Early America: Artistry of a Young Nation

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This Teacher Packet will prepare you for a visit from the Cleveland Museum of Art's Art to Go team. It will help familiarize you with the topic *Early America: Artistry of a Young Nation*. We hope the presentation will not be an isolated event for the students, but rather an integrated part of their course of study. In keeping with this idea, the *Early America* program is designed to fulfill some of the proposed 2002 Ohio Social Studies Academic Content Standards.

The presentation builds on the curriculum for first graders by examining the role of children and families in colonial America. It pays special attention to how children contributed to the welfare of their families and how they learned the skills they would need as adults. The lesson plan incorporates the grade two theme of “people working together” by discussing how settlers used specific skills to make necessary items. It is also well suited to one of the grade three goals, for we “make history come alive” using artifacts that students can hold in their hands.

Additionally, the presentation can be customized to meet goals for older students. Ohio’s Academic Content Standards for grades five and eight emphasize the relationship between geography and resources. Students will learn about the resources that colonists found and how they gathered and refined those resources to create the objects in our suitcase.

We strongly encourage you to bring your students to the museum to view related objects within the permanent collection. The “American Art” school tour is available free of charge. To request a registration form, call 216–707–2462.
Among the first wave of immigrants to North America were a number of highly optimistic silversmiths, goldsmiths, and jewelers. These artisans believed they would find a land brimming with precious metals just waiting to be transformed into teapots and tankards. Needless to say, they were disappointed. Some turned tail and headed back to England. The few who remained—and survived—set out to make a living in their new home.

The settlers were faced with a terrible lack of resources. Most brought little more than a bed roll and tin cup with them. A man who brought a hammer or saw was fortunate indeed, as even the most basic tools were scarce. The technology was not yet in place to manufacture the items the colonists needed to live. Importing goods was also very difficult. The settlers did not generate enough money to purchase finished products and the British government was reluctant to send raw materials. (The crown received higher tax revenues on finished goods.)

The only solution was to make good use of what was already available. The colonists built their first homes from wattle and daub (straw and mud) and then with wood. They raised sheep for wool, meat, and tallow. Dishes were fashioned from local red clay.

Materials that were difficult to replace were carefully preserved and then recycled, if possible. Printed paper was covered with clear sheets of horn—the predecessor of modern lamination. Worn-out tin cups and tools were melted down and transformed into shiny new spoons. Threadbare coverlets came back to life as cushion covers and dishrags.
Human resources were also carefully marshaled. Every colonist had to be productive. In Massachusetts, a Puritan settler who failed to produce his quota of food could be banished, a sentence tantamount to death. Skilled craftsmen were highly esteemed—witness the status of Paul Revere and his fellow silversmiths. Even slaves profited to a degree by learning skills. For instance, slaves working in the iron mills of the Chesapeake Bay could earn pay for hours worked beyond their regular day.

The family was the essential work unit during the settlement of America. The wife and daughters took care of food preparation, from churning the butter to baking the beans. The husband raised crops or worked a trade and maintained the family’s property. The sons looked after the livestock, hunted, and fished. Even small children contributed to the family’s welfare, gathering berries and spinning thread.

In spite of the pressing needs of survival, the colonists found ways to express a no-nonsense sense of beauty. They dyed their home-spun yarns yellow, brown, red, and blue and wove them into attractive geometric designs. They painted simple designs in slip on their clay pottery. And they memorialized their dead with haunting “soul effigies” incised into slabs of New England slate.

The colonists valued usefulness above all, but never sacrificed their appreciation of the attractive and unique. Each of the objects in this suitcase illustrates this ideal and celebrates the heritage of those judicious forebears.
Early American Schools

Children’s books in colonial America concentrated on religion. A hornbook, a 17th-century child’s first book, was used to learn letters and begin sounding out words. It was a single page printed with letters, syllables, and prayers. This sheet was pasted to a wooden paddle to help preserve it. The shape of the hornbook invited other uses, both pleasant and not. Pupils used their hornbooks for impromptu badminton games, while teachers sometimes employed them for a corrective swat or two.

