Lesson Plan 1: First Nations and the Environment

Generalization
Canadians modify and adapt to natural settings in ways that affect their lifestyle and environment.

Rationale
It is important that students understand how environment and geography have an effect on culture and lifestyle. Students must also appreciate that Aboriginal People are not homogenous, and there are significant differences between Aboriginal People of the east and west coasts.

Objectives
Knowledge
- Increase understanding of the differences and similarities between Canada’s First Nations
- Make connections between natural resources and occupations
- Understand the relationship between natural environment, geography and diversity amongst Aboriginal groups
- Appreciate the relationship between Aboriginal People, the land and animals
- Recognize how art represents and reflects Aboriginal culture

Skills
- Advance map reading and processing skills
- Express opinions in a confidant and self assured manner
- Continue to develop memory and recall skills
- Distinguish between important facts and fiction
- Express themselves creatively through an art project

Attitude
- Develop understanding of Aboriginal People across Canada
- Work well with others in a group setting
- Share opinions in a group setting in a positive manner
- Develop confidence in expressing ideas artistically

Teacher Information
The following lesson is intended to help students develop a comprehensive perspective on Aboriginal groups across Canada. Students must be able to recognize that there are significant differences between Aboriginal groups that are related to geography. For example, West Coast Aboriginal People do not draw pictures of buffalo, just as the Plains Aboriginal People do not carve totem poles. Geography and the natural environment also play important roles in deciding what occupations people within that region hold. Obviously, fishing rights are central to West
Coast Aboriginal People’s political mandate, while hunting rights are equally important to Plains Aboriginal People.

**Introductory Activity**

Divide students into groups of four, representing EAST, WEST, NORTH and SOUTH. Once in groups the students will be given a time limit (i.e. 10-15 minutes depending on overall class period length). During the allotted time, they must uncover as much information as they can about their area (direction). Students will use the Internet, atlas, and/or textbooks to answer some of the following questions

1. What Aboriginal groups live in your region?
2. What provinces or territories does your region cover?
3. What Aboriginal languages are spoken?
4. Describe the geography of the region.
5. What is the population of the region?
6. What are some natural resources?

Encourage students to work as a team. The information should be written on large pieces of paper. Some students can be retrieving information from the various sources while others record it. Once the time is up, each group should select one or two spokespeople to share their findings with the class. Initiate a discussion that allows students to focus on the similarities and differences between the four regions.

**Main Lesson**

Divide students into pairs numbered one through four. Group one will represent the NORTH (Inuit and Dene), number two EAST (Huron, Ojibwa, Iroquois), three WEST (Haida, Nuxalt, Coast Salish, Tlingit), and four SOUTH (plains and woodland Cree, Blackfoot, Blood and Sarcee). Each pair will conduct a research project on an Aboriginal group from their assigned area. A written component is required as well as a presentation. Students will share the information they gathered in the form of a television show. They may want to act out their information in a talk show or news broadcast format or another creative ‘made for television’ format. Students must include a map of their area with their Aboriginal group’s location clearly marked. The research project should focus on the following:

1. What is the name of your Aboriginal group and why did you select it?
2. What was their traditional way of life like (i.e. hunters and gatherers, fishing)?
3. What is the relationship between the Aboriginal People in your area to the natural environment? Is there a story that reflects this?
4. What kinds of occupations do Aboriginal People have in this region?
5. What language do they speak? What is unique about this language?
6. How is the Aboriginal art from your group different from others?
7. How many Aboriginal People live in your area? How does this compare to non-Aboriginal People?
8. Do most Aboriginal People in your area live in cities or on reserves? How many reserves are in your area?
9. What was the principal mode of transportation in the early days?
10. What is an important concern for this group today?

Students will want to use the Internet, atlases and textbooks to aid them in gathering relevant information. Encourage students to be creative and share their findings in a fun way.

