

THERESA SECORD

PMA CLASSROOM
BEST FOR
All
Ages



THEMES

- History
- Tradition
- Style
- Identity
- Sense of Place

THERESA SECORD (BORN 1958) IS A PENOBSCOT BASKET MAKER AND THE FOUNDING DIRECTOR OF THE MAINE INDIAN BASKETMAKERS ALLIANCE (MIBA).

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Theresa Secord learned to weave in a traditional setting on Indian Island, Maine, in 1988 from an elder in the community, Madeline Tomer Shay. She weaves Wabanaki baskets using her great-grandmother's wooden forms and tools from the late 1800s that have been handed down to her. She has taught many people to weave ash and sweetgrass baskets, including her own son Caleb Hoffman, to ensure continuity within her family and community.

Theresa Secord (Penobscot, born 1958), *Supeq (Ocean)*, 2023, black ash, sweetgrass, and commercial dye, 2 1/8 x 10 1/4 x 10 1/4 inches. Portland Museum of Art, Maine. Museum purchase with support from the Peggy and Harold Osher Acquisition Fund, 2023.5a,b. © Theresa Secord. Image courtesy Petegorsky/Gipe Photo

CONTENT AREAS AND STANDARDS MET

www.Maine.gov/doe/learning/content

- A1** – Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- B3** – Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
- D1** – Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
- D2** – Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical contexts to deepen understanding.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING COMPETENCIES

www.Casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework

SELF-AWARENESS

Understanding one's own emotions, thoughts, and values

SOCIAL AWARENESS

Considering other points of view, respecting others

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Learn about the rich history, current practices, and future trends of basket making in Wabanaki communities, as well as throughout many cultures worldwide.
- Analyze the concept of form following function.
- Create woven artwork.
- Understand the difference between cultural appropriation and learning an important skill.
- Use found materials.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How do cultures keep important traditions alive?
- What are the ways artists enhance their work to make it personal?
- How can we use weaving to create personally responsive work?
- How can we incorporate local and repurposed materials into our work in a meaningful way?

MATERIALS NEEDED

NEWSPAPER

MAGAZINE PAPER

CARDBOARD

WIRE

YARN

FOUND OBJECTS (cans, plastic bottles, discarded lobster rope, unused garments, and other found materials)

INSTRUCTIONS



LOOK

Look closely at Theresa Secord's baskets. **Notice the details.** Take your time to find things you hadn't noticed at first glance. Look at baskets from a variety of other cultures worldwide.

RESPOND

Think about and respond to these questions:

What are the similarities and differences between Wabanaki baskets and the woven work of other cultures?

What can you tell about the people who made these baskets and their distinct environments?

How do the material choices affect the resulting work?

What embellishments or colors do the artists add to their work to make it personal or meaningful?

Who do you think uses these baskets?

How do you think the shape of the basket reflects what it is used for?

Write down your responses, share them with someone in your house or class, or discuss as a class.

LEARN

Use this section to learn more about the artist, subject, and context of the artworks & objects.

NOTE: The Portland Public Schools Wabanaki Studies Planning Guide is a comprehensive resource for information on how to teach Wabanaki studies. Please refer to it before teaching your lesson. Remember that cultural appropriation is never okay. This lesson is meant to be used to teach Wabanaki studies in a way that promotes the cultural understanding and cross-cultural connections that basket making inspires as we study craft on a local and a worldwide scale.

(https://docs.google.com/document/d/117cd7d06JfdD4QmQdaCu_oaZ4i8_IMBpEr00eq96i0l/edit)

THE WABANAKI HAVE OCCUPIED THE LAND IN WHAT WE CALL MAINE FOR OVER 12,000 YEARS.

As stewards of this land for thousands of years, the Wabanaki Tribes, including the Penobscot, the Passamaquoddy, the Mi'kmaq, and the Maliseet/Wolastoqiyik, have been creating baskets. Those made primarily for a specific use are called utility baskets, and those made primarily for artistic purposes are called fancy baskets. Sometimes artists will combine both types of baskets. Some Wabanaki artists are traditionalists, while others explore new ways of using traditional materials and new forms that honor old traditions. Some of the materials traditionally used in Wabanaki baskets include sweetgrass, brown ash, porcupine quills, and birch bark.

As Western cultures have created and defined their art over the centuries, they have prized beauty above all else, relegating functional objects to the realm of craft or the decorative arts.



Theresa Secord (Penobscot, born 1958), *Barrel Basket*, 2015, black ash, sweetgrass, cedar bark, and dye, 8 1/2 x 4 x 4 inches. Portland Museum of Art, Maine. Museum purchase with support from Friends of the Collection, 2016.5. © Theresa Secord. Image courtesy Luc Demers

INDIGENOUS MAKERS, HOWEVER, PRIZE FUNCTION AS WELL AS BEAUTY IN THE OBJECTS THEY CREATE.

The colonialist mindset and the Indigenous mindset are different, and it is important to understand how the colonizers have tried to undermine and destroy Indigenous culture and artmaking for the past five hundred years.

