



SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

ART FIRST NATIONS : TRADITION AND INNOVATION IN THE CIRCUMPOLAR WORLD

Teacher's Guide by
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Module 2: Alaska

ARTWORKS:

ANONYMOUS: Walrus Mask

LAWRENCE (LARRY) BECK: Punk Walrus Spirit

CONTENTS OF MODULE

This module deals with traditional and innovative artworks from Alaska. The traditional artwork, *Walrus Mask*, made by an anonymous Eskimo artist prior to 1913, features a wooden face mask with a tiny feather attachment. The innovative artwork, *Punk Walrus Spirit*, features a found object sculpture made from recycled industrial materials by Larry Beck in 1986.

A **Perceiving** experience provides students with information for determining how Larry Beck's artwork differs from the traditional artwork. A selected quotation by an Eskimo elder sets the stage for the lesson by referring to the world of change and the values of pride, independence and resourcefulness. This leads to a discussion about the similarities and differences in the artworks. Larry Beck's sculpture is found to differ from the traditional mask in several ways. It contains more varied component parts, uses a greater variety of values, colors, textures, and volume and also uses movement, rhythm and contrast in a dynamic way.

A **Studio Activity** section invites students to construct a found object sculpture representing the survival of an animal. This involves using the image development strategy of substitution to replace anatomical parts of an animal with found object components. It also involves using elements of texture and color and principles of movement, rhythm and pattern to unify the project. Through these activities, students are brought to an understanding of how Larry Beck used innovative ideas.

PERCEIVING

This module focuses on a survival theme and features Larry Beck, an Eskimo artist, who expresses new and different ideas based on the old ways of his culture. These ideas are explored through perceiving and studio activities.

Suggested teaching time

45 minutes

Problem to be solved

What determines how Larry Beck's sculpture is new and different from the traditional work?

Objectives

Students will:

- demonstrate an understanding of the life and culture of Larry Beck;
- distinguish similarities and differences between a traditional mask and a contemporary sculpture made from found materials;
- know the materials and techniques used to create these artworks;
- understand that Larry Beck's artwork differs from the traditional artwork in purpose and meaning.

Vocabulary

Value, color, shape, form, movement, rhythm, contrast, bilateral symmetry.

MOTIVATION

Display the two reproductions and communicate the following information.

To introduce the lesson, the voice of an elder reflects on the modern world of change. These sentiments are captured in a conversation with Odark and recorded by Knud Rasmussen, a famous Eskimo polar explorer at the turn of the century:

"An engine, an airplane, is very lovely, very complicated. But we are not impressed. You white men have equipment, books. But we - without knowing much, look what we've been able to do with nothing, not a piece of wood or iron except what is in Savigssivik (where there is a deposit of iron meteorites). A sledge, an igloo, is also a very good thing....We have been here for hundreds and hundreds of years. We have some say, some right to speak - after all, this is our home."

Rasmussen in Seidelman & Turner, p.182

Discuss with students the suggestion of pride in independence and ingenuity in being resourceful. Present the reproductions to the students. Point out that in one, we see a walrus mask made of wood with a feather attachment. In the other, we see a found object sculpture of ingenious construction made by an artist named Larry Beck.

DISCUSSION

Focus student attention on the two reproductions.

Explain to students that they are going to explore how Larry Beck's artwork is new and different from the traditional mask. Use comparison and contrast to explore the artworks through **description, analysis, interpretation** and **judgement**.

Description

Describe familiar and recognizable aspects of the artworks. Assist students in discovering that Larry Beck's work differs in that it:

- contains more varied component parts;
- uses a greater variety of value, color and texture;
- is a more complex form.

1. Account for the obvious aspects of the artworks. Tell what you see by describing:
 - a. the subject matter. What is depicted (sea mammal; walrus head)?
 - b. the component parts (found materials such as wood, feathers, paint; and oil can spouts, safety pins, hub caps).
 - c. the elements (earth colors, mat surfaces, simple geometric shapes; and neutral colors, textures ranging from smooth shiny surfaces to spiky).

