

Middle Village Lesson Plan Project

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Historical Background of Chinook Life at Middle Village

“As far back as anyone can remember, Chinook people have lived at the mouth of the Columbia River,”¹ The Chinook arrived in the Pacific Northwest thousands of years ago with their own government, systems of money and trade. They also practiced their own religion and created unique art, music and dance. The Chinook people were part of a rich and unique coastal community of peoples whose lands extended north to Alaska.

The EuroAmerican traders referred to the tribal groups who lived on the Columbia River as Chinook based on their language. According to anthropologists, Chinook language was divided into two family groups: Lower Chinook and Upper Chinook. Chinook jargon (Wawa) evolved as a combination of both Chinook and European languages.

The tradition of oral storytelling has passed from generation to generation to preserve Chinook history, values and beliefs. The Chinook creation story is one of hundreds of stories passed down through Chinook families. The origin of waterways, bays and mountains are among the vast collection of Chinook legends. Many stories were lost as a result of epidemics that killed nearly 90 percent of all Chinook people in the years following EuroAmerican contact prior to settlement.

“The traditional Chinooks were separated into bands or villages and the modern Chinook were forced into a modern style of government with five bands united into one group, the Chinook nation...We as a people, however, have a direct blood line to the treaty signers and those on the early Indian rolls,” according to Charles Funk, member of the Chinook Indian Nation tribal council. These bands were the Clatsop, Cathlamet, Wixiacum, the Lower Chinook and the Willapa.

“When Europeans first reached the North American continent, they found hundreds of tribes occupying a vast and rich country. The newcomers quickly recognized the wealth of natural resources available. They were not, however, so quick or willing to recognize the spiritual, cultural and intellectual riches of those called Indians.”¹

The fur trade transformed the Pacific Northwest as American and British settlements continued to flourish and became more permanent as time went on. The EuroAmericans introduced ideas, opinions and practices and goods that sometimes contrasted with those of the Chinook culture. By studying these differing practices, we can learn that cultural viewpoints, traditions, resources, and values influence what type of economy is practiced within a society. Chinook family status improved as they acquired wealth through trading.

1. www.trailtribes.org/fortclatsop

Family Life

Family life has always been important to Chinook people. Large, extended families lived together in a plankhouse. More than 1,000 Chinooks could have lived in some of the Chinook villages. These villages were as large as most of the EuroAmerican settler towns in the United States at the time. Everyone had a role: men built houses and canoes, and taught their sons how to hunt and fish. Women cooked, gathered food, made baskets and cared for children, while passing on these skills to their daughters. Grandparents shared traditions of their people through oral storytelling.

Economy

With a river-based economy, Chinooks used canoes as the primary mode of transportation. Carving a canoe from a single cedar tree could take up to a year. These beautiful, yet durable, canoes were unique. Captain William Clark, watching the Chinook cross the mouth of the Columbia, wrote that he had never seen a vessel of that size handle such huge waves. The larger canoes were 50 feet long, held 20-30 people and could carry 8,000-10,000 pounds.

Commerce was central to the Chinook life. They were well known for their successful trading activity within many Indian groups. In exchange for animal furs and elk hides, the Chinook people received iron, copper, beads, tobacco, cloth and many other goods in trade from the EuroAmericans. These newly acquired items were traded to other tribes and contributed to the wealth and status of Chinook families.

Chinook acted as “middle men” and controlled trade along the Columbia River, in part because of their strategic location at the river’s intersection with the Pacific Ocean. This dominance existed before EuroAmerican fur trade began. Trading created the foundation for Chinook social, business and military alliances with other people. The native tribes along the Columbia and EuroAmerican trappers hunted fur-bearing animals by the thousands. EuroAmerican demand for furs led to years of killing sea otter, seal and beaver for their highly valued skins (pelts). As a result, the animal population living along the Columbia River and the Pacific Coast was nearly driven to extinction.

Chief Comcomly was one of the tribal leaders along the Lower Columbia River. His strong leadership style, knowledge of trade networks and the resources of his people helped him to be successful in meeting the economic needs of the tribes while satisfying demands of the EuroAmericans. He earned respect from native tribes and the EuroAmerican traders.

Food Supply

The Columbia River and surrounding areas (e.g. beaches, forests and estuaries) provided the Chinooks with such a rich source of food that farming was unnecessary. The river was an abundant source of salmon and sturgeon. Chinooks caught fish using nets, hooks, harpoons and spears and fish traps. They harvested oysters and clams in the harbors and on the ocean beaches. They hunted seals, sea lions and sea otters. When whales washed ashore, the Chinook used the meat and blubber. Men used spears that measured as long as 20 feet with a detachable head (or barb) from stone. The removable shaft could be separated from the arrow and reused. Chinook hunted deer, elk, bear, mountain lion, raccoons, squirrels, mink, rabbits and bobcats. To create a balanced diet, women harvested varieties of berries, cranberries, crabapples, wapato and other roots and shoots. The Chinook also stored meat and dried food in their plankhouses suspended from the ceiling.

