

## **LESSON GUIDE: *Totem Pole: Oral Narrative in Art Form***

**Grade Level:** 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup>

### **Materials/Resources Needed:**

- red, blue, black and brown color pencils or crayons
- glue sticks
- scissors

**Kit Description:** Students will be introduced to the creation of totem poles and the significance behind the art. They will hear an oral narrative and link it to a totem pole that re-tells the story through art. They will create their own totem pole that tells a story.

### **Vocabulary:**

- Totem Pole
- Kooteeyaa
- Oral Narrative
- Formline

**Content Connections:** History, Culture, Language Arts.

**Objectives:** Students will hear oral narratives, identify images that retell the narrative on a totem pole, color the totem pole that retells the narrative, create their own totem pole that tells their own story, take a walking tour to observe the actual totem pole that retells the story they heard.

**Assessment Criteria:** Handouts for students to retell the oral narrative that they heard, class discussion about students understanding of images on a totem pole, students creating their own totem and story to tell.

### **Prepare:**

- Make copies of the *Tlingit Oral Narrative Review* worksheet
- Have ready: the laminated paper model of the Gonokadeit Pole
- Copy for each student: the Gonokadeit Pole to color and construct,
- Put scissors, colored pencils or crayons (brown, black, red and blue/green) at each table.
- Have the pictures of formline design ready.

- Have the adze ready
- Have images of carvers ready

### **Lesson 1** (1-3 class sessions)

Prior to starting the activity, ask students what they already know about totem poles. You may choose to use the following questions for older students and then add information as you present the **background/history of Totem Pole**. Or you may choose to simply record everything the students think they know and then add what they learned from the information.

- What is the Tlingit word for totem pole?
- What is a totem pole?
- What type of art represents the Lingit culture?
- What is the most important tool a carver uses to create a totem pole?

### **Encounter**

**Note to Teacher:** Read the following information ahead of time and choose what parts you want to present to your students.

### **Background/History of Totem Poles**

**The Lingit people called totem poles kooteeyaa.** If you were approaching a traditional Lingit village, the first thing you would notice are the tall standing totem poles perched along the shore. All permanent villages had several totem poles at the beach. Today we see them as beautiful artwork, but to the Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian tribes of Southeast, they hold deep meaning. **A totem pole is a form of art that tells clan stories, describes historical events, and some are even the final resting place of clan leaders.**

A totem pole typically features symbolic and stylized human, animal, and supernatural forms. Common crests include the raven, eagle, wolf, frog, brown bear, killer whale, thunderbird and salmon. It's important to know that the names of clans do not translate as the name of the animal. Just like each State in the US has their own flag to represent their area and boundaries. The lingit clans have images of animals that represent their clans and the areas they occupy **(Show images of clan crests).** **The lingit art**

**style is called formline.** Formline includes ovoids, U shapes, S shapes, and T shapes. **(Show images of formline shapes).**

Totem poles are made from Red Cedar and Yellow Cedar trees. The size of a totem can range from 9 feet to about 55 feet in height. A master carver would find the right size tree for the totem he wanted to create. The Tlingit believe everything had a spirit, including the trees. Before they would cut down a tree, there would be a ceremony to show respect and give appreciation to the tree and the spirits.

Once he has cut it down and moved it to the carving place, they must start planning the particular size of the crest and space of the tree they'll use. The carvers would then have to start chipping away at the log of wood to start creating these images through their vision. This process would take a very long time to remove the excess wood, one chip at a time. The tool used was called an adze.

**One of the most important tools a carvers uses is called an adze.**

An adze is a cutting tool similar to an axe but with the cutting edge perpendicular to the handle rather than parallel. They have been used since the stone age **(show adze and image of a carver using it)**

Adzes are used for smoothing or carving wood in hand woodworking. Two basic forms of an adze are the hand adze—a short handled tool swung with one hand—and the foot adze—a long handled tool capable of powerful swings using both hands, the cutting edge usually striking at foot or shin level. Many northwest coast tribes traditionally used adzes for both functional construction (from bowls to canoes) and art (from masks to totem poles). Northwest coast adzes take two forms: hafted and D-handle. The hafted form is constructed from a natural crooked branch which approximately forms a 60% angle. The thin end is used as the handle and the thick end is flattened and notched such that an adze iron can be lashed to it. The smaller sizes are typically much lighter such that they can be used for the detailed smoothing, shaping and surface texturing required for figure carving.

**Show students the pictures of totem poles:**

Say: Let's take a look at some totem poles and make some observations.  
What do types of images do you see? (Animal crests)  
What do these images represent do you think? (People, animals, spirits, a story)

The following two Youtube videos can be used to show students the process of carving a totem pole, the significance behind the pole, the raising and celebration that follows.

- Youtube: Klawock Pole Raising Documentary
- Youtube: National Geographic Kids. Canada: Totem Poles | Are We There Yet?

