

## **American Indian Pottery of North Carolina, Past and Present**

By Anne Haugh from Penderlea School

for the 2021-2022 World View Global Fellows Program

**Overview of Lesson:** Students will study pottery made by American Indians in North Carolina to learn how it marked the beginning of a new way of life for these first peoples. Lifeways began to change from transient hunters and gatherers to living in semi-permanent and permanent villages when pottery and horticulture became an important part of their livelihood. Contemporary Indians of North Carolina continue this tradition of making pottery today as one way they honor their ancestors.

**About the Project:** American Indians lived in the area we now call North Carolina for at least 15,000 years. Archaeologists study the remnants of their communities to learn who these people were and how they lived and prospered for thousands of years. The lesson presented below was developed as part of the 2021-2022 UNC World View Fellows Program, [Exploring Indigenous Cultures: Ancient North Carolinians, Past and Present](#). It is one in a series of lessons that the Fellows created for K-12 schools and community colleges to help students learn about the ancient peoples that lived here and those who represent today's vibrant American Indian populations. Lessons connect past to present day by exploring multiple resources within the [Ancient North Carolinians: A Virtual Museum of North Carolina Archaeology website](#) to examine how communities changed over time and what influenced these changes. Understanding past Indigenous lifeways—their complexity, resiliency, and vitality—allows for a greater appreciation of the contributions American Indians made to the past and continue to make to the present and future of North Carolina.

**Suggested Grade Level:** 4<sup>th</sup> grade

**Subject:** Visual Arts

### **Corresponding National and State of North Carolina Standards:**

4.CX.1 Understand the global, historical, societal, and cultural contexts of the visual arts.

4.CX.1.1 Understand how the visual arts have affected, and are reflected in, the culture, traditions, and history of North Carolina.

4.CX.1.2 Recognize key contributions of North Carolina artists in art history.

4.V.2 Apply creative and critical thinking skills to artistic expression.

4.V.2.2 Use ideas and imagery from North Carolina as sources for creating art.

4.V.3 Create art using a variety of tools, media, and processes, safely and appropriately.

4.V.3.3 Create art using the processes of drawing, painting, weaving, printing, stitchery, collage, mixed media, sculpture, ceramics, and current technology

### **Essential Questions:**

- How did pottery impact and change American Indian lifeways in North Carolina?
- What were these ceramic vessels used for?
- What is the significance of surface decoration?
- How is this pottery-making tradition being carried out today?

**Lesson Objectives:** Students will be able to:

- Learn to identify pottery from the Woodland period to better understand the lifestyle of American Indians in North Carolina.
- Compare these ancient pots to the work of a contemporary American Indians in North Carolina to learn how this pottery-making tradition is being continued.
- Students will make a coil pot and add surface ornamentation to learn about the pottery-making process.

**Background information for the educator:** American Indians have long been stereotyped in movies and literature as people who lived long ago, wore fringed buckskins and feathers in their hair, rode horses, and lived in tipis. These portrayals do not accurately represent American Indians, past or present. Did you know that North Carolina has the largest population of American Indians of any state east of the Mississippi River? There are currently eight state-recognized American Indian tribes in North Carolina, descendants of Indigenous people who lived here hundreds and thousands of years ago. Tribes today carry on many of the traditions of their ancestors, including making pottery. The tradition of making pottery among American Indians on North Carolina can be traced back to 1000 BC during a time known as the Woodland period when Indigenous people first established villages and started farming. Pottery vessels were important in cooking and storing food. The clay used to make these pots was available throughout the area. Once the pots were made and fired, they were durable items that would be useful for years to come. Archaeologists find fragments of ancient pots (called sherds) and can differentiate between different types of pottery based on the tempering agent and surface treatment that was applied to the exterior of pots. Pottery vessels exhibited patterns created from cord, nets, corncobs, and carved paddles that were pressed into the surface of the clay before firing. Today's American Indians have kept alive this longstanding tradition of pottery, incorporating contemporary designs into their pots.

**Note:** More information about the pottery making of the Woodland period can be found on the Ancient North Carolinian website in the section titled "Exhibits / North Carolina's First Peoples / The Pottery Makers" (<https://ancientnc.web.unc.edu/exhibits/first-peoples/the-pottery-makers/>).

**Discussion questions:**

- What did you learn about the history of pottery making by American Indians in North Carolina?
- How is this tradition being carried on by contemporary American Indians in North Carolina?