Analysis

Explore the principles of design in each artwork. Assist students in discovering that Larry Beck's work is different because:

- it uses movement, rhythm and contrast.

While both artworks use bilateral symmetry, they differ in other respects in that the contemporary work uses rhythm and contrast.

- a. How has Larry Beck achieved a strong sense of movement and rhythm (repeated circular shapes, radiating rows of nails and pins)?
- b. How has contrast been achieved (smooth surfaces and spiky textures, highly reflective and mat surfaces, dark and light areas)?

Notice the interrelationship of subject, media and principles of design (contrasting found industrial materials to create textured qualities in the construction of the walrus, uniformity of manufactured materials to promote movement and rhythmic quality - rounded shapes and forms of walrus lend themselves to rhythmic quality of materials chosen by artist.

Cultural Context

Refer to the information provided about the artwork. Use questioning strategies as you investigate the history, materials, tools, techniques and uses of each artwork.

Discuss the tools, techniques, and materials used to create the works and the differences between a walrus mask and a mixed media construction.

Help students understand how Larry Beck was influenced and guided by traditional ideas dealing with mask making.

Help students understand that Larry Beck's artwork differs from the traditional one in that it uses recycled industrial materials and is a self-supporting piece which is made for display only.

Title - "Walrus Mask"

Size - (20.7 x 11.8 x 9.8 cm / 8 1/8x 4 5/8x 3 7/8 in)

Artist - Anonymous

Technique/Medium - Carving with attachments: wood, feather shafts, feather, metal, string and paint.

Mask making flourished in nineteenth century Alaska and consisted of images with a remarkably rich diversity and complexity. In dances and ceremonies they added drama to a story, song or pantomime; in the repertoire of Alaskan Eskimo craftsmen they represented subject matter as diverse as spirits, shamanic journeys, humans and deities, as well as animals and objects. They were a way of paying tribute and making the unseen world of magic and spirits become visible. They were also used as parts of costumes at social gatherings and comic dances where they were meant to amuse the audience. The featured mask was carved out of wood and was used in a pantomime dance to celebrate the walrus, an important animal in the hunting economy. The artist incised areas around the eyes, mouth and nose for emphasis and used hollow feather shafts pegged into the mouth area to form whiskers. A feather fluff which bobs over the head presumably symbolizes the exhalation of air as the animal comes to the surface after a long dive.

Title - "Punk Walrus Spirit"

Size - (48.2 x 29.2 x 33 cm / 19 x 11 ½ x 13 in)

Artist - Larry Beck

Technique/Medium - Mixed media construction: metal and found materials

Larry Beck's sculpture is constructed of found materials such as oil can spouts, hubcaps and nails. There is a centuries-old resourcefulness in Beck's discovery of new uses for old and discarded items: oil can spouts are used to represent walrus tusks, hubcaps are combined to suggest the rounded forms of the walrus head and neck, and nails create the effect of bristled whiskers. Supporting the head is a section of tire. In the whitewall (neck) area there is a drawing of a walrus hunt. Such narratives were commonly carved on ivory knives and other traditional items. Their purpose was to relate stories, instruct the young, and express respect for animals as part of living harmoniously with nature.

"*Punk Walrus Spirit*" is a self-supporting sculpture which, because of its simplicity of form and variety of found materials, has a playful or comical appearance. Its varied surface textures and colors give it a vitality which is lively and engaging.

Interpretation

*Interpret the **meaning** of the works by initiating a discussion.*

1. Examine the traditional artwork. How do you think the mask was used (to amuse an audience, to recount the story of a hunt in a dance or performance, to empower the hunter and ensure a successful hunt)?
2. What are some of the ways the artist has expressed the living qualities of the walrus (walrus characteristics become more alive as they are performed or when the mask is worn, eyes of the wearer make the mask more lifelike when they appear through the eye holes, breath of the walrus is symbolized by swaying and wavering feather attached to its head)?
3. If the traditional artwork dramatizes some of the living qualities of a walrus, what is emphasized in Larry Beck's sculpture (endangered habitat of Arctic animals, endurance of walrus and elevation of its status to an iconic level; changing environments in the Arctic brought about by urbanization, oil and mining exploration, changing world which requires adaptation whenever new ways of doing things is required)?

