

1-A Pottery and Baskets: c. 1100–c. 1960

Various Artists



1-A.1 Anasazi pottery, c. 1100, Pueblo Bonito, Chaco Canyon. Jar at left, height 10¼ in. (26 cm.). Photograph by P. Hollembek. © American Museum of Natural History, New York.



1-A.2 Sikyátki polychrome bowl, c. 1350–1700, height 3 1/3 in., diameter 10 ¾ in. (9.3 x 27.4 cm.). Catalog no. 155479. Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Photograph by D. E. Hurlbert.



1-A.3 María Montoya Martínez and Julian Martínez (San Ildefonso Pueblo, American Indian, c. 1887–1980; 1879–1943), Jar, c. 1939. Blackware, height 11 1/8 in., diameter 13 in. (28.26 x 33.02 cm.). National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C., Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay.

The Art

This poster includes examples of pottery and baskets made in America over the past 900 years. Several of these are highlighted in the following section; however, you may want to spend additional time discussing others that are pictured in the poster.

The large piece of black pottery is the most modern of the pots (1-A.3). It is a reinterpretation of ancient pottery finds that were discovered near Santa Fe, New Mexico, in the early 1900s. It took the artists more than eight years to determine how to make the black-on-black works of art. The geometric designs on the pot cover only half of the pottery.

The baleen basket (1-A.5) was made in Alaska in 1940, by an Inupiat man named Carl Toolak. The stiff fibrous plates in the mouths of whales—the “teeth” of these whales—are called baleen. At the bottom of the basket is an ivory plate with holes drilled around the edges so that the baleen could be threaded to begin the weaving of the basket. The lid is also made with a piece of ivory to serve as a knob. The knob is a carved ivory seal’s head. Baleen comes in a range of colors from light shades of brown to black. In this piece, the white stitches are made of bird quills that form the design on the basket and lid.

The rice basket tray (1-A.6) was made in 1960, by Caesar Johnson, a member of the Gullah people who live on the coast of South Carolina. Gullah is the name of the culture and their Creole language is similar to the Krio language of Sierra Leone. This basket was made to separate grains of rice from the husk of the plant or chaff. Gullah baskets were made from coiled bulrush and saw palmetto or white oak.

The pottery jars (1-A.1) were made by the Anasazi people almost a thousand years ago. These jars were found in the Chaco Canyon in New Mexico. They each have small holes or loops near the top so they could be hung up by rope or cord. The use of these jars is unknown. The geometric designs were painted and fired or baked to set the design on the pottery.

The Artists

María Montoya Martínez and her husband, Julian Martínez, a Tewa couple on the San Ildefonso Pueblo, were contacted by an archaeologist to recreate a very old style of pottery that was discovered near Santa Fe, New Mexico. The couple tried for years to produce black pots made from red clay. After eight years of trying, the couple discovered how to make a style of ancient pottery with a black-on-black finish.



1-A.4 Louisa Keyser (Dat So La Lee, Washoe, c. 1850–1925), *Beacon Lights*, 1904–1905. Willow, western redbud, and bracken fern root, height 11 ¼ in., diameter 16 in. (28.58 x 40.64 cm.), T751. Thaw Collection, Fenimore Art Museum, Cooperstown, N.Y. Photograph by Richard Walker.



1-A.5 Carl Toolak (c. 1885–c. 1945, Inupiat, Point Barrow, Alaska), baleen basket, 1940. Baleen (whalebone) and ivory, height 3 ½ in., diameter 3 1/3 in. (9.0 x 8.5 cm.). Catalog no. 1.2E1180. Courtesy of the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, Seattle, Wash.



1-A.6 Attributed to Caesar Johnson (1872–1960), Gullah rice fanner basket, c. 1960. Rush, height 2 ½ in., diameter 17 ½ in. (6.35 x 44.45 cm.). Courtesy of the South Carolina State Museum, Columbia, S.C. Photograph by Susan Dugan.

The Artists cont...

Caesar Johnson was a Gullah artist from South Carolina who designed the flat basket used as a tray to separate grains of rice from their husks. Gullah people are descended from slaves from West Africa. Gullah is the name of the people, their culture, and their language.

