



# WOODLAND ART

Evening Activity

Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center  
6282 Cranberry Rd, Finland, MN 55603 • 800-523-2733 (MN, WI) • 218-353-7414



*Portion of "The Spirit of Woodland Art," by Roy Thomas*

# WOODLAND ART

## WOLF RIDGE CLASSES:

### Animals:

Animal Signs  
Beavers  
Birds  
Small Mammals  
Snowshoe Hare  
White-tailed Deer  
Wildlife Management

### Plants:

Forest Ecology  
Plant Study  
Trees and Keys  
Wetlands Ecology

### Aquatics:

Lake Study  
Stream Study  
Fisheries Management  
Frozen Lake Study

### Earth Science:

Acid Rain  
Geology  
Weather

### Human Culture and History:

Living Lightly  
Nature's Timing  
Ojibwa Heritage  
Ojibwa Snowshoe  
Seeds of Change  
Voyageur Life

### Personal Growth:

Adventure Ropes Course  
Rock Climbing

### Group Building:

Basic Survival  
F.I.R.S.T. Games

### Outdoor Recreation:

Beginning Orienteering  
Competitive Orienteering  
Canoeing  
Cross Country Skiing  
Superior Snowshoe  
Superior View Hike

### Evening Activities:

Astronomy  
Block Printing  
Creative Expressions  
Creature from Wolf Lake  
Dream Catchers  
Lake Superior Game  
Night Hike  
Owl Pellets  
Paper Making  
Star Lab  
Woodland Art  
Volleyball

### Naturalist Presentations:

Bats  
Fur Trade  
History of the North Shore  
Logging Camp Life  
Raptors  
Wolves

## **Class Description: An Evening Activity**

Students will learn the history and meaning of Woodland Art. They will then observe and interpret an original piece by a well known Woodland Artist. Students will use this information to create their own X-ray drawing, which will later become part of a large-scale collage to tell a story of their own choosing.

Total time: 1.5 hours Audience: 6-20 students, 4th grade through adult

Activity level: Low

Travel: None

Total uphill travel: None



## **About Wolf Ridge**

Wolf Ridge is an accredited residential environmental education school for persons of all ages. We offers immersion programs which involve direct observation and participation in outdoor experiences. Wolf Ridge programs focus on environmental sciences, human culture and history, personal growth, team building and outdoor recreation.

### ***Our Mission***

To develop a citizenry that has the knowledge, skills, motivation and commitment to act together for a quality environment.

### ***What We Do***

We meet our mission by:

- Fostering awareness, curiosity and sensitivity to the natural world.
- Providing lifelong learning experiences in nature.
- Developing social understanding, respect and cooperation.
- Modeling values, behaviors and technologies, which lead to a sustainable lifestyle.
- Promoting the concepts of conservation and stewardship.



*Wolf Ridge Campus*

*Photo by Jim Brandenburg*



## **Wolf Ridge**

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*Wolf Ridge is an equal opportunity educator and employer.*

# WOODLAND ART



## OUTLINE:

### I. Set-up (15 minutes)

### II. Introduction (5 minutes)

- Learn Names
- Greeter/Grabber
- Follow-up and Class Overview
- Behavior Guidelines
- Assess Learner Level

### III. Stories From Art (30 minutes)

- A. Group Interpretation
- B. Symbolism in Art
- C. Large Painting Interpretation

### IV. Art From Stories (40 minutes)

- A. Story Brainstorm
- B. Choose your symbols
- C. Draw your story

### V. Conclusion (15 minutes)

- A. Share your class story
- B. Review
- C. Stewardship

### VI. Clean-up (15 minutes)

### VII. Appendices

- A. Equipment
- B. References
- C. Glossary



## CONCEPTS:

1. Stories can be told through many different mediums.
2. Art is an expression of human thoughts and feelings.
3. Feelings for and understanding of the natural world can be expressed in a variety of ways.



## OUTCOMES:

Upon completion of the Woodland Art class students will be able to:

1. Understand the origin and meaning of Woodland Art.
2. Understand an interpretation of a Woodland Art painting.
3. Create and share a representation of a familiar story.



## MN GRADUATION STANDARDS:

Wolf Ridge has aligned the Center's entire curriculum to Minnesota Department of Education Academic Standards. The Center maintains a curriculum standards matrix for the following subject areas:

- Science
- History and Social Studies
- Language Arts
- Mathematics
- Arts

The Matrices are organized by grade level and subject area, listing Strand, Sub-Strand, Standards, and Benchmarks. Every class addressing a benchmark is also noted. As the primary student audience at Wolf Ridge is from 4th-12th grade, the matrices address these grade levels. Teachers may request that their students focus upon a specific benchmark while attending Wolf Ridge.

