

Traditional First Nations Foods Lesson Plans

GIFTS OF THE PEOPLE

Overview

This lesson will provide the students with connections and reflections to the food and land around them. Use food and culture pyramids to talk about food traditions. Then have discussion on the impacts of colonization on traditional local food systems.

“When one’s heart is glad, he gives away gifts. Our Creator gave it to us, to be our way of doing things, to be our way of rejoicing, we who are [Kwakwaka’wakw]. Everyone on earth is given something. The potlatch was given to us to be our way of expressing joy.”

~ Elder Agnes Axu Alfred <https://umistapotlatch.ca/potlatch-eng.php>

This lesson is focused on grades 6-8. We encourage teachers to use these lessons with all their grades except for lesson 3 which we feel may be too advanced for K-2. We encourage teachers to use their own discretion for the other grades. We feel lesson 3 can provide teachers and students some great foundational understanding and insights into Indigenous food systems and how colonization has impacted them. We encourage teachers go through it and read some of the books to the children and adapt any parts of the lessons for their students.

What Students Will Learn

- Students will know whose ancestral homeland/traditional territories they reside on and will be able to identify which traditional First Nations foods thrive or thrived in that area.
- Students will have a foundational understanding of colonization and how current colonial policies have impacted food systems and access to traditional First Nations foods for generations.
- Students will be able to connect that water, land, forests are in a reciprocal relationship with peoples.
Healthy Lands = Healthy People
- Students will understand the impact of environmental, political, and social policies on traditional First Nations foods systems.
- Students will focus on the resistance and resilience of Indigenous Peoples

TEACHING TIPS

- Frontload students with vocabulary that might need to be revisited: Indigenous, First Nations, Inuit, Metis, traditional First Nations foods. See Glossary in the Foundational Knowledge document.
- Be sensitive to and respectful of your students that this may be the first time they realize that they are living on Indigenous Peoples homelands and the colonization happened and is active here.
- Talk about this with curiosity and openness.
- Please see appendix 2 in the Foundational Knowledge document for a visual list of traditional First Nations foods found across BC from the land, water, ground!
- Please see the National Inquiry reports for more information [Truth and Reconciliation](#), [Reclaiming our Place and Power](#) and [Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples](#).
- Reflect on any emotions and feelings you may have when you explore this topic. Reach out for support and be open to learning as well.

Materials

- Paper and Pen
- Sticky notes or index cards



Set the Table – 30 mins

- Set the Table with a map of Indigenous homelands and examples of which foods create the ecosystems around you.
- Use [Native-lands.ca](#) to find out whose ancestral homelands your school resides on and share a meaningful [land acknowledgement](#).
 - Share a [language map within BC](#) and focus in on the area you live in.
 - Brainstorm what foods come from these lands and the nature around them.
 - Consider pairing up or dividing students in groups of 3. Have them learn about each other to make that cross-cultural connection and present to the class what they learned about their classmates.

Books for K-2

- When We Were Alone - [Read](#)
- Shi-shi-etko - [Read](#)

Books for 9 years +

- Speaking our Truth - [Read](#)

Share a Story of Generosity – 15 mins

It is of the utmost importance to engage local knowledge keepers to ensure stories are local. For context, we have shared related teachings from Knowledge Keeper Jared Qwustenuxun Williams.

The Salish Weir Story

[Picture of fishing weir](#)

A traditional salmon weir, as used in the Salish region, was more than a means of catching fish, it was a way of cohabitating with salmon.

First, we have to think of the salmon runs pre contact. Entire schools of salmon, numbering in the tens of thousands, rushing up the river in a continuous stream that would last for days, even weeks. Elders say things like, “if you could walk on fish, you could walk across the river.” They tell of times where runs of salmon would fill the river so much that fish would get pushed onto the beach and could just get picked up and thrown farther ashore.

