

*Paj ntaub “Flower Cloths” and Hmong History*

# How are paj ntaub fabric(s) of memory?



*Paj ntaub (Kansas Historical Society, 2012)*

## Supporting Questions

1. What are paj ntaub?
2. Who are the Hmong people, and how do they use paj ntaub?
3. How did the secret war impact paj ntaub?
4. How does the story of Paj Ntaub live on in my community?

## Examining Paj Ntaub “Flower Cloths” and Hmong History

### What can we learn from Paj Ntaub?

<b>Standards and Content:</b>	<p><b>Minnesota State Social Studies Standards</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(GRADE 4) History 21. Causation and Argumentation: Integrate evidence from multiple historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument and/or compelling narrative about the past. Benchmark: 5.5.23.1</li> <li>(GRADE 5 &amp; 6). Ethnic Studies 23. Identity: Analyze how power and language construct the social identities of race, religion, geography, ethnicity, and gender. Apply these understandings to one’s own social identities and other groups living in Minnesota, centering on those whose stories and histories have been marginalized, erased, or ignored.</li> </ul> <p><b>NCSS THEMES:</b> 1 Culture, 2 Time, continuity, and change, 3 People, places, and environments, 5 Individuals, Groups, and institutions.</p> <p><b>Learning for Justice: Social Justice Standard:</b> Diversity 8: “Students will respectfully express curiosity about the history and lived experiences of others and will exchange ideas and beliefs in an open-minded way.”</p>
<b>Staging the Compelling Question</b>	<p><i>Before</i> sharing the compelling question, engage students in a discussion of their meaning of memory. As students share, you might ask how memories are kept, illustrated, or displayed in their family? Then, conduct a see, wonder, guess activity (link to <a href="#">optional organizer</a>) of a story cloth depicting scenes of the Hmong community (link to <a href="#">Inquiry Image</a> from LOC***) to invite students into the compelling question, How is Paj Ntaub a "fabric of memory?"</p>

Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3	Supporting Question 4
What are paj ntaub?	Who are the Hmong people, and how do they use paj ntaub?	How did the secret war impact the creation of Paj Ntaub?	How does the history of Paj Ntaub live on in my community?
Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task
Using image analysis tool(s) explore the use, purpose, and origins of paj ntaub (can be small groups).	Students (in groups) record the history of the Hmong people and the creation and use of paj ntaub.	Create a timeline of Hmong Paj ntaub designs and events before and after the secret war.	Research local Hmong history and add to created timelines. Sources for MN are included below.
Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources
<p><b>Source A:</b> <a href="#">Inquiry small group images</a> (day 1/ 2)</p> <p><b>Source B:</b> <a href="#">Vocabulary list</a></p> <p>(Optional) <b>Source C:</b> <a href="#">Organizer</a></p> <p>(Optional) <b>Source D:</b> <a href="#">LOC organizer</a></p>	<p><b>Source A:</b> <a href="#">Paj Ntaub (1996)</a> (thru 9:40)</p> <p><b>Source B:</b> <a href="#">Hmong American Center Website</a></p> <p><b>Source C:</b> <a href="#">Organizer Knew/New</a></p> <p>(Optional) <b>Source D:</b> <a href="#">PBS: Hmong Paj Ntaub</a></p> <p>(Optional) <b>Source E:</b> <a href="#">Hmong American Center Website</a></p>	<p><b>Source A:</b> <a href="#">Minnesota Remembers Vietnam: America’s Secret War</a></p> <p><b>Source B:</b> <a href="#">How to Read a Story Cloth</a></p> <p>(Optional) <b>Source C:</b> <a href="#">Grandfather’s Story Cloth</a></p> <p>(Optional) <b>Source D:</b> <a href="#">A Map Into the World</a></p>	<p><b>Source A:</b> <a href="#">The art, origins of Hmong story cloths and why it shows the resiliency of Hmong women</a></p> <p><b>Source B:</b> <a href="#">Hmong Timeline</a></p> <p><b>Source C:</b> <a href="#">Hmong Women in Minnesota Timeline</a></p>

