

Forest Connections: First Nations and the Forest



Summary

Students will research a First Nations tribe in Canada and explore their connection to forests.

Activity Information



Level: Grades 4, 6 and 7

Subject: Life Science: Habitats and Communities, Diversity of Life, Interactions Within Ecosystems; Social Studies; Drama

Estimated duration: Two 60 minute class periods for research; preparation, one 60 minute class period for presentation

Materials: props useful for individual presentations

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Describe how personal actions help conserve natural resources and protect the environment in their region.
- Describe the potential impact of the use by humans of regional natural resources.
- Identify scientific discoveries and technological innovations of people from different cultures (e.g. identify examples such as the use of tree bark by Aboriginals for headaches, which led to the development of a synthetic drug).
- Predict how the removal of a plant or animal population affects the rest of the community.

Teacher Background

Aboriginal peoples are the original inhabitants of North America. Because we often study their history and their significant role in Canada's history, we tend to forget that they live in sophisticated, organized, and self-sufficient

societies. The First Nations constitute a cultural mosaic as rich and diverse as that of Western Europe, including a large cross section of cultural groups. In Canada alone, we find a rich variety of cultures, including Mi'Kmaq, Maliseet, Seneca, Cree, Ojibwa, Mohawk, and many, many more.

Over the centuries, Aboriginal peoples have acquired knowledge, invented technology and developed a way of life adapted to their specific environment. Their discoveries using traditional herbs and plants from the natural environment are profound. Today, many of the items we find in our medicine cabinets come from traditional Aboriginal healing methods and remedies. They have depended on nature for their survival and have a special relationship with it. For them, the Earth is sacred, something to be respected. They consider themselves a part of the Earth.

The forest plays an integral role in the social, spiritual and cultural lives of First Nations across Canada. It is the forest that provides homes for wildlife that has become the basis for narratives and stories describing tribal customs and culture. It is also the forest where ceremonies and cultural traditions are often based. The forest also offers a firm foundation upon which First Nations peoples and communities can develop an economic future,

Grandchild's Fondness

The time will soon be here when my grandchild will long for the cry of a loon, the flash of a salmon, the whisper of spruce needles, or the screech of an eagle. But he will not make friends with any of these creatures and when his heart aches with longing he will curse me.

Have I done all to keep the air fresh? Have I cared enough about the water? Have I left the eagle to soar in freedom? Have I done everything I could to earn my grandchild's fondness?

Chief Dan George

while maintaining their traditional connection with the land.

More than 80 per cent of Aboriginal communities lie within Canada's productive forest zones and many communities are developing forest-based enterprises such as sawmills, logging companies, eco-tourism activities, and non-timber product ventures. Aboriginal people have also developed a unique knowledge of the forest ecosystem through centuries of intimate contact with the land. With these traditional and contemporary forest experiences, native people are well-positioned to contribute to today's sustainable forest management practices for the benefit of their communities and all Canadians.

The objective of this lesson is for students to better understand First Nations people and their connection and relationship to the forests of Canada.

Procedure

Step 1

Begin with a discussion of First Nations in Canada. Who are they, and what role have they played in Canada's history? Consider their special ties to the Earth, and how they might be particularly interested in the forest environment. Ask the students to list as many First Nations tribes or groups that they can. Put their answers on the chalkboard. You may wish to include some of the following:

- Haida
- Mi'Kmaq
- Ojibway
- Cree
- Dakota
- Tlingit
- Maliseet
- Montagnais
- Nisga'a

- Dene
- Salteaux
- Shuswap
- Nipissing
- Oneida, and any others you want to mention.

Step 2

Divide your class into groups of three or four students, with a maximum of eight groups. Explain that each group will select a First Nations tribe or group. They will carry out background research on their First Nations, exploring specifically how the forest is important to their culture. They will then prepare a presentation to share with the rest of the class.

Step 3

Ask a representative from each group to come to the chalkboard/flip chart and check off the tribe their group is going to study. There can only be one group per tribe. Explain that they will be given library/class time to prepare but that they will need to spend time after school hours to complete their work.

Provide the following questions to your students, explaining that their research and presentation must address the following questions:

- Where is your First Nations tribe located?
- What are three interesting facts about the First Nations people that you discovered in your research?
- What kind of forest do they live in/near? (Boreal, deciduous, etc.)
- What do they use the forest for? (Cultural traditions, harvesting, recreation, etc.)
- Are there any threats to the forest?
- Are there any formal rules, laws or policies in place to protect the forest?

- Are there any cultural practices or traditions that help protect the forest?

First Nations school – coordinate a pen pal exchange between schools.

