



# Lesson: Native American Culture

**Grade:** K-3

**Subject:** English

**Objectives:**

- learn about Native American culture and their views and relationships with the environment
- understand that people from various backgrounds and parts of the world can think differently about the world around them

**Teaching Time:** Varied (depending on the teacher's overview of the subject)

**Materials:** Transparency, Oregon Tribes Map; Handout, Native American Poetry and Pacific Northwest Native American Tales

(Optional:) Native American Play, "The Strongest One" (in the "Play" section of the resource guide).

**Vocabulary:** stewardship culture

## Background

In order to provide students some perspective on environmental issues, it is important to help them understand that people from other cultures and countries may think differently about the world around them.

Americans of European descent brought their own values to the United States which resulted in densely populated cities, industrialization, and deforestation, for example. By viewing the environment as something that can be manipulated rather than something that can be coexisted with, we now live with many environmental problems. After going through this lesson, students should be able to appreciate that people have different cultural perspectives and that our own "cultural values" may have to be examined in order to protect the earth.

In order to discuss Native American themes concerning the environment, students should already have some historical context of early America, Native Americans and the first European settlers. This lesson could compliment your lessons about Lewis & Clark and the Oregon Trail, for example.

You may wish to focus more in depth on tribes in the Northwest or located within Oregon. However, specific poetry and lore from Northwest Native American tribes is not as easy to find as poetry from other tribes in the U.S. There is a list of potential resources on NW tribes at the end of this lesson, for your convenience. You may also wish to read or teach from the books listed in the resource section in "Children's Books" under Native American/Other Cultures.

The following is a partial list of Oregon tribes that you may want your class to study. Tribes marked with an asterisk no longer exist primarily due to diseases brought from settlers; changes in the environment such as mining, logging, or river damming; and reservation relocation.

Alesea*	Coos	Klamath	Molalla	Umatilla
Burns Paiute	Coquille	Kuitsh*	Rogue River	Upper Umpqua
Cayuse	Cow Creek Band	Kwalhioqua*	Siletz	Walla Walla
Celilo Wy-um	Fort McDermott	Latgawa*	Siuslaw	Warm Springs
Chastacosta*	Grand Ronde	Lower Umpqua	Takelma*	Wasco
Chinook	Kalapuya	Modocki	Tillamook	
Yoncalla				
Clatsop*				

## Procedure:

Depending on the skill level of your class, read to the class or assign selections of Native American Poetry, Folk Tales, and the Play "The Strongest One" to members of the class to read aloud and discuss the Oregon Tribes Map in relationship to where you are located.

## Reflection/Response:

### DISCUSSION

- In the poem, "I Look at You", what is the main idea? How does the author describe the way Native Americans value nature and



the environment?

- **What words or phrases does the author use to convey appreciation for the environment?**
- **What natural resources (the things that we use that come from nature) does she identify in the poem?** (berries, rocks, trees, buffalo, etc.)
- Discuss how you would feel if you lived in a society where you or your family made their own clothes, hunted and fished for their own food, and walked, rode horses, or took a canoe to get somewhere.
- **Can you name some types of pollution that would be lessened by living this way?** (List responses on the board--students should identify less air pollution from factories and cars, less chemicals from factories, less waste produced because people use the natural resources around them.)
- **Even though today, Native Americans and other U.S. citizens live in a “modern society” with electricity, cars, and lots of things for our homes and offices, can you think of some ways we can lessen our impact on the environment?** (List the responses on the board: examples include: riding a bike, recycling, reusing things, donating unwanted clothes, learning to take and buy only what we really need and thinking about the things we buy and how they impact the earth--natural resource extraction, transportation to market, etc.)
- **In the Poem, “The Wind Picks Up”, what natural process is the title predicting will happen?**
- **Does the author feel good or bad about the rain storm? What words does the author use to convey mood? Why is her view of the rain positive, when most people think of the rain as negative? Is her viewpoint fact or opinion? Which perspective or viewpoint is the correct one? Does the “correct” viewpoint depend on where you live or who you are?**
- Discuss the ways in which people depend on natural resources such as wind, rain, plants, and animals in order to live.
- Native Americans have a long cultural history of coexisting with plants and animals, discuss how this is different from “modern society”. Bring out ideas like: we raise certain animals on large farms to produce food like chicken, beef, milk and cheese instead of hunting for our food; and grow plants like corn and wheat on a large scale using pesticides and fertilizers, etc. Help students understand that while these changes have “modernized” society, but they have also created much more pollution in the air, water and land that we have to deal with over the long term.
- **Which story from “Pacific Northwest Native American Tales” did you like the best?** Have several students answer and explain why they liked the story.
- **What is the main idea or theme that these three stories have in common? Do you think it is important to respect nature and the animals that live around us? Why or why not?**

(Optional)



Example of Native American furniture. Photo taken at the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.



