

# Making a Winnowing Tray

**Topic:** Great Basin Indians (recommended for early fall).

**Grades level(s):** K-2

**Time required:** Approximately 1 hour

**Background:** (This lesson is meant to be taught as part of a unit about the Great Basin Indians. This is a lesson from the sub-unit: *Tools* into the sub-unit: *Food*. This lesson should be preceded and/or followed by lessons on pinenuts, pinenut collecting, pinenut soup and the pinenut harvest celebration and dance.)

The Winnowing Tray was made and used by all of the Great Basin Tribes (Northern Paiute, Shoshone, Washoe and Southern Paiute). Winnowing trays are large, small, and somewhat flat, fan-shaped woven baskets. They were used for winnowing, parching, and sifting. They are considered hallmarks of Great Basin plant processing. Women used open-twined trays to winnow chaff from large seeds and nuts and to parch these materials with hot coals before grinding them for mushes or adding them to stews. They used finer, more closely woven trays to sift small seeds and flour after it was ground. Plant fibers such as willows (various species of *Salix*) and sumac (*Rhus trilobata*) were used to make the trays, as these materials were strong and easily manipulated when wet. Women carefully tended patches of these plants by cutting and burning them to encourage new growth of long, straight stems.

(Retrieved from: [Infinity of Nations](#))

**Nevada State Social Studies Standards:**

H1.1.1 *H1.1.1* Describe local life long ago, including jobs, school, communication, transportation, and recreation.

**Common Core Standards:**

RL.1.2 Retell stories, including key details and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.

**Objective:** The students will understand the process of Great Basin Indian winnowing by listening to a section of a story and retelling or acting out the story to their elbow partners.

The students will practice the process of Great Basin Indian winnowing using a winnowing tray by creating a paper winnowing tray and then winnowing grass and beans.

**Key vocabulary:**

- ❖ winnowing tray: flat, woven tray used for winnowing (*see Figure 5*)
- ❖ winnowing: the process of separating the grain from chaff
- ❖ basket: a container made of interwoven material, such as rushes or twigs
- ❖ weave: to make (cloth) by interlacing the threads of the weft and the warp on a loom.
- ❖ twining: to twist together (threads, for example); intertwine
- ❖ chaff: the dry plant part enclosing mature grains of wheat and some other cereal grasses, removed during threshing.
- ❖ over: above and across from one end or side to the other
- ❖ under: in a lower position or place than.
- ❖ Great Basin: a desert region of the western United States comprising most of Nevada and parts of Utah, California, Idaho, Wyoming, and Oregon.
- ❖ Northern Paiute: a group occupying eastern Oregon, western Nevada, and adjacent areas of northeast California. Their traditional name is Numa/Numu
- ❖ Southern Paiute: a group occupying southern Utah, Nevada and Northern Arizona and adjacent areas of southeast California, their traditional name is Nuwuvi.
- ❖ Washoe: Tribal history extends an estimated 9,000 years in the Lake Tahoe Basin and adjacent east and west slopes and valleys of the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range. Their traditional name is Washeshu.

- ❖ Western Shoshone: Traditional territories ranged from southern Idaho in the north to Death Valley in the south. The western boarder started in central Nevada and extended east to Utah. Their traditional name is Newe.

**Materials Needed:** Wuzzie Comes to Camp: written/illustrated by Nancy Raven, an example of a winnowing tray or photos of a real winnowing tray, a sample of the paper winnowing tray, 2 sheets of heavy paper per child (half of the sheets with pre-cut horizontal slits about one inch apart, portrait position, not landscape), rulers, pencils, various types of yarn or ribbon cut into 12 inch pieces, stapler, tape, dry grass and beans (or material to winnow)

### Setting the Stage:

1. Gather the students onto the meeting mat.
2. Show the students the winnowing tray or a picture of a winnowing tray (*see Figure 5*). Ask if any student knows what it is.
3. After discussion, tell the student the name of the winnowing tray and read the Objectives.
4. Discuss and review the Key Vocabulary.
5. Read pages 6-11 from *Wuzzie Comes to Camp*, stopping at each step to have the students practice the comprehension strategy of visualizing. Remind them that good readers get pictures in their heads as they read.
6. Have students pair up with their elbows partners and retell or act out the process of winnowing, as was explained in the story.
7. Discuss if we use winnowing today. (If possible, have an example of modern day winnowing or plant processing tools/machines ready to share with the students).
8. Show the students the example of the paper winnowing tray and the supplies.
9. Model to the students how they will get one pre-cut piece of heavy paper (*see Figure 1*), one whole piece of heavy paper (*see Figure 2*), a ruler, scissors, and a pencil.
10. Remind or show the students what an inch is on the ruler. Show the students how the pre-cut paper (*see Figure 1*) has slits that are cut an inch apart, but that they are