Indigenous artists keep their art traditions alive despite the colonizers' efforts. Artists like Theresa Secord are reinvigorating this historic art form and teaching the next generation of basket makers. There is a rich basket-making tradition in Wabanaki culture and many other Native American Tribes in North America, as well as in many Indigenous cultures worldwide. In the resources section, you can find many videos centered on these basket-making traditions.

LEARN

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Theresa Secord says that basket making is

"MAINE'S FIRST ARTFORM BY MAINE'S FIRST PEOPLE."

Using local materials, you will honor this ancient art form by learning the basics of weaving. From there, the possibilities are endless!

UNDERSTANDING A BASKET

These are the parts of a basket:

SPLINTS: a general term for strips of ash wood, encompassing both standards and weavers.

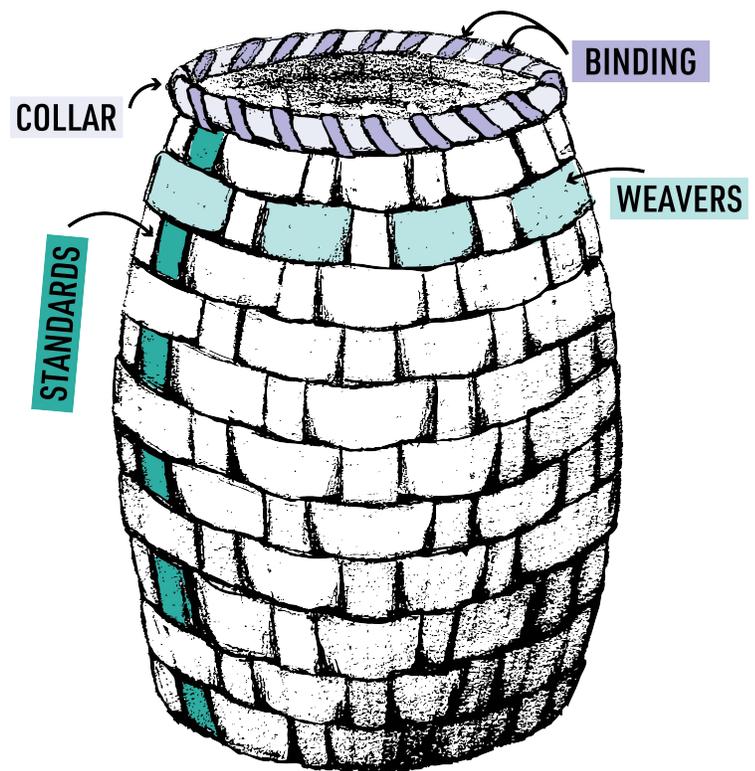
STANDARDS: structural backbone of a basket using splints, often making up the bottom and sides of a basket in a vertical direction.

WEAVERS: splints in a basket woven between standards in a horizontal direction.

COLLAR: top edge of the body of a basket, often using sweetgrass held in place by a binding.

BINDING: a thin splint used to attach the collar to the top edge of the basket.

DESIGNS: Wabanaki baskets can have many different forms and designs woven into them. Curls, flat weave, porcupine weave, and ribbon weave are some of the types of weaving patterns Wabanaki basket makers use.



Serway, Emily (2025). *Basket* (Illustration).

PREWORK

Have you ever used a basket? What was it for?

What uses does weaving have in our culture?

What examples can you think of that use the process of weaving?

WORK

1. BEGIN BY DECIDING what materials you would like to use in your weaving and what shape and size the overall piece will be. Your weaving could take the shape of a vessel or other three-dimensional object, or it could be flatter, like a wall or hanging weaving.

2. ONCE YOU'VE SETTLED ON YOUR DESIGN, collect your materials. What will you use for your standards or warp (the vertical structure)? What materials will you use for your weavers or weft (the horizontal material)? What will you use for your substrate (the paper or cardboard backing material)?

3. LAY OUT YOUR STANDARDS (WARP) on your substrate first and make sure you like the design. They should be vertically aligned on your substrate and parallel to each other.

4. GLUE ONLY THE TOP EDGE of each standard to the piece of cardboard or paper (substrate) so they don't move. Leave a very small amount of space between each standard. Allow them to dry before you begin weaving.

5. BEGIN ADDING THE WEAVERS (WEFT) into your work but be careful not to pull them all the way through. Alternate over and under for each row of weavers. Continue weaving, changing colors or materials as it suits the design of your piece.

6. BE MINDFUL OF YOUR DESIGN and how each weaver interacts with the ones below and above.

7. WEAVE ALL THE WAY to the edges of your standards. Glue the bottom edges of the standards down to the substrate. You can also glue the edges of the weavers down if you want to.

REFLECT AND SHARE

Let's reflect on what we just did and the experience we just had in engaging with this artwork.

WHAT did you learn from this process?

WHAT do you like most about your finished work?

WHAT would you do differently?

RESOURCES

INTERVIEWS WITH THERESA SECORD:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_0cZxwmuP8

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAdtEE6c-UQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgvB8nNf374>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVzgik-Vntc>

<https://vimeopro.com/mbtv11/telling-tales-western-maines-storyplace/video/398982298>

OTHER BASKET MAKING VIDEOS:

<https://www.pbs.org/video/wabanaki-basketmaking-qs0gub>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEaUsNE_vdg

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=31x5HfBmAg0>