Judgement

Explore the significance and value of the artworks.

The two artworks were created for different reasons (a mask for a dance or ceremony, a sculpture which uses recycled materials to express ideas about the environment).

1. Which artwork seems to be more successful in achieving its purpose and why?
2. What do you think are the most important ideas expressed in the contemporary artwork? Do you think these ideas are expressed in a clear and powerful way. Why or why not?
3. If you had the opportunity to change the contemporary sculpture, what changes would you make? Why?
4. If Larry Beck's sculpture addresses environmental concerns, how effective is it in raising consciousness and moving viewers to preserve wildlife and habitat in the Arctic? Give fully developed reasons for your answers.

ACTIVITY

Quiz Sheet

Solving the problem: How is Larry Beck's artwork new and different?

*Reproduce and distribute the **Quiz Sheet** (p. 42). Read the **Biography** and **Culture** texts to the students from this guide (pp. 43-44).*

The Biography and Culture texts provide more clues about Larry Beck's life and culture.

Students should be familiar with this information before they answer the Quiz Sheet. After students have completed it, check and discuss their responses in class. The Quiz Sheets can be used for assessment purposes.

ASSESSMENT

Assess both oral and written responses.

Were the students able to express their ideas about the similarities and differences in the artworks in terms of the questions posed in the description, analysis, interpretation and judgement sections? The innovative artwork can be characterized in terms of:

- containing more varied component parts;
- using a greater variety of value, color and texture;
- having more varied sculptural volume;
- containing a stronger sense of movement, rhythm and contrast;

ENRICHMENT/EXTENSION

1. Larry Beck has assembled found materials from various sources and given them a lifelike quality in the form of a familiar animal. Examine pictures of equipment or complex machinery (cranes, earthmovers, bulldozers) and other machines. Discuss the possibility of creating a fantasy world of monster machines with animal qualities which roam over the earth.
2. Study the way various folk artists have used found materials to create objects or creatures of fancy. Examine weather vanes, whirligig toys and other examples from America's past to gain an appreciation of folk artists' ingenuity and contributions.
3. Larry Beck makes the following comment about using recycled materials to create his artwork: "I live in a modern city where my found materials come from the junkyards, trash cans and industrial waste facilities..." Discuss how recycled or throwaway materials can be used for creating art objects.
 - a. Does the choice and quality of materials affect the value we place on the artwork, i.e. is it possible to respect and value a sculpture made of junk materials?
 - b. What does the material contribute to the idea conveyed by the image, i.e. how do our ideas about a walrus change when we see one made of machine parts as compared with one made of natural materials like driftwood?
 - c. Are there artists (folk artists, fine artists, ethnic artists) for whom recycled materials are especially important and appropriate? You may wish to begin your search with artists like Picasso, Louise Nevelson, and Simon Rodia.
4. Inuit communities often have divided opinions about what is acceptable regarding the creation of art. Many art critics would probably agree that Larry Beck's sculpture is a successful piece of modern art but others might wonder whether it shows a proper respect for artistic and cultural traditions. Organize a debate in which one group vigorously defends the artwork as respecting traditions while the other side presents arguments that criticize its break from traditions.
5. The earth should be viewed as a sacred trust and protecting the environment should also be viewed as a topic of vital importance. Think of solutions for reusing throwaway materials. Make a list of materials that could be turned into useful things as well as artistic objects which make for more attractive surroundings. Conduct research into modern recycling efforts. Visit a recycling center or an industry which uses recycled materials.
6. In the western tradition, the cubists were noted for their use of recycled materials in art. Research well known master artists who have used found or cast-off materials to create their artwork. Make a timeline to determine what materials were used and when and how the artworks were created.
7. Some sculptures exist in public places where they invite discussion and provoke controversy. Investigate the controversy that surrounds public artworks. Save clippings from newspapers. Keep a diary account of public reaction, and the delight or dismay aroused by the public by interviewing, taking notes or audio/videoing responses. Share with classmates and discuss whether or not these reactions are valid.