Now, with that context, let’s talk about weirs. A weir is a fence built across the river, using specific hardwood sticks, that allows for a walkway over top. What makes a weir work best is the small section where fish can pass through. A trained fisher could watch the water and see what fish was passing by. This allowed them to select the salmon they would catch. The fisherfolk could selectively catch males and leave females to pass and spawn. Their knowledge and the weir allowed them to catch specific species for specific tasks. Lastly this ability to keep a close eye on the salmon made it possible for the fisherfolk to harvest based on the health of the species. Living in harmony with the river allowed the salmon runs to become some of the largest ever recorded, as most of the female salmon were allowed to pass the weir and continue upstream to lay their eggs.

Yet the most amazing layer in all this complexity is the fact that the salmon runs were shared by many weirs on the same river. A river could hold

4 or more weirs, each owned by a different family or village. But for the weir farthest up the river to survive all the weirs had to work together to make sure they left enough fish for those at the top of the river. Meaning, the weir at the mouth of the river would never take all the fish going up the river. For thousands of years First Nations people built weirs along rivers and only caught what they needed. Each village would leave enough salmon for those villages upriver who also needed the salmon runs. In fact, some weirs didn’t even go all the way across the river. This left room for most of the salmon to pass, while still letting the fisher watch the narrow opening where some fish would still be forced to pass.

The size of the runs, the centuries of salmon protection, and in the end Salish weirs were made illegal by settlers who blamed the weirs for the lower salmon returns each year. Now, it has been so long that those who last built and walked a weir are few and far between, if they are even in your territory at all. What was once a way of life, is now a story of how the peoples were good to the salmon and the salmon provided for the peoples.

Huy tseep q’u, Jared Qwustenuxun Williams

Story Reflective Questions

- What stood out for you in this story?
- What skills do you think the fisher had to have to understand the fish, river and weir in this story?
- Would anyone like to share other stories of generosity, preservation and conservation?

Activity 1 – 30 mins

Traditional Food Productions Fosters Culture Pyramid - See Appendix 1 in the Foundational Knowledge document and resource list for complimentary Pyramid Video. Listen to the first 9 mins to help explain the pyramid.

Teacher's Prompt

List of Impacts of Colonization on Food Systems - It is so important to spend thoughtful time learning about the truth of the history and impact on foods, lands, forests and waters for Indigenous Peoples. It can be hard to hear. We encourage time, curiosity, courage and thoughtfulness as you bring this forward. Much of this info can be found in these National Inquiry reports: [Truth and Reconciliation](#), [Reclaiming our Place and Power](#) and [Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples](#). Please spend the time prior to this lesson to become familiar with the truth of this history.

The Salish Apocalypse

Salish culture was founded as a system where people built their skills, abilities, and knowledge, through verbal communication and apprenticeship. Our entire world was built around different roles or people working together to keep their families and their villages strong. With such a plentiful food source the people could specialize in their arts and trades. Some people would be chosen to become great hunters or fisherfolk. Others would be taught basket weaving or how to build and maintain a clam garden. While some people would be shown how to care for and harvest berry patches, others would learn how to make powerful medicines. Still there were other community members who'd prepare for cultural practices, build houses, or carve great canoes. Some were the leaders, speakers, or decision makers. Every single person in Salish society was not only important, they were integral. By

working together, the different families would make technological advancements that would aid the entire community. For over ten thousand years this culture advanced and flourished in the Salish sea, creating a food surplus larger than any settler had ever seen.

When the first settlers arrived in our community in the 1850s they brought with them the pandemics of the European world, which had never been seen in Salish country before. Within a couple of decades, the Salish Peoples were so ravaged by smallpox and tuberculosis that 90% of the population had died. Meaning, in a simple way that 9 out of every 10 people died in about 25 years. Entire villages were lost, others had to join forces to maintain some sense of continuity. Without a written language the knowledge loss of this apocalypse cannot be overstated. Then, if this was not sufficient, Salish people suffered the trails of the residential school system from 1889- 1994, the Indian hospital system, Canadian segregation, the potlatch ban, the 60's scoop, millennial scoop and countless other injustices.

Yet after almost 200 years of attempted racial and cultural genocide I can still say 'l tst 'o' hwun' 'l, which translates to. "We are still here."

