



## Lesson Plan

### Embroidery, Beading, and Tufting

#### You Will Need:

General classroom materials: paper, pencil, eraser, markers, scissors,  
Specialty materials: burlap, pony beads, plastic needles, yarn  
Optional: masking tape, white glue, or acrylic paint

#### Where to get the specialty materials locally:

An Art Kit containing a class set of specialty materials is available from the Richmond Art Gallery for \$100 however you can purchase these supplies online or at the following stores:

Plastic beading needles and yarn – Michaels  
Pony beads – Creative Children Educational or Michaels  
Burlap fabric – Dressew Supply or Michaels

#### Procedure:

Review the background information and introduce students to the art practice of embroidery, beading, and caribou hair tufting.

Show the Parks Canada video [The Flower Beadwork People](#) (5 minutes) to introduce the history of Métis beading.

Show the gallery video [Caribou Tufting](#) (23 minutes). In this video, artist Michelle Sound describes her background and art practice, and shows examples of beading and tufting. She then describes the materials used and gives a demonstration of caribou hair tufting. Ask students to take note of the following:

- What materials are used in these artworks? (caribou fur, smoked hide, caribou antler, porcupine quills, beads, rabbit fur, chicken feathers, musk ox tusk etc.)
- What items typically have tufting and beading applied to them? (earrings, brooches, hair clips, regalia, and items of clothing)

After the video, have a class discussion about the artist presentation. Some questions:

- What do the materials used have in common?
- Why do you think these materials were used by Indigenous and Métis peoples?
- What textures do these materials have? (fluffy, shiny, smooth, rough etc.)
- What do the items that are beaded have in common? (They have cultural meanings (regalia) and are decorative items.)
- Look around the room – do you see any items with images and patterns applied to them? What materials are used to create the images and patterns?

## Making the artwork



Show the first 3 minutes of the [video art lesson](#) that demonstrates drawing out your design. Making your own sample prior to the art lesson that you can let students see and touch is ideal, and you can also show the images above and of sample student work including beading and sewing included at the end of this lesson to help generate ideas.

Share the following design tips with students:

- Sketch out your design first on paper
- Keep the picture LARGE and fairly SIMPLE
- Leave a 2 cm border around the edge of the burlap (do not draw to the edges)
- Use a light coloured marker
- Think about which part of the design will be made of yarn, which part will be made of beads, and include at least one pom pom in the design.

Tape the outer edges of the burlap by folding the masking tape over the edges to seal them. Optionally, glue or paint the edges (see finishing touches at the end of this lesson)