8. Imagine you are an artist who has completed a sculpture made from found materials and that a newspaper article has harshly criticized your efforts. Think about your feelings and write a letter to the editor in which you express your ideas arguing the value of your artwork. Limit your response to 250 words because this is the maximum allowed by the editor of the newspaper.

STUDIO ACTIVITY

Survival Theme

Medium and Technique: Construction with Found Materials.

Suggested teaching time

Two or three 45 minute sessions.

Problem to be solved

How can survival be represented in a sculpture made from found materials?

Objectives

Students will:

- demonstrate expertise in showing how survival can be represented in a sculpture;
- skillfully construct a sculpture made of found materials;
- know how to effectively use a variety of found materials and surfaces in combination with another;
- demonstrate the ability to use an image development strategy (substitution) to make a sculpture.

Vocabulary : substitution, found materials.

Materials

*Prepare classroom
for a found object
sculpture project.*

- book and magazine pictures
- boxes or cartons
- found objects: broken garden tools, hose parts, machinery or plumbing parts and gears, camera and bicycle parts, tin or film cans, wrappers, kitchen utensils, broken toys, appliance or computer parts...
- clothing fragments, cord, rope, ribbon, shoe laces, fabric, buttons, wood scraps...
- hardware items: bolts, nuts, washers, brackets, hooks, nails, pins, hinges...
- Tools and Adhesives:
- glue gun (optional)
- 1/4" or 3/8" drill with assorted bits
- masking, silver duct tape
- cord and wrapping wire
- white glue, contact cement
- epoxy resin

DISCUSSION

Briefly review the similarities and differences in the artworks.

- Mention how Larry Beck was inspired by traditional ideas related to the walrus.
- Emphasize that his work is different from the traditional mask because it uses recycled industrial materials.
- Discuss aspects of survival leading to the creation of a found material sculpture.
- Tell them they will be using an image development strategy called **substitution**.

IMAGE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

(substitution)

Artists use a variety of image development strategies to make their work innovative. Larry Beck uses **substitution** in his found material sculpture to replace anatomical parts of a walrus with recycled industrial materials which resemble the body parts of a walrus (oil can spouts for tusks, nails for whiskers, hubcaps for head).

ACTIVITY

Solving the problem

Use Larry Beck's ideas as inspiration to create a found material sculpture that deals with survival.

Suggested procedure

- Preparation

Ask students to bring pictures of animals or birds to class. These may be found in books or magazines. Emphasize the importance of finding pictures that show clear details of the heads. Larger images are preferable to small pictures. Also ask students to start a collection of found materials that would be suitable for use in a sculpture.

- Survival Ideas

Discuss how the appearance of animals aids their survival:

- a. attracting prey or mates through alluring shapes, colors or textures;
- b. repelling predators or rivals through bold or frightening shapes, colors or texture;
- c. concealment or camouflage from enemies through blending with surroundings or having patterns that confuse predators.

- Organizing Ideas and Materials

Choose one animal or bird from the pictures to begin the sculpture. You can begin construction by using a found object such as a kitchen utensil, small tool, a glass or plastic bottle or jug with an interesting shape, that represents the basic form of the head. Examine the picture closely and also look at the collection of found materials that can be transformed and added to represent individual parts of the animal (eyes, ears, nose, teeth). Rope, ribbon, spools, styrofoam cups, egg cartons, nails, bottle caps, and many other items we discard or recycle could be used to embellish the sculpture. The animal or bird you have chosen should make use of at least one survival strategy. Determine the strategy it uses to survive in nature and emphasize or exaggerate that in choosing parts such as enlarged teeth. Attach found materials using appropriate methods (gluing, taping, soldering).

