

Make a Pueblo Style Shield Activity and Video

Part 1: Brief History of Pueblo Shields

Pueblo shields were a tool used in warfare, but it wasn't a weapon. It was a tool used for defensive purposes. When taken into battle the shield was used to distract the attacker and it was used to deflect the attacker's arrow, rock, or war club. Shields have been in use for hundreds and hundreds of years.

The cultures at the earliest of shield use were the Fremont and Ancestral Pueblo, and the best evidence of shields is not in shields themselves, but depictions of shields on rocks and kiva murals that date to much earlier times than most shields.

Different types of rock art (petroglyphs and rock paintings) show depictions of shield use (Schaafsma 2002, Leblanc 1999). The earliest depictions come from rock paintings from the Fremont area in southeastern Utah, and in the northern Ancestral Pueblo area (northeastern Arizona and northwestern New Mexico). Archaeologists associate these paintings and petroglyphs with archaeological sites that date within the Pueblo III period (ca.1100-1300), but more towards the latter part. The images depicted in the rock art consist of shields, or round objects that appear to be shields, concentric circles, and in some instances, shield petroglyphs consisting of the shield itself, two legs, a head, and sometimes with arms coming out from the sides (Figure 1). Shields can sometimes be discovered in sites that have good preservation.



Figure 1. Schaafsma 2000

Excavations from three early sites have yielded shields made like baskets. These shields are from Mummy Cave in Canyon de Chelly, Aztec Ruin, and Mesa Verde, and are associated with shield petroglyphs (Schaafsma 2000). The basket shields were made of willow rods sewn together in a coil by yucca string; no other shields have been found like this. These shields would not survive very well in the archaeological record, because the materials will deteriorate fast over a long period of time. These are probably the earliest type of shield. They measured around 31 inches in diameter. Later on in time these will be replaced with hide shields: single layer and double layer shields which were typically 24 inches in diameter.

The single layer shield consists of just one piece of hide from a buffalo, elk, or deer. Hides that are often too thin require another layer of hide to thicken and harden the shield. Double layer shields comprise of two pieces of leather sewn together with either sinew or thin strands of leather in a style known as blind stitching. This type of stitching involves a threaded needle to go in between each piece of leather without piercing through to the opposite side (Figure .2). The shield maker would stitch several rings, starting from the center, outward. The shield would then be finished with a cobbler's stitch (Figure 3) that goes around the rim. In

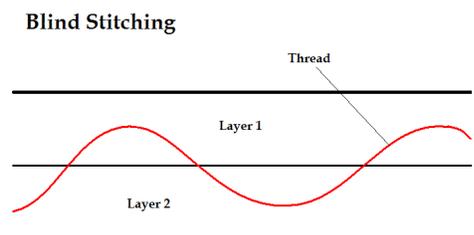


Figure 2.

comparison, Spanish shields (adargas) brought in the 16th century by the soldiers of the Spanish Empire, were double-lobed and had an image of their royal crest on the front. Their handles were two loops that wrapped around the arm near the elbow and one was for the hand. Pueblo shields were held by a neck strap that hung around the neck and back to the side, and a handle was used to hold the shield up (Figure 4).

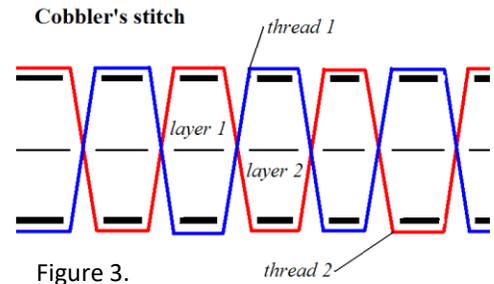


Figure 3.

Pueblo shields had many variations in decoration. Common design elements include the following: stars, horizontal bands, mountain lions, the color red, and horns. Most Pueblo people associated these types of designs with war, because these designs are painted onto an object that was used for

warfare and warfare related activities. Some elements of shield designs may also represent the animal in which they made the shield with. Figure 5 shows a shield with horn elements which I think represents the buffalo, and the shields that have this element may be made of buffalo hide. The buffalo is very sacred being not only just to the Plains people, but also to all Pueblo people. We honor it every year in special dances which each Pueblo has its own style dance. Figure 6 shows a buffalo dancer dressed in the skin and horns of the



Figure 4.

