

Women's Roles in the Mi'kmaq Community Long Ago

Name of Developer	Corinne Chappell
Suggested Length	Four 40 minute lessons
Suggested Grade Level	Five
Subject Areas	Social Studies, Language Arts, Math, Visual Arts

Overview

The roles of the Mi'kmaq women were much more demanding than those of the European women of long ago. This unit will provide a brief description of the responsibilities the Mi'kmaq women had to fulfill, prior to the arrival of the Europeans.

Links to Curriculum Outcomes

Students will (be expected to)

- describe the influences that shape personal identity (social studies)
- use examples of materials and non-material elements of culture to explain the concept of culture (social studies)
- contribute thoughts, ideas, and questions to discussion and compare their own ideas with those of peers and others (language arts)
- students will demonstrate spatial sense and apply geometric concepts, properties and relationship (math)
- understand the past events, the way people live, and the visual arts influence one another (visual arts)

Links to Telling Stories: Themes / Key Words

- Cultural struggles
- First Nations
- Women's roles

Related Art Works

- *Untitled*, Artist Unknown, CAG H-7540 a, b
- *Indian Woman*, Robert Harris, CAG H-180
- *Indian Women Cutting Wood*, Robert Harris, CAG H-112
- *Camp Near Blockhouse*, Robert Harris, CAG H-182



Lesson #1: An Aboriginal Woman's Work is Never Done!

Objective The students will become familiar with the roles of Aboriginal women in their community long ago.

Related Artwork

- *Indian Women Cutting Wood*, Robert Harris, CAG H-112

Materials

- long wooden skewers (pkg. of 50 at "dollar store")
- manila paper / light brown tissue paper
- string
- pencil / dark pastels / charcoal
- paper clips
- journal

Activities

1. Have students brainstorm about who would do the following work / chores if they lived in an Aboriginal community long ago:
 - set up and tear down wigwam (tipi)
 - gather wood
 - start fire
 - prepare food
 - make clothes
 - hunt for food
 - make baskets
 - be caregiver
2. Write their responses on the blackboard or chart paper. Tell students that all of the above tasks were done by the women.
3. Show *Women Cutting Wood*. Have students write how they might feel if they had to find the trees, cut the trees, trim the branches, lug the trees home, and build a wigwam during the summer and winter months. What factors (heat, bugs, cold, snow, wild animals, etc.) would make this chore difficult during the different seasons? Have students share their responses.
4. Show sketch of a wigwam (*Camp Near Blockhouse*). Give each student a paper clip. Tell students the paper clip represents a person six feet tall. Give each student six wooden skewers, a sheet of paper, and a writing tool. Their job is to build a wigwam that would be in proportion to the paper clip. The wigwam must have enough room to house a family of seven.

5. Have students first draw markings on the paper that would represent birch bark. Encourage students to use string to hold skewers together and to weave the string through the paper. Remind students that glue was not used back then.

Ideas for Assessment

Assess their journals for appropriate responses. Check wigwams to see if proportion to the paperclip.



Lesson #2: Who's Minding the Children?

Objective The students will become familiar with Aboriginal women's role as caregivers.

Related Artwork

- *Untitled*, Artist Unknown, CAG H-7540 a, b

Materials

- student backpacks (the heavier the better)
- ballots
- pencil
- box / bag to collect ballots

Activities

1. Have students bring backpacks to class (add books to kitbags if light). Have students do five minutes of exercise – bending, reaching, etc. with backpacks on. Ask students how they felt with the extra weight on their backs. Tell students that Aboriginal women would have their child on their backs while working.
2. Show painting of woman with a papoose (*Untitled*, Artist Unknown). Inform students that in the Aboriginal community everyone cared for the children, but the women did most of the care-giving.
3. Ask students whom they think appointed a chief in an Aboriginal community long ago. Tell students that the women would choose their next chief because they would have been able to foresee the child's qualities as he grew. If the women believed a certain male child held qualities to become a chief, that child would be raised to become one.
4. Ask students to list qualities they believe a chief must have – trust, compassion, honesty, courage, strength, helpfulness, caring, bravery, respect, etc. Write responses on blackboard. Distribute

ballot sheets and have students write down whom they believe would make a great chief. Insist that they choose a person who holds the qualities they listed on the blackboard (this is not a popularity contest). Tell that students they will have to wait until next class to find the results.

