Native American Culture and Customs

Subject Area: Social Sciences

SESSION DESCRIPTION
This session considers the original inhabitants of North America. Students will examine the daily lifestyle of different Native American tribes, especially the Lenape who inhabited New Jersey. Customs, mores, legends, anthropological investigations and dealings with the European settlers will be discussed. Special consideration is given to the Native American interactions with their natural environment. Lenape and other Native American Indian artifacts are available for examination and interpretation, via a hands-on problem-solving activity. Several Eastern Woodland games are available and students will have the opportunity to play at least one.

OBJECTIVES
1. Students will be acquainted with Native American Indian cultures, in particular the Lenape.
2. Students will enumerate the cultural differences between the Lenape and the European cultures at the time of contact.
3. Students will describe the unique and varied aspects of Native American lifestyles.
4. Students will accurately identify Native American artifacts and determine their functions.
5. Students will review the Native American use of natural resources.
6. Students will play games representative of Eastern Woodland peoples.

MATERIALS
Teaching materials for this class are stored in the SOC Nature Center. They will be put out when the first class is taught.

Materials include:
• Tepee, wigwam model, dugout canoe
• Deer hide, wooden box with compartments holding artifacts • artifacts and simulations reflecting modern and Native American technology needed for survival

BACKGROUND INFORMATION
The history of the United States is laden with a rich diversity of cultures. Often the mention of cultural diversity ignores the Native American Indians and their many contributions to modern American life. Too often, a lumping together of all Native American groups under the stereotypical image of “Indian,” precludes the objective scholarship that more fully and truthfully represents the contributions of these diverse cultural groups. Studies of the history of North America must consider the indigenous peoples who had been living on this land for thousands of years, as well as the European settlers who arrived much later. Students need to recognize that the earth is humankind’s common home, that there is only one human race.
PROCEDURES

1. Gather the students together in the tepee and ask them to describe what they know about the Land Bridge and the pre-Columbian settlement of North America by Native American Indian peoples. Explain. Ask them to name some native American tribes. Ask them to name the Native American inhabitants of New Jersey. (Lenape) How long ago did the Lenape settle in New Jersey? (11,000 years ago) How long ago did Europeans and Africans, from which many of us are descended, settle in New Jersey? (Less than 400 years ago).

2. Ask students if they know where the word “Indian” comes from? (from Christopher Columbus, who was attempting to reach the East Indies and thought that he had, when he landed on San Salvador in the West Indies in 1492).

3. Ask students to list the basics for survival. (shelter, water, food) Tell them that all living beings need these resources, no matter when or where they lived. We will be investigating how Native American Indians lived just prior to European settlement.

4. Discuss the teepee construction. Since the teepee was used by the nomadic plains tribes, it needed to be portable as well as functional. Eastern tribes traveled less and created more permanent structures. Show model of wigwam. Discuss why some tribes were nomadic and others were not. (Availability of resources)

5. Ask students to name some common kitchen tools of today (e.g. items such as knives, pots and pans, spoons). Ask them to name common tools used today in repairing a home. (e.g. nails, hammer, screwdriver, hack saw) What is the material common to many of our contemporary tools? (metal) Distinguish between tools and machines. (machines require ancillary power sources, such as electricity generated by fossil fuels)

6. Ask students to describe, using single verbs, the functions performed with these various tools. Encourage them to group various tools according to function. (e.g. nails and screws hold wood together, just as pots and pans hold food together for cooking and baking)

7. The Lenape did not have knowledge of metalworking, yet they prepared food and built homes, too. What natural items were available to them 400 years ago, which performed the same functions as our tools do today? (e.g. rocks, shells, wood, sand, bones, antlers)

8. Play the technology matching game. From the wooden box, take out the Lenape artifacts and place them on the floor of the tepee. Opposite them, place the modern counterpart or simulator. Ask students as a group to match the implements of both technologies. Allow 15 minutes for this activity.

9. Look over the students’ matches. Point out the correct matches. Ask them to explain their rationale for the incorrect matches. Also ask them to closely examine the artifacts that were incorrectly matched to determine their actual functions. For example, have them try to identify the stone hoe for what it is by examining its shape

10. After students have identified the hoe, discuss Lenape agricultural practices. Since their agricultural tools were stone and hand operated, gardens and consequently food production, were limited and small scale. Also, Lenape did not feel that they owned land, as we do. Farming was traditionally considered females’ work. Women grew the “three sisters” - corn, squash and beans. Discuss with students how we get our food today. (agribusiness and large scale production; using non-renewable fossil fuels for farming operations; transportation of crops and manufactured food products; using pesticides and chemical fertilizers)
11. Unroll the deer hide. Have students touch both the suede and hair sides of it. Ask them to express their impressions of its texture and other properties. Discuss the process of tanning and ask students to identify the flint knives and fleshing tool that Indians used in this process to make clothing out of animal skins. Ask students why Lenape did not wear woven clothes as we do. (They did not have domestic animals, such as sheep, which produce wool. They did not have knowledge of flax or cotton. They had no textile industry, as we know it.) Ask students if they know where polyester, a constituent of many of our textiles, comes from. (From petroleum, where all plastics originate, which is a non-renewable natural resource) Discuss what is involved in the production of our textiles.

12. Divide students into two teams and go outside to play Indian games. Playing rules for Hoop and Pole and/or Double Ball are given on the Indian Games sheet. (Background information on games: games were not for children to play. Adults would play them to hone skills needed for performing chores. Children would be judged as an adult, both by peer evaluation, as well as by their demonstrated abilities in handling the equipment.)

Not all of these procedures will be done on occasions due to weather or time constraints. Focus on survival needs if limited by time.

WRAP-UP INTERPRETATION
Ask students to enumerate the cultural advantages that Europeans settlers had over the Lenape. (metal tools, domestic animals, textiles, written language, and the wheel)

There were many Native American Indian groups living in the Americas, and each had a well-defined culture. Ask students to cite cultural differences between the Lenape and other Native American groups they may have studied in school. Ask if they have previously studied the Lenape. The Lenape were one of the first groups to have contacts with European settlers, and thus were acculturated fairly quickly.

Ask students to list instances of the Lenape living in harmony with the natural environment. (Since they had less population than we do, their impacts on the natural environment were less severe.) They also had more simple and appropriate technologies. (Compare the impact of making and using one our 20th century tools to their comparative tool.)

Prepared by Tom Card 2013