Folk Arts

Skill Builders

1. Read several folk tales from different countries. Determine how the climate and geography of the area play key roles in the story. Look for characters that personify elements of nature. What impact do these characters have on the lives of the other characters? Create a presentation of the folk tale for younger Girl Scouts, and lead a discussion about it afterward.

2. Design beadwork or other ornamental jewelry. The tools and materials you use are key. For starters, you will have to select a suitable thread. A standard necklace is 18-20 inches, and a choker is 14-16 inches. Silk, cotton, or nylon threads will accommodate most beads. Experiment with making different kinds of knots on the ends of several threads. Try stringing beads in different weights and choosing beads of various styles and from different cultures. What other materials will you need? Put together a list and purchase what you can. Perhaps share the cost with friends. Once you've tested and mastered the materials, you can focus on design. Look at pictures of distinct styles, such as African or Venetian beads.

3. Develop paper-mache masks to represent mythological characters from different parts of the world. Use these masks in a performance for younger children, such as a play or puppet show, or display them in a folk history or folk arts show.

4. Write your own fairy tale based on a particular culture, or rewrite an old favorite. Put the heroes through tests of strength and character. What struggles do they overcome? What rewards do they reap? Read at least three or four famous fairy tales, such as those by the Brothers Grimm or Hans Christian Andersen, for inspiration.

5. Interview one or more people who are attempting to preserve ancient examples of folk art for museums, for profit, or for their own personal pleasure. Look over a collection and discuss with your troop or group members the appeal of each piece and the techniques necessary to care for and preserve such art.

6. Make an object in the folk arts tradition that requires a painting technique. For example, work on a box, a certificate, or a piece of furniture.

7. Hold a storytelling hour in a local library or school. Read a selection of folk tales. Be dramatic! Use props such as slides, puppets, or sound effects. Leave time for discussion.

8. Make a collection to show the variety of design found in one type of folk art, such as baskets, religious symbols, woven cloth, or pottery. If you can obtain pieces made in other countries, you may even have an international collection. Use photographs or illustrations if you do not have examples of the actual objects.

9. Host a folk song session in your local park or other community area with your troop or group, a friend, or neighborhood center. Invite people to share and sing folk songs together. Distribute the song lyrics.

10. Teach or demonstrate folk dances at a senior citizens' center.

Folk arts and folk tales have existed throughout time in all cultures. Folk tales are stories that illustrate natural phenomena. Folk arts reflect the stories, myths, and symbols of a culture and are expressed in objects such as cooking utensils, textiles, and toys. Folk songs and dances reveal the mysteries of nature and the complexities of culture. Exploring the many facets of folk arts helps us understand and appreciate cultures around the world.

Explore the art of collecting. There are many people who collect folk art objects. How do they store, preserve, and display their collections? Visit at least two museums exhibit folklore and folk objects. Historical museums and universities, as well as art museums, house such collections.

Find out about careers in curating art conservation from the education department of a major museum or the fine arts department of a college, through research online, or by talking to professional artists and craftspersons. If possible, observe a conservation project in progress.

For fun, make something "fouzy" for your home, like a weather vane, stenciled wallpaper for your bedroom, or a decorative jewelry box. Develop your interest in folk arts in an ongoing hobby. For additional information, read the section on hobbies in the Cadette Girl Scout Handbook or on the arts and music in A Resource Book for Senior Girl Scouts.

To further your appreciation of folk arts, try these related interest projects:

- Collecting
- Museum Discovery
- Visual Arts
- Artistic Crafts
- Women Through Time
- Reading
- Once Upon a Story