Hands On Learning
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PHILIPPINES AND PACIFIC ISLANDS G38/A

The Pacific Ocean is a vast expanse of water that has between 20,000 and 30,000 islands. There are so many that we are still not sure of the exact number!

The Philippines is a country made up of lots of islands. This is called an archipelago.





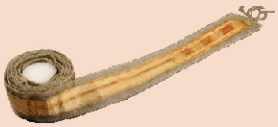
The Pacific Islands are a group of thousands of small islands near Australia. These comprise of countries such as Samoa, Fiji and Tonga.

In this box are objects that are made from similar materials but used in different ways throughout the islands.

Tapa cloth



Can you guess what material tapa is made from? It is from the bark of a tree! When the trees are still very young they are cut and the dark, hard bark is removed. The outer bark is stripped away leaving a fibre that is then placed on a wooden anvil. Women beat the material with a wooden hammer, making it thinner and wider. They often do this in groups and make a musical accompaniment out of the hammering. If you look closely at the back of the tapa cloth you can see where the two pieces of tapa have been joined.



The tapa cloth is painted in geometrical patterns with traditional colours such as black and rusty-brown favoured. These dyes are made from mangrove sap, terracotta clay and specially prepared soot.





Most people in Fiji wear western style clothing daily but tapa cloth is actually used to make the national dress. The tapa cloth is mainly worn on special occasions such as a wedding day. The problem with tapa clothes is that if they get wet they turn to a pulpy mush, a bit like paper.

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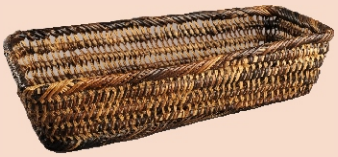
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Necklace



This necklace has been made from local shells and seeds, instead of precious metals or stones. Tiny holes have been drilled in all of them. Imagine planning and threading all the seeds to make such lovely patterns!

Basket



Basket weaving was traditionally a man's activity. The baskets were used for home storage, transporting goods and serving food. Most are not decorated, they are valued for their form. The basket trade has become very reliant on tourists.

Cup



In the Pacific Islands people make a drink from the root of a plant called kava. The roots are stewed in milk or water to let it brew - a bit like tea leaves. It is drunk at ceremonies and informal occasions. The men often sit around in large groups, singing songs and watching sport while drinking kava. The cups they use, like this one, are called an *ipu*.



First the kava is stirred in a large bowl called a *kumete* before being served in rounds. It is poured into the *ipu* which is passed from hand to hand to those sitting furthest away. The empty cups are returned again from hand to hand while everybody remains seated, cross-legged. Meanwhile more cups are filled and the drinking continues until those nearest to the *kumete* have had their drink too.



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Shell



This was once the home of an edible sea snail called an abalone. It is called an ear shell because of its shape. The small holes on top are used to expel waste.

Hold the shell up to the light. Can you see the colours changing?

Palm-leaf fan



Have you seen a fan like this before? Fans from China are made with thin strips of wood. This one is different. Palm leaves have been weaved together making it a lot more rigid and unable to be folded. Like Chinese fans, however, it has been decorated to make it more attractive.



In hot countries the fan was used to keep cool before air-conditioning.

Bamboo chain



We don't know what this chain was originally used for. It could have been a piece of jewellery or maybe the chin strap to a hat.

Bamboo is the fastest growing plant in the world but it only grows in a few places. One of these areas is south east Asia.

It is a very useful plant. The roots are boiled and used in Asian cooking to flavour the food. The food might even be eaten with bamboo cooking utensils. These are easy to make and recycle.



Bamboo is used in the Philippines to make chairs, wooden sofas, wooden beds and as framing for a Nipa hut, the traditional Filipino house. It is so versatile that builders use it as scaffolding. It is light enough to move between work sites but still strong when tied together.