Six- to eight-year-olds began learning reading and arithmetic at dame school, taught by a woman in her home. Older children attended common school, where they studied writing, spelling, and arithmetic. One teacher taught all grades in a single room. School was in session from 7:00 AM to 4:00 or 5:00 PM six days a week. Discipline was strict. Students who failed exams or daydreamed had to wear a pointed dunce cap, and disrespect could earn a public whipping. School ended for most children when they were 11 or 12. A few boys with wealthy, ambitious parents went on to Latin school to prepare them for college. America’s first college, Harvard, was founded in 1639.

In the northern colonies, common schools were supported by taxes. In the south, parents had to pay tuition. Many southern children, both black and white, never learned to read.

For girls who did not go to school, making a sampler was a way to learn reading by embroidering letters, numbers, and prayers or poems. Look closely at our sampler: its author did not quite master all her digits.
Colonial Houses

It’s hard to talk about a “typical” colonial house. Housing quality in the south ranged from the dirt-floored shacks of field slaves to the mansions of plantation owners. In New York, Dutch immigrants constructed stone houses several stories high, while settlers on the frontier made do with log cabins.

One common housing type was the simple wood farmhouse of an established New England family. Its steeply pitched roof shed winter snow. Inside was a single room with a plank floor. Planks were often laid over the rafters to create a sleeping loft for the children.

The great room was dominated by two large pieces of furniture, a bed and a loom. A coverlet woven by the wife decorated the four-poster bed. There were also a table and a few stools, with a chair for the head of the household. A hearth large enough for an adult to enter took up most of one wall. Equipped with hooks for hanging iron pots over the fire and a spit for roasting meat, it provided heat, light, and a place to cook and bake.

In the era before gas or electric lights, illuminating the house was a major concern. Colonial women made their own candles, either by dipping or using a candle mold. Wax for the candles came from tallow or from bayberries gathered by the children of the house. The iron betty lamp, an American invention, reduced the likelihood of dangerous house fires. A groove in the metal under the wick caught dripping oil before it could fall onto a flammable item such as a coverlet.
Highlights in Art and World History

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Birth of Christ

79
Mt. Vesuvius erupts, Pompeii buried

500 AD

1000 AD

1368–1644
Ming Dynasty in China

1440
1492
1503–06
1473–1506
C. 1440
Gutenberg invents printing press
Da Vinci paints Mona Lisa
Columbus sails the ocean blue
Leif Eriksson reaches North America

1500 AD

500 AD

1000 AD

1500 AD

Early America: Artistry of a Young Nation
Art to Go Suitcase
Reproduction Hornbook
20th-century replica, after an American or English original, c. 1660–80

Rubbing from the Gravestone of Abigale Muzzy
20th-century rubbing of 1766 gravestone

Betty Lamp
18th or 19th c.

Spoon Mold
early 19th c.

Fragment of a Coverlet
early 19th c.

Pie Plate
mid 19th c.

Native American Art

Diego Rivera

1600 AD 1700 AD 1800 AD 1900 AD 2000 AD

1665
Sir Isaac Newton articulates laws of gravity

1706–90
Life of Ben Franklin

1750–83
Revolutionary War

1776
Declaration of Independence signed

1789
George Washington elected first American president

1827
Napoleon Bonaparte makes first photograph

1879
Edison invents light bulb

1879
Rodin creates Thinker

1803
Wright Brothers take first airplane flight

1905
Einstein formulates theory of relativity

1928
Penicillin discovered

c. 1907
Cubism conceived

1930s
Television equipment perfected

1945
Atomic bombs end World War II

1982
Compact disc introduced

2003
You are here
A Colonial Family Dinner

Imagine having supper in the home described above. The children are busy feeding wood to the fire in the hearth, turning the spit to roast the meat or stirring the stew in its iron cauldron. Before supper, they recite what they learned at school. Mother and Father sit, but children stand to eat and are expected to keep silent throughout the meal.

Food is served in trenchers, big oval dishes shared by two people. You have a spoon but no fork, and the only knives are what the men and boys carry on their belts. Mostly, you use your fingers. A typical meal might consist of hasty pudding (corn meal mush) or a simple meat stew.

The colonists love sweets. Local cherries, apples, blueberries, and other wild berries combined with imported cane sugar make a lovely pie, especially when served in an attractive pie plate. Pies and bread are baked in a brick oven, a special compartment in the chimney with an iron door.

Jobs in Colonial America

Christian ministers were the leaders of the New England colonists because they were college educated and thought to have a special relationship with God. Their authority was rarely questioned.

