

Scrimshaw Scribbles

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about art of Native Americans by recreating examples using simple materials.

MATERIALS

- paper
- pencil
- cutting board
- large, soft bar of white floating soap
- plastic knife
- black water-based paint
- paintbrush
- illustrations of scrimshaw (see Bibliography on page 24)

BACKGROUND

Many Native American artists use animal bones and ivory (*tusks*) in their art. One of the most popular uses is to carve pictures into them. The artists stain the bone or ivory to bring out the highlights of their etchings. This type of art is known as *scrimshaw*.



ACTION

1. Show illustrations of scrimshaw. Native Americans often carve animals found around them—polar bears, walruses, ravens, and whales. Discuss a few other animals students might see if they lived in the Arctic.
2. To begin the activity, place the bar of soap on the paper and have students draw an outline of the soap shape. Remove the bar of soap.
3. Students should sketch their animal on the piece of paper within the outline of the soap shape. Lines can touch the edges. Simple sketches result in the best carvings.
4. Place the soap bar on the cutting board. Use the plastic knife to scrape off the soap's brand name.
5. Place the paper sketch on the soap bar. Trace the lines on soap using the blunt side of the plastic knife.
6. Remove the paper and use the plastic knife to carve details and shape the soap.
7. After soap is carved, paint the area with black water-based paint. Allow to dry for about 5 minutes.
8. Lightly run water over the soap to remove excess paint. The paint should remain in the carved areas. Let the bar of soap dry for at least two hours.