- Completing the Found Object Sculpture

Many animals and birds such as the killer whale, chameleon, mandrill, zebra, polar bear, peacock and grouse have color that increases their chances of survival. If the creature you have chosen relies on color for attracting, repelling or concealing, use paint to emphasize this in your sculpture.

If color and distinctive markings are not a prominent feature of the animal or bird you've chosen, there may be another reason to paint your sculpture. Because found object sculpture consists of many disparate parts, a unified color scheme may be needed to unite the sculpture.

ASSESSMENT

Display the results of the art production activity.

Explain to students the importance of evaluating their sculptural results, i.e. determining strengths and weaknesses.

Use group or peer discussion to explore and question methods of creation and ways ideas were developed.

Conduct a discussion while noting student comments and the degree to which they are thoughtful and constructively critical of their own work and others. Are they able to:

- describe various kinds of survival in the animal world (fish, birds, reptiles, insects...);
- explain how they chose found materials and objects to represent their ideas of survival;
- describe how they substituted animal features in pictures for found material to create a sculpture;
- discuss how they used elements of color and texture in their sculpture;
- comment on how they used movement, rhythm and pattern to construct a unified result;
- discuss how they feel about their own work as well as each other's artwork. If given an opportunity, how would they change it and why?

ENRICHMENT/EXTENSION

1. Traditional Inuit sculpture sometimes began by using found, natural materials. Invite students to find a natural material such as a twig, leaf or shell. Attach this object to a page where it becomes part of an animal such as an eye, antler, tusk or tail. Complete the animal by drawing the remaining parts.
2. The contribution made by materials in the expressive character of artwork is evident in the Larry Beck sculpture which uses mechanical parts to create an animal with a certain identity and character. Find pictures of machines or mechanical parts in discarded magazines. Arrange or compose the parts to construct a human figure instead of an animal.
3. The idea of a walrus may have been suggested to Larry Beck by the chance discovery of a mechanical part. Bring to class discarded mechanical objects and parts. Ideal for this project would be small parts from radios, clocks, watches, small electric appliances and computers. In small groups of two or three students, place some of the objects or parts on a table and arrange them to discover relationships which suggest insects. Use wire or other binding materials to create a sculpture or do a series of drawings. Share your results with another group as well as the whole class.

4. Some people view the Larry Beck sculpture as toy-like with its use of mechanical and found object parts. Larry Beck's approach to using found objects seems to be playful. As a class, design several pieces of playground equipment based on automobiles and parts which resemble real and imaginary animals. Present your ideas as drawings and/or three dimensional models.
5. The traditional artwork makes use of a tiny feather above a walrus to represent its breath as it comes up for air. Draw or sculpt something as transient as breath - something which is fleeting or momentary. What materials could be used and how could they be constructed or formed?
 - a. Possible suggestions for materials: gauze, plastic rings, saran wrap, fishing line, plexiglas;
 - b. Fleeting moments: yawn, sneeze, cough, gasp, whistle, chilly breath, exhalation.
6. Although the walrus is familiar to some coastal Inuit people, a few early European explorers who saw the walrus for the first time drew it as a strange fantasy-like creature. The walrus is best known for its rounded lumpy features and its distinguishing ivory tusks. Create your version of a fantasy creature with these same characteristics. Use several sketches and then translate your ideas into a soft sculpture model which can be advertised as the best children's toy of the year.
7. The walrus is often regarded as a clumsy creature when seen on land but quite differently in the water where it is an adept and swift swimmer. Divide a piece of drawing paper in half. On one side represent your idea of awkwardness and clumsiness and on the other side speed, agility and swiftness. If possible, show several ideas of each characteristic.