The majority of settlers were farmers, who had learned by working alongside their parents. Farmers grew crops and raised animals to provide the raw materials for feeding and clothing their families. When they were able to produce extra, they bartered for items they could not make themselves.

Tradesmen used specific skills to earn a living. They learned their crafts by apprenticeship, assisting and observing an established artisan at work.
Apprenticeships could last up to seven years. The pewterer who made our **ink stand** probably had an apprentice because it took two people to operate the lathe, the machine used to shape the metal.

Women prided themselves on their domestic skills; girls learned by watching their mothers and grandmothers work. This presentation pays special attention to the crafts of weaving and candlemaking. Women wove fabric and made candles to benefit their families, but many made extra to sell for profit.

**What did people do in their spare time?**

Sunday, usually the only day off, was spent in church in the northern colonies. After service colonists could pursue quiet activities, chatting with neighbors, or reading religious texts. Children who played loudly on a Sunday could get their parents in trouble. Walking in the churchyard was permitted, however, because the pictures and epitaphs carved on the stones would properly orient one’s reflections. The **rubbing from the gravestone of Abigale Muzzy**, cut in 1766, illustrates Puritan attitudes toward the loss of a loved one and the hope of heaven.

On other days, northern children might find a little time to play with balls or dolls and ice skate in the winter. Music, dancing, poetry, and gambling of any sort were frowned upon.

In the south, the rules were not as strict. The wealthy learned to dance and play instruments and hosted card parties, balls, and hunting expeditions. The imported **shoe buckles** were the sort of finery rich men wore to impress the ladies at a dance. Poor whites and slaves also enjoyed music and dancing and made simple toys for their children.
List of Objects

- **Reproduction Hornbook**
  American, 20th century
  Replica of an English or American hornbook, c. 1660–80
  Paper, wood, and imitation horn
  Gift of Mrs. Ruth F. Ruggles TR10092/19

- **Sampler**
  Lucretia Rachel Arnold (American), 1819
  Cross-stitch embroidery on linen
  Gift of Mrs. E. A. Ruggles 1948.45

- **Fragment of a Coverlet**
  American, early 19th century
  Wool and linen
  Gift of I. T. Frary 1946.155

- **Candle Mold**
  American, early 19th century
  Tin
  Educational Purchase Fund 1935.195

- **Betty Lamp**
  American, Pennsylvania German, 18th or 19th century
  Iron with brass ornament
  Gift of Miss Ruth E. Adomeit 1984.1088

- **Spoon Mold**
  American, early 19th century
  Brass
  G40.146

- **Reproduction Spoons**
  American, 1966
  Lead (imitating pewter)
  S53/24, S53/24a

- **Pie Plate**
  American, mid 19th century
  Redware with slip decoration
  Educational Purchase Fund 1932.79

- **Ink Stand**
  American, early 19th century
  Pewter (glass ink container is modern)
  Gift of Mrs. Ruth F. Ruggles 1961.115

- **Rubbing from the Gravestone of Abigale Muzzy, 1766**
  Ann Parker and Avon Neal (American, 20th century)
  Crayon on paper
  The Harold T. Clark Educational Extension Fund 1966.247

- **Pair of Shoe Buckles**
  European (English or French), after 1780
  Silver on brass, with hinged steel prongs for mounting
  Gift of Juanita Sheflee 1968.82-3

Vocabulary List

- **anvil.** heavy block of iron or steel with a smooth, flat upper surface on which metals are shaped by hammering
- **apprentice.** person who agrees to work for a master craftsman for a specific period of time in return for instruction in a trade
- **crucible.** vessel used for melting materials at high temperatures
- **epitaph.** inscription on a tombstone in memory of the one buried there
- **forge.** furnace or hearth where metals are heated or wrought
- **glaze.** glass-like coating applied to ceramics before firing
- **indigo.** deep blue dye derived from the indigo plant
- **lath.** machine for shaping a piece of material, such as wood or metal, by rotating the material rapidly along its axis while pressing against a fixed cutting or abrading tool
- **pewter.** any of numerous silver-gray alloys of tin with various amounts of antimony, copper, and sometimes lead
- **shuttlecock.** small rounded piece of cork or rubber with a conical crown of feathers, used in badminton
- **slip.** thinned potter’s clay used for decorating or coating ceramics
- **tallow.** hard fat obtained from cattle, sheep, or horses, used to make candles, leather dressing, and soap
- **warp.** vertical threads on a loom
- **weft.** horizontal threads interlaced through the warp to create a woven fabric
Art to Go
Suitcase
Presentations

