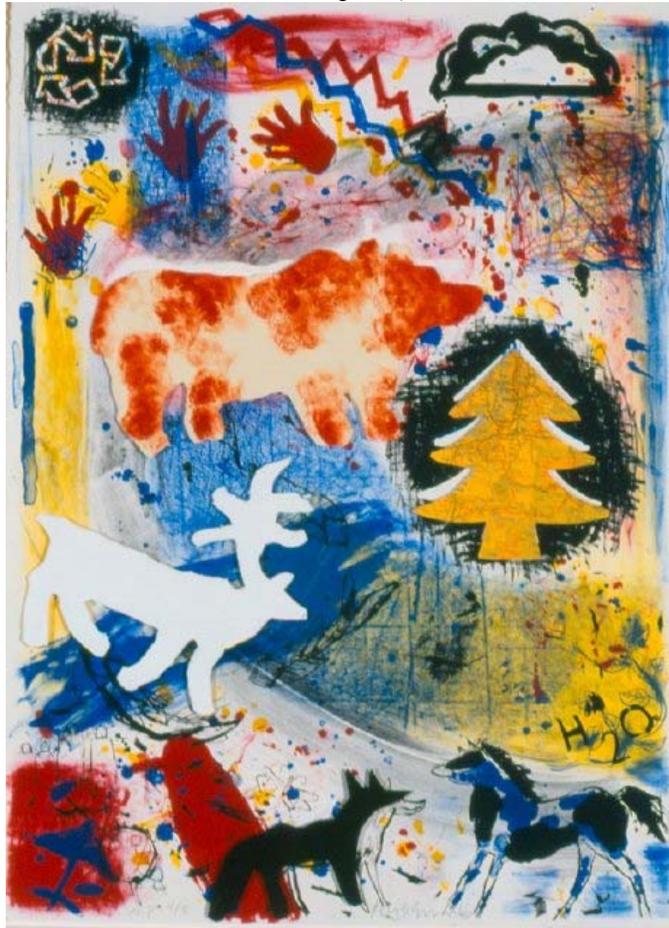


# Montana Animal Stacks: Shapes and Symbols

## 4<sup>th</sup> / 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Art Lesson

Jennifer Ogden, 2008



*Ode to Chief Seattle*, lithograph 1991 30"X22"

### **Description:**

Students will create an animal sculpture inspired by *Ode to Chief Seattle*, by Juane Quick-to-See Smith.

### **Duration:**

Four one-hour sessions, depending on whether the instructor wishes to use clay to be fired in a kiln and also do a glaze fire. Painting the fired clay rather than glazing it may shorten the project time. Alternatively, air-dry clay may be used, as well as acrylic paint for color.

### **Materials:**

Pencil, paper, animal magazines, clay, canvas for tables, clay tools, glaze, access to kiln OR air-dry clay and acrylic paint. Oil base clay, coat hanger wire, pony beads, pliers.

### **Background Information:**

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith was commissioned to create *Ode to Chief Seattle* as a reference to the Pacific Northwest watershed. It reflects an eco system, an ancient native homeland, as well as a site for contemporary practices, such as airplane manufacture. Quick-to-See Smith pulls from a variety of ideas that blend together in a fitting tour de force. She honors Suquamish Indian leader, Chief Seattle who lived from the late 1700s and well into the following century. He rose to leadership in his region, and bore witness to the changes visited upon his people by white settlers, and is attributed to a speech in reaction to treaties signed in 1854.

### **Learning Sparks:**

Have the class study *Ode to Chief Seattle* by Juane Quick-to-See Smith, looking first for essential strong shapes such as trees, and animals. Go over vocabulary for categories and aspects of shape.

A second reading of the image will be for meaning, utilizing the clues given within the compositions, such as symbolism, and clues from the title of the work itself. We see a variety of symbols, ranging from plants and animals rendered in both tight and loose styles, to the circling arrows of the recycle symbol, to pictographic imagery of ancient people. There is a cloudlike shape, and an airplane, as well as differently colored zigzag lines which seem to indicate lightning and water.

Brainstorm Montana flora, fauna and geographic symbols inspired by the environment, perhaps focusing on imagery found in the "Great Seal of the State of Montana" as well as other state symbols, such as the Grizzly Bear, the Western Meadowlark, Bitterroot Flower, Ponderosa Pine, and Mourning Cloak Butterfly etc...

### **Goals and Learning Objectives:**

Students will study *Ode to Chief Seattle* by Juane Quick-to-See Smith in order to identify recognizable symbols and shapes and textures.

Students will hypothesize possible meanings they find from the combination of symbols found in the artwork.

Students learn about Suquamish leader, Chief Seattle

Students will translate ideas about a chosen ecosystem into shapes and arrange them in a combine sculpture.

### **Vocabulary:**

Symbol- Something used for or representing something else. An emblem, token or sign.

Shape- A form or object defined by its contour or outline.