Carl Toolak, from the Inupiat people, was among the first of the baleen basket weavers in Alaska. Because baleen is too stiff to use when starting a basket, Toolak used a starter plate of ivory and stitched the first strip of baleen to the edge of the starter plate through holes drilled around the edges.

The Anasazi people made the cylinder-shaped pottery almost a thousand years ago. They were farmers who built homes and small villages across the Four Corners Region, now the area where the borders of New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado come together. The Anasazi are known for their architecture, and the largest of these buildings is called the Pueblo Bonita. These six pots were found with about a hundred others in one of the rooms.

The Historical Perspective

The time period for these pieces of pottery spans more than 800 years. The three pieces of pottery on the poster were made between 1100 and 1939. The baskets were made between 1904 and 1960. A thousand years ago, American Indians used plants, bone, skin, earth, and stone to make pots, baskets, arrowheads, and other objects they needed for everyday life. In addition to being useful, many of these objects were beautiful works of art.



Conversations and Teaching Activities

Head Start Children ages 3 to 5

Encourage children to look closely at the pots and baskets in this poster. Introduce new vocabulary as you probe their thinking and discuss what they see.

Describing



- ✓ What do you think of when you look at these baskets and pots? How are they alike?
- ✓ How are they different?
- ✓ If you could touch these objects, how would they feel?
- ✓ What are they made of? (Pottery is made of clay. The baskets are made from whalebone, grasses, plants, and willows.)

Analyzing and Interpreting



Ask the following questions to stimulate thinking and discussion:

- How would you use any of these objects?
- Are there other things you would like to tell me about what you see?



Connecting and Extending

Introducing Vocabulary

ceramic
contrast
cylinder
fragile

image
kilns
pottery
smooth

spacing
spirals
rough
weaving



Books

A Birthday Basket for Tia by Pat Mora (Simon and Schuster Children's Publishing, 1997) Cecelia prepares a gift for her great-aunt's 90th birthday.

Basket Moon by Mary Lyn Ray (Little Brown Books for Young Readers, 1999) After being sneered at by townspeople, a boy rediscovers the beauty of his family craft and follows in his father's basket-making footsteps.

Circle Unbroken: The Story of a Basket and Its People by Margot Theis Raven (Square Fish, 2007) A grandmother tells the story of the beautiful sweetgrass baskets made by Gullahs that keep their African heritage alive.

Books continued on page 8



Connecting and Extending continued...

Related Family Literacy Experiences

Parents and children can:

- ✓ go on a scavenger hunt in their home looking for different textured objects or objects that hold various-sized items.
- ✓ sing the song "A Tisket, A Tasket" during extended waits or long car or bus trips.



Books continued...

The Cherokee: Native Basket Weavers by Therese DeAngelis
(Coughlan Publishing, 2003)

Cherokees of the American Southeast made baskets of river cane. When the Indians were sent to Oklahoma, they adapted new materials to continue traditional basket weaving.

The Pot that Juan Built by Nancy Andrews-Goebel (Lee and Low Books, 2002)
Juan Quezada is a Mexican potter who makes beautiful clay pots the same way potters in the area did hundreds of years ago.



Related Educational Experiences

- ✓ Have a potter visit the classroom to demonstrate pottery making and decorating. Perhaps the potter can bring a small kiln or photos that show the stages of pottery making.
- ✓ Make a pot out of clay or play dough. Children can make a ball and dig out the center or coil a "long worm" of clay or play dough.
- ✓ Weave a basket or mat out of colored paper or other materials.
- ✓ Draw or paint pots and baskets.
- ✓ Have parents bring handmade pots and baskets to the classroom. Hopefully, they will represent a variety of cultures.

The ideas listed are just a few of the many activities that could be used to introduce or extend children's learning. Your knowledge of your children and families supports your ability to ensure positive learning experiences and outcomes for students. As an educator, you probably have ideas for books, songs, finger plays, and activities that you have thought of when introducing or extending children's learning related to the "A Head Start on Picturing America" artworks. We encourage you to confer with your colleagues, visit the local library or bookstore, and share your ideas with others.