

What's in a Tree?

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Summary

Students explore contemporary and traditional uses of trees.

Grade level

Kindergarten

Time required

1_ hours

Materials

The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein

Cultural artifacts made of wood or [photos of them](#) – bark baskets, bows, arrows, flutes, drums, toys, etc.

Posters and [photos of indigenous trees](#)

Photographs of Plateau Indian baskets – see Resources

[Trees of the Flathead Indian Reservation document](#)

[Basket template](#)

Goals

By completing this lesson, students will

- 1) identify a wide variety of contemporary and traditional uses for trees
- 2) learn the concept of a resources and
- 3) develop inquiry process skills.

Science standards addressed

National Science Standards

- Abilities necessary to do scientific inquiry
- Abilities of technological design
- Understanding about science and technology

American Indian Science Standards

- The innate properties of objects and materials that were (and are) recognized by traditional Native American cultures in the manufacture and use of specific tools and material objects that capitalize upon those properties
- Problem solving skills demonstrated by historical American Indians in the development and improvement of tools and technologies, such as in pottery technology

Teacher tips

Gather traditional or contemporary American Indian music that utilizes traditional wooden instruments like drums, cedar flute, etc. Display cultural artifacts made from wood (or pictures). Use the Flathead Reservation Trees document to familiarize yourself with the reservation's indigenous trees and their uses.

Consider taking students on a fieldtrip to the People's Center located in Pablo, MT, which has excellent exhibits of Salish, Kootenai and Pend d' Oreille artifacts, many of which are made from wood. The Center staff are very knowledgeable and work well with students. Ask them to teach students to play a traditional game whose equipment is made from wood.

If you have access to birch bark, it is relatively easy for students to work with. Use the templates to cut out the basket patterns from the bark. Using an awl, punch holes every _ ". Cut lengths of string or sinew for students to use in sewing the baskets together. Thread the string into large needles and knot the ends.

Background information

Trees have provided materials that American Indian people used to make a variety of tools, instruments, utilitarian items, shelters, art, etc. for generations. Trees species were chosen to make specific types of items based on their wood's properties. Refer to the file on trees of the Flathead Indian Reservation for specific information about indigenous trees and how they are used by Salish, Kootenai and Pend d'Oreille people.

Today the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes manage the reservation forests for sustainability and to satisfy a wide variety of interests including timber harvest, recreation, wildlife and cultural concerns. Timber harvest is the second largest source of income for the tribes, after the leasing of Kerr Dam for hydroelectric power production.

Procedure

Engagement

- 1) Read *The Giving Tree* and discuss.
- 2) Ask students to look around the classroom and find the things made of wood. Make a list of the many things we use each day that are made from wood.

Exploration

Let students examine cultural artifacts or direct them to pictures displayed. Ask students to *predict* what the artifacts are and what they are made of. Play American Indian cedar flute and drum music.

Explanation

Facilitate a discussion about using wood as a *resource* to make items long ago and today. Talk about the fact that long ago people were limited to using trees that grew in their areas. Post pictures of the indigenous trees of the Flathead Reservation and discuss the types of items made from them.

Elaboration

- 1) Invite a tribal basket maker or another tribal artisan that makes cultural items from wood to talk to students and demonstrate their art. Ask them to talk about how they obtain the resources for their work.
- 2) Give each student a birch bark basket pattern and a threaded needle. Help students sew their basket together.

Evaluation

Have students draw one *traditional* item that Indian people used to make from wood a long time ago. Ask students to draw a contemporary item made from wood. Post the pictures beneath pictures of the types of trees they are made from.

Vocabulary

resources

predict

traditional

Resources

Riverside Municipal Museum – Provides photos of Plateau Indian baskets. Go to “Online Exhibits” then to “Art of the Plateau Indians”, then to “Interior Salish Baskets”.
www.ci.riverside.ca.us/museum/