Positive Shape- Looking at Robert Indiana's LOVE sculpture, the letters are the positive shape or space.

Negative Shape- Looking at Robert Indiana's LOVE sculpture, the air around the letters and the space where the person is standing is considered the negative shape or space. (The same rules for positive and negative shape apply to flat images on a picture plane).

Geometric Shape- Shapes which are simple, clean and straight sided, or generally symmetrical, such as squares, triangles, rectangles, etc...

Organic/Living Shape- Shapes based on natural forms, or are generally curvilinear, complex and detailed, such as a tree or plant shape.

Symmetry: Something that is the same on both sides of a central line. For example, a human is symmetrical, having the same number of parts on either side of the body.

Asymmetry: Something that is not the same on both sides of a central line, for example, the side-view of a car or animal.

Counterbalance: A sculptural term, which allows for a part of a sculpture that reaches out high or to the side to be balanced or weighted lower down in the structure of the composition in order to avoid it toppling over.

#### MONTANA STATE SYMBOLS:

Animal, Grizzly Bear  
Bird, Western Meadowlark  
Butterfly, Mourning Cloak  
Fish, Black Spotted Cutthroat Trout  
Flower, Bitterroot  
Fossil, Duck-billed Dinosaur  
Gemstones, Sapphire and Agate  
Grass, Bluebunch Wheatgrass  
Tree, Ponderosa Pine



### **Steps and Procedures:**

Lay out a clay and hand building set up in the classroom. There should be canvases covering the tables, clay tools, slip containers and small portions of clay at each student work site.

Each student will need to create a base for his or her sculpture, which will be an inverted pinch pot with a quarter inch hole in the top. An easy pinch pot method is to roll a ball of clay about the size of an orange. Poke in a thumb like “Little Jack Horner”, stretch the hole to include the other thumb, then working with the rest of the fingers on the outside of the pot and the two thumbs stretching the pot from the inside to create a pot with walls of uniform thickness. At this point the pot can be pounded against the table to create a boxlike shape or other shapes, such as stars hearts or freeform shapes. The surface may be textured using a variety of clay tools, combs, wire coils, etc... Don't forget to poke the one-quarter inch hole in the very top of the base.

Students can continue the activity by sculpting a series of animal shapes, all of which will need to have the quarter-inch hole poked vertically through the center. Include detail such as fur texture, eyes ears noses, tails, snouts horns, scales, feather texture etc... If using fire clay, be careful not to have thick solid areas of clay, which will trap moisture or air during the firing process.

To break up the shapes, as they are stacked for the final assembly, students should create homemade beads that can help to separate the animal shapes visually. The beads can also represent flora, clouds, raindrops, snowflakes, letters, numbers or geographical features of the area and ecosystem being symbolized.

Dry and fire the pieces, once again checking to make sure all pieces have holes in place.

Once fired or dry, have the students glaze or paint each individual clay piece. If using glaze, fire a second time using bead racks or wire props.

Begin assembly of the animal stacks using the concept of counterbalance. Add plasticene clay to the inside cavity of the pinch pot or clay base for extra weight. Using the pliers, open up the coat hanger wire, maintaining the hook part. Roll the hook into a heavy coil then straighten out the remainder of the wire. Judge how high the animal stack sculpture will be and trim off the excess wire. Thread the wire through the plasticene inside the pinch pot cavity and out through the hole.

Practice layering the animals spaced with homemade beads or pony beads to set off each piece. They will assemble like a beaded necklace, threading the holes through the wire base. When the desired effect is reached, bend and trim the wire on the top of the sculpture to keep all pieces together. If the sculpture tips too much, consider shortening the stack, adding more weight on the bottom or hot gluing each piece to the wire, as it is stacked.

### **Assessment:**

Students should be able to identify categories and aspects of shape, whether informally through verbal checks, or through a descriptive statement written by the artist about his or her art piece.

An extension of the writing might include difficulties experienced and resolved while stacking the differing weights of each symbol, what other aspects might be at work to unify the different ideas and shapes of the symbols apart from the wire.

### **Alternative Method:**

A flat version of the animal stack concept can be done by having students look through source material for images of animals they wish to portray in their piece. Using watercolor sets and white sulphite paper have the students make a loose, washy impression of the animal. Allow for drying, and then sharpen up the paintings using markers to add line work for texture, detail and contrast, allowing for the images to develop.

Cut out the animal shapes and have students arrange them on a contrasting background in a stack or other composition suggesting interdependence.

### **Teacher Resources:**

[www.missoulaartmuseum.org](http://www.missoulaartmuseum.org)

(Click on "experience", then "search the collection", search for *Ode to Chief Seattle*, click on descriptive list, as well as image.

<http://www.chiefseattle.com/history/chiefseattle/chief.htm>

(This is good for read-aloud biographical information on Suquamish leader, Chief Seattle).

[www.Montanakids.com](http://www.Montanakids.com)

(This website includes information on state symbols, geography, flora and fauna etc... a useful resource for teachers and students).