



Teaching with Historic Places Lesson Plan

Scrimshaw Candle

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Subject: Before & After School Program **Grade:** K-6

Introduction:

I am the director of the Kids Come First Before and After School Program for children who are in grades K-6, so I want to teach a lesson that involves an art project. In this lesson, students will demonstrate how scrimshaw was made by early mariners in the 1800s. This activity addresses the Massachusetts Arts Discipline Frameworks in Visual Arts strands 1.1 which states that students will use a variety of materials and media and understand how to use them to create different visual effects; 1.2 which states that students will create artwork in a variety of 2-dimensional media; 1.5 which states that students will expand their repertoire of 2-dimensional art processes, techniques and materials with focus on the range of effects possible within each media, such as 2-dimensional wet or wash effects; 3.3 which states that students will create 2-dimensional artwork from memory or imagination to tell a story or embody an idea or fantasy; and finally, the History Connections Strand 8.3 which states that students will perform or create works inspired by historical or cultural styles.



One view of the resulting scrimshaw candle.

Teaching this lesson uses what I have learned about scrimshaw during this course at such sites as the Newburyport Maritime Society and the Charlestown Navy Yard's Constitution Museum.

Objectives:

- Students will understand that scrimshaw is a valuable fine art that is the oldest of all North American Art forms.
- Students will know that scrimshaw was originated by native peoples in 100-200 AD, but that it was made popular by early mariners such as the Yankee Whalers in the early 1800s.
- That early mariners amused themselves on their long sea voyages by carving designs into ivory and bone (such as whale teeth) from the whales they hunted.



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- That scrimshanders today can only use materials that can be obtained legally because so many animals that are a source of ivory are on the endangered species list.

Materials:

- Plain white candle approximately 3" in diameter
- Sharpened pencil
- Black acrylic paint
- Small paint brush
- Clean towel or paper towels

Procedure:

1. With the pencil, students will lightly draw a design all around the candle until satisfied with the design.
2. Using the pencil, retrace the design using slight pressure so as to carve it into the candle.
3. With the towel, brush away all of the excess wax from the carved grooves.
4. Use the brush to apply some black acrylic paint to one half of the candle.
5. Before the paint dries, wipe it off the candle with the towel. The paint should stay in the grooved design.
6. Paint then wipe the other half of the candle.
7. Let the candle dry.



Another view of the scrimshaw candle.

Evaluation:

The goal is for the students to produce a finished scrimshaw candle. They will be evaluated on whether or not the project is finished. It doesn't matter how the design looks. The experience of making the scrimshaw is what is important.

Resources:

I used the web pages *The Scrimshaw Studio* at www.scrimshawstudio.com, and *What is Scrimshaw?* at www.scrimshaw.net.