

## Wampum Beadwork



Northeastern Native Americans made beads from shells. Some made purple and white beads from the quahog shell. Known as wampum, these had special significance. The beads might be strung or woven. The beads were used to show the importance of what was being said and also used as a memory aid. The designs reminded individuals of important events and could be read back to the people. The Iroquois Confederacy used wampum. The Oneida were part of the Confederacy and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century some of the Oneida moved to Wisconsin.

## Hiawatha Belt or Five Nations Belt



Examples from Oneida Nation (<https://oneida-nsn.gov>)



Quahog shell

## Porcupine Quillwork



Native Americans, among both the eastern and plain tribes, used porcupine quills to decorate clothing and accessories like bags, boxes and baskets. The quills were wrapped, twisted, or sewn and were usually dyed. It is very time consuming and delicate work. The quill is only 2-3 inches, the ends aren't visible and the pieces need to be soaked so they are pliable and then flattened. Using natural dyes, the quills could be blue, purple, black, yellow or left creamy white.

Men's moccasins with quill and beadwork, 1900. Woman's dress, 1906. South Dakota Public Broadcasting, Images of the Past series



Ojibwe quillwork on birch bark box



Lakota baby bonnet, quill work, 1900. National Museum of the American Indian.

### **Glass Beads**

With the introduction of glass beads, Native Americans adapted their traditional designs and styles to the new material. Glass beads were more durable and easier to work with than quills and more plentiful than the laboriously produced shell beads. Different tribes had different styles and color preferences. Some designs were more geometric and others more naturalistic. Beads could be sewn onto the backing like the floral designs on the Ojibwe bag or woven with small looms to make panels or strips.



Ojibwe bag and Menomonie bandolier.  
Milwaukee Public Museum

## Create Your Design

### Wampum? Quills? Glass Beads?

You can do a little research. What designs were popular among the different tribes? Are you interested in Plains tribes or the Great Lakes area? What colors were available? What kind of designs were used and what objects were decorated?

You can create your design using graph paper. Woven designs would fill each space of the graph paper. The purple color wampum beads were scarcer than the white beads. Will your design use symbols that send a message? Quill designs tend to be rectangular. The quill might cover two or more squares on your graph paper. Individually sewn on beads had more open space but still were somewhat restricted by the size and the shape of the beads.

Decide if you are doing a loom design or a spot stitch design like the floral ones shown. Outline on your graph paper the shape you want for your work. Select your colors. Fill in each square as if it is one bead. In a loom design you will fill in each square. In a sewn design, you will fill in your background color once you are done.



Ojibwe moccasins and bandolier bag. Morrison County Historical Society, MN and Fox & Sauk breechcloth, Milwaukee Public Museum



