

Martin Puryear-Inspired Basketry

(art + history; art + social studies)

The art of basketry has existed in North America long before the settlement of the colonies. Traditionally, Native Americans wove baskets for practical purposes, such as for storing food or documents. They also wove baskets for spiritual reasons, such as Strawberry Baskets, which were given to infants when entering the Spirit World.

Stemming from the unconventional, Martin Puryear's abstract sculptural forms branch out from the expected and breathe new life into traditional materials. In working with assumed materials, Puryear reinvents their purpose and their intent.

Students learn the importance of negative space while creating a non-traditional basket by focusing on it as a sculptural element rather than a functional object. Being a non-representational form, these abstract baskets draw attention to volume and space and redefine what a basket is intended for.

Grade Levels 5-12

Note: instructions and materials based on a class of 25 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Create the basket concept in the sketchbook. Draw out several sketches of the sculpture from different angles, taking into consideration the scale and dimensions of the piece.
2. Based on the sketch, approximate the amount of materials that will be needed.
3. Pull and set aside the **Preparation, continued**



Materials

NOTE: Sculptures should be made with minimal materials to allow focus on the integral form and the space it encompasses. No more than two materials per project are recommended.

Materials may include, but not be limited to:

Natural Reed

flat (60961-1038) or round (60961-1316); one 1-lb coil will make approximately 5-10 baskets

Jute Twine (62984-8542)

Genuine Balsa Wood, assorted strips and sheets, such as 1/16" x 1/4" x 24" (33300-2014), 48-piece bag

Scale Lumber, assorted sizes, such as 0.0416" x 0.0625" x 11" (33304-4167), 15-piece bag



Wood Basket Bases, assorted sizes, such as 4" x 6" oval (60417-1001); need one per student

Premium Tacky Glue, 4-oz (23879-1104); share six bottles across classroom

Surebonder® Easy Tacker Staple Gun (57235-1001) and staples

Hammer (35104-1016) and nails

Canson® Biggie™ Sketch Pad (10332-1003), 9" x 12"; will use 3-4 sheets per student

needed supplies. Tacky Glue or staples will work for reed and small scale lumber projects. Nails will be needed to construct larger scale lumber and Balsa wood projects.

Process using Natural Reed

1. Soak Flat Reed in water for 10 minutes to soften for flexibility. For larger-scale work, this step is not necessary.
2. Starting with a Wood Basket Base, staple end of Reed to the top side of the base. Bend and manipulate strands over to the opposite side of the base (still on the top). Staple securely.
3. Repeat the process, crossing strands and alternating heights according to the design.
4. Jute Twine or other materials may be added to add texture and dimension to the piece, but use of these materials should remain minimal. One material should dominate the piece.

Secondary materials may be used internally to create added dimension to the form, drawing attention to the space within.

Process using Scale Lumber/Balsa Wood

1. Three or more strips of wood may be glued or nailed together to form a base for support.
The base may also serve as a central core of the sculpture, elevating the piece so that the bottom of the sculpture is a result of the ends of the strips of wood instead of a flat base.
2. Connect pieces of wood according to the design. Wood pieces can be stacked on top of one another or they may be placed randomly to create depth and space between the strips of wood. Stacked strips of wood will form a more solid sculpture, placing emphasis on the space it defines, whereas open forms draw focus on the space surrounding and within the form.