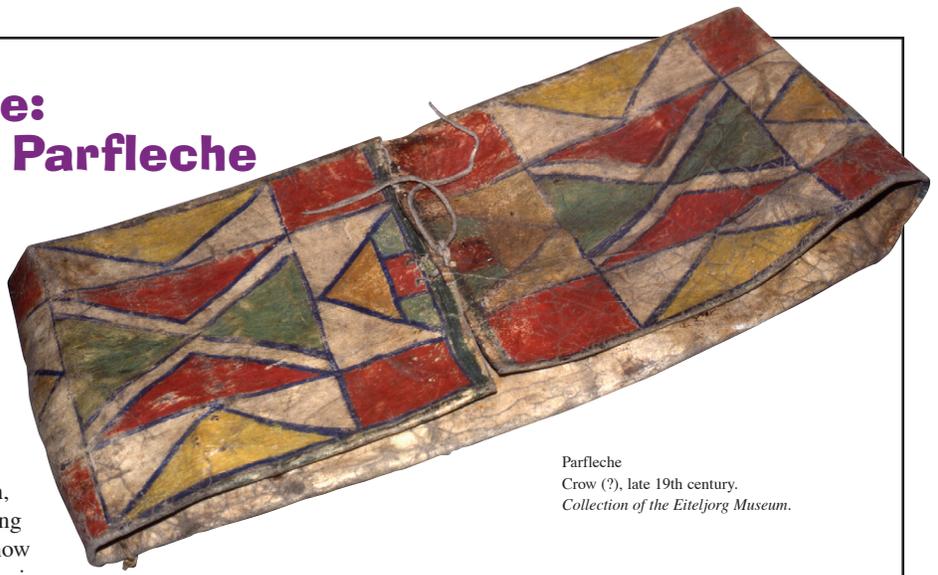


Sacagawea's Suitcase: Create a Plateau-like Parfleche

Sacagawea, Shoshone guide to the Lewis and Clark expedition, was a teenaged mother who carried her child in a protective cradleboard and her belongings in parfleches. Native peoples of the Plateau and Plains used parfleches, which are lightweight, decorated containers, to move household items. They were made from animal rawhide, a common resource in both regions. This art tradition continues even today.

Parfleche (pronounced: PAR flesh) was the word the French gave to rawhide. The French observed how tough, thick hide shields could parry (from French *parer* meaning “to ward off”) a *flèche* (French for arrow). The word is now used more often to mean a rawhide container. A parfleche is tough, lightweight, sturdy, durable and water resistant.

Designs on parfleches identify the owner or maker. Sacagawea's parfleche may have had Hidatsa geometric designs, from the group which she was living when she met Lewis and Clark in November 1804.



