

CURRICULUM ACTIVITY CHAPTER TWO

TURTLE TEACHINGS

TEACHER BACKGROUND

First Nation Creation Stories recognize the origins of human beings. This story is one of the first stories told. It is important to include the Creation Story in First Nations education because every nation has an origin story, and it is important for students to understand where they come from. In addition to understanding Creation, this story will help students understand the significance of the turtle to First Nation cultures.

The turtle is of special importance because of its role in Creation. The turtle gave humankind life by offering its shell, hence the reference to North America as Turtle Island. The cultural concept of human life on Turtle Island is also a metaphor for life on planet earth and of land in space, a fragile place where all life as we know it exists. Many Nations and cultures have a special relationship with the turtle and it is very important in First Nation Traditional Teachings. Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee people look at the turtle's back as a calendar, with its pattern of thirteen large scutes, or sections of the shell, representing the thirteen moons of each year. The twenty-eight smaller scutes around the edge of the shell represent the twenty-eight days in each moon cycle. This teaching demonstrates that all things are connected.

First Nation communities traditionally lived according to the lunar calendar. With each passing moon, a new time of year and different seasonal activity was recognized. The traditional name for each moon described the activity or seasonal changes which took place during that moon cycle. For example, Tatgogmene Giizis in Anishinaabe describes blackberry moon, the time of year for harvesting blackberries in a particular area.

It is important for students to understand this Turtle Teaching as it is a key cultural understanding of the relationship between the turtle and lunar calendar. This allows students to explore their Native language, and it allows them to understand more deeply their own cultural traditions.

Additional Resources:

Adopt-A-Pond Turtle Curriculum website – Unit 4: Ethics and Culture, Section 2: Legends of the Fall
Activity 14: How Did You Get That Fabulous Hiding Spot?
A re-telling of the Creation Story by Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac.
http://www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/turtle_curriculum/unit4.pdf

Haudenosaunee Creation Story by Tom Porter
<http://www.fourdirectionsteachings.com/transcripts/mohawk.html>



ACTIVITY

2.1 CREATION STORIES

There is a teacher guide provided with the worksheet in the Activity Worksheets section.

Using the direct instruction learning strategy, story mapping, this activity reinforces an understanding of the Creation Story, the importance of turtles in First Nations culture, and the structure of stories in general.

Materials:

- *Walking with Miskwaadesi or Walking with A'no:wara* storybook
- *Copy of the Creation story (in book)*
- *Copy of 'Shape Go! Map' for each student (located in the Activity Worksheets section of document)*
- *Writing tools*

Steps:

Read chapter two of *Walking with Miskwaadesi or Walking with A'no:wara* to the class. This chapter includes a version of the Creation Story.

Distribute a blank 'Shape Go! Map' to each student.

Ask students, individually or as a class, to complete the 'Shape Go! Map.' Use the questions provided on the graphic organizer to help guide their understanding of the story.

The 'Shape Go! Maps' can be collected for assessment, or it may be helpful to have some students share their maps to expand the students' interpretations of the story.

2.2 A YEAR OF THE TURTLE-THIRTEEN MOONS

Using the arts-based strategy, sketching to learn, this activity reinforces cultural knowledge of the lunar calendar, the significance of the turtle in First Nation teachings, and the integration of Traditional Knowledge in everyday life.

Materials:

- *Internet Access*
- *Computer with Projector*
- *Native Language Teacher/Community Language Speaker (if available)*
- *Native Language Calendars (located in the Activity Worksheets section of document)*
- *'Thirteen Moons on a Turtle's Back' Option 1 and 2 (located in the Activity Worksheets section of document)*
- *Art supplies*

Steps:

Play the short video of Jan Longboat, an Elder from Six Nations, and her teaching of the lunar calendar http://www.dodemkanonhsa.ca/videos/turtle_teaching.htm

Ask the Native Language teacher in the school, or a community language speaker, to help the class learn the community names for each moon. If there is no language teacher, have students learn the English names and consider why the moons have those particular names. Have students fill in the 'Thirteen Moons on a Turtle's Back' worksheet with the names in English and in the language if possible.

As a class, compare the community calendar with the calendar of another First Nations community from the chart provided which includes Haudenosaunee (from Six Nations) and Anishinaabe (from Wasauksing) moon names and descriptions. Have students use this to compare moon names. Ask the students:

1. *Are the names similar?*
2. *Why might some of the moons be called a different name?*

Have students individually illustrate their understanding of each moon name and cultural significance on a scute (section) of the turtle's shell on the other 'Thirteen Moons on a Turtle's Back' worksheet to make their own personal calendar.