

Penobscot Marine Museum presents

Sailors' Valentines

Students will learn the history of the shell art now known as Sailors' Valentines. They will identify where they were made, how they arrived in the United States, and why ships from Maine were able to buy them. They will understand how present-day artists obtain tropical shells, as opposed to how people obtained them 100 or more years ago. They will learn the word "octagon," use patterning to create their own Sailors' Valentine, and understand the general classification of the shells used.

Grades K – 2

Learning Results (2007) addressed by this lesson and activity:

MATHEMATICS

A1.a. Read and write numbers to 1000 using numerals.

A1.c. Compare and order one-, two-, and three-digit numbers. (Using shells)

C1.a. Identify shapes in the physical environment.

C1.b. Classify figures as circles, triangles, and quadrilaterals by focusing on their properties.

C1.c. Create shapes by using objects to combine and decompose other shapes.

C2. Students understand how to measure length and capacity and use appropriate units.

D3. Students understand how to create, identify, describe, and extend patterns given a pattern or rule.

SOCIAL STUDIES

B3.b. Compare traditions that are similar across the nation and traditions that differ in various cultural groups....

C1. Students understand the nature of economics as well as key foundation ideas.

D1.c. Use basic maps and globes to identify local and distant places and locations, directions, and basic physical, environmental, and cultural features.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

A1. Students recognize that parts work together and make up whole man-made and natural objects.

A4. Students observe differences in scale.

B2. Students use a simple design process and basic tools and materials to solve a problem or create a product.

E1. Students describe similarities and differences in the observable behaviors, features, and needs of plants and animals.

E2.b. Compare different plants and animals that live in different environments of the world.

C2.b. Distinguish between objects that occur in nature and objects that are man-made.

VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS (Visual Arts)

A1. Students recognize a variety of purposes for making art, including telling a story, communicating emotion, or beautifying functional objects.'

A2. Students identify features of composition.

B2. Students use Elements of Art and Principles of Design to create original art works.

Sailors' Valentines

Grades 3-5

Learning Results (2007):

MATHEMATICS

C1.

Grade 3: Students identify, describe, and classify familiar two-dimensional shapes.

Grade 4: Students identify and name angles, lines, relationships between lines, quadrilaterals, and triangles.

Grade 5: Students identify, describe, and classify solid figures.

C2.

Grade 3: Students understand how to find the distance around a figure.

Grade 4: Students understand the concept of area of a figure.

Grade 5: Students find the area of triangles and quadrilaterals.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

A1. Students explain interactions between parts that make up whole man-made and natural things.

A4. Students use mathematics to describe scale for man-made and natural things.

B2. Students use a design process, simple tools, and a variety of materials to solve a problem or create a product, recognizing the constraints that need to be considered.

E1. Students compare living things based on their behaviors, external features, and environmental needs.

C1. Students understand personal economics and the basis of the economies of the community, Maine, the United States, and various regions of the world. D1. Students understand the geography of the community, Maine, the United States, and various regions of the world.

E1. Students understand various major eras in the history of the community, Maine, and the United States.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS (Visual Arts)

A1. Students explain purposes for making art in different times and places, and the relationship to cultural traditions, personal expression, and communication of beliefs.

A2. Students describe features of composition.

B2. Students use Elements of Art and Principles of Design to create original art works...

How to Make a Sailors' Valentine

Learn about the history of Sailors' Valentines, how they got to Maine, and the trade routes involved. Learn about people's love of natural materials for decor in the 19th century. Practice patterning and design elements as you create your own Sailors' Valentine with a variety of tropical shells on an octagon-shaped base. Use pictures of real captains and their wives as the centerpiece, and learn something about their lives, or place a picture of yourself or a loved one in the center.



Local Shells: The most common shells available along the Maine coast will be periwinkle and dog whelk shells for snails and clam and mussel shells for bivalves.

Vendor: Sea Shell City (www.seashellcity.com). Warning--do not buy mixed packages of shells. The point of patterning is to create a specific design, so shells should be separate. Order bulk craft shells by type and size. You will need lots of small shells for filling areas.

Plastic Octagonal Plate (www.4-plasticplates.com) – Rough the inside surface of the plate with sandpaper before using a glue stick to apply a light colored paper octagon to the center of the plate. Glue the paper in preparation for the activity.

Glue: Use “tacky glue” to apply the shells to the paper. Apply glue to the entire surface and then place the shells in the desired pattern. Layout or sketch a pattern in advance on a template and refer to it when applying the shells.

History of the Sailors' Valentine

It was originally thought that the idle hours aboard the large four-masted schooners and whaling ships in the 1800's was perhaps the time and place for crafting Sailors' Valentines. However, it turned out that their creation was actually the brainstorm of two English brothers for a cottage industry on the island of Barbados. They employed local children and women to collect and make Valentines for sale to the sailors on the trade ships. Barbados was once considered the crossroads of the world and a major stopping point on long sea voyages. Here sailors could happily order or purchase a Valentine to bring back home and give to a family member or loved one. Once a few decades had passed, the Valentines began to turn up in antique shops and upon opening some of the cases to repair broken shells, it was discovered that most of them were made in Barbados.

A true Sailors' Valentine was said to include a flower or a heart in any form, and a special verse or message. Many of these pieces had messages inscribed with small seashells such as "Think of Me", "Love the Giver" and "Forever and Ever". Many of them left a space in the center for the insertion of a picture, perhaps a wedding photo or a photo of the sailor and his sweetheart. These works of art were always made in octagonal wooden boxes that represent the eight points of the nautical Compass Rose. They were often two sided (double) and hinged in the center, covered with a glass overlay and frequently closed with a heart shaped lock. When closed, the shell work is hidden and the glass protected so that the Valentines could be stored safely for travel. It has been discovered that other Valentines were made during the Victorian era and were later described as "fancy work for ladies". Possibly some of the shells used in these pieces were gathered by sailors on their sea journeys. Some of the antique vintage Valentines sell for as much as \$80,000 and upwards. This makes Valentine current prices seem moderate and affordable in comparison, especially for an art form so beautiful that it has withstood the true test of time.