

The Weaver as Engineer

The Weaver as Artist



Engineers are people who invent, design, analyze, built and test machines, structures and gadgets, and the Native people of this area that later became Utah were engineers of the past that meet a human survival need.

Grade Level	3rd-5th Grade, 8th grade
Activity Length	4 class periods, 45+ minutes
Materials	Copies of worksheets An object from home or provided the instructor. Acrylic paints

Third Grade, Objective 2: Explain how selected indigenous cultures of the Americas have changed over time.

•Why do cultures change over time?

- Identify how indigenous people maintain cultural traditions today.

Fourth Grade, Objective 1: Describe the historical and current impact of various cultural groups on Utah.

•How have various cultural groups had an impact on the development of Utah?

- Explore cultural influences from various groups found in Utah today
- Explain the importance of preserving cultural prehistory and history, including archaeological sites and other historic sites and artifacts.

Objective 3: Investigate the development of the economy in Utah.

•Why does economic development influence communities?

- Explain the relationship between supply and demand.
- Describe the role of producers and consumers.
- Identify examples of producers and consumers in the local community.
- Identify the factors which bring about economic changes
- Examine how economic development affects communities

Eighth Grade:

UT Standard 1.1: Students will make evidence-based inferences about the complex ancient cultures in Utah after studying artifacts from the prehistoric era. (history)

UT Standard 1.3: Students will explain the economic activity of a prehistoric and/or historic American Indian tribal community by using basic economic concepts, including supply, demand, trade, and scarcity. (economics)

UT Standard 1.5: Students will describe the cultural change and continuity of at least one of Utah's current sovereign nations as it has responded to changing political, social, and economic forces. Students will use a variety of resources that may include written primary and secondary sources, oral histories, photographs, artifacts, and art. (economics, civics)





How to Use this Activity

People have lived in the area currently known as Utah for thousands of years. What problems did these people need to work through? In this activity, learn more about the ways in which people used the natural resources around them to make baskets that they needed, and then how over time their descendants have continued to develop and extend their expertise in making these baskets. They maintain their ancestors' deep knowledge and innovative technologies, changing design and purpose as needed to meet the demands of consumers.

For Teachers:

People have been engineering objects to help with their survival needs. The weavers in these videos have evolved their craft to meet their needs. At the beginning of this lesson students will learn about utility vs. art, and discuss their views about them. In the second part, students will learn more about the engineering of Navajo baskets, and the people who create them. In the third part of this lesson, students will learn about how the baskets have transitioned from purely utilitarian and ceremonial use, to also becoming an art form. These transitions have been driven by how people meet their economic and creative needs. Finally, on the last lesson, students will design and create an item of art from a utilitarian object.

Make copies of all worksheets for students. Many of the discussion questions can be answered by group discussions or individual work. The painting activity may take more than one class session.

Online Teaching: Introduce the worksheets in a group meeting. You may want to watch the videos and work through the worksheets as a group. If necessary, eliminate the painting an object activity.

Activity Alternative: Students without internet connections can have copies of the worksheets and work on finding examples of objects that are both art and utilitarian in the real world. Although they may not be able to watch the films, they can take photos and make drawings of what they find.



Utilitarian Art



Name: _____

Utilitarian means that something is made to be useful rather than to be decorative or comfortable. Can something be both utilitarian and artistic, however? Can these two things go together? Many people say that these cannot go together. What do you think, and why do you think this?

Massimo Vignelli was an Italian designer. He once said, "Design is not art. Design is utilitarian, art is not." Do you agree with him? Why or why not?

Here is a photograph of three mugs. Look at them closely. Draw a line from each word to a mug to show which category you would put it in. Each can belong in more than one category. Explain why you categorized the mugs as you did.