**Tell the story of Gonakadeit - Story included.** Say: Now you will get to hear a traditional oral narrative that tells the story of a totem pole. Pay close attention to the characters in the story, what happens, and how the story ends. When we are done hearing this story, we will look at a picture of the totem pole and try to identify the parts of the story through the carved images.

**Note to teacher:** If you would like a longer version of the story, one is included in the book titled *Heroes and Heroines in Tlingit-Haida Legend* by Mary Beck which is included in the kit.

### **Engage**

**Hand out the Oral Narrative Review sheet.** Say: Now let's talk about the oral narrative that we just heard. (Read each question one at a time, having an all class discussion about the story. Have students write down their answers on their sheet)

Say: Now let's look at the totem pole. Hang the paper Gonokadeit Pole included in the kit on the board for all to see).

What images do you see? Do you recognize any similarities between the story and the totem pole?

Do you see the image of \_\_ what part of the story do you think that represents? Ask that of each image going down the totem pole.

Say: Now you get a chance to color and construct this totem pole. Today we are only going to be able to use four different colors; brown, black, red and blue/green. Can anyone tell me why we are only using these colors? (they are the traditional Lingit colors)

### **Reflect**

Let's all take a look at the totem poles that we colored.

What images are usually on totems?

What do these images represent?

What is a totem pole?

What is one other thing you learned about totem poles today?

### **Lesson 2**

#### **Prepare:**

Make copies of the Personal Totem Pole Activity sheets (2 pages). If done a different day, put out the 4 colors at each table again.

#### **Encounter**

We are going to hear another oral narrative about another pole. This one comes from the Haida people. Haida are called Kaigani. Their culture is related to the cultures of the neighboring Tlingit and Tsimshian. The Haida people live at the southern end of Southeast Alaska and in British Columbia.

Read the book *The Woman Carried Away by Killer Whales* to students.

Now let's look at a Haida style totem pole. This one is called The Four Story Totem. It is located outside of the Juneau Douglas City Museum. This totem pole was carved by John Wallace in 1940. This totem pole tells four stories. The history of this totem pole is detailed in the handout attached. (see A History of the Four Story Totem carved by John Wallace)

Once the totem pole was completely carved and the crests finely etched, it was time to paint. Traditional colors used were black, red and turquoise. Traditional paint was made by mixing salmon eggs with ground matter from materials within their local environment. Black paint was made by mixing finely ground charcoal from a fire with salmon eggs. Red was made by finely ground inner bark of a tree, mixed with salmon eggs. Turquoise was

made by finely ground limestone powder mixed with salmon eggs. Once the totem was painted, it was ready to be raised.

If you have access to salmon eggs, charcoal, inner bark or lime stone. You can try to recreate the traditional paint used by the southeast tribes to paint totem poles and other carvings. The instructions to do so are in the book titled Tlingit Wood Carving: How to Carve a Tlingit Tray by Richard Beasley.

Traditionally Lingit and Haida people paid their opposite clans to create a totem pole. Eagles commissioned Ravens and vice versa. This was done to maintain balance between clans. During the time of celebration, many speeches are given. The clan that had the totem pole made shows appreciation to the carvers and gives thanks especially since they are the opposite clan. Singing, drumming and dancing happens to celebrate the success and accomplishment of this big task.

Now that we have heard an oral narrative, seen how a totem pole can retell an oral narrative through art form and colored one in ourselves. We will create our own totem pole and tell our own story through form line images.

### **Engage**

Hand out the Personal Totem Pole Activity and Instructions sheet. Read the instructions to students. Encourage students to pick form line images that tell their own story. Have them write a word below the animal that describes why they chose the image. They will color the photo, cut it out and glue it to their own totem pole page. They will write the (lingit) name of the animal they chose and explain why they chose that animal.

### **Reflect**

When all the students' totems are done, have each student identify which animal they chose and explain why. Have them tell the story of their totem pole. When the whole class has done this, recap and ask students What do totem poles do? (tell stories, identify clan lineage and ownership)

### **Lesson 3**

#### **Encounter**

Tell the stories of (Gonokadeit, and the Four Story Haida totem pole)

After each story, show a picture of the actual totem pole and ask students if they can identify images from the story.

Ask students what the image might represent or how it might tell a part of the story. Hearing the stories again may seem repetitive, but traditionally oral narratives were told many times so that the learner could be able to retell the story for future generations.

#### **Engage**

Have the students complete a Lingit Oral Narrative Review Worksheet. If necessary, have an open discussion to help facilitate.

Take a walking tour to the State office Building, main Lobby and the Juneau Douglas City Museum to see the totem poles in person.

Ask students if they can identify the images or recall parts of the totem. Have them complete the Totem Pole Observation Log for each totem pole visited.

#### **Reflect**

What new story did you learn this time?

What is something different about totem poles that you observed compared to the totem poles you colored and the personal totem pole you created? (size, shape, quality, beauty, audience)