- Perform the Play “The Strongest One”
- **What does this play make you think about?**
- **What are the relationships between the plants, animals and natural resources mentioned in the play?** (Lead the students to understand that life is a cycle and that all things are interconnected, for example plants need the sun to grow, animals eat the plants, people eat the animals, etc.)
- **Why do you think that Native Americans tell folk stories to their children?** To help them gain a “sense of place”, in other words to understand the environment in which they live and to learn to respect the natural things around them.
- **Why is it important to respect our surroundings and understand the relationships of nature?** Because we have to learn to coexist with the earth. For example, it is okay to use trees to make wood for our houses and to make paper, but if we take too many, we are destroying the homes for animals in the wild. Also, if we cut too many trees in one area, rain makes the soil run into our rivers, lakes and streams which can kill the fish.
- Discuss the concept of “stewardship” and help students understand that no matter what our cultural values are, it is important to think of ourselves as stewards of the earth so that we can leave a happy, healthy environment for future generations.

**Extensions:**

- Have students write/present their own play or folk tale about something in the environment.
- Some subject examples include: Why do the seasons change?, Why does the sun rise and set?, Why do some animals come out only at night?, Why do salmon migrate from the river to the ocean and back?

**Oregon Common Curriculum Goal:**

**English:** Reading and Literature

- Recognize, pronounce, and know the meaning of words in text.
- Demonstrate literal comprehension of a variety of printed materials.
- Demonstrate evaluative comprehension of a variety of printed materials.
- Read a variety of literary forms of varying complexity from a variety of cultures and time periods.

**Social Science:** Geography

- Understand spatial concepts of location, distance, direction, scale, movement and region.

**Grade 3 Benchmark:**

Students will:

- use context clues to choose the correct meaning of words
- identify a sentence or statement indicating the main idea of the selection
- draw conclusions about the author’s motivation or purpose, probable reasons for actions or beliefs, whether identified portions of the passage are fact or opinion
- view and draw simple maps and pictures to locate, describe, and show movement among places.



Resources to find information on Northwest Native American tribes:

- The First Oregonians*. Eds. Baun, Carolyn M. and Richard Lewis. Portland: Oregon Council for the Humanities, 1991.
- Beckham, Stephen Dow. *Native America in the Twentieth Century: An Encyclopedia*. Ed. Mary B. Davis. New York: Garland Publishing, 1994. *The Indians of Western Oregon: The Land Was Theirs. Coos Bay: Arago Books, 1977.*
- Deloria, Vine, Jr. *Indians of the Pacific Northwest, From the Coming of White Man to the Present Day*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1994.
- Gale Encyclopedia of Native American Tribes, Vol 10*. Ed. Sharon Malinowski & Anna Sheets. Detroit: Gale Publishers, 1998.
- Rafe, Martin. *The Boy Who Lived with the Seals*. (Chinook Legend). New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1993.
- Ruby, Robert H. and John A. Brown. *A Guide to Indian Tribes of the Pacific Northwest*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992.
- Seaburg, William R. and Jay Miller. *Handbook of North American Indians, Vol 7: Northwest Coast*. Ed. Wayne Suttles. Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1990.
- Trafzer, Clifford E. (Wyandot). *Chinook*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1990.