Ideas for Assessment

Observation would be the key assessment tool for this lesson. Some students might show lack of respect / negative attitudes toward this lesson; therefore, you must be ready to deal with inappropriate comments in such a way that students understand and learn.



Lesson #3: Keepers of Traditions

Objective Students will become familiar with the traditions that Aboriginal women keep alive in the community.

Related Art Work

- *Indian Woman*, Robert Harris, CAG H-180

Materials

- piece of wood (approx. 10"- 12" long x 3" in diameter), with the outer bark removed, one per student (students might bring to school). Wooden dowels, paper towel rolls, or anything that resembles a stick might be used.
- permanent markers
- ribbon (optional) one 12" long
- feathers (optional) two per student
- pony beads (optional) two per student
(These items are available at various discount stores)

Activities

1. Prepare a Talking Stick before the class. It can be used as a visual aid for students as well as the Talking Stick for the Talking Circle activity.
2. Tell students Aboriginal women were keepers of traditions, culture, and language. When the community came together, a Talking Stick would be used during Talking Circles. Talking Circles were used to settle an argument within the community, help the community heal from a tragedy, or to celebrate.

3. Explain that, while in a Talking Circle, a Talking Stick is used to maintain order in the Circle. The only person allowed to speak is the person holding the Stick. Everyone else must listen. In the Talking Circle everyone is equal.
4. Have students draw designs on the stick. Wrap ribbon around top and come down 1/4" leaving enough ribbon ends for attaching beads. Glue beads to ends of ribbon. Insert feathers inside beads while glue is wet.
5. Display *Indian Woman*. Tell students this will be the topic of discussion during the Talking Circle. Have students sit in a circle. Explain Talking Circle once again and have students share their feelings / thoughts about the art work. If individual students do not wish to talk, they can pass the Talking Stick to the next person on their left. The Talking Circle continues until everyone has expressed their feelings.

Ideas for Assessment

Assess the Talking Stick that students make according to the criteria established. Observe responses made during the Talking Circle.



Lesson #4: Aboriginal Women of Today

Objective Students will explore the different roles Aboriginal women portray in today's society, and any stereotyping they may have regarding Aboriginal people will be addressed.

Materials

- unlined paper (8 x 14)
- pencil
- coloured pencils, markers, crayons

Activities

1. Review the roles Aboriginal women had long ago from previous lessons, writing responses on the board. Ask students what they think Aboriginal women's role is today and note these responses as well. Hopefully, the student's responses will include teachers, students, mothers, doctors, carpenters, welders, lawyers, professors, curators, etc.

2. Discuss with students why it may be that many have misconceptions about present day roles of Aboriginal women. How might these misconceptions be corrected?
3. Once students have gained understanding of and respect for the roles of Aboriginal women, both in the past and today, have them write two diary entries, one speaking as an Aboriginal woman of the past and one from the present. They might write about all the tasks they have had to do during that day, the problems and joys, the hopes for tomorrow.
4. Once the diary entries are complete, invite students to share what they have written. Students might also decorate their diary entries, using colours and symbols that are appropriate.

Ideas for Assessment

Note the sensitivity with which students write about the roles of others.

Wrapping up the Learning

It is important to emphasize that Aboriginal people today do not live in wigwams, but in homes. They now have elections for chiefs and work in the broader community.

Suggested Resources

- www.inac.go.ca
- www.aboriginalcanada.ca
- www.firstnationhelp.com

Possible Extensions

Encourage students to bring in posters, newspaper articles, etc. about Aboriginal people today who fulfill roles such as teachers, lawyers, actors, musicians, artists, etc.

Invite a Mi'kmaq woman to class and ask her to speak about her role in her community today.