Teacher Prompts

- Pause for reflective writing activity with students. Provide them time to process.
- Be mindful here as this information can be hard for you as a teacher and the students to hear and understand. A group discussion may not be safe so we encourage a writing process here for students to reflect on what they have learned.
- Use the students' writing reflections as a gauge for how the information landed.

Activity 2 – 45 mins

- You will need a box or bin to put the Indigenous food roles and numbers 1 or 2 on pieces of paper.
- See the list of Indigenous community food roles. Print out roles and provide each student with a role. Double or triple up the roles to match the number of students in your class.
- Then name each of the roles and ask the students who have those roles. Ask one of them to read it out loud and share any connections they see to other roles.
- Have the students then randomly draw a number card. For every ten students, place nine 1's and one 2 in the random draw. The students will have a 90% chance of drawing the number 1.
- Then ask the students to stand up and to turn their cards over. If they have a 1 let them know they have been lost to the impacts of colonization and to sit down.
- The last ones standing - ask them to share what role they had. Have the class look around and compare the roles everyone had and the numbers to what is left.
- Have a discussion with the whole class about what skills and abilities were lost due to disease and colonial policy.
- Leave time for students to share their reflections and feelings after this activity.

Role Summary

Plant Harvester - a person with teachings about plants not only knows how to harvest different types of leaves, roots, and berries quickly and effectively but they also know the networks of ancient gardens. Plant people would know which family owned which garden. Community members who picked plants were often also taught how to dry and preserve their harvest. It is a teaching of some communities that a dedicated harvester will not eat while they are picking.

Without a plant harvester no one eats berries, roots, or leaves, or has access to plant medicines

Weaver - making baskets or blankets takes incredibly strong hand eye coordination along with dedication to learning the different knots and weaves to create the endless patterns used in Indigenous design. Weavers also learned how to harvest and maintain the many different textiles that could be used for weaving. From watertight baskets to thick wool blankets, the weavers keep the village clothed and running.

Without a weaver harvesters cannot harvest

Medicine person - these people were chosen at a young age and raised in their own way by other medicine people to learn the sacred ways of both good and bad medicine. These strong community members could not only heal physical sickness but could also heal the mind and spirit of those who became mentally or spiritually sick.

Without a medicine person sick people die

Shellfish harvester - A shellfish harvester knows the different family harvesting sites and where they can and cannot harvest. They also know how to tell different shellfish apart, as well as what shellfish that should be harvested at what time. When they got back home these harvesters often also knew how to dry and preserve their harvest. In certain nations dried shellfish were a highly valued trade commodity.

Without a shellfish harvester no one eats shellfish, and the family loses out on possible trade

Fisherfolk - Masters of the net and spear, fisherfolk would have trained in plant identification to be able to know which plants to use in the creation of their spears, nets, and weirs. In a world without refrigeration, it often fell upon the fisherfolk to dry or smoke their catch as quickly as they could catch it. The most important job of the Fisherfolk was the monitoring of the health of fish in the river system and only harvesting what they needed, allowing the fish to thrive.

Without a fisherfolk the tribe cannot eat fish

Hunter - Studying tracks and following game trails the hunters of yesteryear could take down a moose, a deer, or even a bear, with a spear, bow, or trap. The hunters also needed to know how to get the meat cured and brought home as quickly as possible to be smoked or dried. While in the forest the hunters would monitor the forest habitat, noting different animals' movements in the forest. They would use this information to ensure the ecosystem thrived and they never took too much from the forest.

Without the hunter the tribe cannot eat game meat

Elder - The teachers and keepers of the past, the elders are the cornerstone of Indigenous society. In their wisdom the elders often counsel the family leadership in all matters. Quite often the elders of the family would raise the children while the working age parents were off doing their much-needed job. In a verbal society it is integral that the elders, with all their lived experience, educate the young. The information needed to keep indigenous society running exists nowhere better than in the minds of the elders.

Without the elders the history is lost, the children suffer.

Child - The most sacred part of Indigenous society, children are often raised by the elders. Children are integral to the continuation of the culture and language of any people. Instead of being in

a school, indigenous children were often raised in apprenticeship, working to learn the crafts and trades that they would continue for most of their lives. The children take the teachings from the elders into the next generation.