<p><b>Summative Performance Task</b></p>	<p><b>ARGUMENT:</b> <i>How are paj ntaub fabric(s) of memory?</i> Students construct an argument featuring their understandings of this historical art form (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that evaluates the need to study, remember, and/or celebrate this question using specific claims and relevant evidence from sources while acknowledging competing views.</p> <p><b>EXTENSION:</b> Students research additional story cloth representations, such as <a href="#">Esther Nisenthal Krinitz’s embroidery of the Holocaust</a>, and/or read about the formerly enslaved people’s agency in the <a href="#">Quilt Codes of the Underground Railroad</a>. After reading, students create a comparison of these events, noting similarities and differences amongst the stories of the tapestries.</p>
<p><b>Taking Informed Action</b></p>	<p><b>UNDERSTAND:</b> Students develop a presentation highlighting one of the uses/historical meanings of the Paj ntaub, finding an example of their own, and researching its history. They present the era or time period in which each style of paj ntaub was popularized and discuss relevant events leading to and from its creation.</p> <p><b>ASSESS:</b> Citing sources, the students will show a representative sample of paj ntaub work (which could include a timeline of Hmong history surrounding the period from Formative task three), and a description of the style of paj ntaub and the meaning held in that style. For example, was it decorative, motivated by financial needs after the war, or keeping family history?</p> <p><b>ACT:</b> Students will create an object or artifact based on their inquiry research. This could be as simple as a written entry for their history books to accompany the timeline they’ve created or as complex as a classroom community-created mural documenting their journey of discovery. Students may present their family paj ntaub or present findings from their exploration of Hmong families and artisans in the local community, or take their action to public spaces for review.</p>

*\*Featured sources are suggested, and links are provided. It may be that these links are broken, and we apologize in advance for the inconvenience.*

Overview

**Inquiry Description**

This inquiry leads students through an investigation of paj ntaub, the “flower cloth” or story cloth textiles of Hmong communities in the United States and abroad. By examining examples of paj ntaub, students will develop theories and read about the experiences, values, and histories of Hmong communities in Minnesota and beyond. The final steps of the inquiry ask students to explore local Hmong communities and cultures.

Ultimately, the inquiry leads students through an examination of the historical aspects of paj ntaub in Laos, Thailand, and across the United States. Through images and students' research and discussion, they can discover the artistry, community, hidden histories, resilience, and renewal of Hmong communities in the United States and abroad. The paj ntaub becomes a vehicle for telling the story of Hmong history- engaging students in responding to the compelling question.

While some students may have background knowledge or experience with paj ntaub, it is essential that the *teacher* prepare to engage with students’ questions about the history, people, places, and background of this incredible art form. To develop background knowledge, the teachers may further

utilize the following curated sources and research through the Library of Congress and/or your local community history outlets. For additional information, [please see the linked resource list](#).

This inquiry highlights *Minnesota State Social Studies Standards*

- (GRADE 4) History 21. Causation and Argumentation: Integrate evidence from multiple historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument and/or compelling narrative about the past. Benchmark: 5.5.23.1
- (GRADE 5 & 6). Ethnic Studies 23. Identity: Analyze how power and language construct the social identities of race, religion, geography, ethnicity and gender. Apply these understandings to one's own social identities and other groups living in Minnesota, centering those whose stories and histories have been marginalized, erased or ignored.

**NCSS THEMES:** 1 Culture, 2 Time, continuity, and change, 3 People, places, and environments, 5 Individuals, Groups, and institutions.

**Learning for Justice: Social Justice Standard: Diversity 8** “Students will respectfully express curiosity about the history and lived experiences of others and will exchange ideas and beliefs in an open-minded way.”

**Structure of the Inquiry:** The inquiry is expected to take 4 class (45-60 minute) class periods, with the opportunity to extend the work based on availability. \*\*Teachers are encouraged to adopt the inquiry's content to meet their students' needs and interests. This inquiry allows students to bring previous ideas paj ntaub as an additional source. Teachers may choose to complete activities as a whole group, small group, or a flexible amount of days.

- Day 1: Staging the Question and Supporting Question 1 with all formative tasks.
- Day 2: Supporting Question 2 and formative tasks.
- Day 3: Supporting Question 3 and introduction of Question 4.
- Day 4: Completion of question 4, an invitation to local leaders/community members, etc.

### Staging the Compelling Question

*Before* sharing the compelling question, the teacher will set up the lesson by providing visual supports for students to investigate an image of paj ntaub. Using this image from the Library of Congress: [INQUIRY IMAGE whole group](#) \*\*\*

Using this image the teacher models questioning techniques:

The teacher begins by projecting /sharing the image [INQUIRY IMAGE](#) and encourages students to observe without explanation. Sharing the Graphic organizer (or the related questions), students jot their thoughts about the image on [Organizer](#) from staging the question, or [LOC organizer](#)

Alternately, the teacher probes, and writes responses to inquiry:

- What do you see?
- What do you wonder?
- What do you guess (might these be or have been used for)?

