

## **Exploring Our Past Native Americans of the Northwest**

### **Program Overview and Objective:**

Travel through the history of the Northwest United States to a time with no cars, skyscrapers, or suburbs. A time when Native Americans used the gifts of the land to survive. Discover the abundance of food available to the people of the Northwest and the comfortable lifestyle they were able to attain with their natural resources.

The following activities are designed to enrich students' understanding of the culture and customs of Native Northwest Americans. These exercises expand on the content of the video and allow students to use their own creativity and their ability to draw conclusions and develop critical thinking skills.

### **Teacher Led Activity #1**

Objective: Archaeologists have learned about Native American culture (and other cultures) by studying artifacts. This exercise gives students the opportunity to make inferences about other people based on important artifacts, giving students a sense of how archaeology works and a sense of the importance of artifacts left over from other cultures.

Ask students to collect a few items that they believe tell something about themselves (e.g. sports trophy, favorite book, etc) and bring them to class for an activity. During class time, have students share their "artifacts" with a small group or partner (this can be more of a game, if the "artifacts" are buried in a box of packing popcorn). Each group or partner should study the "artifacts" and try to learn something about their fellow student. Ask students to think about what these "artifacts" tell them about this person, what is important to him/her? What kind of person is he/she? etc. Note: this activity works best if the partners/groups are not made up of students who are already close.

### **Independent Activity #1**

Objective: When Native Americans first came to the land that is now The United States, they settled in areas where they could find resources to support life. In the Pacific Northwest, that included the Pacific Ocean and rivers filled with fish and sea life, as well as a cool environment with trees that provided wood for shelter and transportation. This activity provides an anticipatory set for understanding the settlement patterns of Native Americans and the need for proximal resources.

Teacher should hand out map of the United States (worksheet #1 – a blank map of the U.S. as it stood when Native Americans crossed the Bering Land Bridge). Before watching the video, ask students to study the map and determine where they would choose to live if they had just discovered this new mass of land.

Encourage students to consider the geography of the place and the types of resources that might be available. Following the video, have students reassess the work they've done, make changes that they deem necessary, and discuss their choices with a partner or a small group.

### **Independent Activity #2**

Objective: The Native Americans in the Northwest had abundant natural resources at their disposal. With these resources, these people were able to meet their basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. This activity will encourage students to reconsider their own needs for survival and an appreciation for the resourcefulness of the Northwest Native Americans.

Teacher should hand out a picture of the typical Northwest landscape (worksheet #2 – an illustration of the basic landscape of the Northwest as it appeared to the Native American tribes). Before watching the video, ask students to imagine they were transported to this beautiful area with none of their possessions – no clothes, no food, no shelter. How would they begin to meet their basic needs? Ask students to write some of their ideas on a separate piece of paper or to use the worksheet to draw in the kinds of things they might do with the resources of the area. After watching the video, ask students to reassess their previous brainstorming session and add to their drawing and/or list of means to meet their basic needs.

### **Independent Activity #3**

Objective: Following the American Revolution, the lives of Native Americans in the Pacific Northwest were forever changed. One of these changes was the loss of many tribe members and the oral history that helped to keep their culture alive. This activity gives students a sense of their own history and the

importance of storytelling in all cultures. Discussing this activity as a class should help students understand the gravity of the loss of this storytelling tradition in these communities.

Ask each student to think of one or two family members that they believe could help pass down their family history through stories. Have students interview these family members and record their conversations to preserve their stories. Before talking to their family members, students should think of questions to ask to get the conversation started. After speaking with their subjects, students should reflect on the meaning of their stories. Have students share with the class some of their stories and discuss what would happen if these family members weren't around to share this history.

### **Small Group Activity #1**

Objective: While watching the video, students will be introduced to some differences in the culture of the Pacific Northwest tribes that they may find disturbing or strange. This small group exercise is meant to get students to consider the broader picture of Native American culture and allow them to place themselves in the perspective of another culture.

