

Lesson 17

Native Waters

Why is the river important to Native Americans?
How is life different now?
How did Native Americans pass down traditions to other generations?

GOAL To understand that Native American stories provide a glimpse into traditions and culture of the people.

OBJECTIVES Students will:

- ✓ understand the significance of the river to Native American people
- ✓ identify the storyteller as an important aspect of Native American culture
- ✓ understand that traditions were passed down to other generations through the repetition of stories.

MATERIALS story, cardboard or oak tag, natural items, such as grasses, twigs, bark, glue. Masking tape, stapler,

CORE CURRICULUM CONTENT STANDARDS

- Language Arts 1(1,11-14), 4(4,5)
- Science 2(4), 7(5), 8(7)
- Social Studies 1(1,3,5,6), 2(1,3), 3(1-3), 4(1,5), 11(3,5)
- Art 1(3,4), 2(3), 4(1-3), 6(2)

VOCABULARY culture, tradition, storyteller, ancestors, elders, generations, cattails, glacier, drift, wigwam

PROCEDURES

1. Have students go back in time and compare and contrast land and water use during Native American settlement and now.
2. Have them listen to a prelude to the story. When the storyteller delivers the story, in order to create a more interactive atmosphere, the Storyteller says “ho” throughout the story and the listeners answer with the word “hey”. The storyteller can speak softly at times and louder at other times to create interest in the listeners.
3. Explain the significance of the storyteller to Native American times. Traditions were passed down through stories.
4. Have students or read aloud the story about a youngster who is listening to a Native American elder. The story that follows is based on the story about the Nash-a-way River, but may be interchanged with rivers they are more familiar with, such as the Farmington or Connecticut Rivers. The elder provides some background information before commencing with the river story. Read this part to students or have them read silently:

Farmington River Watershed Education Curriculum: Elementary

(Prelude to river story read by instructor)

It was a cool, autumn day and we sat around the campfire listening to stories that were passed down from our ancestors. "Grandfather, tell us a story." I wanted to hear of a time past. My grandfather would tell us stories that were handed down from generation to generations. Listening to stories helped us remember our roots, what our traditions and cultures are and most importantly why it is so important to preserve the river. "What was it like many years ago?" Before telling my favorite story, grandfather told about our ancestors.

"Ancestors of Connecticut's Native American people once lived by a great lake," the grandfather said. He went on to tell us that it was later called Glacial Lake Hitchcock. The people swam and fished in this lake many thousands of years ago. The lake no longer exists, because the unstable dam of drift that held the water back broke through. All that is left are the fertile fields for farmland. Ancestors moved from the area of the lake to a valley.

They settled in the valley of the river called Wattunkshausepo, meaning 'fast flowing and winding river'. The river was significant to the Native Americans. Life was based on more of a nomadic (wandering) lifestyle. Whole villages were moved to a river in the spring for fishing, to small forest crop clearings in the summer and thick woods for hunting in the winter. That is why the land and river were always cared for, because the American Indians did not use up all its resources. The river provided most of the food for the tribes living in the Farmington River Valley. Wildlife, birds, salmon all thrived in this river. In meadows in what was later called the town of Simsbury, corn was planted, a staple of Native American life.

"Tell us the story of the river," I begged my grandfather. And so he did...

Excerpt from (The River Ran Wild, by Lynne Cherry)

"Long ago a river ran wild through towering forests. Bears, moose and herds of deer, hawks and owls all made their homes in the peaceful river valley. Geese paused on their long migration and rested on its banks. Beavers, turtles, and schools of fish swam in its clear waters.

One day a group of native people, searching for a place to settle, came upon a river valley. From atop a mountain, they saw the river nestled in its valley, a silver sliver in the sun.

They came down from the mountain, and at the river's edge they knelt to quench their thirst with its clear water. Pebbles shone from the bottom.

"Let us settle by the river," said the chief of the native people.

The people built a village. They gathered cattails from the riverbanks to thatch their dwellings. In the forest they set fires to clear brush from the forest floor. In these clearings, they planted corn and squash for eating. They made arrows for hunting and canoes for river travel.

When the Indians hunted in the forest or caught salmon in the river, they killed only what they needed for themselves for food and clothing. They asked all the forest creatures that they killed to please forgive them.

The people saw a rhythm to their lives and in the seasons. The river, land and forest provided all that they needed."

