enough to cut half class set or more of salmon shape
- 6" x 8" blue and red construction paper.

- 9"x12" red construction paper.
- White scrap paper
- Blue markers
- Pencils, erasers
- Class set glue sticks
- Class set (or share) hole puncher, white oil pastels or white tempera paint (depending on options for buttons— see step #10 in Instructions for Lesson

**Context (History and/or Artists)**

**Florence Davidson (1896-1993)** was a Canadian First Nations artist from the Haida nation who created traditional basketry and button-blankets. As a child she assisted her mother in sewing button blankets. Her daughter Primrose Adams, was the 2011 recipient of the Creative Lifetime Achievement Award for First Nation’s Art, for her traditional basketry.



Florence Davidson, *Haida Button Blanket*



The traditional style is highly abstracted and standardized, meaning it is always done the same way regardless of clan or art medium. It’s a form of visual identification and communication between clans. Self-expression or changing the designs isn’t allowed. Apprentices learn the rules from the masters and continue the designs. Sticking to traditions is a way of preserving the culture for the future. Of course, there are some PNW Coast native American artists who modernize the traditions anyway, so they can’t be considered traditionalists, but they can still be artists.

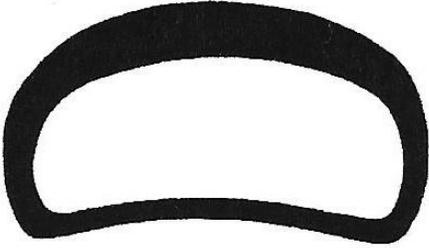
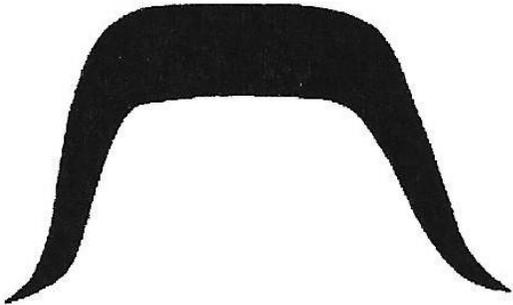
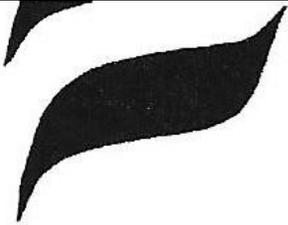
Traditional standards used are:

- the use of symmetry
- clan identification animals and totems are always depicted the same way
- specific colors always painted in the same places
- Filling interior space with line designs: ovoids, U-forms and S-forms. (see below)

When European fishermen visiting NW waters during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, they often traded their blue wool blankets for food and fresh water. Rather than used for sleeping, the blankets were used as capes and gifts at ceremonial dances. They were traditionally decorated with buttons made from abalone or dentalium shells. The central crest typically portrayed a symbol (spirit animal) of the

wearer's family heritage (clan). The blankets usually have a red border and red flannel applique makes up the inner shapes.

**Shapes** – templates made from animal hide or tree bark were used to learn the basic shapes.

<p><b>Ovoid</b> – most dominant shape, rounded rectangle with inner tension pushing the top to form a convex. Larger ovoids used to form the head of a subject, eye sockets, major joints, wings tails or fins. Smaller ovoids used to form joints, eyes, ears, noses or contain faces. Can also be used to fill empty spaces/corners.</p>	
<p><b>U-form</b> – resemble thick letter U's with ends tapering to sharp points. U-forms can vary in size but they all have the U shape. Larger U-forms are used to contour the body of the subject and as part of the form for tails of ears. Smaller U-forms are used as space fillers and even feathers of a bird. Multiple U-forms can also be stacked together to represent tails for fins.</p>	
<p><b>Split U-form</b> – the U-form is split in the middle with the inner U looking more like a V that ends up with a point in the center. Split U-forms can also vary in proportion. They are used in ears, feathers and tails. Northwest artists also used split U-forms as space fillers in open spaces.</p>	
<p><b>S-form</b> – is like the letter S with tapered ends. It is used as a space filler as well as parts of arms and legs. Multiple S-forms can also form a subject's ribcage. S-forms are used to connect different body parts of a subject.</p>	

**Advanced Preparation**

- This lesson can be taught as a single or two-day lesson. Your preparation will be different if you are doing the extensions. (see steps #10 & 11)
- Print salmon template. Computer paper is fine.
- Using cardstock, make a half-class set (or more) of templates with no inner shapes visible, just the outline of the salmon.
- Cut construction paper to size.

### **Tips & Tricks:**

- Demonstrations are very important. They will answer a lot of questions in advance for you. When you demonstrate, be sure every student can see what you're doing and hear what you're saying before you start.

### **Discussion Points**

- Post art vocabulary and briefly go through it. Refer to them whenever possible.
- Refer to information in the Context above. Talk about what button blankets are and show above images of Davidson's work. Explain the traditions of this style and the importance of not changing the style.
- Show examples of the ovoids, U-Forms and S-Forms.

