

## **Exploring Our Past – Native Americans of the Great Plains**

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

For thousands of years, Native Americans of the Great Plains roamed across this land, following the buffalo and living off the land. This program explores the customs and culture of these nomadic tribes, including their spirituality and their respect for nature. The activities below allow students to expand their comprehension and interest in the Great Plains people, using critical thinking activities, discussion, and opportunities for artistic expression. Students will learn more about the experiences and lifestyle of Native Americans through independent activities, small group discussions, and whole class activities designed to help students retain knowledge and enrich their understanding of Native American culture.

### **Whole Class 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.

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

Objective: Native Americans of the Great Plains traveled from place to place seeking food from buffalo. These nomadic people had to create shelter that could be transported, was light, and yet could still protect them from the elements. This activity involves the entire class using available resources to create a life size model of a tipi. This activity encourages cooperation and team building and reinforces the necessary elements of this type of shelter.

Working as a class, build a life-size tipi. Have students work together to brainstorm materials that can be used, how to engineer the tipi and how to set it up. Using what they have learned from the program, students should make this tipi as accurate as possible. The tipi should be easy to set up and take down, it should be set up to face the east, it should be filled with the same items a traditional tipi would be filled with (symbolically), and decorated on the outside with meaningful art.

### **Whole Class Activity #3**

Objective: For thousands of years, Native Americans of the Great Plains lived off the land, following herds of buffalo and using natural resources to survive. Once European

settlers came to the Great Plains, the number of Native Americans was drastically reduced in a short amount of time. This activity should provoke a discussion among students about the slippery slope of introducing a new culture and set of standards to an existing group.

Conduct a class discussion about the progression of events that led to the demise of Native American tribes in the Great Plains. The beginning of the demise began with the slaughter of buffalo by European settlers, which led to a diminished food supply for the Plains people. Ask students to consider how the disappearance of buffalo led to other events, resulting in both the killing of Native Americans, and the building of reservations. Students should be encouraged to consider the perspective of both the Native Americans and the European settlers. Further, ask students to consider our current global situation – are these events taking place in America or elsewhere in the world?

### **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 Great Plains, that included vast grasslands, sweeping valleys, rolling hills, freshwater streams, and few trees. This activity provides an anticipatory set for understanding the settlement patterns of Native Americans and their ability to adapt to different environments.

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: Native Americans of the Great Plains were incredibly resourceful in using all parts of the buffalo they killed. This activity encourages students to think about the differences between the Native American perspective on food and our own modern perspective. Students should consider whether Native American ideals are realistic in our modern world.

Think about the different types of food we eat in America today. How much waste do we create? How could we be better conservators of our resources? Consider how the Native Americans of the Great Plains used their resources, specifically, how they utilized all parts of buffalo. How can we learn from their practices? Is it possible to live this way in the modern world?

### **Independent Activity #3**

Objective: Men and women in the Great Plains tribes had very distinct roles. This activity allows students to review these roles and to determine what their place would be in one of these tribes. Students also compare roles of the Great Plains people to the modern day roles of men and women.

Have students make two columns on a page and list the roles of women of the Great Plains in one column and the roles of men in the other. Ask students to identify which

tasks they would feel most comfortable doing. How are those roles different from those of the people in their own lives? How would they fit into the Great Plains culture?

#### **Independent Activity #4**

Objective: The Native Americans of the Great Plains made unique artwork and clothing. This hands-on activity allows students to express their own creativity by emulating some of the creations of the Great Plains people.

After watching the program, students should think about the artistic nature of the people of the Great Plains. Using what they have learned from the video, students should create for themselves artwork based on that of these Native Americans. Students can choose from examples in the video (crushed berry painting, carving [soap], designing/making clothing from classroom materials or fabric) to re-create using common materials.

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

Objective: The Native Americans of the Great Plains lived a nomadic lifestyle. They traveled from place to place, following herds of buffalo. This activity allows students to imagine changing their lifestyle to that of a nomadic people and to consider how that change would influence their lives. Furthermore, students are given the opportunity to think about modern day nomadic people and how they fit into our culture.

Divide the class in to small groups. Have groups discuss the nomadic lifestyle of the Native Americans of the Great Plains. How would you live this lifestyle? What would you take with you from place to place? How would you learn? How would your life be different? Ask students to think about these questions, and come up with their own as well. Ask students if they know of people today who live a nomadic lifestyle. Who are they? What are they following? How are their lives different from those of your students?

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

Objective: Native Americans of the Great Plains hunted for most of their food. This activity allow students to express their creativity, combined with physical activity to review the different types of food and the ways in which these tribes found food on the plains.

Have students work in small groups to create a physical fitness game to help other students appreciate how the Native Americans of the Great Plains found food. Students can use different types of targets and different types of implements to re-create the idea of hunting game. Encourage students to be creative, but to use as their foundation information from the video.

#### **Small Group Activity #3**

Objective: The oldest members of the Great Plains tribes were the tribal chiefs. Chiefs used their wisdom to solve problems in the tribe. This role-playing activity allows students to experience different functions of the tribe and to become chief, making rules, solving problems, and passing on the ways of the Native Americans.

Divide class into small groups. Each group should imagine that they are members of a Great Plains tribe. Each group should be assigned a tribal chief. The chief should make rules for the tribe and solve problems that the members create by role-playing. Chiefs should find a way to pass on their wisdom to their tribe and to teach them the ways of the

Native Americans. Each member of the group should be given a chance to be chief during the role-playing session.

#### **Small Group Activity #4**

Objective: The Native Americans of the Great Plains believed in many gods. Their beliefs were reflected in their vast artwork. By examining different pieces of art, inferring meaning, and creating tales, students gain an understanding of the depth of importance of these pieces of culture to the Plains people.

Working in small groups, students should look at pictures of Plains tribes' artwork. Using what they know about the beliefs of these people, students should study this artwork and infer their meaning to the culture of the Plains people. Students should consider that the Native Americans of the Great Plains believed that the gods showed themselves in the form of the sun, moon, stars, animals, people and even rocks. Students should use these pieces of art to record their interpretation of a Native American tale.