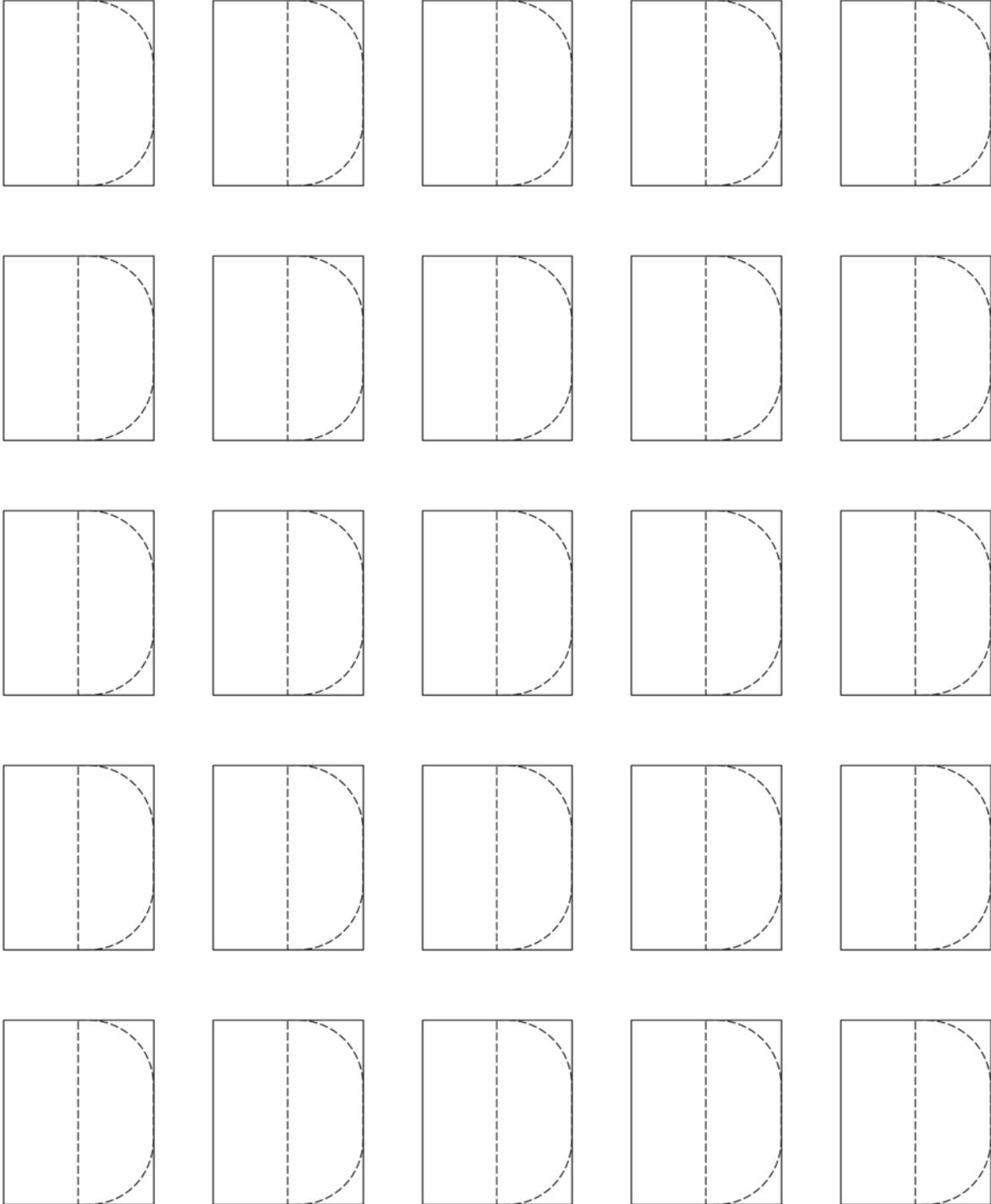
Show the next section of the [video art lesson](#) from timecode 2:38-4:20 that demonstrates threading your needle with yarn using a folded piece of cardstock as a threader. Have each student make their own or create a class set of threaders using the template at the end of this lesson.

For the remainder of the lesson, either show the rest of the video as instruction, or watch it ahead of time and teach the students the steps in person.



## Threader Template

Print this template on cardstock, cut out the rectangles, fold in half, then trim the corners to create a "hot dog bun" shaped threader.



## Finishing Touches

The advantage of using burlap for embroidery is that large dull needles can be used rather than sharp metal needles, however unfortunately the edges fray easily. One approach is to tape the edges with masking tape. For a more permanent solution, you can seal and trim the edges of the burlap. There are two ways to approach this.