Without children the family line dies

Carver - From grand canoes with fine paddles to massive cooking bowls and bentwood boxes the carver, or woodworker, was a cornerstone to the Indigenous community. Also, as keepers of history they would carve totem poles that told stories of ancestry, legend, or history. Carvers would also know about the wood quality of each tree they'd see and would work in with the forest to grow the best trees for what they want. They were such stewards of the forest that it is said that Indigenous carvers could take planks from a tree and have the tree survive.

Without a carver the tribe has not canoes, totems, boxes, or bowls

Engineer - There were many different specialist engineers in the indigenous world. Some designed massive rock walls that formed highly productive clam gardens. Others designed and built our longhouses with their great cedar house posts and high smoke-filled roofs. Engineers oversaw rope systems that moved sixty-foot-long canoes from the forest to the river, lake, or ocean.

Without an engineer a family has no house

Leaders - Every family had leadership, some tribes even had collective leadership, a few nations even had a leadership council. These are people who know the will of the people and follow it. Indigenous leadership was heavily influenced by the desire of the community members. Simply because to go against the will of the people would lead to removal as a leader, disgrace, or even death. Leaders make the hard decisions so families can form villages that can form nations.

Without a leader the family struggles to work with other families

Activity 3 – 45mins

Brainstorm as a class, what may be some of the things (social, political and environmental) that have impacted these foods in your area? How has this limited Indigenous Peoples' access to Indigenous foods?

Have groups of 3-4 students pick a food below. Using critical thinking, your understanding of food (and technology) to explore how colonization has impacted this traditional food.

What might be happening to the water, to the land, is there a town there, what is happening to the birds, pollution, resource development/extraction etc)

- Salmon, halibut, cod, herring
- Shellfish, Clams, mussels, crabs, urchins
- Berries, plants and medicines and wild crab apple
- Deer and Moose
- Herring Roe
- Oolichan oil
- Seaweed
- Roots - camas, rice-root
- Duck

Teacher Prompts

- What might be happening to the lands, forests and waters where this food is harvested?
- Is there any industry, population or urban sprawl?
- What is happening around this area? Is there any pollution, towns, housing?

Have each group present their food and what they think may have and is affecting this food.

Indigenous Resistance and Resilience

End these lessons with a discussion of the resilience and resistance of Indigenous Peoples across these lands. We are still here! Resistance to colonization and protecting land, language and ecosystems is a daily activity for us. These lessons have focused on learning and understanding the truth about the many colonial policies that continue to impact Indigenous Peoples.

For the settlers, they need to see, hear and listen to these stories of resistance and resilience.

Time



2:30 mins (varies by grade level and whether all the stories, poems and extension activities are included).

Extension Activities

- Provide opportunity for children to process conversation through a discussion of resistance and resilience.
- Ask the children to bring one food example home to ask their family if they know what ecosystem it comes from and how that ecosystem has been impacted.
- Each season, students can highlight one food and each class can create a visual presentation of the importance of this food and ecosystem and why it is endangered.

Curricular Links

- English Language
- Physical & Health Education
- Arts
- Social Science

BC Curriculum Competencies K-2

- ways in which individuals and families differ and are the same
- personal and family history and traditions
- needs and wants of individuals and families
- rights, roles, and responsibilities of individuals and groups
- people, places, and events in the local community, and in local First Peoples communities
- diverse cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives within the local and other communities
- relationships between a community and its environment
- key events and developments in the local community, and in local First Peoples communities
- relationships between people and the environment in different communities
- adaptations of local plants and animals
- local First Peoples uses of plants and animals
- properties of familiar materials
- effects of pushes/pulls on movement
- effects of size, shape, and materials on movement
- relationships between people and the environment in different communities
- diverse characteristics of communities and cultures in Canada and around the world, including at least one Canadian First Peoples community and culture
- practices that promote health and well-being
- elements of story
- the knowledge of First Peoples
- visual art