Internet sources:

- Chinook Tribe: [www.chinook-art.com](http://www.chinook-art.com)
- Cow Creek Band: [www.cowcreek.com](http://www.cowcreek.com)
- Grand Ronde: [www.grandronde.org](http://www.grandronde.org)
- Klamath Tribes: [www.klamathtribes.org](http://www.klamathtribes.org)
- National Museum of the American Indian: [www.nmai.si.edu](http://www.nmai.si.edu)
- Siletz Tribes: <http://ctsi.nsn.us>
- Umatilla Tribes: [www.umatilla.nsn.us](http://www.umatilla.nsn.us)
- Warm Springs Tribes: [www.warmsprings.com](http://www.warmsprings.com)

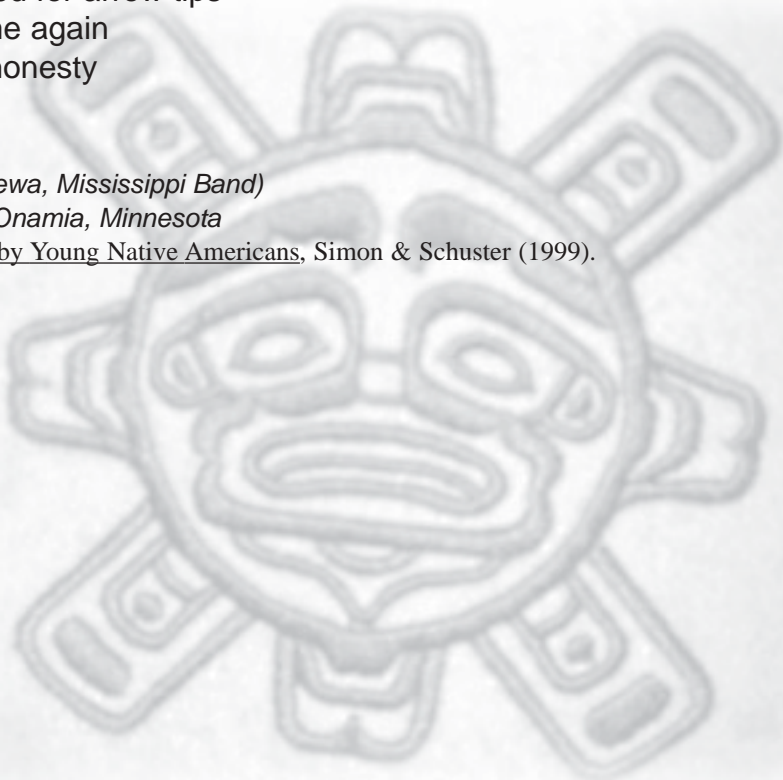


From the Objive People

## I Look at You

I look at you and my mind drifts back to  
A time of peace and honesty  
A time of honor  
A time when all our people  
spoke our Native language  
and were proud to wear  
eagle feathers and beads.  
A time of dancing and giving thanks  
for all that Mother Earth  
gave our people:  
buffalo that roamed the grasslands  
fish that swam in clear blue rivers and lakes  
trees that our canoes were made from  
horses our people rode  
natural spring water pure and cool  
berries, roots, and bulbs, grown in rich soil  
rocks people used to tan hides  
stones our people used for arrow tips  
Then I wish our people had that time again  
A time of peace and honesty  
A time of honor.

- Kelly Hill (*White Earth Minnesota Chippewa, Mississippi Band*)  
Grade 10; age 16; *Nay Ah Shing School, Onamia, Minnesota*  
excerpted from: When the Rain Sings: Poems by Young Native Americans, Simon & Schuster (1999).





From the Tohono O'odham People

### **The Wind Picks Up**

The wind picks up  
the cold air blows  
the clouds bring  
the loud sound  
of thunder and the  
flashing lightning.  
The animals go to  
their homes  
and the people come  
out and enjoy the rain.

The smell of soil:  
the rain falls just enough  
to make a few puddles  
then the rays of the sun  
peek through the clouds  
and the animals  
come out and play  
and soon  
the sun is out  
the puddles of water  
and the sun create  
a rainbow  
that stretches across  
the desert making even more beauty.

- *Rayna Two Two (Tohono O'odham)*

*Grade 8; age 14; Baboquivari High School, Sells, Arizona*

excerpted from: *When the Rain Sings: Poems by Young Native Americans*





From the Tillamook People

## South Wind and Frog

Water was very scarce at that time. There were no rivers, Frog alone had water which she kept in a basket water bucket. Anyone who wanted a drink of water had to go to Frog and ask for it. South Wind came to Frog; he said, "Auntie, I want a drink of water." "Confound it!" she said. "Everybody's drinking my water." She gave him a small drink, just a certain amount and no more. South Wind thought, "It is indeed terrible that there is no water. Water should be free." He left her and he hunted for a long rock that he could grasp in his hand. He watched for his opportunity; and he hit her on the head. He knocked Frog senseless and South Wind took Frog's water; he emptied out that bucket; he threw water all around. He spoke, "That shall be rivers. All over the land there shall be rivers and creeks. Nobody shall own water, no one person."

excerpted from: [Nehalem Tillamook Tales](#) by Melville Jacobs.