Students should discuss with a partner or a small group how the culture of the Northwest Native American tribes differs from our culture today. For example, there has been much debate in recent years about spearing whales and hunting in general. It is now illegal to hunt whales. Why was it acceptable for Native Americans to hunt whales, but it is not acceptable in today's society. Students should consider the differences in need, culture, and technology. Ask students to think of other examples of how our culture is different from that of the Pacific Northwest Native Americans, and to discuss how those differences influence our culture today.

### **Small Group Activity #2**

Objective: Men and women in the Pacific Northwest tribes had very different and defined roles. This activity will encourage students to discuss these roles and determine which responsibilities were more important to the tribe. Students should conclude that, while different, each group had a necessary role in the community and that the community could not thrive without the participation of both men and women. Divide students into small groups, including an equal number of boys and girls in each group, if possible. Have students recall from the video the different roles of men and women in the Pacific Northwest tribes. Ask the boys in each group confer to debate the importance of the women's roles in the community and have the girls in each group confer to debate the importance of the men's roles in the community. Ask students to consider whether the men or the women played a more important role in these communities and to defend their position. Ask students to consider how the roles of men and women have changed over time, and whether their roles have increased or diminished in importance.

### **Hands on Activity #1**

Objective: Native Americans in the Northwest typically lived in communities of plank houses built in a row. More important members of the village had larger plank houses. The most important person in a family had a separate room. This activity gives students the opportunity to design a plank house for their own family, embracing the architectural, artistic, and hierarchical aspects of the Northwest tribes. Imagine that your family lived in the Northwest as Native Americans. Design a three-dimensional plank house using classroom supplies or (if no supplies are available) design a two-dimensional plank house. Try to design the house to scale, and decorate it with family symbols. As you are designing your house, think about how large it should be, considering how important your family would be in the tribe. Also, consider who would be the leader in your family and why. Present your plank house to your group or class and discuss your thoughts as a group.

### **Hands on Activity #2**

Objective: Part of the Northwest tribal culture was reflected in totem poles that stood outside of every family's home and in the canoes they carved from trees. This activity will help students personalize the importance of this art form, using common objects to create their own family totem pole or canoe, and using it to tell an important story about their own family.

Ask each student to bring in to class several bars of plain soap, a plastic spoon, and a wooden skewer. After watching the video, students should have an idea of the symbolism behind totem poles. Ask students to consider the kinds of things they would use to create their own totem pole or canoe. Students should then use their spoons to carve totem figures or canoe out of their bars of soap and assemble the (totem) pieces on

the wooden skewer. Decorate (totem poles) with red and black paint. Once they have completed their totem pole or canoe, students should write the story that their project tells about their family.

### **Whole Class Activity #1**

Objective: Because the tribes of the Pacific Northwest had abundant resources, they had ample time for social activities. Many families regularly hosted parties called “potlatches” to elevate their status in the community. By organizing and hosting their own potlatch, students will gain a sense of how duties can be divided in a community, a familiarity with the customs of these tribes, and an understanding of the differences between a culture that gives away possessions as a mode of gaining respect and compare it to the inverse relationship in our own culture.

Divide the class into two groups. Each group will plan and host a potlatch on a different day. Students should be given the basic guidelines of what a potlatch is and encouraged to work as a group to determine the best method for hosting. Students can use symbols for gifts or make gifts with classroom art supplies. Students should be given some time to plan their potlatch during class and a given date and time to host. Following the parties, discuss as a class the planning and execution of each potlatch, and the differences between the culture of these tribes and our culture today.

### **Whole Class Activity #2**

Objective: Following the American Revolutionary War, life changed for the Native Americans in the Northwest. These communities were virtually destroyed when European Americans overtook the land for their own use, and spread diseases that killed thousands of Native Americans. This exercise is designed to give students the opportunity to consider both the Native American and the European American perspectives at the time.

Divide the class into two groups. Assign one group the identity of Native Americans of the Northwest and one group the identity of European Americans. Remind students that in any situation, each group of people has their own perspective. Ask each student to write down their perspective from their assigned identity. Encourage a class discussion about the different points of view of the Native Americans and the European Americans following the Revolutionary War.