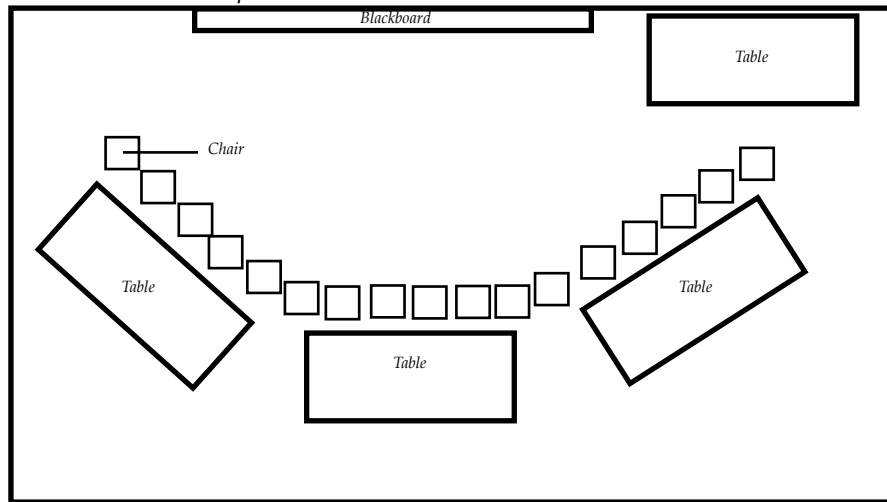
Copies of our matrices are available on the Wolf Ridge web site at [www.wolf-ridge.org](http://www.wolf-ridge.org), found under the "Education" menu. If you cannot access the matrices via the website, request a printed copy by calling 218-353-7414 or e-mailing us at "mail@wolf-ridge.org".

*Teacher Note: This is one possible classroom set-up. It works well with the flow of class, but feel free to try other arrangements.*

## I. Classroom Set-up (15 minutes)

Set up one table in the front of the classroom next to the blackboard. On this table, set out construction paper, templates, and markers. Set out three more tables in a half circle, facing the blackboard. On these tables, set out Cray-pas, symbolism charts, and scissors. Put chairs in a half circle within the tables (they will move their chairs over to the tables later.) Hang posters and ventilate room as needed.

Possible Room Set-up:



## II. Introduction (5 minutes)

### Learn Students' Names

Take a few minutes to learn the names of your students and welcome them individually to the class. Repeat their names and strive to use them in every communication.

### Greeting/Grabber

Ask students if they have been canoeing in the BWCAW or Quetico. How many of them have seen Native American rock paintings? Nobody knows for sure the exact method used for the painting or the exact meaning of many of the figures. Woodland Art is the modern-day version of rock paintings and birch bark scrolls. Show the Woodland Art poster. Artists use symbols and colors to tell a story. Tonight students will learn about the history and symbolism of Woodland Art, and then have a go at it ourselves.

### Follow-up and Class Overview

After looking a little bit at some professional works, students are going to incorporate symbolism to tell their own story in what is called an "X-ray painting." An X-ray painting is a picture within a picture. Encourage students to begin thinking of outdoor experiences that they have had. They may also decide to use something they have learned or experienced at Wolf Ridge to tell their story.

## Set Behavior Guidelines

Discuss clearly and specifically which behaviors you expect from your students during the next two hours. Explain the need for respect; for you, for each other, and for the equipment.

## Assess Learner Level

Have the students talked about symbolism in school? Have students give some examples of color or animal symbolism (ie yellow means slow down on a stoplight or an owl may be known for wisdom.)

## III. Stories From Art (30 minutes)

### A. Group Interpretation (15 minutes)

Woodland Art is also known as legend painting. The pictures tell stories of the relationships between humans and animals, of ancestors, and traditional explanations of how things came to be. This next activity gives students a chance to interpret a Woodland Art painting. Granted, they don't have much background, but it will give them a chance to look closely at a painting and start getting used to the style.

- If they are not already, have students sit in the half-circle of chairs facing the blackboard.
- Hand out the "Interpretation Cards," in order. There should be enough to give one card to each student, but double them up if needed.
- Give students a minute or so to look at their picture and think about what the shapes, colors, and pictures might mean. They can look at the pictures to their right and left as well.
- Each student is going to tell one or two sentences of the story, starting with the first person in the semicircle and ending with the last. The story needs to make some sense, but it also has to incorporate the objects in the picture they are holding. They should show the rest of the class their picture as they tell their portion of the story.

### B. Symbolism in Art (5 minutes)

Symbolism is the representation of something abstract using something that is concrete. For example, we are unable to draw a picture of bravery, but a picture of a lion may represent bravery. Look at the "Common Symbols" poster and let students interpret their probable meanings. Have students brainstorm some other common symbols.

