

NATIVE AMERICAN EDUCATION FOR ALL RESOURCES

Partnership of IllumiNative and the National Indian Education Association



ILLUMINATIVE



Grade Level

3-5

Subject

**Art
Social Studies**

Lesson Title

**A Life in Beads: The Stories a
Plains Dress Can Tell**

Activity Description: In this activity, students will explore the traditional art of dressmaking and dress decoration among Native American women from the Great Plains regions, including the materials used in the past and today, and the symbols used to represent the cultural values and meanings family and tradition. Students will then have the opportunity to design their own clothing using original symbols to represent their own values, culture, and family.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Wifi access (optional)
- ["a life in BEADS: The Stories a Plains Dress Can Tell"](#) from the National Museum of the American Indian (printable PDF)
- Printer paper
- Construction paper
- Glitter and/or paint
- Crayons, colored pencils, or markers
- Scissors
- Glue

STEPS

Learning about the Dresses of the Plains Indians from "a life in BEADS: The Stories a Plains Dress Can Tell"

1. Read about who the Assibinoine and Sioux tribes are on page 1, and examine the images of different Plains Indian dresses.
2. Read and review the "Resources & Materials Used to Make Dresses" (Reproducible 1.1)
 - a. How did the men and women both contribute to the making of dresses?
3. Read and review the "Decoration & Adornment" (Reproducible 1.2)
 - a. What were some of the first materials used to decorate Plains clothing? Why is beading easier than quillwork?
4. Read and review "Plains Dresses: Layers of Meaning (Reproducible 2.1)
 - a. How are Plains dresses different from your special occasion clothes? How might they be similar?
5. Read and review "The Give Away Horses Dress: A Dress Rich with Honor and History" (Reproducible 2.3)
 - a. Discuss the importance of symbols and how they communicate and represent values of family and traditions.

Making Your Own Clothing

1. Using printer paper, and any art materials you may have, draw your own dresses and shirt.
2. Use designs and symbols that are unique and have special meaning to you according your own values and culture.
 - a. Think of symbols and designs that might represent your family, animals, or other things that you hold dear, such as respect, love, and honor.

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HELPFUL TIPS

Parents and caregivers: As children begin to understand the significance and meaning of dresses to the Plains Indian tribes, they might be curious about items in their family and culture that have meaning. This is a great opportunity to reflect on your own culture, and what items or clothing might be significant to your family, both past and present.

- Consider discussing with your child some of these items in your family and culture that are significant to you, and why these are significant.
 - Discuss in great detail what these items mean to you and your family, pointing out any unique features or symbols and what those might signify. Ask your child to explain to you what some of these items might mean to them.
- This is also a great opportunity to have your child explain and/or write a story about the significance of the clothing they just designed.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Families and Educators: This activity may open up talking points around the Plains Indian peoples.

- Watch the [optional Youtube video](#) that discusses in great detail the "People of the Plains in 1800s American: A Map".
- This is also a great opportunity to [explore a virtual museum](#) with your child that discusses the culture, histories, and living traditions of the Plains Indian peoples.

Activity Resource Links:

- Adapted by: "a life in BEADS: The Stories a Plains Dress Can Tell" from the National Museum of the American Indian (printable PDF): https://americanindian.si.edu/sites/1/files/pdf/education/NMAI_lifeinbeads.pdf
- People of the Plains in 1800s America: A Map: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=pdlBeNSBxak&feature=emb_title
- The Plains Indian Museum: <https://centerofthewest.org/our-museums/plains-indians/>