- not cut all the way. Explain that they will cut their whole paper all the way into one inch slits (*see Figure 2*).
11. Model how to measure out one inch sections and to draw straight lines from top to bottom. Make sure to explain why they will need to cut vertically, rather than horizontally so that the paper will not fall short in the weave (it might be good to show them how this could occur).
  12. Once the paper is cut, model the weaving process. At this point, explain the term twining and how the Indian women would twine the materials and then weave.
  13. Once the weave is complete, talk to the students about twining. Show them the twining on the real winnowing tray. Tell them that they will choose two pieces of ribbon or yarn and will intertwine them through the weaving approximately  $\frac{1}{3}$  and  $\frac{2}{3}$  the way down the weaving (*see Figure 3*). Explain that in basketry the artist will often intertwine or weave different patterns or colors into their creations.
  14. Compare the real winnowing tray with the woven paper and ask students about the shape of the tray and the shape of the paper.
  15. After discussion of this, model how to round the top corners by cutting off the top corners in a curve (*see Figure 3*).
  16. Have students fold bottom corners in (*see Figure 3*).
  17. Model how to hold the winnowing tray with both hands to form a concave shape at the bottom, just like a real winnowing tray.
  18. Once the students have created their own winnowing tray, place a handful of beans and grass into the tray and model how to winnow by slightly tossing the beans/grass into the air, pointing out how the grass blows away and the beans stay in the tray. Explain that the grass represents the chaff. (It may help to find an online video of winnowing.)

**Activities:** Elbow partners, Comprehension Strategy: Visualization

**Evaluation:** Grading Rubric: Winnowing Tray Rubric (*see Figure 4*)

**Activities/Strategies: Evaluation/Assessment(s):** Informal assessment of student skills by observation. Formal Assessment of skills assessed with Winnowing Tray Rubric.

**Accommodations (Differentiated Instruction):** Added cutting assistance, as needed according to fine motor skills of the child.

**Bibliography/Resources:**

Website: Infinity of Nations: [Art and History in the Collections of the National Museum of the American Indian](#)

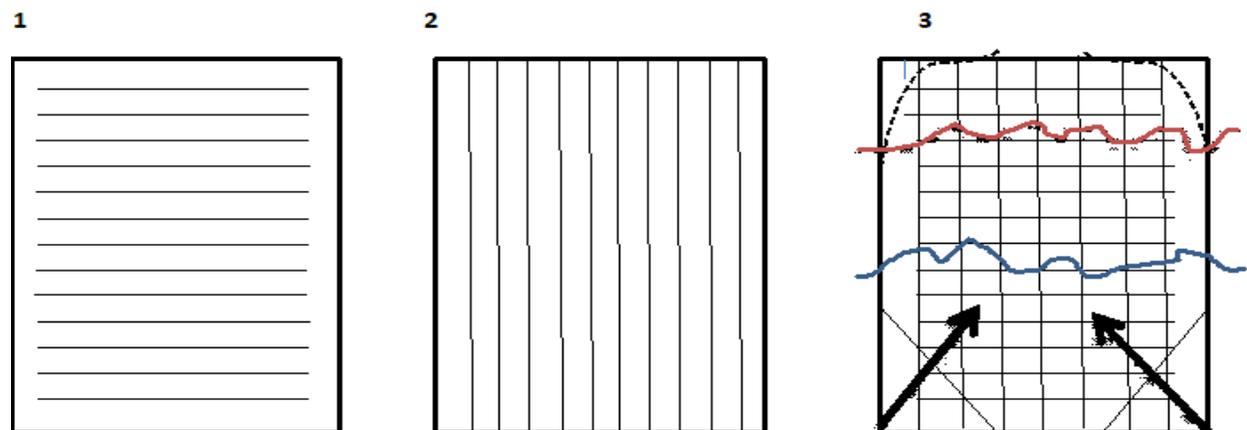
Website: The Free Dictionary: [Basket](#)

*Wuzzie Comes to Camp*, Written and Illustrated by Nancy Raven

*Survival Arts of the Primitive Paiutes*, (pp. 29-39, 91-96) By: Margaret M. Wheat

*Celebrating Nevada Indians*, (pp. NP-8, NP-9, SP-9) By: Nevada Native American Education Association

**Example Figures 1, 2, and 3**



**Figure 4**



[\(Northern Paiute Winnowing Basket\)](#)

Figure 5

Winnowing Tray Rubric

Category	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
<b>Followed Directions</b>	Student followed all of the directions thoroughly.	Student followed directions with few errors.	Student followed some directions while others were ignored.	The student did not follow instructions and followed their own desire.
<b>Retold Story</b>	Student listened to partner's retell and also retold the story	Student retold story but did not listen to partner.	Student listened to elbow partner, but did not retell.	Student just visited. No retelling.
<b>Woven Correctly</b>	Over/Under pattern is well defined and used from beginning to end	Over/Under pattern is somewhat visible but not clearly defined.	Over/Under pattern is somewhat visible but not continuous.	There is no visible over/under pattern.