



Story Sticks

Overview: Visitors create Native American-style story sticks to record a tale from their own life.

Objective: Visitors learn about pictorial representation of stories and discuss cultural variations in the passing down of personal history.

Related Exhibits:

Totems
Ancient Graffiti
Coat of Arms

Format Options:

Table top walk-up
Make and Take
Content for class

Age Appropriateness: Families; Grades Pre-K and up.

Staffing Prerequisites: 1 person; minimal understanding of storytelling and/or Native American culture a plus.

Vocabulary:

Symbol: character or image that represents an idea, concept, or other abstraction.

Oral history: The practice or tradition of passing cultural or familial information to further generations by word of mouth, or story telling.

Diary/Autobiography: a written record of personal experiences and observations; a person's account of his or her own life.

Materials Needed:

1. Large craft sticks
2. Fine point permanent markers
3. Yarn, ribbon, twine, raffia, or string
4. Craft feathers or feather shapes cut from paper or felt
5. Paper and pencils

Demonstration Notes:

Some Native American people, such as the Pima of Arizona, created story sticks to keep records of things that happened in their lives. Story sticks were

smooth, flat sticks with pictures drawn or burned onto them. They were decorated with paint and wrapped with sinew and feathers.

Story sticks are not to be confused with talking sticks, which were used in tribal meetings to communicate the holder's right to speak. Story sticks function more like diaries, or short chapters of an autobiography, which record the events of a person's life for future recall or storytelling. They were a way to write down history, as well as an aid to the passing on of oral history.

To Do:

1. Plan out your story first by sketching it on a piece of paper. Create a symbol to represent each part of the story.
2. Draw the first part of your story at the top of the stick.
3. Continue making drawings down the stick, showing each thing that happened next.
4. When you have finished the story, wrap a piece of yarn (or ribbon, string, raffia, etc.) around one end of the stick and knot it tightly. Tie a feather or two onto the end of the yarn.
5. Use your stick to tell your story to someone.

Extensions:

Create Native American picture stories on brown construction paper, using the symbol guides at <http://www.indiansummer.com/symbol.htm> or <http://www.kivatrading.com/symbol1.htm>. Visitors may also create their own symbols.

Learn how many Native American peoples used hanging animal hides and teepees to record stories. Teepee designs often portrayed history, war scenes, and symbols of supernatural creatures. Hanging hides were often used for record keeping. If possible, find out how (or if) indigenous peoples in your area used animal hides to record their stories. Create teepee designs or hanging hides from paper, clay, or fabric and decorate with visitor-created stories.

For an on-going, make and add option, create a cave-wall, hanging hide, or teepee mural from butcher paper/newspaper roll that visitors can decorate with their own symbols and images.