Crafts and Craftspeople

Creating handcrafted items was central to the Chinook way of life. They made and decorated objects used in everyday tasks. Wood and animal horns were used to create ornately carved bowls, combs and baskets. Baskets were also woven from grasses and cedar bark. The decoration of handcrafted items was so important that the embellishment of objects, such as canoes, fish hooks and jewelry, usually indicated the social position of the owner – and thus the social status of the tribe.

Chinook Today

Today Chinook people continue to honor and practice their cultural traditions in areas bordering the Lower Columbia River. The Chinook tribal council continues its fight for official federal recognition. Middle Village and Station Camp opened in 2012 to welcome people to the area and provide an opportunity to learn about the Chinook people of the past and present.

Archaeologists as Detectives

Background

Archaeologists have uncovered thousands of artifacts at the Middle Village site that reveal clues about many facets of Chinook life. By studying clues, in a way similar to the way a detective studies clues and looks for evidence at a crime scene, archaeologists have learned that Middle Village was an important site for trade among Indian tribes long before EuroAmericans arrived. Evidence reveals that Chinooks lived at Middle Village from 1790 to 1820. Weapons, pottery, beads, bracelets, buttons and remains of plankhouses are some of the artifacts recovered from sites where the Chinook once lived.

All cultures, historic and contemporary, leave evidence behind of their daily life. All people need to eat, for example. By studying artifacts, archaeologists can learn about foods that people ate hundreds or even thousands of years ago and how they ate them. Today people visit antique shops and attics searching for objects that reveal stories of family history, and other times and places that represent our society's collective memories.

"Who owns history?" is an important question to ask. Does any one person or culture own the stories that objects tell us? *Can what we believe to be true about history change* depending on the perspective of the teller and the listener?

This lesson consists of three parts. When presented as a unit during a site visit, students have the opportunity to develop their knowledge of archaeology while learning to apply standard practices.

Goal

Understand the role of an archaeologist, the use of tools, standard practices and what can be learned from the evidence discovered at Middle Village.

Objectives

1. Understand that stories about historical events, and the people who lived through them, are largely based on the interpretation of those who tell the stories.
2. Map the Middle Village site and learn about and how to use some of the commonly used tools of an archaeologist
3. Use both oral history and a series of questions to analyze cultural artifacts.

Key Terms

archaeology, artisan, aerial, artifact, chamber, cultural resource, descendant, excavation, features, field record, intact, natural resource, preserve, primary, protect, recover, remains, ruin, replica, site, stratified, terrain, trowel.

Time: up to 60 minutes

Procedures

“Who owns history?”

1. Advise students that people from different backgrounds and areas of expertise bring different and new perspectives that change the way “facts,” events and ideas are interpreted.
2. Discuss the role of an archaeologist in interpreting history.
 - ✓ How can archaeologists tell so much from so little?
 - ✓ What can archaeology tell us that written history cannot?
 - ✓ How can you see a house that is no longer there?
 - ✓ What does Chinook oral history tell us about the object’s story
3. Engage students in a thoughtful discussion about what is “fact” and what is actually “interpreted” by asking the question, *who owns history?*
4. Ask for opinions and ideas regarding student beliefs about history. Is history a fluid concept that continues to change with time? Or is history more like a mirror that reflects back different pictures depending on the angle of our perspective and in response to our own time and culture. Or a blend of both?

Procedures

Investigate the Middle Village Site: Learn research and recovery practices

1. Describe to students that they will be learning about the Middle Village site by mapping its resources and features.
2. Explain that different perspectives can present different interpretations of the same object or data. Given that understanding, students assume a similar role to an archaeologist.
3. Pass out the *“Think like an archaeologist”* handout (currently p. 15 and 16) for students to complete during the program or after the visit, based on what they learned.
4. Show a sample site map of Middle Village as drawn by an archaeologist and describe the map’s purpose.
5. Distribute a blank site map of Middle Village Station Camp for students to fill in – a map that does not display any of its characteristic features.
6. While students stand in the overlook, ask them to identify and mark on their map the features as they were (or could have been) during the time when Chinook lived here.

Procedures

“Clue Finders”

Use artifacts as a primary resource and a series of questions to analyze artifacts.

Discussion:

Explain that archaeologists keep different types of field records that contain identifying information about the artifact they find. Field records include information such as the artifact length and width, where it was found, a brief description, the material the artifact is made from (e.g. bone, pottery, metal, wood, stone, glass, cotton, leather), special qualities of the artifact (e.g. shape, color, any moving parts) and questions about its possible uses.