The teacher may wish to publicly capture students' initial wonderings, documenting additional questions and

assertions. After documenting students' responses, The teacher shares the inquiry question with students- **What can we learn from paj ntaub?** – Students may share initial perspectives.

\*\*\*If locally accessible, substituting physical paj ntaub artifacts is always welcome. The materials linked are from the LOC and offer some small explanations to accompany each image. If students are already familiar with paj ntaub, the teacher will honor their prior knowledge and expertise and integrate students' comments into the inquiry as an additional source. While students and family experiences with paj ntaub are incredible elements to add, it is the *teacher's* responsibility to facilitate the inquiry, instead of relying on students and families to inform the work.

It is important to note that this inquiry requires no prerequisite knowledge but may require the use of vocabulary, including [VOCABULARY LIST](#).

Teachers [Find additional CURATED sources to examine for the inquiry here](#). Swap these out as needed to substitute for sources provided in the inquiry.

## Supporting Question 1

### The first supporting question is: What are paj ntaub?

Building on the work from staging the question, students examine the methods of paj ntaub as both historical and utilitarian artifacts. Students develop theories about the images' art, history, and culture. Students may respond to the image using the [optional organizer](#) by responding to questions like: What do I see? What do I wonder? What do I guess? – The teacher will direct group discussion with additional questioning as students work through the inquiry. Students are assigned an image for further exploration from source A.

The formative task leads groups of students to develop hypotheses of what that paj ntaub is (used for, represent, and memorialize or commemorate) through discussion. Each group will focus on a different image from which to develop theories more developed than those in staging the question. The teacher will hold off on sharing the image descriptions until day two so that students' full ideas about paj ntaub are still developing. As students question the art form's history, and what different types of paj ntaub may represent, their responses can be publicly documented for consideration throughout the lesson.

The following sources were selected to support the inquiry.

### Featured Sources:

- **Source A:** [Inquiry small groups images](#) (for use both day 1 and 2)  
–These sources are drawn from L.O.C- the links and images are all included in the document.
- **Source B:** [Organizer](#) (students may be given a new copy of this or add on to their old ones)

(Optional) Source C: [Organizer](#)

(Optional) Source D: [LOC organizer](#)

## Supporting Question 2

**The second supporting question is: Who are the Hmong people, and how do they use paj ntaub?**

Teachers may implement this task with the following procedures:

Building on day 1, students will examine paj ntaub as both historical and utilitarian artifacts. The teacher will break students back into small groups (4-6 students), and provide them with the supporting documentation to revisit the images from day one. ([the paj ntaub are labeled on subsequent pages](#)). After revisiting comments and questions from day 1- Students will read excerpts from the L.O.C. and Hmong historical organizations to learn more about the images they were given for investigation in the day (see pages following the paj ntaub images).

After students have documented new ideas, gather students for a shared investigation. Watch the first 9 minutes, and 40 seconds of [Paj Ntaub \(1996\)](#)

While watching the video, students will continue noting different types of paj ntaub, the varied reasons behind their creation and use, and the different meanings shared.

Once students have watched and discussed the movie, they can revisit in their list of questions from Day 1, and respond to supporting question 2. Hold a short class discussion to identify different ideas about the Hmong people, culture, and paj ntaub.

Attempt to answer supporting question 2 at the end of day two.  
Introduce students to supporting question 3.

### Featured Sources:

**Source A:** [Paj Ntaub \(1996\)](#) (thru 9:40)

**Source B:** [Hmong American Center Website](#)

**Source C:** [Organizer Knew/New](#)

Additional (Optional) Sources:

- Source D: [PBS: Hmong Paj Ntaub](#)
- Source E: [Hmong American Center Website](#)

## Supporting Question 3

**The third supporting question: How did the secret war impact the creation of Paj Ntaub?**

Today, (Day 3), Students will examine online documents and video/ audio recordings to complicate their understanding of the secret war through varied perspectives about paj ntaub, their use, and the secret war.

Optional sources include children's literature that may be added to the inquiry/whole group discussion.

Teachers may implement this task by choosing to break students into groups to examine these resources, and each one teaches one afterward, or may slow the inquiry down to examine the parts collectively.

Students consider the supporting question and how paj ntaub is shared and remembered today through each of the examples they've viewed.

After listening/investigating/watching, students directly respond to the history standard History 21: "Create a timeline demonstrating a sequence of events related to a contemporary local or global issue." –students will create a timeline of Hmong Paj ntaub designs they examined in days 1/2 before and after the war. Writing descriptions to accompany these designs, they discuss the changes in paj ntaub before and after the secret war. The teacher documents outstanding questions as they go.