Ancient Americas:
Art from Mesoamerica
The Art of Writing: The Origin of the Alphabet
Classical Art: Ancient Greece and Rome

Cool Knights: Armor from the European Middle Ages and Renaissance
Diego Rivera: A Mexican Hero and His Culture
Early America: Artistry of a Young Nation

Journey to Africa: Art from Central and West Africa
Journey to Asia
Journey to Japan: A Passport to Japanese Art
Let’s Discover Egypt
Masks: Let’s Face It

Materials and Techniques of the Artist
Museum Zoo: Animals in Art
Native American Art: Clues from the Past
Problem Solving: What in the World?
Lesson Plan

- **Focus**
  Students will be introduced to the arts and crafts of the early Americans using artifacts from the Art to Go collection. The lesson is appropriate for grades two through eight, but can be adapted for older audiences as well.

- **Purpose**
  To give insight into the daily lives of the American colonists and to make topical connections to classroom studies.

- **Motivation**
  Students will be motivated through a direct, hands-on experience. Students will be further motivated by classroom discussion during the presentation. Follow-up discussion and projects assigned by the classroom teacher will help students retain information.

- **Objectives**
  Students will learn:
  - about early American houses, schools, and family life
  - how settlers learned and used specific skills to make the items they needed
  - about the resources available to the colonists and how they were used
  - how the colonists preserved and recycled scarce materials
  - how colonists made utilitarian objects beautiful.

- **Participation**
  Students will be asked questions from simple to complex. They will be asked to problem solve using questions designed to help them identify what they see. Students will use critical thinking skills to determine how objects were made, and how these objects assisted the colonists in their daily lives.

- **Comprehension Check**
  The Art to Go presenter will ask the students questions as the lesson is taught to ensure that they understand the material. The classroom teacher will be able to reinforce what the students have learned with curriculum ideas from this packet; teachers may also incorporate ideas from the lesson in an art project.

- **Closure**
  Students will be able to reinforce what they have learned in the Art to Go presentation by visiting the American galleries in the Cleveland Museum of Art. They will be able to make connections between their classroom studies, the Art to Go presentation, and what is on view in the museum.

Suggestions for Further Reading

“Webbing”
American Artistry

Visual Arts
Weave a piece of cloth, embroider a sampler, make your own walnut-shell ink and quill pen. See the craft books listed in the “Further Reading” section for instructions and more ideas.

Earth Science
The colonists had to work hard to get the materials they needed. Where did they find iron and how did they extract it? Tin was not available so they had to recycle it from worn-out items. What materials do we recycle today?

Social Studies
A great way to get to know a culture is to sample some of its foods. Try making hasty pudding (Laurie Carlson’s book has a recipe.) Would you be willing to eat this every day? Try adopting a piece of the past. Are there any Revolutionary soldiers buried in your area? Your class can volunteer an afternoon to clean the cemetery and plant flowers. While you’re there, try making your own rubbing. (Be sure to get permission from the caretaker, first.)

Resources for Craft Projects

Suggestions for Further Reading

Especially for Children

Mathematics
A housewife decides that her 6 x 8 foot coverlet is too tattered to put on the bed anymore. She will make seat covers from it. If half of the coverlet is too worn to use, and each seat cover requires 2 square feet of fabric, how many seat covers can she make? A blacksmith bought a sheet of iron for 5 cents. He made a half-dozen lamps from it and sold them at 10 cents each. What was his profit?

Music
Sing a few verses of “Yankee Doodle” (there are more than 100), then learn the history of the song. Check out www.contemplator.com/americana for information on this and many other American tunes.

Language Arts
Study poetry the way American children did in times past. Memorize a poem and recite it to the class or to your family. Senior citizens can be a fine resource for this activity because memorizing poetry was once a part of most school curricula. Some suggestions: “The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere” or “The Village Blacksmith,” both by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. For briefer selections, try some of Benjamin Franklin’s aphorisms.
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