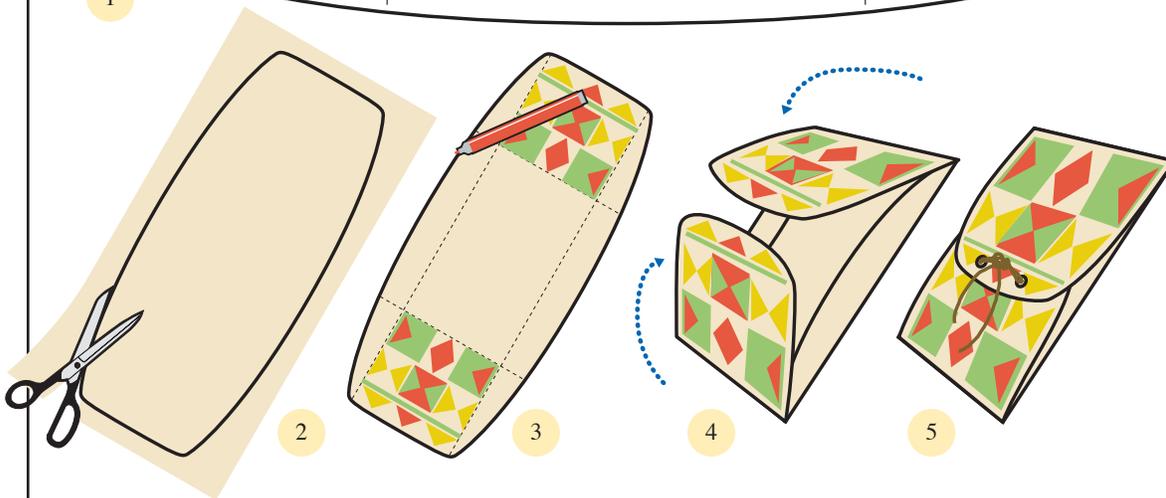
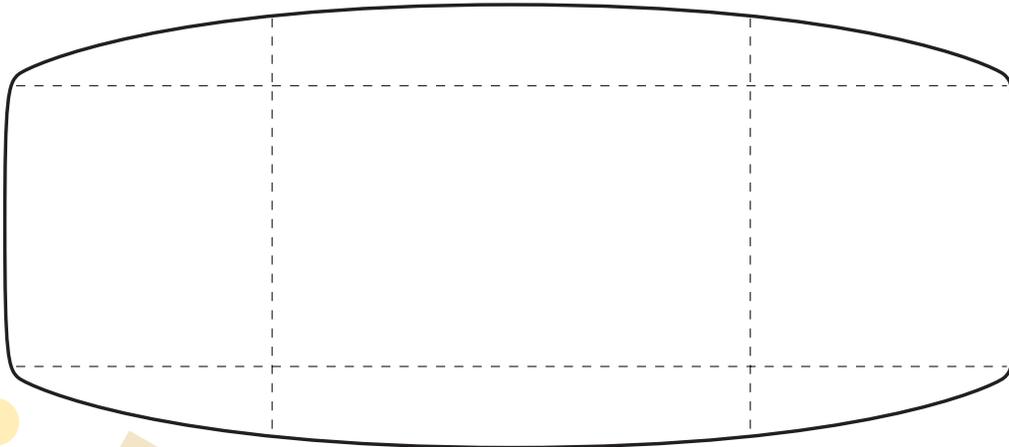
Parfleche
Crow (?), late 19th century.
Collection of the Eiteljorg Museum.

Materials

- Ⓞ Heavy paper
- Ⓞ Copier
- Ⓞ Markers, colored pencils, crayons
- Ⓞ Hole punch
- Ⓞ Yarn, string or fake sinew (waxed nylon twine)
- Ⓞ Scissors

Instructions

1. Copy template onto heavy paper, enlarging the design and erasing the fold marks, if desired, or trace around the shape.
2. Cut out the shape.
3. Draw designs on the two areas that will become the top flaps. Linear geometric designs are traditional. See what happens if you are limited to three colors; just a few colors are used on authentic parfleches.
4. Fold up toward the blank side—first the long sides, then the outside flaps.
5. Punch holes to tie, if desired.



Optional: You can try this activity with real rawhide. Look for thin rawhide at leather or craft stores. Thin hide from deer or goats, often sold for drum heads, will work for a smaller parfleche. Cut out the shape with craft shears. Moisten the hide and use a nail to score fold lines and to scratch lines into the design surface area. Moisten once more and fold. Place the hide, wrapped in a paper towel, under a phone book with a brick on top to dry. If the dried hide is slick, rub it with sandpaper to get a “tooth” for the design. Use colored pencils on the dry parfleche.

A sampling of connections to IDOE Academic Standards:

Visual Art: History and Production, all grades, Standards 1, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13. Social Studies: 3.3.3, 3.3.7, places, environment 3.5.3, 3.5.4, contributions of artists, crafts, languages, use of community resources, 4.1.1, 4.1.6, 5.1, 1-10, 5.1.19, 5.3.2-3, 5.3.4-5, 5.3.6-7, 5.3.10-11. 5.5. Language Arts: Grade 3 and up Standard 7. Mathematics: (Geometry) 3.4, 4.4, 4.4 use and knowledge of geometric shapes.