

Navajo Blankets

The Navajo

- Native people of the American Southwest since the 1200's
- Came from Canada
- Originally called the Dine', and they still prefer this name

Life as a Navajo

- Four Corners region of USA – Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona and Utah
- Lived in hogans – hut like structures with the door facing east
- Started by hunting and gathering, then trading and farming
- They raised goats and sheep for milk, meat and wool
- A large growth in their sheep population in the late 1800's allowed the Navajo to make money from their beautiful wool blankets
- Later the US government intervened and nearly ruined their sheep ranching and blanket/rug making
- Today the blankets are considered art
- Navajo consider weaving an opportunity to get together with friends and family

Weaving Blankets

1. Wool is trimmed (sheared) from the sheep.
2. Wool is carded by 2 wooden blocks fitted with combs. This aligns the fibers.
3. Wool is spun into yarn using a spindle.
4. Yarn is dyed with natural dyes made from flowers, cactus, onion skins and other items.
5. An upright loom is used to weave (takes at least 2 to 3 months!).
 - a. Warp – vertical threads
 - b. Weft – horizontal threads
6. Designs are kept in the weaver's head and are all unique! They usually include:
 - Geometric shapes
 - Symmetry
 - Patterns
 - Natural colors

Tradition

- Legend says a spirit, Spider Woman, taught the Navajo to weave
- Simple patterns reflect the view that the world is balanced and organized
- Navajo believe the world is woven together
- Geometric shapes stand for different parts of life – water, mountains, sun
- Blankets often tell stories

For more information, check out navajopeople.org.

Design a rug online and watch it unfold at:

http://www.statemuseum.arizona.edu/activities/symmetry/dsgn_yr_own.shtml