**Lesson Outline**

**Part I (Ancient North Carolinians) ~1-2 40' class period**

1. Ask students what they know about American Indians in North Carolina or elsewhere in North America. Students can record what they know on the first part of the [American Indian Pottery of North Carolina: Past and Present worksheet](#). Students can share their answers with the whole class.
2. Explain that in this lesson, they will learn how the American Indians have lived in North Carolina for thousands of years which is evident in the artifacts uncovered by archaeologists. Students will be learning about some of the contemporary American Indians of North Carolina and how they are

carrying on the traditions of their ancestors in various art forms, including pottery.

3. Next, explain to the students how archaeologists have been able to tell something about the lifestyle of a group of people by the artifacts that they have found. In particular, projectile points (called arrowheads when they are attached to an arrow) tell us about the importance of hunting for ancient North Carolinians.
4. Next explain to students that they will be looking at the artifacts from the Woodland period and then answering questions about these images on their worksheets. Before they begin writing, show them some of the 3D images of these pots that are found on the Ancient North Carolinian website (<https://ancientnc.web.unc.edu/galleries/3d-gallery/woodland-pots/>). Have students share their findings about the pots found in the Woodland period. Tell the students that the time and work involved in making pottery suggests that these ancient North Carolinians were settling in areas for longer periods of time. Also, the cone-shaped bases suggested that vessels were propped directly on the fire and used for cooking.  
**Note:** It is also important to convey to students that the American Indians respected the earth and were intentional in what they created. They used only what they needed and thought about what purpose the pottery would serve before making the vessels.
5. Next students will look at the fragments of pots on their handouts and answer questions regarding these images. Once again, students can share their findings. Discuss how pots were often stamped with a variety of materials including cord wrapped paddles, cordage, netting, and corncobs. According to Cherokee potter Davy Arch, pots were made thin with a textured outside so they could expand and contract when heated and that patterns on Cherokee pottery has cultural and symbolic significance.

**Note:** For students to better understand how impressions were made in the pots, take a small amount of clay and demonstrate by impressing a textured object into the clay, such as a piece of burlap or a corncob.

More information about the pottery making of the Woodland period can be found on the Ancient North Carolinian website in the section titled Pottery Makers <https://ancientnc.web.unc.edu/exhibits/first-peoples/the-pottery-makers/>. Parts of this web page could be read together as a class to increase students understanding of the Woodland period and the pottery that was created.

6. Discuss with students the importance of American Indians of North Carolina today, that these people are still here and many are continuing the traditions of their ancestors. In particular, they will look at the tradition of making pottery.
7. Students will now compare and contrast a pot made by Ancient North Carolinians with a pot made by Senora Lynch, a member of the Haliwa-Saponi tribe. Students can share their findings.
8. Students can learn more about Senora Lynch through this video: [https://youtu.be/MYUiYM78\\_kY](https://youtu.be/MYUiYM78_kY)  
Note: In the video Senora talks about the history of her tribe and how her family taught her how to make clay. You may want to just show the parts that deal with her making pots which start at ~10' into the video.

## Part II: Art Component (2 40' class periods)

1. Direct students how to make a coiled pot. You can follow directions outlined at: <https://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Coil-Pot> or another method is to make a small pinch pot and then add coils to the pot. Students can add 2-3 layers of coils. Stress keeping coils thick to avoid cracks and coils breaking when drying. If time allows, students could add pattern or impress designs into their pots. Once pots have dried, they can be fired in a kiln. Pots can be glazed and then fired. **Note:** Remind students about how American Indians would consider the purpose of the vessels that they made (cooking and storage). Ask them to think about the purpose of their pots to help them become more intentional in the creative process.

## Part III: Closure

1. Have students fill out the last section of the handout asking what they learned and if the lesson changed their understanding of American Indians of North Carolina.

**Explore Further :** If time allows (after glazing pots) students could watch “Voices of the Sandhills” [https://ancientnc.web.unc.edu/galleries/video\\_gallery/voices-of-the-sandhills/](https://ancientnc.web.unc.edu/galleries/video_gallery/voices-of-the-sandhills/) to learn more about American Indians in North Carolina, their ancestry and their history of making pottery.

### Materials:

Students will need a copy of the [American Indian Pottery of North Carolina: Past and Present worksheet](#), pencils, clay, clay tools (sponges, water, scoring tools), kiln

[American Indian Pottery of North Carolina: Past and Present worksheet](#)

[American Indian Pottery of North Carolina: Past and Present slide deck](#)

### References:

Ancient North Carolinians. (nd). <https://ancientnc.web.unc.edu/>

Dikareva, N. (2021). *How to Make a Coil Pot*. <https://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Coil-Pot>

Peterson, S. (2009). Contemporary Pottery from North Carolina’s American Indian Communities.

*This lesson plan was created by Anne Haugh of Penderlea School as part of the 2021-2022 UNC World View Global Fellows Program. For more information about the program, please visit <http://worldview.unc.edu/>.*