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## TOTEM POLE LESSON PLAN

### GOALS

Thrive Collective provides project-based learning that teaches both art and life skills. To the extent possible, every lesson plan provides three clear goals. First, what art skill, subject area, or big idea is being taught (the art “learning”)? Second, what will the students produce by the end of the class (the “project”)? Third, how does that art skill translate into an everyday life skill (the life “learning”)?

1. This class will teach students how to reflect and identify self-awareness through art.
2. By the end of class, the student will accomplish a totem pole design based on different aspects of themselves.
3. Students will be introduced to how the art skill relates to life outside the classroom because the process will teach them to reflect inwards and see how parts of their being creates a beautiful larger picture.

### MATERIALS

Used toilet paper or paper towel rolls for the totem pole, colored construction paper or coloring mediums and white paper, scissors, glue or tape, pencil

### EXPECTATIONS

Students are currently in different stages of adolescent development. This project helps their thinking process make sense of or addresses further questions in regards to their self-identity. Different age groups will have different understandings of the topics that will be addressed. Be sure to understand their level of comprehension and format your questions appropriately.

Beyond learning to engage in their creativity, the students will learn more about themselves and think beyond self-absorption.

### MAIN IDEAS TO COMMUNICATE

Students will identify four aspects of themselves:

- How they view themselves culturally
  - This can range from pride in ethnicity, traditions, customs, family hierarchies, etc.
  - If the concept is lost on them, they can focus on simpler aspects of physical attributes like speed, strength, agility, etc.



- How they view themselves socially
  - To describe this, ask them what their role or purpose is if they play sports or games with friends.
  - Examples are defenders, offensive players, healers, tanks, supportive, etc.
- How they view themselves emotionally
  - Resilient, courageous, timid, jolly, shy, clever, etc.
- How they view themselves spiritually
  - This doesn't necessarily pertain to faith and religion as the spiritual aspect is more about an awe inspiring or overwhelming experience with something outside of their being like music, art, poetry, nature, role models, etc. to help them understand how life is connected beyond their sense of self drawing them out of being self-absorbed.
  - Combined with emotions, spirituality helps fuel their passions and dreams.
  - Ask your students what they are grateful for, what they care about most, what they are passionate about doing, what they would change about a particular situation, what they think about most often, etc.

Symbolism will be needed to take these ideas and transfer them into images that are relatable. For instance, how does one visually depict being a defender in soccer or how does one show their appreciation for playing the piano?

## WHAT TO SHOW

Images of actual totem poles, images of paper constructed totem poles. Examples of symbolism for basic traits or ideas (e.g.: a heart for love, a cracked heart for heartache or a broken heart).



## WHAT TO TELL

Your primary focus should be to create a space where students feel safe and comfortable enough to share and take a risk by trying something that they may have never done before. Be aware that the directions you give can be too restrictive and stifle creativity and in a twist of paradox, the same can be said about giving too much freedom in your directions.

Remember that a lot of the ideas being discussed are still undergoing peer validation and that some might conflict with one another so it's better to validate the process in which the student



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has used to come to their conclusions. Encourage further development. If negative ideas are brought up, like gore and violence, tactfully redirect their aggression into something positive. If outright ideas of hate come up, that would be a time to involve a school counselor.



# THE PROJECT: PERSONAL TOTEM POLE

## OBJECTIVE

- Students will create a list of answers to questions in regards to four aspects of themselves
- From there, they will draw a simple visual of what that idea looks like
- They will then prioritize their list and visuals for what order they will appear on their totem pole, number 1 being at the top
- Students will then assemble their visuals onto or draw directly onto their totem

## STEP 1

### DEMO

Start by introducing what a totem pole is with examples and show what the end result of this lesson will be by showing examples of a totem pole constructed out of paper and a roll.

### CLASS WORK

Pose your questions to the students in regards to their four aspects of themselves and have them list what those are in as few words as possible.

### GROUP CHECK-IN

Give them a few moments for each question and help probe their thought process to come up with an idea to list. If time pertains, ask some students to share their ideas.

*Note: If some of the ideas look too complicated to visualize into a symbol, have them simplify their ideas more. When some of the students finish before the others, instruct them to think about what images they can use to represent their ideas.*

## STEP 2

### DEMO

Next, take a few pre-thought out ideas and translate them into images for the class to see. Use simple shapes to fit the skill level of the classroom. If some popular ideas exist in the class, use one of them as a follow-up example.

### CLASS WORK

Have your students begin sketching out visuals for each item on their list. Try to help students who are falling behind by directing them or having them simplify their original ideas.

### GROUP CHECK-IN

As students begin to pass the halfway mark, encourage them to start thinking about the priority of each idea as it relates to them so they can order it on their final totem pole. Ask other students who haven't participated yet to share some of their drawings before moving on.



## STEP 3

### DEMO

Show an example of how you could use the construction paper to create a visual of an idea to be placed on their totem. Also, demonstrate drawing directly onto the paper roll with colors for those who don't have access to construction paper. Remember to work within their skill level. If you can, use one of the popular ideas from the students.

### CLASS WORK

Allow the kids to construct their totems in whichever medium they prefer. Encourage them to take risks or refine their work if they start to finish earlier than others.

### GROUP CHECK-IN

Help those who struggle along. For those who finish right away, have them prepare a presentation to explain their totem to the rest of the class. Make sure to take photos of each piece of artwork. Encourage those who feel like they didn't have enough time, that they can continue to build and work on it on their own and are able to share again with the rest of the class.

*Note: Display their work for all to see for sometime after the assignment is through. If through*