



EARLY AMERICAN WOODWORKING

Subject Area: Social Sciences

Core Curriculum Content Standards: 2.5.A, 3.3.A, 3.4.A, 4.2.A, 5.1.A,
5.5.A & B, 5.10.A & B, 6.1.A, 6.4.A & D, 6.5.A & B, 6.6.E, 9.2.C

Description:

This hands-on session takes place in the School of Conservation's 150 year old Carriage House. After a discussion of the colonial period, and a look at tree types and felling practices, students will use colonial tools to complete a group or individual project.

Objectives:

1. Students will use colonial tools to make a bootjack, a coat rack, or a candleholder.
2. Students will compare and contrast colonial tools with corresponding modern tools.
3. Students will compose a description of a colonial woodworker based on their experiences using the colonial tools.
4. Students will justify the value of trees and wood to both colonial and modern people.

Materials Needed:

drawknives several sticks of wood for use with drawknives shaving horses lathe
chisel augers cross-cut saw felling axe froe and froe club several quarters of
wood for froeing peavey spud wedge mallet *Tree-Felling* card *Early
Workers of Wood* cards *World of Wood* card *For Every Need* card *Modern Tool
equivalents* cards *Tool Evolution* notebook *Museum of Early American Tools* notebook

Procedures:

1. Begin by demonstrating two colonial tools that have practical names: the *drawknife* and the *shaving horse*. Have students try to guess the names of the tools. *What are the uses of these tools? How are they powered? How might a colonial person have used even the smallest shavings that fell from the wood?*
2. Show students the *lathe*. *What would this tool be used for? How is it powered?* Inform them that a woodworker who used a lathe to make bowls, chair parts, and wheel hubs had a special name—he was called a *turner*. If there is time, play the *Early Workers of Wood* match game. *Do they know anyone with a last name that describes an ancestor's job?* Choose two students to demonstrate the use of the drawknife and lathe.
3. Ask students what time period they think the tools are from. Introduce them to the colonial period and to woodworking by showing them items a colonial woodworker might have made. *What would he have needed to know in order to make these items?* (what tools to use, how to use them, which kind of wood to use)
4. Using the laminated card titled *Things to Consider Before Felling a Tree*, show students a few trees in the forest, identify them, and discuss what uses they would have had for the colonial woodworker. For instance, the ash in front of the carriage house can be identified by its opposite branching and diamond-patterned bark. Since ash is a very hard wood (its cells

grow densely), it was used to make the handles of tools such as hammers, and baseball bats. Behind the carriage house stands a large white oak, which can be identified by its acorns, wavy-lobed leaves, and white, flakey bark. Since white oak is very resistant to decay, it was often used for flooring and barrels. A woodworker who made barrels was called a *cooper*, another last name we take from our history.

5. Finally, take students to the large white pine out in the forest. Bring the felling axe and cross-cut saw with you. *What criteria would a woodworker use to choose a tree?* (type of wood, use of wood, size, straightness, number of branches and knots) *What would he need to consider before cutting it?* (which way it was leaning, the wind, where heavy branches are) Show students the stump and describe how a tree can be forced to fall in a certain direction.
6. Take the cross-cut saw to the log fixed in the tackle prop. Point out what the tackle prop is made of—a forked branch. Pair up students to use the cross-cut saw and cut a wood slice.
7. Leaving the cross-cut saw at the tackle prop, move on to the *peavey*. Have students try to move the log lying on the ground with just their hands. Show them how the peavey can hook onto the log and then be used to move the log. Choose a student to use the peavey.
8. Next, demonstrate the use of the *adze* and/or *spud* and *hammer* to strip the bark from the log. An adze was sometimes also used to square the log, although a *broadaxe* was the tool of choice for this purpose. Show the laminated picture of squaring a log. Point out how and why the logs in Degroat Cabin have been squared.
9. Have students sit on the logs provided while you demonstrate the final tools: the *froe* and *froe club* and/or the *wedge* and *mallet*. Give each child a turn until you have sliced off a board appropriate for making a boot jack or coat rack.
10. At this point, allow students practice time with the tools. Station yourself or a parent at the cross-cut saw, and have another adult supervise the use of the froe. If time permits, students may make individual candleholders, or work in small groups to make boot jacks or coat racks. If there is little time, help students to finish one group project that they can take back to their classroom.

Summary:

Gather students together and have them show their finished projects. *What qualities would a colonial woodworker have needed in order to produce these items? How do you think the woodworker valued the items he or she made? Can they name something in their house that is made of wood? Should they value this item? Why?*

If there is time, hand out the pictures of modern tools and have the students tell you which colonial tool serves the same purpose. *How do most modern tools differ from colonial tools? What do we use to power many modern tools? How does this affect our environment?*

Bibliography:

Sloane, Eric. *Museum of Early American Tools*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1964.
Sloane, Eric. *Reverence for Wood*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1974.