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The Fur Trade Era: Exploration and Exchange in Wisconsin

Activity 4.2: Making a Birchbark Canoe

Teacher Materials

Preparation/Organization Students will work with their own copies of Student Pages 1–2 for this activity, so be sure to make copies of these pages beforehand. You will also want to have colored pencils or crayons, scissors, and paste available. Optional materials for an enrichment activity include vegetable oil and tubs of water. After initial work with the whole class, students should be divided into small groups or allowed to work as supervised individuals. (**Note:** It is a good idea to make a sample canoe of your own beforehand that you can use as a model for students.)

Procedure

1. After students have read Chapter 4 of *Wisconsin: Our State, Our Story*, conduct a discussion about birchbark canoes. Use the following questions to stimulate and guide the discussion:
 - What were birchbark canoes used for?
 - What advantages did birchbark canoes have over dugout canoes?
 - Why were birchbark canoes so popular?
2. Tell students that they will be making their own models of birchbark canoes. Explain that this will be a simple paper model but that it will have the same shape as a real birchbark canoe.
3. Pass out the “Birchbark Canoe Directions” worksheet (Student Page 1). Read through the directions with the class.
4. Next, pass out the “Birchbark Canoe Cut-Out Activity Sheet” (Student Page 2), as well as crayons or colored pencils, scissors, and paste. Model following the directions to construct a canoe. Then have students make their own canoes, reminding them to follow the directions and to proceed one step at a time. Provide students with assistance as they work.
5. When students have finished, give them time to share their work. Then discuss the completed canoes, pointing out the shape and design. Also encourage students to discuss the desirable properties of birchbark canoes:
 - Made from materials that were readily available.
 - Could be mended easily if damaged.
 - Could be easily carried over areas of water that were impassable for one reason or another (too shallow, too many rapids, waterfalls, etc.).

Enrichment You might wish to extend the activity by giving students a chance to actually float their model canoes in water. First have students paint the outside of the canoes with a coating of vegetable oil. Allow time for the oil to dry. Then fill tubs with water and have students try to float their canoes.

Answers

Student canoes will vary in quality.

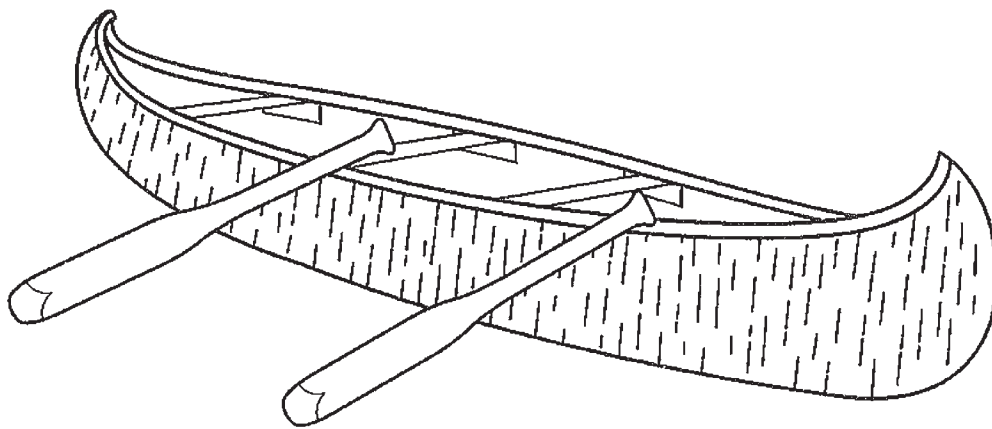
Name _____ Date _____

Activity 4.2 Making a Birchbark Canoe

Birchbark Canoe Directions

1. Use the canoe cut-out pieces on the next page and **color** the canoe pieces:
Interior (*inside*) of the canoe hull: Brown
Cross braces (*thwarts*): Brown
Paddles: Brown with Red or Yellow tips
Exterior (*outside*) of canoe hull: White
2. **Cut out** the hull. Put a thin line of glue on the edge of the bow (*front*) and press the ends together. Do the same thing with the stern (*back*) of the hull. It should start to look like a canoe.
3. **Cut out** the middle cross brace (*the longest one*) and **fold** the tab on the dotted line
4. Put a drop of glue on each dot and press to the inside middle of the hull.
5. **Cut out** the two end cross braces and **fold** each tab on the dotted line.
6. Put a drop of glue on each dot. Place one brace near the bow and place one near the stern.
7. **Fold** each paddle over on the dotted line and **glue** the paper together.
8. When the glue has dried, **cut out** the paddle shapes. **Glue** paddles to the outside of the canoe, or place them inside the canoe.

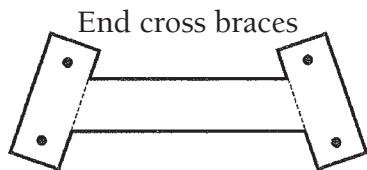
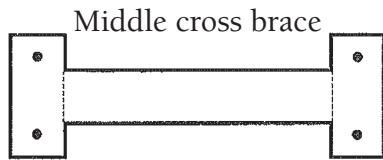
This is what your finished birchbark canoe will look like!



Name _____ Date _____

Birchbark Canoe Cut-out Activity Sheet

Cut out all pieces of the canoe.
Fold on all dotted lines.



Paddles

