

# FIRST PEOPLES

## ARTS AND CULTURE

*Join us Mondays through Nov. 28, 2005, as we take a look at the contributions — past and present — of Washington's First Peoples.*

With many of their essential needs met by an abundance of food, Washington state's First Peoples were free to pursue other interests including the creation of intricate and useful works of art. Among the most notable were decorative carvings and baskets that were also used to gather and hold foods.

In recent years, a carving and basket weaving renaissance has swept through many native communities. These art forms are enormously popular with today's Northwest Tribal people. Men and women, as well as younger adults and children, are taking up the tradition of carving and basketry. Many native people see creating art and teaching it to younger generations as an important way to transfer knowledge as well as cultural traditions. The items they create, also including paintings and jewelry, are found in art galleries and museums throughout the Pacific Northwest. You will also find them being used in tribal communities.

For many native artists, creating beautiful works of art is a necessity, not a luxury. They have to make art. The physical and mental processes involved feed their creative spirits. They are compelled to create their works of art to nourish their soul. However, being able to make a collectable piece of art also enables them to earn money and support their families, which are often in rural and isolated locations. Baskets and carved objects today range in price from inexpensive to thousands of dollars. Typically baskets are made of cedar root, cedar bark, sweet grass or bear grass.

Traditional Klickitat, or imbricated baskets, will sell for up to \$1,000 per gallon volume, with some being as large as 10 gallons. These baskets are still used today by native people to gather huckleberries.

Several of the Northwest basket makers have won awards for their exceptional baskets. Nettie Jackson of the Yakama Nation won a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Heritage Fellowship award in 2000. A very beloved Skokomish spiritual leader, Bruce Miller, or Subiyay as he was better known, recently passed away. He was awarded the 2004 NEA Heritage Award for his work preserving Salish basket making and art styles. His baskets are now considered priceless.

The nonprofit Northwest Native American Basketweavers Association (NNABA) was started in 1996 to encourage basket makers. The NNABA "... offers awareness of and education about the diverse weaving arts of the Northwest, increased Native access to traditional cultural resources on public and tribal lands, and unity and communication in social and cultural environments for the teachers and apprentices of traditional and contemporary basketweaving ..." to display and share their tradition and teachings.

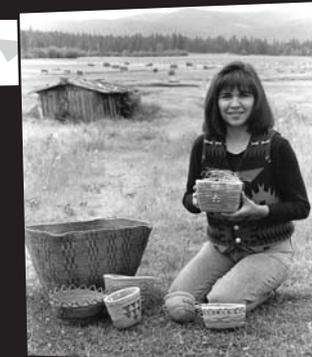
The tradition of carving woodworks, often of cedar, also continues. Like basket making, carving is an essential component of Northwest culture. Hand carved bentwood boxes, welcome and story poles, rattles, drums, masks, bowls and spoons for use in potlatches, and even canoes are being carved by contemporary artisans. These carvings traditionally utilize whales, ravens, eagles, otters, bear, salmon and other animals indigenous to the Northwest. Ceremonial potlatches are still being conducted by tribes where traditional potlatch dishes are served and traditional utensils are used. Potlatching is the practice of feasting and giving gifts to visitors to show appreciation, or to

bestow an honor upon a family or tribe. At one time, the government outlawed potlatching as a ceremonial practice. But today, potlatching flourishes. Many tribes are also involved in annual canoe journeys during which tribes paddle from one reservation to the next in huge hand-carved, traditional canoes.

These days, many tribes operate their own museums or cultural centers. They range from simple to sophisticated buildings designed to house historical and contemporary collections. Tribes with museums include the Colville tribes, the Lummi Nation, the Makah Nation, the Puyallup tribe, the Quinault Tribes, the Skokomish Tribe, the Steilacom (an unrecognized tribe), the Suquamish tribe, the Tulalip Tribes and the Yakama Nation. These are wonderful places to learn more about Washington's First Peoples — plan on visiting one in the near future. Many have Web sites where more information can be found on location and visiting hours.

## ACTIVITIES

- 1: Art is critical to any nation's culture. As a class, discuss how art contributes to society in general. Then, look through The Seattle Times for articles and images about the arts. What purpose do newspaper articles about art serve to the community?
- 2: This article discusses the idea of "nourishing one's soul" — what exactly does this mean? As a class, discuss ways in which humans nourish souls. What is important to you with regard to the type of career you decide to pursue? Look through the Business section for articles about what satisfies people at their job besides money.



**BERNADINE PHILLIPS**  
BASKET WEAVER  
COLVILLE NATION

I learned to make coiled cedar root baskets about 14 years ago from master basket weaver Elaine Timentwa Emerson.

There's more to basket weaving than the simple act of weaving. You spend time going out to the mountains at certain times of the year to gather the materials (cedar roots, bear grass and wild cherry bark). And then preparing them takes time, too. In the end, only about one-third of your time is actually spent weaving your basket.

The fun part is getting together with others to weave. There's always a lot of visiting and laughter and food, and an elder who tells of the legends and stories about your ancestors and language. And no one even cares if they finish their basket — they just want to hear the stories.

While non-Indian influences have changed the way of life of our ancestors, modern technology is bringing us back together, again. Driving a car to collect basketry materials may only take hours, instead of the days or weeks it took our ancestors. Telephones and the Internet give us information on areas to gather materials, and it brings us closer to all of the basket-weaving friends we've made.



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CHAPTER 3:

**CANOE JOURNEYS  
AND LANGUAGE**