### Sealing the edges with glue

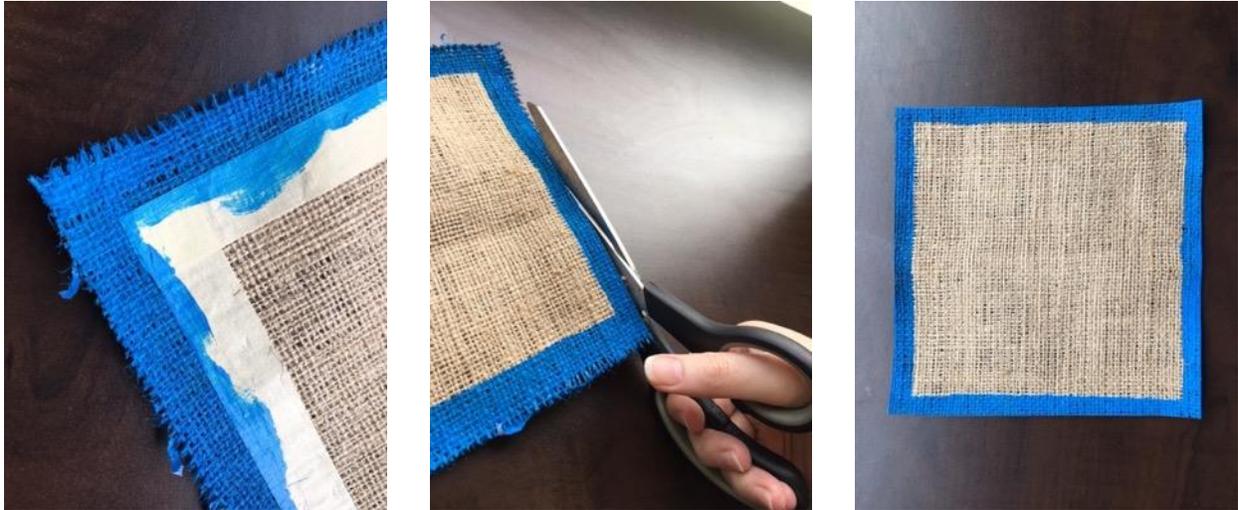


Regular white glue can be applied and spread on the edges of the burlap to seal the fibres. After drying overnight, the edges can be trimmed. The glue can be applied to the outer edges of the burlap as above, or in a shape if you wish the final piece to be cut out, as shown below.



## Sealing the edges with Acrylic Paint

The edges can also be sealed with acrylic paint to add a coloured border. First tape off the edge to be painted with masking tape, then using a stiff paintbrush paint the edges of the burlap, ensuring you add enough paint to soak into the fibres completely. Please note, you cannot substitute water-based types of paint such as tempera as it is the plastic medium in acrylic paint that seals the fibres. Dry the pieces overnight. Once dry, trim the edges with a scissors.



## Classroom or School Installation

Once the individual artworks are finished and sealed, discuss with your class the ways the pieces can be displayed at the school. The pieces can be combined to make a larger whole, such as a quilt, or combined and hung to create three dimensional elements, such as columns. Pieces can be combined through sewing, safety pins, clothes pins, tape, or glue.

## Example student artwork images

These are some examples of student artwork created at the Richmond Art Gallery during workshops held in February of 2020, and through an outreach project with the students of Quilchena Elementary in November 2020 in response to the *Labour's Trace* exhibition. Unfortunately, there are no examples including tufting as these workshops were limited by time.



## Background Information

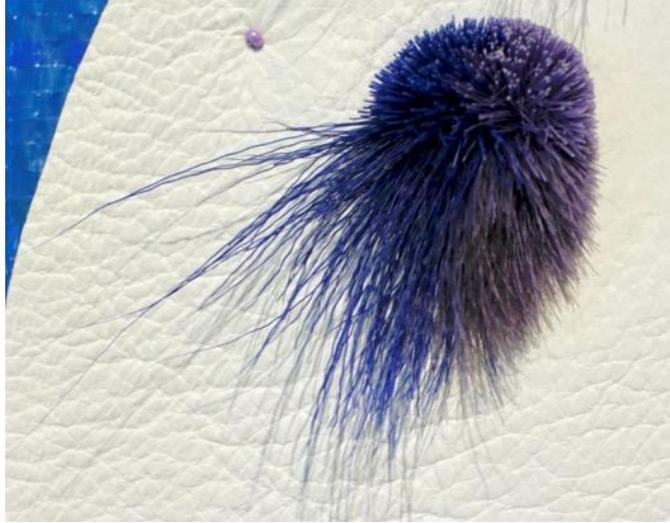
For this project, we will be learning about the techniques of embroidery, beading, and caribou tufting. The combination of these three techniques was developed into an incredibly beautiful artform by Indigenous and Métis artists and these techniques are still being practiced today by contemporary Canadian artists such as Amy Malbeuf.

Embroidery means to create a picture or design by stitching coloured threads onto a piece of fabric. It is an incredibly old art form, with archaeological evidence dating back to 30,000 BCE! The term comes from the French word *broderie* meaning embellishment. Originally, Indigenous artists in North America used all-natural materials such as sinew, bone, shells, porcupine quills, and fur to create decorative designs on clothing, jewelry, household items, and regalia using the techniques of beading, embroidery, and tufting. When glass beads and coloured silk thread manufactured in Europe became available, these new materials were incorporated into traditional techniques and designs. In addition to embellishing their own items, Indigenous and Métis artists created items for sale or trade, and this art form became an important source of income for communities. The Métis became so well known for their beadwork they were often called the Flower Beadwork People, as their beadwork featured floral designs.

Contemporary Canadian artists are continuing the traditions of their ancestors but are also creating new meanings from the use of these materials and techniques. One such artist is Amy Malbeuf who is a Métis visual artist from Rich Lake, Alberta. Her work embodies many aspects of Métis cultural identity, such as the techniques of beading and tufting, the use of traditional materials such as leather and fur, and the value of respect for the natural environment. However, Malbeuf expands beyond the traditional with the use of modern materials such as plastic tarps, and by commenting on current issues such as the value of women's labour and the environmental impact of the oil and gas industry in her home province of Alberta. Here are a few examples of her work featured in the Richmond Art Gallery exhibition *Labour's Trace*.



