

Folk Arts



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.

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 Learn how to hook a rug by reading books that offer instruction on the subject or by taking a course. Obtain the supplies and tools you will need. Look at pictures in books or visit a museum that displays rugs from different cultures, for example, Persian or Navajo rugs. Design a rug. Describe the fibers you would use or get actual samples.

3 Develop papier-mâché 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 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 of 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.

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.

Technology

1 Make a quilt from start to finish. It could be small enough for a baby carriage or large enough for your bed. Choose a design pattern from one of the many fine fashion design programs now available via computer.

2 Find at least two computer programs that can be used to design folk art. Use a design on fabrics or articles of clothing. What method do you use to transfer the design to the fabric?

3 Find out about the technology of music and sound recording. Interview two professional musicians, music archivists, or recording engineers. How are old records or tapes preserved? Solo or with partners, sing and record on tape your favorite folk music.

4 Interview one or more people who are attempting to preserve antique 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.

Service Projects

1 Put on a folk arts festival in your community. Invite neighbors, friends, art students, and professional artists or crafts people to set up booths with crafts to view or do in a variety of areas: for example, macramé, hooked rugs, woven baskets, beadwork, batik, quilting, decorative wooden objects, painted furniture, pottery, tinware, and carved soapstone.

2 Hold a storytelling hour at 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.

3 Make a collection to show the varieties 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.

4 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!

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

Career Exploration

1 Shadow a professional in the folk arts field for one day. It could be an artist, a writer, an oral historian, a teacher, a musician, or an archivist at a museum. Take notes on what she does and the skills needed in her field.

2 Read a biography or work of a famous anthropologist such as Ruth Benedict or Margaret Mead. Where and how did they work? Discuss the book in a book discussion group or troop meeting. Or read a work by a famous folklorist or writer of fairy tales.

3 Learning about the traditional customs, folk tales, dances, art forms, and legends of a culture is one of the tasks that cultural anthropologists engage in. Call a local college's department of anthropology for the name of a professor of anthropology to interview. Ask her about her fieldwork or academic research. What does she observe or look for?

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

5 Find out about careers in curating and 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 craftspeople. If possible, observe a conservation project in progress.

And Beyond

FOR FUN, MAKE SOMETHING "FOLKSY" for your home, like a weather vane, stenciled wallpaper for your bedroom, or a decorative jewelry box.

Develop your interest in folk arts into 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