




STEM



Plains Indian Parfleche

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1900 Dalrymple Drive
Baton Rouge, LA 70808

Knock Knock Children's Museum is a community spark for engaging, playful learning experiences that inspire and support lifelong learning.

Plains Indian Parfleche

Age Level: 5 and up | Learning Zone: Art Garden

Subject: Plains Indian Parfleche (Par-Flesh)

[WATCH THE VIDEO LESSON HERE!](#)

Materials Needed:

- Brown paper bag (folded and punched with holes)
- White oil pastel pipe cleaners (2 long, 4 short)
- Pony beads
- Water color paint
- Cup of water

Louisiana Standards:

VA-CE-E1, VA-CE-E2, VA-CE-E3, VA-CE-E4, VA-HP-E1VA-HP-E3

Learning Objectives:

The participant will learn to make a parfleche, a leather folded bag created by Plains Indians to hold food, medicine, clothing, and tools. The Plains Indians used the Parfleche as a saddle bag strapped to their horses, to carry items when they moved to new hunting or farming grounds.



Steps:

- Take out your bag, notice it has been folded and holes have been punched on the sides.
- Use the white oil pastel to draw geometric patterns on your bag (triangles, squares, circles). You can also draw letters like X's, W's, and Z's, drawn on the inside and outside areas of your bag.
- Open up your watercolor paint. Use your paint brush to add water to activate the paint.
- Paint around your oil pastel designs. You will notice that the oil pastel will show up even if you paint over it.
- Wash your brush with each color change.
- Paint the front and back of your paper - keeping the sides folded in. You do not need to paint the INSIDE of the bag.
- Let the bag dry.
- Clean up your paints. Wash your brush and empty your cup of water.
- Take a long pipe cleaner.
- Open up the top flap of your bag and put your pipe cleaner in the hole marked with the X.
- Fold the pipe cleaner over so it stays attached.
- Lace the pipe cleaner in and out of the holes.
- Add pony beads to the end of the pipe cleaner, leaving about 1/2 inch of pipe cleaner to fold over your last bead, and push inside your second to last bead.
- Repeat with the other side using your 2nd long pipe cleaner.
- Take one of your short pipe cleaners. These will go on the top of the parfleche.
- Put short pipe cleaner through the hole marked with dot.
- Fold pipe cleaner over and twist to attach and add beads - keeping 1/2 inch of pipe cleaner that you can fold over and tuck into the other beads to keep from falling off.
- Repeat this with the other 3 holes.
- Now you are done!
- Clean up.
- You can use your parfleche to hold pieces of paper, your mask, or just about anything that will fit.



History and Vocabulary:

"Parfleche" is a name given to these colorfully painted bags by French fur traders who traded furs and other goods with the Plains Indians. Trading was a way people shopped before there were stores. Rather than using money, they traded items that they made or food that they grew for other things that they needed.

Traditionally, a Parfleche is made from animal hides. The Plains Indians hunted Buffalo, eating its meat, and using its hides to making tee pees to live in, blankets to sleep on, clothing and shoes to wear. Plains Indian women painted colorful geometric patterns including diamonds, triangles, and zigzags.

These designs were a map of where they lived - the mountains, plains, rivers and valleys. These beautiful bags often had fringe (leather tassels) on their edges. These tassels were used to hold the sides together and drain water away from the bags when it was raining.

The Plains Indians once lived throughout the Great Plains, west of the Mississippi River. The Plains Indians were made up of different Tribes, each speaking a different language and having different cultures. The Plains Indians were known to be excellent riders, hunters and farmers.

When pioneers began moving West and needing land to live on, the Plains Indians' way of life changed. The Plains Indians were very brave and fought American Soldiers to keep their land, but sadly the soldiers were more powerful, and the Indians were moved to special towns called Reservations. Today the Plains Indians still celebrate their culture and traditions and are an important part of America.