Traditionally beading and tufting was done by women and became an important source of income as these beautifully decorated items could be traded or sold. A humble pouch or bag would become very valuable through the addition of these beaded designs, and in these works shown above, Amy Malbeuf is bringing attention to the value of women's labour. By beading ordinary items such as a plastic tarp or cardboard box, she is reminding us of the history of Métis and Indigenous women's contributions, both artistically and economically.



The images shown above are examples of tufting, in which animal hair is tied together in clumps and sewn onto fabric or leather. The hair is then trimmed evenly to create a sphere shape such as the example on the left or cut to different lengths and coloured with dye as shown in the example on the right. The ideal hair to use for this technique comes from the caribou because caribou hair is hollow and when it is tied together it sticks out in all directions creating a puffball or pom-pom shape. In addition to creating tufts with caribou hair, Amy Malbeuf has created sculptural images of animals by cutting the hair to different lengths as shown in the examples below. The three animals shown, *Arctic Grayling*, *Woodland Caribou*, and *Whooping Crane* are all native to Alberta, and each animal is now endangered due to loss of habitat due to oil and gas extraction. Amy has added lines of embroidered grey tarp in the background which represent the oil pipelines that traverse the Alberta landscape.



For more information on Amy Malbeuf's work in the *Labours Trace* exhibition and for a virtual video tour and artist interview, visit the Richmond Art Gallery's [website](http://www.richmondartgallery.org).

Page 7: Amy Malbeuf, *Tarp 2017* (detail), 2017, Beadwork on tarp

*Box 2017* (detail), 2017, Glass and plastic beads on cardboard box

Page 8: Amy Malbeuf, *Beginnings* (detail), 2017, Caribou hair, deer hair, moose hair, silk, glass beads, and buckskin on polyurethane tarp  
*Woodland Caribou*, *Arctic Grayling*, *Whooping Crane*, 2018, Caribou hair sculpturing and polyurethane tarp on velvet

## About The Artists



**Amy Malbeuf** is a Métis visual artist from Rich Lake, Alberta. Utilizing materials such as caribou hair tufting, beadwork, installation, performance, and video, Malbeuf explores notions of identity, place, language, and ecology. Malbeuf has exhibited her work nationally and internationally and has participated in many international artist residencies. Malbeuf holds an MFA in Visual Art from the University of British Columbia Okanagan. In 2016 Malbeuf received a Lieutenant Governor of Alberta Emerging Artist Award and a William and Meredith Saunderson Prize for Emerging Artists in Canada from the Hnatyshyn Foundation and was long listed for the 2017 Sobey Art Award.

**Amy Malbeuf's Website:** [amymalbeuf.ca](http://amymalbeuf.ca)



**Michelle Sound** is Swan River First Nation Cree and Red River Métis born and raised in Coast Salish territory. She completed her Bachelor of Fine Arts at Simon Fraser University, School for the Contemporary Arts, and her Master of Applied Arts from Emily Carr University Art + Design. Michelle is currently the Aboriginal Program Assistant at Emily Carr. Michelle has exhibited her artwork in *Pushing Boundaries; Contemporary Indigenous Art, The Talking Stick Festival: Kwèykw`áystway: Speaking With One Another* and a public art piece in *nākateyimisowin/Taking Care of Oneself*, Ottawa-2018, Curated by Joi Arcand. Photo: Sweetmoon Photography

**Michelle Sound's Website:** [michellesound.art](http://michellesound.art)

### Artists with work shown in the tufting video

Skye Paul, Dene: <https://www.instagram.com/runningfoxbeads/>

Kaylyn Baker, Tutchone and Tlingit: <https://www.instagram.com/nanamomma/>

Catherine Blackburn, Dene: <https://www.instagram.com/catherinejewellery/>

Tahltan and Kaska Artist/Sisters @cjakesta @ndncia: <https://www.instagram.com/tahltanregalia/>

Carmen Miller, Métis: <https://www.instagram.com/carmen.miller.bluecaribou/>

Tania Larsson, Gwich'in: <https://www.instagram.com/tania.larsson/>

Vashti Etzel, Dene: <https://www.instagram.com/goldeneyedesigns/>