



Arts and Entertainment

Totem Poles

Totem poles are an artform developed by Native Americans on the Pacific coast of the United States and Canada. A totem pole is created by carving figures into a large cedar tree trunk. The figures are usually painted black, white, red, green, green-blue, and yellow.

Together, the figures on the totem pole tell a story. The story could be a legend, the history of a family, or a depiction of an important event. In the past, a family member would interpret the symbols on the pole to tell the story.

Poles were also carved to ridicule or shame a person. If a person did not repay a debt, his or her image might be carved upside down on one of the poles and displayed for everyone to see. However, in most cases, totem poles were carved for more positive reasons, such as welcoming visitors or marking the grave of an important person.

Some Native American artists still make totem poles today. They follow traditional methods and do not use modern tools such as chain saws or electric drills.

Color the totem pole in the traditional Native American colors mentioned above. Then complete the caption below.

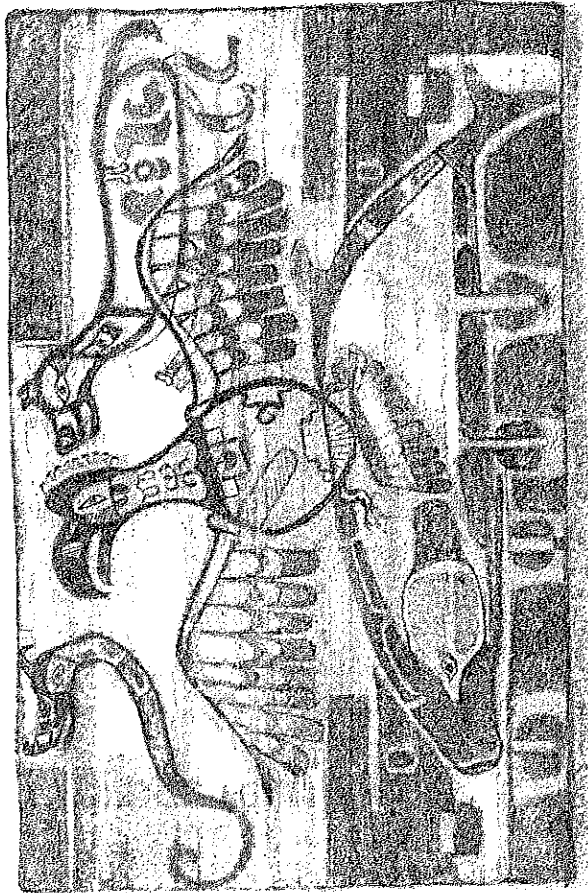
I think this totem pole tells a story about _____



Note: If possible, find additional examples in reference books to share with the class.

Artists of the Northwest Coast

Most native North American peoples believed that everyone could be an artist. But not on the coast of the Pacific Northwest. There, the Haida, Tlingit, Nootka, and Kwakwaka'wakw nations had specially trained professional artists. Their art had to adhere to specific rules. These artists created paintings, carvings, weavings, and totem poles for the wealthy leaders of these nations. Owning this art was a sign of status and prestige.



This drawing shows a picture painted on a wood plank by a Nootka artist of Vancouver Island around 1850. It shows a thunderbird, whale, wolf, and snake. Notice the thick, curving lines. There are blocks of color and patterns that real animals don't actually have. The colors most often used were black, brown, gray, white, yellow, and red.

Make Your Own Nootka-Style Drawings

Here are the outlines of two animals, a bear and a fish. Use what you have learned about the style used by the Northwest Indians to finish the drawings. Add lines and patterns; make the lines dark so that they really show up. Then color the drawings using black, brown, gray, white, yellow, and red.

