

NATIVE AMERICAN EDUCATION FOR ALL RESOURCES

Partnership of IllumiNative and the National Indian Education Association



ILLUMINATIVE



Grade Level

PK-2

Subject

**Social Studies
Art**

Lesson Title

**Navajo Medicine Men: Sand
Painting**

Activity Description: In this activity, students will learn about the importance of sand painting as a Navajo ceremony used by Navajo medicine men to drive away evil spirits. Students will then have the opportunity to create their own sand paintings.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- WiFi access (optional)
- [Music Center Art Source Geri Keams: "Sand Painting Transformation" - page 3-6](#)
- Various colors of fine sand or salt
- Jars or bowl for mixing and stirring the sand
- Newspaper or wrapping paper
- Cardboard
- Spoon
- Glue or paste
- Watercolor paint
- Carbon paper (to transfer design)
- Brushes or Q-tips for gluing
- Toothpicks
- Paint Brushes

STEPS

This activity is for children to do with a person from the family or community.

1. Read with your child the "[Sand Painting Transformation: Introduction](#)" story on page 3-6 of the [Music Center Art Source Geri Keams PDF](#), that describes the significance of sand painting used by Navajo medicine men to drive away evil spirits. Then review the pictures of "Traditional Sand Painting Images" and "Symbols" with your child.

Making Your Own Sand Paintings

1. Work with your child to sketch or trace a design on the cardboard sheet using symbols that resemble aspects of nature of life around them, similar to the American Indian Symbols on page 6 that they looked at previously, until they have a sand painting pattern.
2. Help your child to use paint to brush in the background colors where sand is not desired.
3. Choose the area to be done in a particular color sand and paint a thin coat of glue or paste on these parts.
4. Trickle or sprinkle the colored sand from a spoon onto the areas that have been covered with glue or paste.
5. Allow the work to dry for a few minutes, then lift the work and tap it lightly so excess sand is removed.
6. Repeat this process for all additional colors until the picture is completed.

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HELPFUL TIPS

Parents and caregivers: This is an opportunity for your child to work with minute details and stay focused on a task for a long stretch of time. This is also a great opportunity for your child to learn about the significance of sand paintings to the Navajo people.

- While reading the "Introduction" with your child, point out the significance of sand paintings to the Navajo people.
 - Emphasize that this is a sacred ritual to the Navajo people. The medicine man would create these sand paintings to drive evil spirits away. The medicine man would create a sand painting using different colors of sand, just like you will do in your own sand painting. Sick people were then laid on this sand painting, and then the medicine man would transfer some of the sand to that person's skin to give that person some of its power.
 - Share that sand paintings were typically destroyed by sunset and thrown in 4 directions to confuse the evil spirits.
- Consider reviewing some of the sand painting symbols on page 6, and their meanings before your child creates their own sand painting.
- As your child creates their sand painting, ask them some questions about their sand painting:
 - Why they chose certain symbols or designs?
 - What those symbols mean?
 - Why they are using specific colors?
- When they have finished, ask your child to describe their sand painting to you or tell you a story about the meaning of their sand painting.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Families and Educators: This activity may open up other talking points about Navajo Sand Paintings. Perhaps your child will want to learn more about Navajo Sand Paintings, and see more images of sand paintings from Navajo artists. Below are a few suggestions:

- [Additional Navajo Sandpainting Information](#)
- [Navajo Sandpainting artists](#)

Perhaps, your child may want to learn more about other tribes who may have done similar rituals.

- Read through this [Native American Sand Painting Guide](#) with your child to learn more about the significance of Sand Painting to other tribes and the materials they may have used.

Activity Resource Links:

- Adapted from: Music Center Art Source Geri Keams: "Sand Painting Transformation": <https://sharemylesson.com/teaching-resource/geri-keams-native-american-storyteller-264859>
- Additional Navajo Sandpainting Information: <https://navajopeople.org/navajo-sand-painting.htm>
- Navajo Sandpainting artists: <https://www.penfieldgallery.com/sandPaintings/sandPaintings.html>
- Native American Sand Painting Guide: <http://nativeamerican-art.com/sandpainting2.html>