

LESSON 9 – MATERIALS

TRADITIONAL DYES

- 1. Grade Level:** Grade 4/5 (can be modified for Primary and Intermediate)
- 2. Activity:** This activity will help students understand how some colors are extracted from nature to be used as dyes.
- 3. Estimated Time:** 2 periods
- 4. Prescribed Learning Outcomes:**
 - Art
 - Context
 - C2 Identify distinctive styles of visual images from various historical, cultural and social contexts
 - Exhibition and Response
 - D2 interpret reasons for preferences in artworks
 - Economy and Technology
 - D2 describe technologies used by Aboriginal people in BC and Canada

RESOURCES REQUIRED

Section of Website containing relevant information, photographs and film clips:

- [Potlatch](#)
- [Virtual Tour](#)

Blackline Masters:

- [BLM 9A – Traditional Paints](#)

Film Clips:

- [Bakwas, Wildman-of-the-Woods Dance](#)
- [Hamsamala, Man-Eating Birds' Dance](#)

Other Materials:

- Variety of dark-coloured berries (or beets, onion skins)
- Plants
- Wool
- Cotton
- 2 old pots
- Rubber gloves
- Salt
- Vinegar
- Stove/hot plate

LESSON:

1. Ask students to revisit the *Potlatch Collection* in Virtual Tour and observe the painting on the masks. BLM 9A Examine the raven mask and pre-contact (prior to Europeans on BC Coast), white paint – this was created by burning clam shells and crushing them with fish eggs and adding saliva, the dyed red cedar bark (cedar was traditionally dyed with the inner bark of the alder tree), Dzunukwa mask with the graphite, Bakwas mask with mica (mica is a mineral ground up and added to black paint to give the mask a shine.) Why do you think these materials were chosen? How would they look in the fire light in the Bighouse?
2. Discuss with the students that back at the time when these objects were created, artists could not buy paint from the store. The Kwakwaka'wakw had to make their own natural paints.
3. Explain to students they will be making their own natural dyes (red, purple, blue, yellow) with the following materials: Beets, onion skins or dark wild berries available in your area. The cloth that you will dye for this lesson can be used as table cloth for the Pole Raising feast at the end of the Unit.
4. Follow these steps with students:
 - Chop all materials into smaller pieces (inch or smaller) and place into a large pot that you are willing to sacrifice.
 - Measure the amount of plant material and place twice as much water as plant material into the pot (1 part plant material to 2 parts water)
 - Bring the mixture to a boil and then simmer it, stirring occasionally, for at least an hour.
 - Strain out the plant material and set dye bath aside.
 - Place your fabric or wool into a color fixative bath such as salt water (1 part salt to 16 parts water) or a vinegar bath (1 part vinegar to 4 parts water)
 - Allow the fabric to absorb the color fixative mix and simmer it for an hour.
 - Remove fabric from the fixative and wring out thoroughly.
 - Place the wet fabric into the dye mixture and simmer it until the desired color is achieved.
 - Remove the fabric from the dye bath with rubber gloves.
 - Wring the fabric thoroughly and hang to dry.
 - When the dyed cloth is dry, set aside until the day of the pole raising and lay the cloth on the table which your refreshments (food and drinks) will go on for the guests at the pole-raising.