

Lesson #5

Lesson designed by Stefan Superina

Grades: 4-5

Content Focus:

- a) The importance of places and regions to individual and social identity.
- b) Perception of places and regions. Compare ways in which people of different cultures define, build and move places and regions.
- c) Interpret how people express attachment to places and regions.

Lesson Plan:

Through this activity, students will gain an appreciation for the cultural history of Aboriginal people that have lived on the land for generations that the Coppermine Expedition travelled through.

Lesson Instructions:

1. To start this activity, cue up the documentary film of the expedition and fast forward to the following time: 5:50. The film can be found at the website: www.coppermine2012.com Here students will be given a brief history of the Dene, a First Nations people who have lived in and around the Great Slave Lake region for thousands of years. This segment of the film should last until the 7:23 mark. If you would like, keep on watching to learn about the arrival of explorers to the region and learn about the first leg of the expedition across Great Slave Lake.
2. At the 12:00 minute mark of the film, the expedition party has arrived at the eastern end of Great Slave Lake. Here they tour the site of Reliance, the old settlement for the people of the Chipewyan Dene community of Lutsel K'e, who now reside on the south-eastern shore of the lake in the community of Lutsel K'e. Watch until the 12:42 mark. This will give students an understanding of ways in which the people of Lutsel K'e use the land for hunting and fishing.
3. Ask your students for their general observations of the landscape here. How is the terrain different from the area that they currently live in? Ask them about the historical pictures they saw in the movie depicting ways in which the Dene people travelled and lived off the land. What did they travel in? What were their canoes made out of? What was used in the wintertime for transport before the onset of the snowmobile? What was worn for clothing? What kind of structures were used to provide shelter?
4. Place the following definition of an Aboriginal Cultural Landscape at the front of the class. Read it with your students.

Aboriginal Cultural Landscape

“Any geographic area that has been changed, influenced, or given special meaning by people, or a geographic area that shows characteristics or values of a society as a result of people living with the land.”

Ask your students what they interpret this definition to mean to them.

5. Explain that cultural landscapes are about how people live with the land. They show how people have lived with and interacted with the land for survival. When we trace these cultural landscapes, we can see how we affect the landscape in which we live. These places have both cultural and spiritual meaning to people.
6. Now ask your students if they can think of any important cultural landscapes in the area they live. This may be a historic building, a river or lake, or an oral tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation in their own family.

7. Read the Dene Creation stories to your students on the following pages to help them understand the importance of animals in being a part of their cultural landscape. Then discuss their meaning.

Where Our World Came From

Story told by Sarah Peters

“A long time ago, when animals could speak like we do, the earth was all covered with water. There were no hills, no riverbanks, no forests, no fields, only water and sky. All the animals lived on a large raft, including Raven.

It wasn't long before Raven was feeling a little crowded on the raft. He longed to stretch out his legs on dry ground. Now Raven liked to be comfortable and well fed at all times. Raven, you know, was a very wise bird and if he didn't like something he would think of a way to make things better for himself. “If I had any earth, even a little bit, I would make it grow large enough for all the animals to live on,” Raven told everyone.

Of course, all the animals were excited because they missed their old homes in the woods, in holes, or river banks or in trees. They missed running and playing and stretching their limbs. But who would be brave enough to find some earth for Raven? They all know that deep in the water they could find it far beneath their safe raft.

Some animals peered over the edge of the raft but no earth could be seen. Finally Muskrat volunteered to search for a piece of earth. Muskrat remembered his cozy home in the river and thought to himself, “It is true that this is not a river and that I have never seen so much water before but it is water all the same.”

Down he dove, and the water closed over him. After a very long time, Muskrat's good friend Otter said, “I think something's happened. I can dive very well. Let me try.” And down he dove into the dark water. But like muskrat, Otter never returned.

“Let me try,” offered Loon. “I can stay under water a very long time and travel quickly over a long distance under water. I should be able to find some earth.” But like Muskrat and Otter, Loon never returned either.

You would think that the other animals would be afraid to follow Muskrat, Otter and Loon, but they were concerned about what had happened to their friends. And so all the good divers and swimmers - the Loon, the Oldsquaw Duck, the Harlequin Duck, the White Wing Scoter, the Goldeye Duck, the Grebe and the Mink went down under and tried to bring back some earth but none of them returned. The other friends feared their brave friends had drowned.