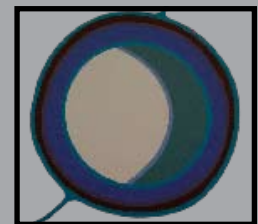
Woodland Art has some common themes and symbols. Go over the following definitions with the students and see if they can find these images or symbols in the pictures they are holding.

#### Common Woodland Art Symbols

**Circles** -- Circles can represent the life cycle, the sun, the moon, and the directions.

**Divided Circles** -- A divided circle may represent opposites.

*Concept:  
Feelings for and understanding of the natural world can be expressed in a variety of ways.*



**CONCEPT:**  
*Stories can be told through many different mediums.*

**Lines** -- Lines drawn from one object to another can represent energy, spirit, or communication. Lines that are drawn from the mouth symbolize talking or communication, and lines that emanate from the hand or body may symbolize energy or spirit flowing from one being to another.

**Large Eyes** -- Large eyes are seen often in Woodland Art. These eyes are a symbol of a shaman or medicine man.

**X-ray pictures** -- This technique shows the interior as well as the exterior of a figure. The inside of the figure may be other lines and shapes, to indicate what that animal may be feeling.

**Bird, Fish, and Mammal** -- The appearance of a bird, a fish, and a mammal may represent air, water and land.

**Turtle** - The appearance of a turtle may indicate the earth.

There are many other symbols that appear in Woodland Art. Sometimes artists use symbolism that has existed for generations. Artists may also create their own symbolism to express meaning.

### C. Large Painting Interpretation (5 minutes)

Take the students down the hall to Room 1 of the Science Center. Hanging on one wall is a painting by Roy Thomas, who is a well known Woodland Artist. The painting is called "The Spirit of Woodland Art." This piece is meant to tell the story of how modern Woodland Art came to be and its connections to the past.

Let the students look at the whole painting for a moment and try to find within it the images they were interpreting during the last activity. Use the "Description of Painting" poster found in the kit to take the students on a visual tour of the painting. What types of symbolism that they have learned about can they see in this painting?



Figure 1. Description of Painting Poster



Figure 1. "The Spirit of Woodland Art" by Roy Thomas

## IV. Art From Stories (40 minutes)

### A. Story Brainstorm (5 minutes)

The rest of the class is dedicated to creating a personal piece of artwork in the form of an X-ray drawing. Students will use a template to trace a shape onto construction paper, then draw their "story" within that figure. Decide on an overall theme that is appropriate for the students pictures, such as their stay at Wolf Ridge, their year at school, or maybe even family stories.

Because there is a relatively short period of time for this creation, have the students brainstorm what they have done so far at Wolf Ridge that could be drawn in the form of a picture. Write their answers down on the board.

If the students are having trouble starting the brainstorm, help them get started with this list of ideas:

- a big thunder or snow storm
- an animal they saw in the woods
- a funny experience at stream study
- a funny campfire story
- a rock climbing experience
- success at Basic Survival
- tracking a Snowshoe Hare
- games at Voyageur Life

Once the students get going, they should be able to make a long list of possible ideas for their x-ray drawings.

### B. Choose Your Symbols (5 minutes)

Students should use at least three symbols in their x-ray pictures. They can borrow symbols from other cultures to help them tell their story, or they can make up their own symbols. If you do this step by step with all the students, they will have more time for their x-ray drawing.

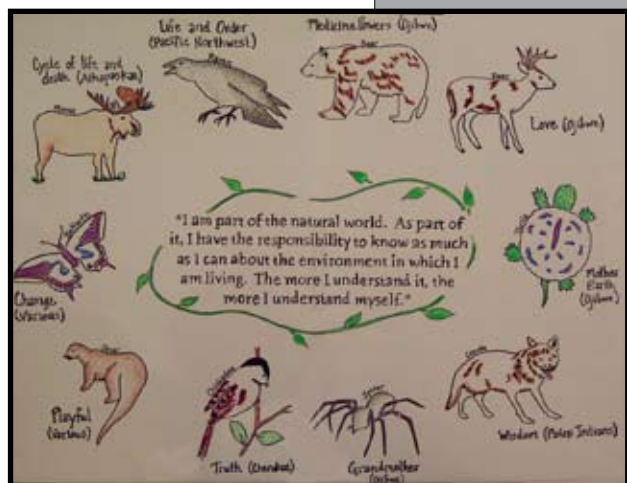
#### Pick your Color

Most people could easily list a handful of common color symbols. Blue usually stands for cold, red for hot...or angry. Some of the most common symbolism is even found across many cultures. Have students look at the color symbolism charts that are on their tables. Let them pick a color that relates to their story, then give them a piece of construction paper in the corresponding color.