BIOGRAPHY

LARRY BECK (1938-1994)

Larry Beck is an Alaskan Yupik. He received his formal art education at the University of Washington, and retains a strong sense of his Eskimo heritage. He comments : "I am an Eskimo, but I'm also a 20th century American. I live in a modern city where my found materials come from junkyards, trash cans, and industrial waste facilities, since the ancient beaches where my ancestors found driftwood and washed-up debris from shipwrecks are no longer available to me. But my visions are mine, and even though I use Baby Moon hubcaps, pop rivets, snow tires, teflon spatulas, dental pick mirrors, and stuff to make my spirits, this is a process to which the old artists could relate. Because, below these relics of your world, reside the old forms familiar to the Inua." (Fitzhugh in Crowell, ed., 1988, p. 333)

In his use of recycled industrial materials from the modern world and his combination of found materials to represent personal dreams and visions, Larry Beck is able to bridge two cultures. The title of his sculpture, *Punk Walrus Spirit*, suggests a mingling of new and old. Punk makes reference to contemporary popular culture while the subject of walrus is one which Eskimo artists have carved for centuries. Like many other Eskimo artists, Larry Beck continues to look for ways of coming to terms with cultural changes among his people. In his sculptures of walruses, polar bears, and other animals of the north, Beck keeps traditions alive while giving new meaning to the spirit of this culture.

ESKIMO CULTURE

The Bering Sea cultures of Alaska and Siberia have long attracted interest of artists and scholars because they are steeped in antiquity. Various indigenous peoples inhabited the area of the vast Yukon-Kuskokwin coast, river and tundra lowlands for thousands of years. The coastal groups hunted walrus, seal and beluga whales but did not participate in the hunting of large whales. Interior groups depended on fish and bird resources as well as numerous land animals such as bears and caribou. A distinctive aspect of the Bering Sea Eskimo cultures were their wide variety of art and cultural forms. This resulted, in part, from the relatively stable subsistence base, the occupation of a large geographical region, and trading that encouraged the exchange of ideas.

Hunting implements were designed to attract and please animals and spirits. They were ornamented with intricate designs as were utensils. Many of these motifs, engravings and carvings were based on continuing traditions of the Bering Sea and Punuk cultures dating back 2000 years. Masks and accessories of festival life were also elaborate. At the point of European contact, the Bering Sea people were the most remote and isolated, and their limited contact with outsiders helped preserve their well established cultural life. They continued to retain the rich artistic traditions well into this last century. Today, traditional ways still remain strong in Southwest Alaska and the introduction of new ideas and materials by artists is considered important for revitalizing the culture, keeping it alive and strong for future generations.

NAME:
DATE:
CLASS:

QUIZ SHEET – LARRY BECK

1. Larry Beck’s artwork is referred to as a sculpture because

2. Discuss two ways in which Larry Beck’s work exhibits a strong sense of movement and rhythm.
3. Traditionally, masks were never used to dramatize stories in Alaskan Eskimo culture.
True or False
4. A drawing which appears on the neck area of Larry Beck’s sculpture is thought to contain instruction for assembling his work. **True or False**
5. Both artworks were created within a decade of one another. **True or False**
6. The materials used in Larry Beck’s sculpture were easily obtained by his ancestors in Alaska a century ago. **True or False**
7. Underline 4 out of 6 words that best describe the materials used in Larry Beck’s artwork (found, colorful, industrial, discarded, natural, uneconomical).
8. Larry Beck uses his ingenuity to substitute recycled materials for various anatomical parts of the walrus. Fill in the blanks:
Oil can spouts represent _____
_____ represent whiskers.
Hubcaps represent _____
9. Match the descriptions on the right correctly drawing a line to the artwork:

Anonymous Mask	expresses ideas about the environment
Larry Beck’s sculpture	used in a dance ceremony
	a carving with attachments
	records scenes of a walrus hunt
10. Briefly list aspects or ideas about Larry Beck’s artwork that might relate to environment issues
a. _____
b. _____
c. _____

Write a paragraph discussing how Larry Beck’s sculpture is new and different from the traditional mask.

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