From the Makah People

## When the Birds and Animals Were Created

When the world was very young, there were no people on the earth. There were no birds or animals, either. There was nothing but grass and sand and creatures that were neither animals nor people but had some of the traits of people and some of the traits of animals.

Then the two brothers of the Sun and the Moon came to the earth. Their names were Ho-ho-e-ap-bess, which means "The Two-Men-Who-Changed-Things." They came to make the earth ready for a new race of people, the Indians. The Two-Men-Who-Changed-Things called all the creatures to them. Some they changed to animals and birds. Some they changed to trees and smaller plants.

Among them was a bad thief. He was always stealing food from creatures who were fishermen and hunters. The Two-Men-Who-Changed-Things transformed him into Seal. They shortened his arms and tied his legs so that only his feet could move. Then they threw Seal into the Ocean and said to him, "Now you will have to catch your own fish if you are to have anything to eat."

One of the creatures was a great fisherman. He was always on the rocks or was wading with his long fishing spear. He kept it ready to thrust into some fish. He always wore a little cape, round and white over his shoulders. The Two-Men-Who-Changed-Things transformed him into Great Blue Heron. The cape became the white feathers around the neck of Great Blue Heron. The long fishing spear became his sharp pointed bill.

Another creature was both a fisherman and a thief. He had stolen a necklace of shells. The Two-Men-Who-Changed-Things transformed him into Kingfisher. The necklace of shells was turned into a ring of feathers around Kingfisher's neck. He is still a fisherman. He watches the water, and when he sees a fish, he dives headfirst with a splash into the water.

Two creatures had huge appetites. They devoured everything they could find. The Two-Men-Who-Changed-Things transformed one of them into Raven. They transformed his wife into Crow. Both Raven and Crow were given strong beaks so that they could tear their food. Raven new people would have fruit and could use the cherry bark for medicine.





A thin, tough creature they changed into the alder tree, so that the new people would have hard wood for their canoe paddles.

Thus the Two-Men-Who-Changed-Things got the world ready for the new people who were to come. They made the world as it was when the Indians lived in it.

Excerpted from the "Native American Lore Index" page hosted at: <http://www.ihawaii.net/~stony/loreindx.html>

From the Umatilla people

### **THE BOY AND THE EAGLE [Hots-Wal ka Wap-tesh]**

To the Indian, the eagle is held in high regard. The feathers are used in ceremonies and as part of some clothing. For instance, the feathers are attached to a staff and used like a flag.

This story is about a boy who saved the lives of young eagles and how the mother eagle helped. The boy had been fishing and was taking a short cut home when he was bitten by a rattlesnake. An eagle had been watching the snake. She flew down and killed the snake and took it to feed her young. At that time people and animals could talk to each other. The boy asked the eagle to help him. The eagle flew to a low marshy place and gathered medicinal grasses and seeds which the boy wrapped around the place where the bite was. Soon it healed enough so he could go on home.

One day the boy decided to go fishing again, and on his way home he met a group of bad boys who had a bunch of eagle feathers. He knew that they must have killed the parent eagles. He looked for them and found them both dead. He climbed the high bluff and found two young eagles who were much too young to go out and find food for themselves. He fed them the fish he had caught and made them comfortable.

Every day or so he would take them some food like snakes, mice, frogs, and fish. They grew fast and strong and were soon trying their wings for flight. Soon they were finding small animals to eat and flying further away from the nest. One day they were gone from the nest and never returned. Sometimes eagles would be seen flying high in the air.

Oh yes, there is a certain time of year when the eagles lose their feathers, so they would let the boy pick what he wanted.

Told by Esther Lewis

excerpted from the "Traditions" page on the Umatilla website: <http://www.umatilla.nsn.us>



# Oregon Tribes Map

