

Standard One – Lesson Four

Achievement Goal:
Describe ways students and their families can provide respectful care for the environment to ensure it is healthy for future generations.

Time:
Two class periods

Core:
Cultural Arts, Science



Grades: 3rd - 5th



Background:

There is a saying that is often attributed to a variety of American Indian tribes and native leaders, although its exact origin is unknown: “We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors. We borrow it from our children.”

This saying expresses a principle that is common to many American Indian cultures. The well-known Haudenosaunee principle called the “Seventh Generation” Pphilosophy states it a different way and relates it to government and important decisions: “The Chiefs are instructed that when they deliberate on the serious matters of the Council, they are to consider the impact of their decisions on seventh generation into the future. This way, they are to proceed cautiously, thinking of what effect their decisions will have on the welfare of their descendants. It requires a special attention to the future. But it also produces a sense of stability (quoted from resource (2) below).”

In addition to taking into consideration future generations in important decisions, many American Indian cultures believe that respect should be shown to plants and animals currently living in the environment as well. This is because all things are interdependent and rely upon each other as relatives do. Thus, being a respectful caretaker of the community involves being aware of the interrelationships within the community environment. It means being a good relative.

In the first part of this lesson, students will discuss how one can be a good relative by thinking about the children of tomorrow and listening to one’s elders. The second part of this lesson will help illustrate the principle that things in nature are interdependent and our relationship with them resembles the relationship we have with relatives.

Preparation:

- For day 2, obtain a copy of Luther Standing Bear’s book listed in the resources section of this lesson.
- Review the lesson plan “Food Chains & Food Webs” at http://www.unr.edu/nnap/PW/pw_fdchain.htm. Review and prepare for the activity “A Student Food Web.” This lesson helps illustrate the fact that

all living organisms are interdependent. While reviewing the lesson, think about the plants and animals the local tribe or tribal community relied upon. Substitute these organisms for the ones mentioned in the Washoe-focused lesson.

Student Activity:

Day 1:

- Begin the lesson by discussing with the children what the following proverb means: “We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors. We borrow it from our children.”
- Have the students brainstorm about what it means to be a good relative. Ask them how they would apply this idea of being a good relative to members of their family who aren’t born yet. Ask them to think up scenarios in which actions or decisions today may affect relatives who are not born yet.
- Read out loud sections of the Seventh Generation article found in resource (2). Explain to students that decisions made about land often affect people who are not yet born because the land is ever-present but also capable of being changed. Its enduring presence connects ancestors, people living today, and future generations.

Day 2:

- Study American Indian wisdom and teachings concerning relationships with the natural world. Have the students study Luther Standing Bear’s book, (1) below, particularly Chapter VII. Lead a class discussion on Standing Bear’s teachings regarding land connections.
- Lead a class discussion on basic responsibility of being a respectful caretaker of the environment. If the student treats the environment as a respected living relative, what does that mean in terms of careful treatment of the environment? Have the students discuss and answer that question.
- Demonstrate to the children the interdependence of all living things through the activity “A Student Food Web.” Discuss with the children how one can demonstrate care for the environment by not over-harvesting, over-hunting, or damaging one particular organism in the web. Relate this mistreatment to mistreatment of a relative by stealing from them, damaging their property, or harming them.

Evaluation:

- Students will be evaluated on the quality of their participation in discussions and activities regarding what it is to be a good relative and responsibilities for the environment.

Resources:

1. Standing Bear, Luther. Land of the Spotted Eagle. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978.
2. “Culture: What are the values, beliefs, and traditions that the Haudenosaunee seek to maintain?”, Haudenosaunee Home Page , http://sixnations.buffnet.net/Culture/?article=seventh_generation