### **Reflection Point (Assessment of Learning Objectives)**

Students will:

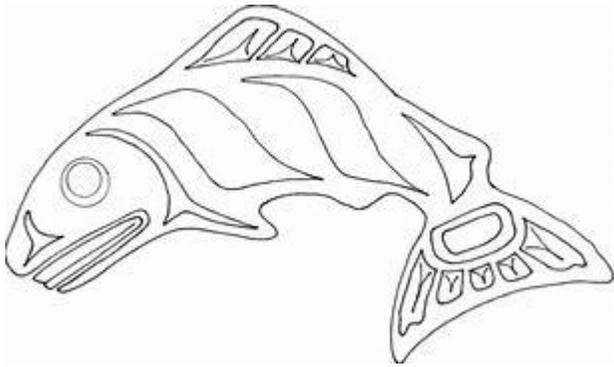
- Observe Northwest Coast Native American design.
- Add traditional details to a traditional image.
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### **Instructions for Lesson**

After you've gone through the discussion points, hand out white scrap paper.

1. **Demonstrate:** draw the ovoids, U-Forms and S-Forms on white scrap paper. Ask students to follow along with you. Talk about the process as you draw, how you see the lines as you draw them (curved, straight, diagonal, horizontal, etc)
2. After a few minutes pass out the templates and 6"x8" red construction paper.
3. **Demonstrate:** trace the salmon onto the red paper and begin to cut it out. Have them do the same as soon as they feel comfortable. As you trace, describe the process of holding the pencil closely to the edge while you draw, careful not to move the template.
4. Have students do this. If you have any students that would rather free-draw the salmon on the red paper, give them a few minutes to try. If it's taking too long have them use the template. The main goal for this lesson is to draw the ovoids, U-Forms and S-Forms.
5. Once most students have completed this step, stop them to watch you.
6. Post Template with inner shapes diagram (see below) on the board.
7. **Demonstrate:** drawing ovoids, U-Forms and S-Forms in the same places as the diagram.
8. Have students do this, and color in with blue markers.
9. As students finish, they will carefully glue onto the blue paper and then onto the larger red paper.
10. Buttons: If you choose this as a one-day lesson, use oil pastels to make the button border.  
If you have more time you can: a) hole punch paper circles and glue them around the border or  
b) stamp flat pencil backs into white tempera paint and stamp buttons around the border.  
Small real white buttons make a more authentic touch.
11. Those students who finish early can try drawing the salmon shape free-hand and adding their own inner shapes.

12. This lesson could also be done as a collage, using paper or felt.



Template with inner shapes

**References and Attributions:** *The Button Blanket*, by Nan McNutt. This book has a great template you can work from. Lesson written by Cynthia Moring.

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## Notes for Educators

### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Thinking Skills

Thinking flexibly, persisting, questioning, creating, innovating, listening with empathy, taking responsible risks, observing, making connections, visualizing, sequencing, predicting, comparing/contrasting, determining main idea, finding evidence, problem solving, cause and effect, determining point of view, decision making.

### WA State Learning Standards

(VA:Cr1.2.3) a. Apply knowledge of available resources, tools, and technologies to investigate personal ideas through the artmaking process.

(VA:Cr2.1.3) a. Create personally satisfying artwork, using a variety of artistic processes and materials.

(VA:Cr2.2.3) a. Demonstrate an understanding of the safe and proficient use of materials, tools, and equipment for a variety of artistic processes.

(VA:Cr3.1.3) a. Elaborate visual information by adding details in an artwork to enhance emerging meaning.

(VA:Pr6.1.3) a. Identify and explain how and where different cultures record and illustrate stories and history of life through art.

(VA:Re7.1.3) a. Speculate about processes an artist uses to create a work of art.

(VA:Re8.1.3) a. Interpret art by analyzing use of media to create subject matter, characteristics of form, and mood.

(VA:Re9.1.3) a. Evaluate an artwork based on given criteria.

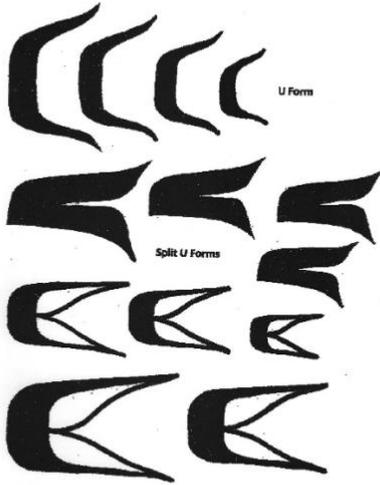
(VA:Cn11.1.3) a. Recognize that responses to art change depending on knowledge of the time and place in which it was made.

### Arts Integration Opportunities:

Social Studies: Examine cultural Pacific NW Coastal tribes.

Read Aloud: *The Button Blanket*, by Nan McNutt. The story of a Kwakiutl girl making her first ceremonial button blanket introduces activities that provide information about the crafts and ways of life of Indians living along the Northwest Coast of the United States and Canada.

Native Shapes Template 1



Native Shapes Template 2