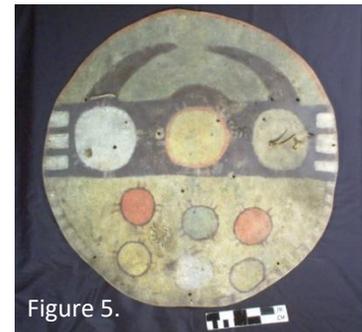


Figure 5.

Some horizontal bands like the one in Figure 7 may represent the wingspan of a raptor of some kind (eagle or hawk) as is shown by rock art that actually have the tail and the head with a three-circled band as wings (Figure 9).

Pueblo people no longer use shields like this but are still held in high regard because of why they were made, warfare. We no longer have quarrels and battles in order to need these shields, but we still remember the times of the past when we didn't get along with other groups of people.



Figure 6. Curtis 1926



Figure 7. Schaafsma 2000

Part II: Make a Pueblo Style Shield Activity and Video

(With adult supervision)

1. Watch accompanying video
2. Find any large piece of cardboard (from a TV, Fridge, etc.)
3. Cut out a 12 or 24 inch circle, depending on the size of cardboard
4. Using the diagrams below, mark where the holes will be. For the handle, mark the holes to the width of your hand (3 inches). The shoulder strap holes should be between the handle and the outer edge. Figure A
5. Carefully poke holes with the pencil
6. Cut the strings. 3 pieces for the handle and shoulder strap ties, 15 inches long. 1 piece 24 inches long for the shoulder strap.
7. Put the string through the holes and tie to make a loop. You should now have one handle in the center and 2 strap loops beside the handle. Figure B.
8. Now tie the shoulder strap to the loops. Figure C
9. Decorate your shield. Shields are meant to protect you. Draw, paint or color something or someone that you feel would help protect you from danger.

Materials needed:

Large Cardboard
Pencil
Scissors
String or rope
Art supplies

Figure A

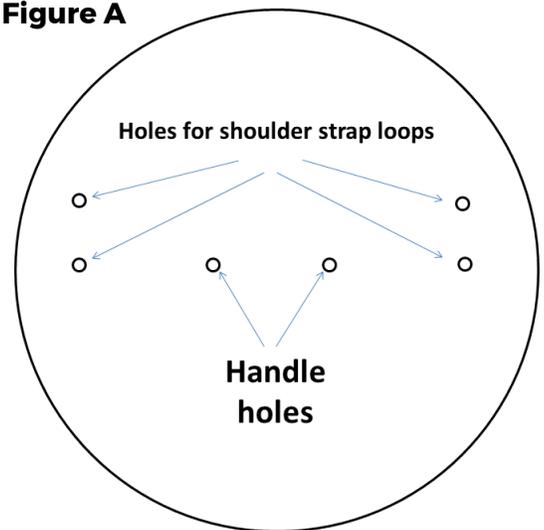


Figure B

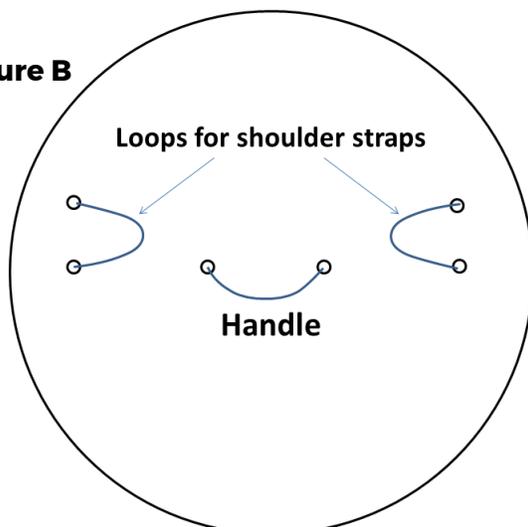


Figure C