The whole class may choose to read the intro to [PBS's documentary Minnesota Remembers Vietnam: America's Secret War](#). Then, the group will engage with the featured source A to watch a 60-second intro to the PBS documentary. After watching, discuss questions about the story cloths based on this new information. Read [Garland Magazine: How to Read a STORY CLOTH](#) (Source B), with the class or in small groups to continue to develop students' background knowledge.

After reading/listening and discussing, the class should construct a timeline to represent their notes through the inquiry. A suggestion would be to position the "secret war" Vietnam in the middle of the timeline, and build it out both ways - starting with the paj ntaub images from the inquiry day 1 and 2 ([Inquiry small groups images](#))

For *optional* preview or review, including the Children's Books found in the additional sources. [Grandfather's Story Cloth](#) and Grandfather's Story Cloth (text) [Grandfather's story cloth guide for teachers](#) consider reading this text as a group and complicating Grandfather's forgetting and the pain of the forgotten grandson. How does this relate to the stories of the secret war?

- [A Map Into the World with the Author](#) - another text to examine the lasting legacy of the paj ntaub.

#### Featured Sources:

- **Source A:** [Minnesota Remembers Vietnam: America's Secret War](#)
- **Source B:** [Garland Magazine: How to Read a STORY CLOTH](#)

(Optional) Source C: [Grandfather's Story Cloth](#)

(Optional) Source D:

IF children have additional questions, you may examine [Vang Pao](#), and [Hmong Veteran's Naturalization Act](#) as well as the links on the secret war in the [additional CURATED sources](#).

#### Supporting Question 4

The fourth supporting question is: How does the history of paj ntaub live on in my community?

After revisiting the timeline created in Q3, students research local Hmong history through elements of state timelines, local news articles (to be curated by the teacher), and connections with local Hmong history organizations, families, and community groups.

If Guest speakers may be contacted, or sources from "Additional sources" used from Days 1-4 to connect paj ntaub, Hmong history, and the local community.

Students complete the exploration by writing additional entries for the timeline in response to supporting question four, noting elements of connection between their school, town, and state.

- [Hmoob Hauv Minnesota](#)

**Source A:** [The art, origins of Hmong story cloths and why it shows the resiliency of Hmong women](#)

**Source B:** [Hmong Timeline](#)

**Source C:** [Hmong Women in Minnesota Timeline](#)

## Summative Performance Task

At this point in the inquiry, students have examined the compelling question: [How are paj ntaub fabric\(s\) of memory?](#)

Students should be expected to demonstrate the breadth of their understandings and their abilities to use evidence from multiple sources to support their claims.

In this task, students construct an argument featuring their understandings of this historical art form (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay, or additional options identified by the teacher) using specific claims and relevant evidence from sources to answer the compelling question: [How are paj ntaub fabric\(s\) of memory?](#)

**UNDERSTAND:** Students develop a presentation highlighting one of the uses/historical meanings of the Paj ntaub. **Some example projects may include:**

- presentations on a sample paj ntaub and research about its history
- presentations highlighting one of the uses/historical meanings of the paj ntaub,
- presentations on an era or time period that a particular decorative, historical or familial Paj ntaub was popularized with a discussion of relevant events leading to and from its creation.
- Creation of a community poster, mural, or speech sharing the reasons paj ntaub can be considered fabrics of memory.

**To support students in their writing, educators may wish to provide sentence stems and supports:**

Paj ntaub are fabrics of memory because . . .

This type of paj ntaub is used for. . .

This type of paj ntaub was created to be . . .

This type of paj ntaub represents the local community by. . .

**ASSESS:** You will know students are successful in this inquiry when they can describe a representative sample of paj ntaub, illuminating the people who made the artifact, its use, and its meaning.



To extend their arguments, ...

**EXTEND:** Students research additional story cloth(s) and fabric representations throughout history, such as: [Esther Nisenthal Krinitz's embroidery of the Holocaust](#), and/or read about the formerly enslaved people's agency in the [Quilt Codes of the Underground Railroad](#).

After reading, students create a comparison of these events, noting similarities and differences between the tapestries, histories, and their cultural uses.

Students have the opportunity to Take Informed **ACTION by** Students present findings from their exploration of Hmong paj ntaub by constructing a product (video, mural, essay, etc.) explaining why their community should take action to honor Hmong history and paj ntaub.

## References:

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