5. After both the prelude and story are either read to the students or the students read themselves, lead a discussion about the Native American life. Group students and divide questions for student groups to answer for a later discussion. The last question may be

answered by all the groups. Use the following questions as a guide:

1. Who is the storyteller? (*grandfather or elder*)
 2. What is the significance of the storyteller to the Native American culture? (*The storyteller shared Native American traditions and culture through the stories*)
 3. Where did the first Native Americans live in Connecticut, according to the elder? (*Lake Hitchcock*)
 4. What happened to this lake? (*the unstable dam of drift broke*)
 5. What does the “unstable dam of drift” mean? (*drift is glacial rock that held the water as a dam would – it later eroded and broke away*)
 6. Where did the ancestors move? (*valley – Farmington Valley*)
 7. What was the river called and what does it mean? (*Wattunkshausepo – fast flowing and winding river*)
 8. Describe the river. What type of fish swam in it? (*clear, cool, rocks on bottom – salmon*)
 9. Describe the valley and surrounding area. (*tall forests, mountains, wildlife plentiful*)
 10. What is the time period for this story? (*approximately 500 years ago*)
 11. What was used to make houses? (*Cattails thatched houses, wood*)
 12. What did the Native Americans grow and eat? (*corn, squash*)
 13. Compare your lifestyle to the Native Americans.
6. Have students refer to a picture of a Native American house, a wigwam. Have students work in groups to create a wigwam. They may use construction paper or a sturdier paper, such as oak tag or cardboard. Students can collect natural items, such as leaves, sticks or grasses to glue on their wigwam form. Have students place wigwam on a piece of cardboard. Add a river, trees, garden and wildlife pictorial to your model.

EXTENSION:

1. Read the following Native American story:

How the Fly Saved the River

A Native American Tale

Many, many years ago when the world was new, there was a beautiful river. Fish in great numbers lived in this river, and its water was so pure and sweet that all the animals came there to drink.

A giant moose heard about the river and he too came there to drink. But he was so big, and he drank so much, that soon the water began to sink lower and lower.

The beavers were worried. The water around their lodges was disappearing. Soon their homes would be destroyed.

The muskrats were worried, too. What would they do if the water vanished? How could they live?

The fish were very worried. The other animals could live on land if the water dried up, but they couldn't.

All the animals tried to think of a way to drive the moose from the river, but he was so big that they were too afraid to try. Even the bear was afraid of him.

At last the fly said he would try to drive the moose away. All the animals laughed and jeered. How could a tiny fly frighten a giant moose? The fly said nothing, but that day, as soon as the moose appeared, he went into action.

He landed on the moose's foreleg and bit sharply. The moose stamped his foot harder, and each time he stamped, the ground sank and the water rushed in to fill it up. Then the fly jumped about all over the moose, biting and biting and biting until the moose was in a frenzy. He dashed madly about the banks of the river, shaking his head, stamping his feet, snorting and blowing, but he couldn't get rid of that pesky fly. At last the moose fled from the river, and didn't come back.

The fly was very proud of his achievement, and boasted to the other animals, "Even the small can fight the strong if they use their brains to think."

1. What does the last sentence in the story mean to you?
2. Can the animals mean other things? For example, the moose drinking all the water, leaving nothing left, what can that signify? (industry, big developments, colonization)
3. When did the Native American tribes live in your area? What are the names of the tribes?
4. Are Native Americans alive today? How are they different and how are they the same as their ancestors?

RESOURCES

Bell, Michael, *The Face of Connecticut, People, Geology, and the Land*, 1986, Connecticut Geological and Natural Survey, Hartford, CT 06106

Cherry, Lynne, *A River Ran Wild*, 1992, AA Gulliver Green Book, Harcourt Brace & Company, New York, NY 100110.

<http://www.ilhawaii.net/~stony/lore09.html>

GLOSSARY

ancestors - a person from whom one is descended, especially if more remote than a grandparent; a forebear

cattails - any of various perennial herbs of the genus *Typha*, widespread in marshy places and having long strap-like leaves and a dense cylindrical cluster of minute flowers and fruit

culture - patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought

drift - rock debris transported and deposited by or from ice, especially by or from a glacier

elders - greater than another in age or seniority

generations - all of the offspring that are at the same stage of descent from a common ancestor

glacier - a huge mass of ice slowly flowing over a land mass, formed from compacted snow in an area where snow accumulation exceeds melting

storyteller - one who tells or writes stories

tradition - the passing down of elements of a culture from generation to generation, especially by oral communication

wigwam - a Native American dwelling commonly having an arched or conical framework overlaid with bark, hides, or mats.