“It's no use,” they all agreed, hanging their heads.

But Beaver made the last try. Beaver not only was a good swimmer, but he was a hard worker and a clever builder. Now he made sure that he tied a line around his body first so that he could be pulled up out of the water.

He dove so deep into the water; he almost drowned when he reached the bottom. As he struggled in the water, he clutched some mud in his paws. Beaver knew that when his friends pulled him up, they would find the mud. Sure enough, the mud was still on his paws when his friends pulled poor Beaver out of the water. He had used his last strength to reach the bottom and get the earth and the water had been too much for him. Beaver had given his life to help the other animals. All of them were sad but thankful when they laid eyes on their good friend.

Now Raven started to work. Carefully, he gathered the mud from Beaver's paws and formed it into a ball. Then he took his walking stick and ran it through the bit of earth. He planted the stick on the surface of the water. No sooner did the earth touch the water than it began to grow, just as the Raven said it would. They laughed and sang with happiness.

And they never forgot their friends the Otter, Muskrat, Beaver and the others who had been so brave for their sakes. They had offered their great skills in swimming to find a home for everyone else.

The small clump of earth that Beaver found soon grew into our beautiful land with its hills and forest and lakes. And even today, Raven's walking stick still holds up the land. Somewhere, where the Old Crow and the Porcupine Rivers meet, you can see it. And if you do, remember this story of how Raven made the earth. And when you play on the land in the summer, remember Beaver and his friends who were so brave and kind."

Story of Yamozha

Story told by the Weledeh Yellowknives Dene Elders

“The banks of the Weledeh (Yellowknife River) from the mouth to the rapids had always been preferred sites for fish camp settlements. For generations, the people have told their youth a story about the Weledeh.

This story occurred in the time of Yamozha, the very powerful medicine man of the Dene. Yamozha was pursuing a giant beaver that lived at the mouth of the Weledeh, in order to help the people for two reasons. The giant animal dragged people underwater when they were canoeing and the beaver also blocked off the flow of the Weledeh into Tinde’e (Great Slave Lake) by building a huge dam across the mouth.

Yamozha had a giant snow shovel, much like the smaller ones used by Weledeh Yellowknives Dene for ice fishing. Yamozha struck his huge snow shovel into the giant beaver’s lodge. The giant beaver pushed the huge lodge to one side of the Weledeh, swimming into Tinde’e to escape from Yamozha. The river flowed freely as it does today.

The giant beaver’s dam became stone and to this day it exists on the point of land at the mouth of the Weledeh. This place is known by Weledeh Yellowknives as “Kweh kah tswa”.

Yamozha’s huge snow shovel grows to this day as a large spruce tree. This tree is known as “Tsi-wah cho”. The tree and the land around it is a very sacred site to Weledeh Yellowknives Dene. Many of the peoples, past and present, have paid their respects at the site of Kweh kah tswa and Tsi-wah cho. The tree site and the hill to the north of it were strategic lookout points for Akaitcho; he would stand next to the tree or on top of the hill watching the bay for tribal enemies or strangers.”

Lesson Plan Option 1:

Ask your students to write their own creation stories using animals as central figures. Ask them to consider the following questions when they write their story:

1. What is a physical place?
2. What does it mean to have a special cultural meaning?

This would be a great activity for the teacher to take their students into an outdoor environment whereby they can identify elements in nature to encourage their imagination and creativity.

Lesson Plan Option 2:

Below is an official languages map of the Northwest Territories. At the 6:54 mark of the expedition movie, there is a brief explanation of this map. Please show it to your students to help them gain an understanding of its components. Now ask them to pick one of the regions on the map and do a short presentation on the following:

1. The importance of this place and region to the individuals that live there.
2. Compare ways in which people of this region are defined.
3. How have these cultures changed over time? What are some of the forces which have changed them?
4. What challenges do they face being in such a remote area?
5. Can you find any creation stories from their culture? If so, what aspects of the land do they represent?



Image Source: http://www.pwnhc.ca/exhibits/aboriginal_languages.asp