UTILITARIAN

ART

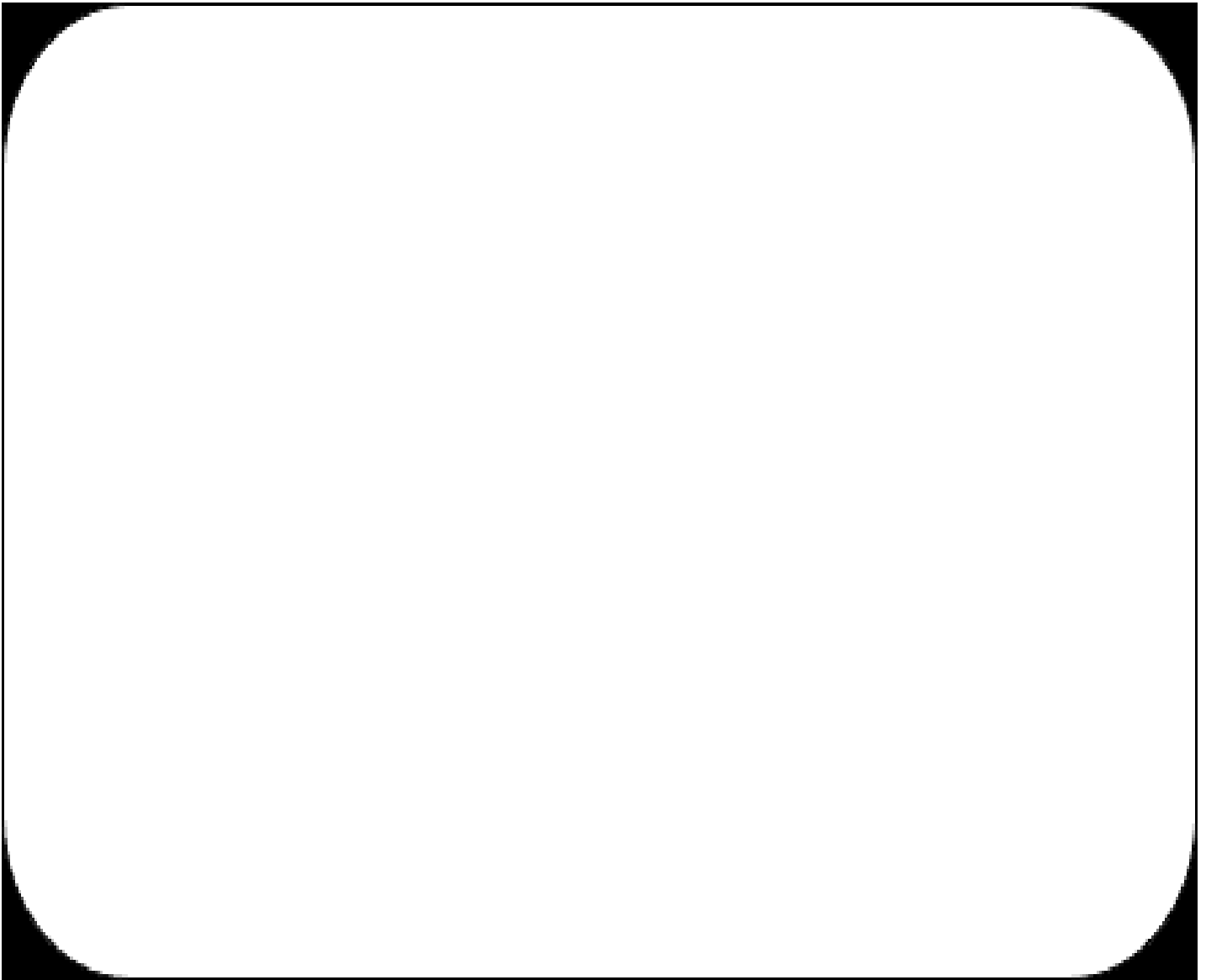


Two of these mugs came from an art gallery. Does that change your mind about whether or not they are art? What determines if something is art? _____

Utilitarian Art



Design your own art gallery mug. Your mug should be utilitarian; it should help someone meet their survival need to drink water. It should also be something that someone might find in an art gallery.