Native Links Page
<http://www.johnco.com/native/>

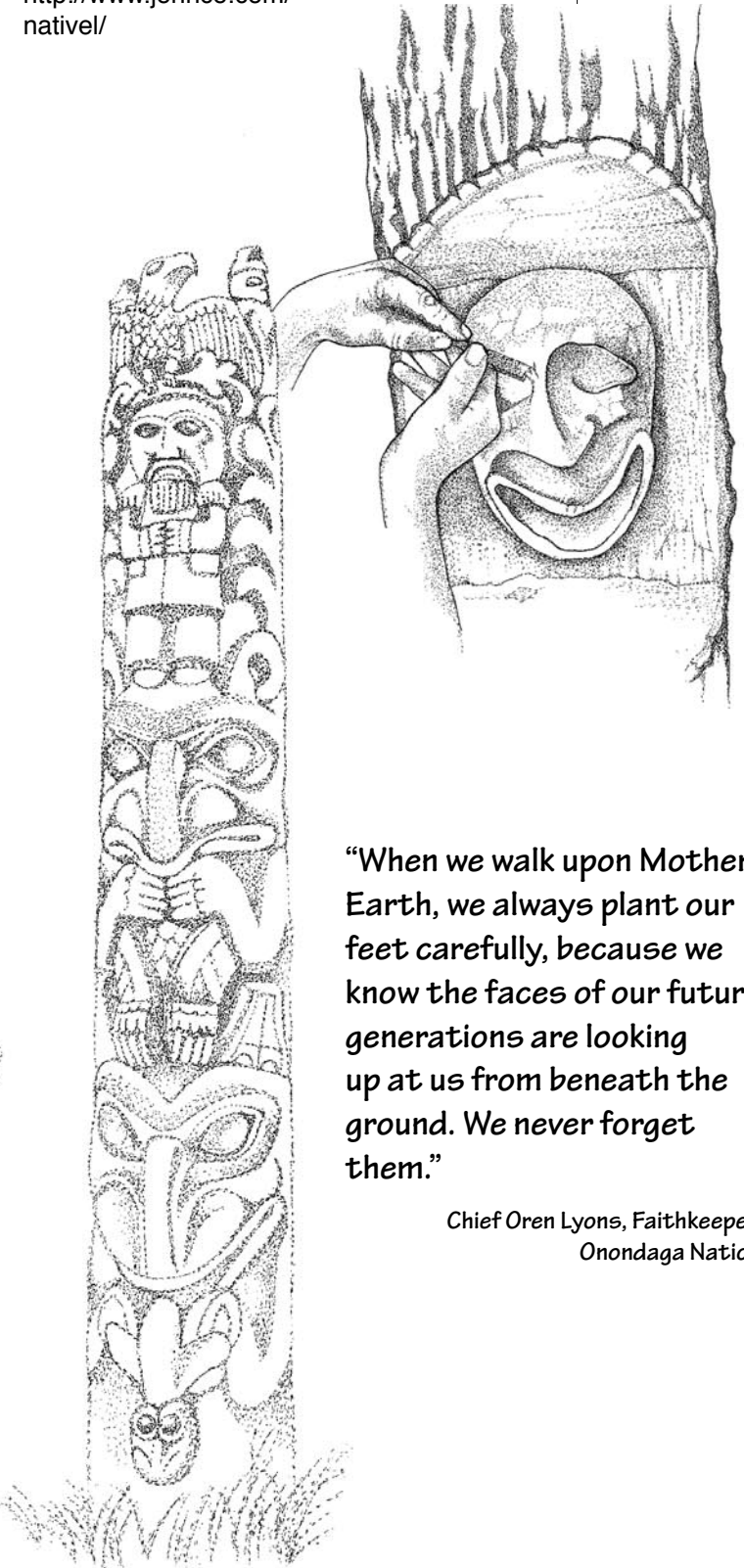
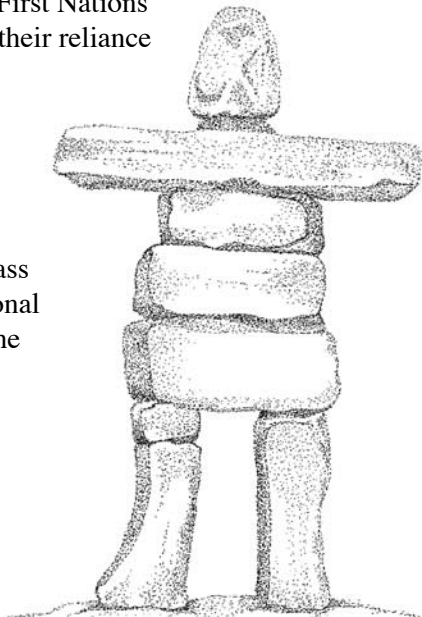
Step 4

Your students can present their information in a variety of forms, but the emphasis will be on the oral rather than written presentation material. Here are a few ideas they can use to present their information:

- Create a skit/play or movie to show the relationship between the First Nations and forests.
- Create and produce a news magazine show about First Nations and their connection to forests.
- Carry out a mock interview with an “elder” who will explain the traditional relationship.
- Create a story or legend that explains the relationship between First Nations and the forest. Present this in the form of a skit.

Extensions

- Ask your students to research an American or International First Nations community and their reliance on the forest.
- Invite an elder from a local First Nations group to speak to your class about their personal connections to the forest.
- Search the Native Links Page and contact a



“When we walk upon Mother Earth, we always plant our feet carefully, because we know the faces of our future generations are looking up at us from beneath the ground. We never forget them.”

Chief Oren Lyons, Faithkeeper,
Onondaga Nation