

# Porcupine Quillwork Embroidery



Audubon Center  
of the North Woods

**Purpose:** Who needs needles and thread? Not the Ojibwe! Students will be introduced to the natural history of the porcupine and paper birch, and the collection and preparation techniques of materials needed to do porcupine quill embroidery. Then they will create a quilled design on a birch bark medallion after observing a demonstration of quill embroidery technique.

## Concepts:

- Humans and the environment are interrelated
- Native American people (including the Ojibwa) living in the eastern woodlands, used forest resources to make tools, clothing, shelters, and other articles needed for everyday life.
- Porcupine quills can be used to make embroidered designs on birch bark

## Learning Outcomes: *Students will be able to*

- List the materials used in the creation of a piece of birch bark decorated with porcupine quill embroidery.
- Describe the process of embroidering birch bark with porcupine quills.
- Embroider with porcupine quills on a piece of birch bark.

## Minnesota Academic Standards:

### Science:

- 5.1.3.2.1 Describe how science and engineering influence and are influenced by local traditions and beliefs.
- 7.4.3.1.3 Distinguish between characteristics of organisms that are inherited and those acquired through environmental influences.
- 8.1.3.2.1 Describe examples of important contributions to the advancement of science, engineering and technology made by individuals representing different groups and cultures at different times in history.

### Social Studies Standards 4-8<sup>th</sup> grade:

#### I. U.S. History

A. Pre-story through 1607: The student will understand that large and diverse American Indian nations were the original inhabitants of North America.

#### II. Minnesota History

A. Pre-Contact to 1650: The student will demonstrate knowledge of Minnesota's indigenous peoples.

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**CLASS LENGTH:** 3 HR

**AGES:** GRADES 4-12

**SEASON:** F, W, SP, S

**GROUP SIZE:** 15-17 students

**SAFETY:** Quillwork requires manual dexterity and eye – hand coordination. The class may include some outdoor time walking on uneven terrain in the woods and fields.

**MATERIALS:** Two birch bark discs, about 3 “diameter, per person, Porcupine quills, 12 aluminum pie pans, awls - one per person, Tweezers - one per person, Scissors, Sewing material – sinew or cotton thread, Small darning needles - one per person, Quill work patterns, ID posters for paper birch, Range poster for porcupine and birch, Porcupine poster, Birch baskets to put tweezers, awls, and patterns in Examples of quill work, 2 Rolls of masking tape, Ojibwe music, CD player

**CLASS PREP (30 min):** The instructor needs to check on the birch bark circle supply. Circles need to be cut if the supply is low. Each student needs two circles. Room set up includes spreading a big tarp or several small ones to cover the floor and placing two tables over the tarps, with chairs arranged around the tables. One embroidery needle per participant should be threaded with split pieces of simulated sinew approx. 4' long. Quillwork supplies including birch bark circles, scissors, tweezers, pans of different colored quills, and threaded needles should be arranged for instruction and demonstration. If water is not available in the classroom, get a pan of water, and a hot plate set up to heat water for soaking the quills. Quills will need to be soaked a few minutes before the students start to use them.

## CLASS OUTLINE:

### I. Ten Minutes to Teaching

### II. Introduction (15 min)

### III. Class Experiences (30 min)

- A. Cultural History Background (min)
- B. Natural History: Birch
- C. Natural History: Porcupine Quills
- D. Gathering and Preparing the Materials
- E. Quill Embroidery Designs
- F. Quill Embroidery Stitches

### IV. Quillwork Project (1-2 hours)

### V. Authentic Assessment

### VI. Reflection

### VII. Sending