

# Art or Craft?

**The Mississippi Craft Center sits in a beautiful, contemporary building in rural Mississippi, a state in the Deep South of the US. It serves as the modern home for a very old idea: a special place for exhibits, classes, sales, and demonstrations of handcrafts of the South. These include quilting, basket making, wood carving, and many others. But how is a craft center different from an arts center? And how are crafts different from art?**

## What is a craft?

Generally, a craft is a special artistic skill which may be handed down from generation to generation. Or it's a special skill requiring "sensitive hands" for making practical items – furniture, clothing, dishes – that only some people are able to do well. Art also requires skill, but the ability is not necessarily handed down through generations. Art expresses emotions.

## Keeping traditions alive

The Mississippi Craft Center was started in just that way: one member of a family – a grandmother, for example – knew how to make traditional Choctaw Indian\* baskets, and chose one granddaughter to pass the craft on to. People began to realize that this tradition was slowly dying, and so to save it, they gave it a real home in the Craft Center.

The Craft Center displays only completely handmade crafts of the highest standards. In many cases the craftsman prepares them from natural materials – reeds and rushes are picked from the river bank, dried and woven into baskets; raw cotton or wool may be spun and hand-dyed using local plants, and then knitted or woven into a scarf. Often the parts come directly from the crafter's home area, which also makes these crafts something special.

Some crafts are social events: Craftswomen and their family members or closest friends may gather to work together on one quilt, talking, laughing, and gossiping as they work. Other crafts are very individual. A man may sit alone with his thoughts or memories while he uses his pocketknife to carve a bird out of wood.

## AMAZING CREATIONS IN THE MISSISSIPPI CRAFT CENTER



In the US, doing crafts (or "crafting") is very popular, and you don't need to be skilful to try several types of basic crafts – keeping a scrapbook with family photos, painting toys or arranging dried flowers. You can even buy a kit with all the pieces and parts – and simple step-by-step instructions – that you need. However, the Mississippi Craft Center displays only completely handmade crafts.



### Little craftsmen

A big part of the Center's work is to give children the chance to try simple crafts in summer workshops. "Children get used to buying everything in a big super-store," the workers at the Craft Center explained. "They need to learn that it's better for their community, and even for the environment, to buy some things that are made locally, by hand. And to learn that even they can make some nice things themselves."

### Why so expensive?

The prices for hand-crafted items may seem very expensive (a quilted bag: \$80, a basket: \$450), but because they take so very long to make, the crafter actually earns a very small amount of money per hour. So although some craftsmen are able to support themselves and their families with their craft, most must also have a fulltime or part-time job, or do their craft only as a hobby.

Take a look at some of the handmade craft items I found at the Mississippi Craft Center on my Road Trip. Which look distinctively American to you, and which could easily be found in your home region too? Which do you like? And which would you like to try?

**Mary Matz (USA)**

You can watch craftspeople at the Mississippi Craft Center by going to their website at <http://www.msccrafts.org>. The videos will give you practice in listening to authentic Southern accents, too!

### TASK

Match the artifacts (left column) with the materials they are made from (middle column) and with the name of the craft (right column).

- |                      |           |                |
|----------------------|-----------|----------------|
| 1) quilt             | A) clay   | a) woodcarving |
| 2) basket            | B) iron   | b) quilting    |
| 3) sweater           | C) cloth  | c) knitting    |
| 4) ceramic pot       | D) wood   | d) basketry    |
| 5) metal candlestick | E) rushes | e) pottery     |
| 6) carved figurine   | F) wool   | f) smithery    |

Solutions: 1Cb, 2Ed, 3Fc, 4Ae, 5Bf, 6Da

## The Missing Mississippi Miss

### Looking for Renata Stará

On my Road Trip, I met Jessica Sullivan Grady, a shop assistant at The Mississippi Craft Center. She told me she's looking for an old friend, a Czech exchange student who studied with Jessica at Mendenhall High School in 1995–1996. The Czech student's name is Renata Stará. So if you know Renata Stará (or you ARE Renata Stará!) and would like to write to Jessica again after all these years, you can contact her via the Craft Center (<http://msccrafts.org/index.php/contact-us>).

### LANGUAGE POINTS •

**Crafter, craftsman, craftswoman, craftspeople** – you can use all these word forms to describe the people who do crafts.

### Skilful x skilled

**Skilful** means you have a special, natural ability to do something well. **Skilled** is often used with the particular skill – a skilled carpenter or electrician, for example – and it suggests that you have had many years of formal training and work experience.

### Make or do?

Generally, **we make art and do crafts**. But when we speak about a specific item, we switch to make. So: "I do ceramics." (= unspecific) But: "I make clay bowls and coffee mugs." (= specific)

### VOCABULARY

- quilting** [kwɪltɪŋ] – výroba (ozdobných) prošívaných dek
- basket making** ['bɑːskɪt] – výroba košíků
- wood carving** – řezbářství
- to hand down** – předávat
- reed** [riːd] – rákosí
- rushes** [rʌʃɪz] – proutí
- raw** [rɔː] – surový (nezpracovaný)
- to spin** – příst
- to hand-dye** [hænd daɪ] – ručně barvit
- to knit** [nɪt] – plést
- to weave** [wiːv] – tkát
- to gossip** ['gɒsɪp] – klábosit
- to carve sth out** – vyřezat (něco)

### GLOSSARY \*

**Choctaw Indians** – a Native American tribe from the southeastern US