The Weaver as an Engineer



Name: _____

An engineer is someone who creates or builds something in order to fulfill a need. Humans' basic survival needs are clean air, water, nutrients, shelter and sleep. Long before the arrival of Europeans, the Indigenous people of Utah and the southwest engineered baskets of all kinds. What survival needs did these engineers fulfill? _____

Watch the video "[The Weaver as an Engineer](#)" The weavers in this video have learned from their relatives how to weave baskets. They have a high degree of knowledge of plants and how to process and dye the material to make their baskets. The skill that goes into the creation of a basket is considerable. Most of the weavers began as young children, and all were taught by experts. They continue to practice their craft and have reached a point where they are among the best in the world.

Do you have any skills that you started practicing as a very young child and now consider yourself very capable at performing? _____

Survival needs don't change over time, but how those needs are met does change. Baskets remain useful, but some of those needs have been taken over by other objects. Name two objects that you own that could have replaced baskets.

In the video, master weaver Sally Black tells a story about being a young girl of six. Her mother asks her to give a basket to a woman at a trading post and collect the money for the basket. Although money is used all over the world to help people meet their survival needs, Sally didn't understand what money was or why it was needed. Why do you think Sally didn't have a need to understand the use of money before this? _____

How do you think that the need for money has changed the way people live and work? _____

The Weaver as an Artist



Name: _____

The survival needs that people have do not change, but the ways those needs are met have changed. Over time, some of the uses of baskets have been replaced by other objects. Some of the uses have not been replaced, especially when the baskets are used in ceremonies.



The Navajo Ceremonial Basket, also called the Navajo Wedding Basket, is a ceremonial object. You can read more about the significance of the design at the following website:

<https://nhmu.utah.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/The%20Navajo%20Ceremonial%20Basket%20Interpretations.pdf>

Watch the video "[The Weaver as an Artist](#)" This video highlights the artistic innovations made by Navajo basket weavers, encouraged by the Simpson brothers and Damian Jim, who understood the incredible expertise and abilities of the weavers.

Damian Jim in the video says, "I think that in order for basketry to survive, it needed that catalyst in order for it to change." Think about the utilitarian use and ceremonial use of baskets. Think about how people get their survival needs met today. Do you think that basket making by Navajo weavers might not have survived without changing? Why or why not?

What role do collectors of baskets have in encouraging the weavers to create art?



The Weaver as an Artist



The weavers in the video talk about their designs and inspiration. Most of them find inspiration in the stories and traditions from their families and cultures, and places where they live. Examine the following baskets. Examine the colors and the images. Even if you don't know or understand the stories that are an inspiration for the baskets, write down what you notice.

What I notice about the colors:

What I notice about the shape of the basket:

What I notice about the images:



Placing the Stars, 1994, Eleanor Rock.
Photograph by: Kristin Roper © NHMU

What I notice about the colors:

What I notice about the shape of the basket:

What I notice about the images:



Storyteller and Firedance, 1995, Mary Holiday Black & Sally Black.
Photograph by: Kristin Roper © NHMU.



Painting Activity

Name: _____



In this activity, you will take something that is utilitarian and turn it into art. Your piece may or may not remain something useful. The design is up to you, but you will be creating it from your experiences and your personal stories and culture. *Be careful not to copy the experiences of other people or from other cultures.*

Here is an example of a utilitarian object that has been turned into art. First I decided on something that inspired me, then I chose the colors, and I decided on other kinds of design elements I wanted.

Utilitarian Object: Wooden cooking spoon

Inspiration: The sky at sunset when a storm was coming in.

Colors: Blue, gray, and purple

Other Design Elements (space, line, form, light, texture and pattern): Soft waves that blend into each other to represent the wind and the clouds. Free form, with soft shapes. Layers of color.

Does the object remain utilitarian? Why or why not: No, it does not, because I had to attach it to a stand in order to paint it. I also would have had to be careful to use paints that are food safe if I wanted it to remain utilitarian.



Painting Activity



Design and paint your object. Make sure your designs and inspiration are original. Do not copy anyone else. Draw a picture or attach a photo of your object.

Utilitarian Object:

Inspiration:

Colors:

Other Design Elements (space, line, form, light, texture and pattern):

Does the object remain utilitarian? Why or why not:

A large empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for drawing or painting the object described in the activity.