

Name:

Native American Inspired Totem Poles

History of Totem Poles

The carving of totem poles is an ancient Native American tradition found primarily in the northwest along the coast of Alaska and British Columbia. Animal and human figures on the totem poles tell stories and honor the heritage of the clan it belongs to. Common symbols are the eagle, raven, beaver, fox, bear, and frog. Due to the nature of the materials, totem poles decay over time. This is viewed as a natural part of the process of all living things.



Totem poles are carved from red cedar trees by skilled artists and craftsmen. Traditional tools were made from hard stone, bone, antler, shell, or even beaver teeth! Extra appendages (arms, legs, wings, beaks, etc.) are made separately and attached with dowels and glue. Traditional paint colors used to decorate totem poles are black, red, and turquoise. Other colors like brown, white, green, and yellow can also be found. Colors and carving styles vary by clan.

The raising of a totem pole is a large ceremony called a “potlatch” that involves the whole community. The base of a totem pole is burned to resist rot before the pole is raised by hand, with many men using ropes and wooden scaffolding to pull the pole into place. The raising of a totem pole is a celebration. There is drumming, singing, dancing, storytelling, and feasting. Neighboring clans are invited and it is a time for the chief of a clan to build his social standing and exhibit his wealth and prosperity.

Design and Construction

1. You will begin by designing your Totem Pole. What story will you tell? What animals will you use as symbols? Begin with a list of the animals you might like to include. Make notes on what they symbolize.

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2. Choose 2 or 3 animals from your list to represent you in your totem pole. Think carefully about how they will connect to create a unified design. Create 2 **or more thumbnail sketches** of your ideas.

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3. Using recycled containers, wire, cardboard, newspaper, and tape to build the **armature** (or skeleton) for your totem pole.
 - Be sure to consider how your totem pole looks from all angles; you are creating a **3-dimensional** sculpture that can be viewed from all sides.
4. Use **plaster tape** to cover the armature. Be sure to overlap the pieces and smooth them as you apply each piece.
5. Allow your project to dry. Use acrylic paint to decorate and add **texture** and **details** to your sculpture.



Resources:

<http://gocalifornia.about.com/od/ak/a/totempole.htm>

http://www.nativeaccess.com/ancestral/totems_1.html

<http://www.totem-pole.net/>

<http://www.crystalinks.com/totempoles.html>