Artisan Crafts of the World

FCE Cultural Arts Leader Guide 2014

Objectives

1. Demonstrate the importance of crafts as a vital part of cultural life.
2. Understand the economic impact crafts have on artisans and their communities.
3. Increase awareness of global education.

Maintaining Culture and Heritage

Webster’s dictionary defines culture as “the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; also: the characteristic features of everyday existence.” When we think of everyday existence, some items that may come to mind are TV, microwaves, phones and cars. However, if we had only five minutes to gather items that would demonstrate our culture, what would we choose? A cell phone? An outfit? Would that list change if all other items would be lost? Would the family quilt be selected instead?

Throughout history, individuals have used their hands to make items. These skills were passed from one generation to the next and considered a rite of passage. We have seen a decrease in these arts as the digital age has flourished and more people spend their days in front of a computer. There is concern over losing parts of our cultural heritage, with only a few knowing the skills and techniques. If no one comes into the craft to take the place of those before them, the continuation of these skills is interrupted and they could be lost. For the artisans, it is still important to emphasize these skills to gain a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction in taking time to make something oneself.
**Economic Value and Impact**

As modern forms of travel and technology continue to make the world seem smaller, Americans are increasingly interested in understanding the places that they visit, read about, or see on TV. One way to learn about different cultures is by supporting the work of local artists who specialize in creating traditional arts and crafts. While these objects may seem exotic or unique to buyers, they often serve real functions as necessary household goods. Woodworking, metal crafts, textiles, pottery, and the production of other domestic items also generate much-needed income for families.

Previously, artisans in isolated regions had little choice but to sell their crafts to wholesalers who received the majority of profits. Now there are catalogs and websites that link buyers directly to artists from every part of the globe. Direct buying through reputable organizations is a positive economic model for several reasons. It offers buyers a chance to get to know the stories behind the crafts. Many websites and publications feature biographical and background information on the artists. By cutting out middle-men, direct buying puts a larger portion of money into the artisans’ pockets. Craftspeople then have a better chance of staying in their hometowns and continuing their traditional way of life.
**Irish lace**

Irish lace is considered a luxury because creating the smallest item takes considerable time and the patterns are extremely intricate and delicate. Its origin dates to the 1840s when lace-making skills were introduced by the Ursuline nuns, a Roman Catholic religious order from Italy. They went to Ireland in the early 1800s. With a famine devastating much of rural Ireland in the 1840s, the nuns felt that hand-crafted lace could be sold to help support the family. Hence, the nuns set up crochet schools, which evolved into a cottage industry throughout much of the 1850s and 1860s.

The schools more or less disappeared by the early 1900s because of changes in fashion and the introduction of factory production that could produce vast amounts of lace in a short time.

Over the years, Ireland has gained an international reputation for the fineness of its needlework and the intricacy of lace’s designs. Some examples include Kenmare Lace, Carrickmacross Lace, Youghal Lace, and Limerick Lace – all named after towns in which the lace originated. The Carrickmacross Lace is likely the most well-known. The Duchess of Cambridge, Katherine Middleton, featured this lace on her wedding dress as did Diana, Princess of Wales.

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**Ugandan Jewelry**
Much Ugandan jewelry is considered eco-jewelry, meaning it is made from recycled or sustainable materials. One way is to make handmade beads from recycled paper. To create the beads, artisans cut magazines into widths and lengths that are appropriate for the size of the finished bead. The papers are rolled onto a needle to maintain only a simple hole. As the paper is rolled onto the needle, it is glued to make a tightly rolled bead. The beads are dipped in varnish and hung to dry in the sun to provide a pretty polished finish. Typically, it takes three days to create the beads and an artisan can assemble about 20 pieces of jewelry in a day. Artisans turn these handcrafted paper beads into necklaces, bracelets, and earrings. Because the artisans use recycled, colorful paper, making the beads helps prevent environmental degradation. Another benefit of the bead jewelry is that its global market has aided the economic development of impoverished communities in Uganda. Many nonprofit organizations and for-profit individuals now sell Ugandan jewelry at parties and over the Internet.

**Mexican Huichol yarn**
The Huichol (pronounced “We-chole”) is an indigenous group of about 26,000 people. Living in the mountains of west-central Mexico, this group has maintained its pre-Columbian customs, beliefs, and crafts. Yarn paintings called “nieli’ka” are important symbols of shamanistic traditions. Niel’ika are created by heating beeswax and pine resin in the sun and then affixing colorful yarn to objects in complex patterns.
You can make your own Huichol-style yarn art by following these steps:

1. Trace a design onto a piece of cardboard or other firm object. Coloring books have easy-to-follow designs.
2. Apply a layer of adhesive to the surface of the design.
3. Beginning from outside edges, press a piece of yarn around the outline.
4. Place a contrasting color of yarn inside of the design to fill the pattern, following the design shape.
5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 for each shape in your design.
6. Select other contrasting colors to use as the background of your yarn art.

You might use yarn art objects as Christmas ornaments, refrigerator magnets, name tags, and coasters. Larger pieces can be framed as decorative art. Share your ideas with your group.

Prepared by: Lamanda Weston Greene County FCS Agent

Adapted from: West Virginia Extension Agents—Tina Cowger, Denis Scott, and Julie Tritz
Where Did it come From?

Ask the group what country they believe each item originated from. And after they guess at each one you can reveal the answers.

1. Wedding Ring
   **Answer:** Egypt - it signified eternity for which marriage was binding.

2. Clothes Iron
   **Answer:** Greece – smooth, wrinkle-free clothing has been a symbol of refinement and cleanliness. First iron was similar to a rolling pin.

3. Cough Drops
   **Answer:** Egypt – produced by Egyptians confectioners to soothe and relax throat muscles.

4. Pretzel
   **Answer:** Italy – created by a medieval Italian monk to reward children for memorizing their prayers. Shape was derived from folded arms of children in prayer.

5. Suntan Lotion
   **Answer:** USA – government invention to protect American soldiers from sunburning.

6. Toothbrush
   **Answer:** Egypt – was called a “Chew Stick”.

7. Ice Cream
   **Answer:** China – A favored dish of Chinese nobility. Originally a paste made of overcooked rice, spices, and milk and packed in snow.
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There is concern over losing parts of our cultural heritage, with only a few knowing the techniques. It is still important to emphasize these skills to gain a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction in taking time to make something oneself.

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Globally, 72 percent of women in developing countries live in rural areas where the production of foodstuffs and crafts is the main source of income. Despite limited opportunities, nearly a third of all small- and medium-size businesses are owned by women in regions like Latin America.
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Given changes in fashion and the introduction of factory production, the schools disappeared by the early 1900s. But, over the years, Ireland has gained an international reputation for its needlework’s fineness and intricacy of design. The Carrickmacross Lace is likely the most well-known. The Duchess of Cambridge, Katherine Middleton, featured this lace on her wedding dress as did Diana, Princess of Wales.

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Try different uses for yarn art objects. You may use them as Christmas ornaments, refrigerator magnets, name tags, coasters or frame larger pieces as decorative art. What are your ideas?

As a society, we need to recognize crafts as a vital part of cultural and economic life. Young people should be encouraged to learn these skills, not only to maintain their heritage but also to continue the impact the craft industry has on the economy.

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