Curricular Links	BC Curriculum Competencies 3-5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English Language • Physical & Health Education • Arts • Science • Social Science 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • story/text forms, functions, and genres of text • features of oral language • food choices to support active lifestyles and overall health • practices that promote health and well-being, including those relating to physical activity, sleep, and illness prevention • nutrition and hydration choices to support different activities and overall health • food choices to support active lifestyles and overall health • factors that influence self-identity • visual arts

Curricular Links	BC Curriculum Competencies 6-8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English Language • Physical & Health Education • Arts • Science • Social 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Peoples knowledge of changes in biodiversity over time • evidence of climate change over geological time and the recent impacts of humans • physical records -local First Peoples knowledge of climate change • economic policies and resource management, including effects on indigenous peoples • origins, core beliefs, narratives, practices, and influences of religions, including at least one indigenous to the Americas • social, political, and economic systems and structures, including those of at least one indigenous civilization • scientific and technological innovations • philosophical and cultural shifts • interactions and exchanges of resources, ideas, arts, and culture between and among different civilizations • exploration, expansion, and colonization changes in population and living standards • visual art

Resource List

- FNHA Traditional food [Fact Sheets](#)
- [NIDA](#) Food List, calendar
- Nuu chah nulth Seafood cards [Order here](#)
- Pacific Northwest plant cards – [Order here](#)
- Watcherseyes - [Learn more](#)
- Stinging Nettle - [Video](#)
- Deekers harvesting with family - [Video](#)
- Pit Cook Video Raven or Qwyatseek [Video](#)
- AWINAK'OLAS - [Video](#)
- Pyramid visual - Please see appendix 1 in the Foundational Knowledge document
- Pyramid video - first 9 mins [Video](#)
- Seasonal Calendar - This is not to encourage harvesting-https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mVT1Y88pNJ7V_yO-tpvzs10rAyoOTxn-/view
- Book, K-3. Lessons from Mother Earth (2002) by Elaine McLeod: https://www.strongnations.com/store/item_display.php?i=2076&f=3111,2,1136
- Book, K-3. From the Mountains to the Sea: We Share the Seasons (2015) by Brendha Boreham & Terri Mack. https://www.strongnations.com/store/item_display.php?i=5832&f=3111,2,1136
- BC First Nations Studies text, pg. 35-39 (Living on the Land) https://greatbearrainforesttrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Textbook_BC_First-Nations-Studies.pdf

List of things that have impacted First Nations Foods and Ecosystems

- Government systems and policies negatively affect access to food – seafood/shellfish closures, contamination, development, housing, loss of land and access.
- Sale and gifting of land to settlers (some of our ancestors)
- Limitations on harvesting, hunting, fishing, producing and managing food systems. Overfishing and commercial fishing industry.
- Public health regulations that restrict the ability to process and serve traditional First Nations foods in facilities
- Large losses of population, skills, knowledge and wisdom due to disease, starvation, residential schools, Indian hospitals, foster care, 60 and millennial scoop loss and restricted access to land and waters
- Creation and confinement to reserves and removal from traditional harvesting, gathering, fishing and hunting sights, governmental regulations limiting access to food
- Dramatic losses of food ways replaced with commodities: flour, sugar, milk, fat, salt and cost and access to food across the province especially the north.
- Potlatch Ban from 1982-1951 which prevented First Nations from gathering to feast and carry out ceremonies and cultural way of life
- Traditional food ways have and continue to be devalued, destroyed and replaced with colonial food systems and ideologies
- The environmental impacts of industrialization and large-scale agriculture have caused destruction to lands, waters and impacted the health of Indigenous individuals and food systems destruction or contamination – elk, buffalo, salmon, root gardens, forests, etc.
- Chronic underfunding
- Creation of dependency on emergency food systems and donations over hunting, fishing and harvesting
- Decisions made about and for Indigenous communities by settler society
- Creation of dependency over self-sustainability
- Negative effects of government systems and policies on access to food – shellfish closures, contamination, development, housing, loss of land and access.
- Hunger and inadequate nutrition were tools used to assimilate Indigenous peoples and relationships with food have been severed as a result of unethical nutrition experimentation and the residential school system, which fed children unfamiliar and inedible food and contributed to experiences of hunger, starvation and sickness.