#### Pick your Shape

Animal symbolism is found throughout Native American culture, as well as other cultures across the world. Have students (5 or 6 at a time) come to the front table and choose a template on which they will do their x-ray drawings. They should trace the template onto their paper up at the front table, then bring it back to their own table, where they can begin their drawings. They should not cut out the template until they have finished their drawing. (This is to prevent the Cray-pas from getting on the table.)

**CONCEPT:**  
*Art is an expression of human thoughts and feelings.*



**C. Draw Your Story (30 minutes)**

Remind students to begin their drawings promptly so they will have time to finish. Using colors, animals, or other figures, they should include at least three symbols in their drawings. The Animal Symbolism poster may help them get started with some examples from different Native American cultures.

Their "artist medium" today will be Cray-pas on construction paper. Cray-pas will wash off skin and tables, but remind students to be careful of sleeves. If students are careful, the Cray-pas will not smudge. They may even choose to blend colors on purpose for effect.

**V. Conclusion (20 minutes)**

**A. Review (5 minutes)**

Think back to the beginning of class. From what form of symbolic painting did Woodland Art evolve? Woodland Art tells stories from what culture? What role does symbolism play in Woodland Art? What are some examples of this symbolism?

**B. Share Your Class Story (10 minutes)**

Each x-ray drawing tells an individual story, but when you put them all together, they tell the story of the class. Have students use masking tape to put their painting on the giant red backdrop, so that it becomes one large piece of art rather than several small pieces. Depending on what the main theme of the drawings was, this great piece of art may tell a story of a week at Wolf Ridge, a class of 6th graders, or even an overall view of modern day American culture.

Put the giant piece of art in the middle of the room. Begin in a logical place, and have each student use just a couple of sentences to explain their drawing and how it relates to the overall theme. The challenge will be to try and make their stories flow into one complete story.

Example of Full Class Picture

**C. Stewardship (5 minutes)**

Using symbolism, especially symbols involving colors and living things, reminds us to pay attention to our natural surroundings. Using a plant or animal to symbolize something that is important to us gives us a sense of connection to the natural world. What is the value of keeping those connections in the forefront of our mind? What is the value of putting cultural or personal stories down for others to admire or interpret?

*CONCEPT:  
Art is an expression  
of human thoughts and  
feelings.*



## VI. Clean-up

Students should take their finished drawing with them as they leave. Put Cray-pas back into boxes and return extra construction paper to the folder. Please put scrap construction paper in the bucket so that it can be used in the paper making class. Put folder, scissors, books, pictures, Cray-pas and all other props back into the kit box. Return the kit box and posters to the kit room. Use the sponge to wipe down all tables. Stack chairs in stacks of four or five, take down tables, close windows and turn off lights.

## VII. Appendices

### A. Equipment

- Construction Paper
- Cray-pas
- Black markers
- Scissors
- Animal Templates
- Woodland Art pictures
- Posters: Animal Symbolism  
Description of Painting  
Woodland Art Example
- Books: "The Spirit of Ahnisenabae Art"  
"Animal Speak"  
"Talking Rocks"
- Masking Tape
- Laminated examples of student work (3)

### B. References

- Roy Thomas, The Spirit of Ahnisenabae Art: A Gallery Edition. James R. Stevens, Ahnisenabae Art. ISBN 0-9688345-0-7
- Norval Morriseau: Travels to the House of Invention. Norval Morriseau, Key Porter Books Limited, 1997. ISBN 1-55013-880-4
- Animal Speak: The Spiritual and Magical Powers of Creatures Great and Small. Ted Andrews, Llewellyn Publications, 1993.
- Indian Rock Paintings of the Great Lakes. Selwyn Dewdney and Kenneth E. Kidd, University of Toronto Press, 1973.
- Shared Spirits: Wildlife and Native Americans. Dennis L. Olson, NorthWord Press, Inc. Minocqua, WI 1995. ISBN 1-55971-474-3
- Talking Rocks. Ron Morton and Carl Gawboy, Pfeiffer Hamilton Publishers, 2000. ISBN 1-57025-142-8
- Magic On the Rocks: Canoe Country Pictographs. Michael Furtman, Birch Portage Press, Duluth, MN 2000. ISBN 0-916691-02-0

## C. Glossary

**Circles** - circles can represent the life cycle, the sun, the moon, and the directions.

**Lines** - Lines drawn from one object to another can represent energy, spirit, or communication.

**Cray-pas** - A crayon like pen made of wax and oil.

**Pictographs** - Rock paintings that use special figures and symbolism to relate the stories of old.

**Symbolism** - A representation of something abstract using something that is concrete.

**Woodland Art** - A form of modern art from the Ahnishnabae community. It uses symbolism and pictures to tell stories.

**X-Ray Pictures** - A technique that shows the interior as well as the exterior of a figure. The inside of the figure may be lines or shapes, which may indicate what the animal is feeling. It may also represent another story related to that animal or what it represents.