Create a Story Blanket (Pa Ndau)

Story blankets (pa ndau) became a way to strengthen the bonds among family members and preserve Hmong history during a difficult time due to war and displacement (forced removal from homes). Traditionally in Hmong culture only women had created pa ndau. In the refugee camps, however, everyone had time on their hands. Almost every member of the family might be involved in the process. Men drew the scenes on the blanket. Women used those drawings as guides for creating the embroidery. Young children learned to sew the same way their mothers did, by watching and helping their elders. The scenes they sewed helped them get to know a way of life they could not experience.

This activity is an interactive and collaborative group activity designed to facilitate story sharing with visual artifacts. There are many ways to do this activity (including drawing, painting, collaging, gathering photos, and etc.) using whatever you have available at home. The important thing is to share stories with your loved ones.

What you will need:

- BLANKET/TOWEL (FOR JUST PLACING DRAWINGS ON TOP OF)
- 1 SHEET OF PAPER FOR EACH PERSON
- DRAWING UTENSILS
- OPTIONAL: PHOTOS OF MEMORIES YOU LOVE
Instructions

Acting It Out

Let’s take a closer look at the “Village Story Blanket.” (View or download the photo of the artwork here: https://collections.artsmia.org/art/3301/village-story-blanket-ka-zoua-lee-born-laos)

1) **Zoom in:** Pick one scene as a group to focus on. Then each person in the group can pick one person/animal from the scene to act out.
2) **Create:** Come up with one motion and one sound for your person/animal.
3) **Action:** Take turns performing your motion/sound one at a time. Then once everyone has had a chance, act out all the motions and sounds of the scene together on a count of three!
4) **Repeat:** You can repeat this activity exploring more scenes from the artwork.

The Hmong artist Ka Zoua Lee pictures what her old home and neighborhood in Laos looked like before the war forced her to move for safety. A home is more than a physical house -it is the people, nature, traditions and the things we do every day that make us feel “home.” Home is a very special and precious feeling. It is hard to change homes, but still many people are forced to change homes because it’s not safe where they are.

People who are forced to leave their homes due to war, persecution, or violence are called *refugees*. Minnesota is home to many refugees who have come from many different places to build a peaceful future for their families. By making this artwork, the artist is able to remember the things she misses about her old home and pass on her memories for the future generation.

Sharing Your Stories

Find a blanket or towel to place in the middle of the group. Each person should have a piece of paper and a drawing utensil.

Now, let’s think about your home and the things that make you feel “home.” There have been many changes recently due to the pandemic and there may be aspects from our daily lives before that we miss like going to school, visiting friends, or practicing sports. While our current situation is very different from the experience of war that the artist experienced, we can draw inspiration from the story blanket and make art together to share and hold onto memories and stories we love.

1) **Think and Draw:** Think about something (people, places, activity) you miss and take some time to draw it. You can use whatever materials you have to draw this memory, whether it’s drawing, painting, or collaging. You can also find a photo from your album and use as inspiration for the activity.
2) **Share your story:** Once everyone has had time to think about and finish their drawing, take turns sharing your story as you place your drawing/photo on top of the blanket/towel.

3) For those who want to make a more permanent version of your story blanket, you can cut and glue the various scenes on a larger piece of paper. Or you can try re-drawing the scenes on a piece of fabric with a fabric marker and sewing it on an old towel, tote bag, or fabric.

**Continue Learning**

- **Learn more** about the “Village Story Blanket” in this link ([https://new.artsmia.org/objects-in-focus-village-story-blanket/](https://new.artsmia.org/objects-in-focus-village-story-blanket/))

- **Research** other Hmong textile art and Cy Thao’s Hmong Migration Series on Mia’s online catalog

- **Read:**

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