Location, contextual and soil data are also very important to record in field notes. Another important discussion is that archaeology is inherently destructive as a result of the search and recovery process involved.

1. Display a sample of 6-8 or more artifacts and/or replicas on a table that students can touch, hold and examine.
2. Distribute *Field Record* forms for students to complete. Review each entry on the form by demonstrating with one of the artifacts.
3. Ask students to silently select one or two artifacts to focus on and complete their own field records.
4. When students have completed their field records, review each artifact and ask students to share what they wrote on their form. This allows students to check their work for accuracy.
5. Engage students a step further by asking them one question at a time about the object(s) they selected. Instruct them to respond in writing on their field record. Give them ample time to write a response to each question before proceeding to the next one.
 - ✓ What might the item have been used for?
 - ✓ Who might have used it?
 - ✓ Where might it have been used?
 - ✓ When might it have been used?
 - ✓ How can we tell the age of this object?
 - ✓ What can we learn from this artifact about the technology at the time it was made?
 - ✓ What stories does it tell about the life and times of the people who made it and used it?
 - ✓ Can you name a similar item in use today?
7. Conclude this lesson with a brief explanation of how to assure the safety of these sensitive objects.

“Objects are fragile and pieces can break off easily. Fingerprints contain oils that can lead to degrading the quality of the artifact(s). “

Supplies

- “Think like an archaeologist” handout
- 1-2 sheets of lined paper for each student
- One blank template map per student
- Field Record forms
- Pencils and rulers
- Clipboards or other hard and mobile surface (as needed)

Materials

Artifacts and/or replicas: *Chinese coins, buttons, beads/necklace, cradleboard, copper bracelets or pendant, animal traps, iron nails, pottery, ceramics, fish weight, baskets, fishing or cargo net, spears, arrowhead or rope, pipe, replica projectile point, musket ball, gun flint, bottle, marine animal bone, salmon vertebrae, charred acorn shell, camas or wapato bulb or stone fishing weight.*

Archaeology tools: such as *trowels, shovels, brushes, hand brooms, dustpans, screens, tape measure, levels or dental picks.*

Content Standards

WA: EALR 3, 3.2, 3.2.2: Geography, EALR 5, 5.2, 5.2.1: Social Studies Skills

OR: Historical Thinking 7.7, Historical Knowledge, 6.1

Common Core Standards

Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, 2

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects 6-12

Research to Build and Present Knowledge, 7; Key Ideas and Details 3

Artifact Field Record

Date _____

Location of site (Name)

Length _____

Width _____

Type of artifact: Describe the material it was made from (*bone, pottery, metal, wood, stone, leather, glass, paper, cotton, other*)



Draw object in this box

Special qualities: Describe how artifact looks and feels (shape, color, texture, size, weight, moveable parts, printing/stamps or writing on the surface)

Full description

Other Comments

Think like an Archaeologist

Fill in the blanks with a word from the box. Use all the words. All words are used only once.

aerial archaeologists artifacts descendants evidence	field record recovered protect stratified excavated	intact terrain replicas cultural resources site	ruins trowel feature preserve
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- Looking at a **(site)**_____ from the air is called an **(aerial)**_____ view.
- The people who engage in scientific studies of historic or prehistoric people and cultures by analyzing **(artifacts)**_____ are called **(archaeologists)**_____.
- Archaeologists often find **(evidence)** _____ of past lives when they excavate a site in vertical layers.
- Once an artifact is found, it is considered to be **(recovered)**_____.
- Many times archaeologists find broken pieces of artifacts and other times they find items **(intact)** _____.
- When a building or even in a town is destroyed, in archaeological terms, this can be referred to as **(ruins)**_____.
- The Chinooks still have **(descendants)**_____ living in areas along the Columbia River.
- Some sites need to be **(excavated)**_____ before archaeologists can find any evidence. Some artifacts are found on the surface of the (ground/soil) _____.
- The designation of a specific landform, such as hilly, dry, flat or grassy is usually called **(terrain)** _____.
- One of the most common tools used by an archaeologist is called a **(trowel)**_____.
- We **(preserve/protect)**_____ a river, a landscape or even a house or piece of furniture so it is neither harmed nor destroyed.
- (Replicas)**_____ are often used when using or showing the real thing is not possible.
- When an archaeological site has a distinguishing characteristic that is a permanent part of the landscape, such as a fire-pit, this is called a **(feature)**_____.
- The Middle Village site is an excellent place to study about **(cultural resources)**_____ because it contains such plentiful historic information about people, activities and buildings.

15. When an archaeologist wants to document information about what is found at a specific site, he or she uses a (**field record**)_____.
16. Sometimes archaeologists need to dig through several (**stratified**)_____ layers of rock and soil to find artifacts.