**Supplementary Lesson #1**

*Teacher information*

Before the fur trade, the Beaver, Chipewyan and Cree were self-reliant on the rich resources of the Athabasca region. They fashioned their tools, clothing and shelter, as well as obtained all their food stuffs from the environment which surrounded them. First Nations people across Canada have always had a special relationship with the land and animals. An excellent example is the way in which Aboriginal Peoples on the Plains utilized every part of the buffalo, letting little go to waste. First Nations cultures have a deep respect for the earth, often referring to it as ‘Mother Earth’. They also recognize that everything in nature is connected. This concept is often referred to as the ‘circle of life’. Plants, animals and the environment are interdependent, working with one another in creating the ecosystem and becoming a part of the food chain. The earth feeds the plants and animals that in turn feed the people. When someone died, their body would feed the plants and animals. First Nations had to be aware of everything happening to the land, in the air and in the water in order to live successfully off of what Mother Nature provided. Aboriginal People were excellent observers, demonstrated for instance by their recognition that certain animal behaviors signaled changes in the weather.

Aboriginal Peoples knew the habits of the animals they hunted, trapped and fished. Detailed traditions about the animals, the land and human behaviour were passed on from one generation to the next through stories. Many groups used controlled burning to maintain grasslands in order to support the bison and the small mammals on which fur-bearing carnivores such as lynx, fox and wolves depended. Moose took advantage of the secondary growth, which occurred along the edges of the meadows. In the Peace-Athabasca Delta, spring flooding also maintained early successional habitats and the lakes and rivers supported beaver, muskrat, mink and otter. Mature forests provided food and shelter for caribou, marten and other animals. A complex community of vegetation and animals produced a secure resource base on which residents still rely today.

Despite an abundance of game in the Athabasca region, fish have been the most reliable source of food for various Aboriginal People and their dogs, who camped where they could fish as well as hunt. Later, the fur traders located their posts close to good fishing locations, or “fisheries.” Today, the most common fish used locally are whitefish, lake trout, northern pike (jackfish), walleye (pickerel) and goldeye. ([http://www.albertasource.ca/treaty8/eng/Peoples_and_Places/Northwind_Dreaming/northwind_fn_1.html](http://www.albertasource.ca/treaty8/eng/Peoples_and_Places/Northwind_Dreaming/northwind_fn_1.html))

It is important students realize how important it was for Aboriginal People to be aware of their surroundings at all times. Aboriginal People respected the animals and plant life for what they had to offer and they never hunted and killed needlessly.
Aboriginal People frequently called on nature to guide them. The wind was an important navigational tool. They would remember important landmarks that aided them and helped prevent them from getting lost. It was very rare that an Aboriginal person got lost or froze to death.

Lesson
Students will have an opportunity to learn the importance of understanding and remembering your surroundings. Give students approximately two to three minutes to examine the classroom. Encourage them to remember as much as they can. What temperature is the room, what time of day is it, where are specific things located in the room? Once the time is up, have each student bring a piece of paper and pencil with them into the hallway. Close the classroom door and have students try and recall as much as they can about the classroom environment. Only give students a maximum of five minutes. Once the students are situated in the classroom again, have them volunteer to share observations they made about the classroom environment. Write everything on the board until a comprehensive list is created. Discuss some of the elements on the board. What things did student remember right away? What is missing from the list? Why did students think they could remember everything? Why were certain things easier to remember? Have them write a short paragraph about what they learned from this exercise. How does it relate to Aboriginal People during the early contact period? Can students imagine how hard it would be to remember things in nature?

Supplementary Lesson #2

Teacher Information
Students can become familiar with different Aboriginal cultures by examining artwork and traditional games. Aboriginal People across Canada have distinct cultural traits that are displayed through a variety of arts and games. Provide students with pictures or actual artifacts (perhaps borrowed from people in the community) that show how art is different in the four different sectors of Canada. Students will find it interesting to learn why West Coast Aboriginal People carve totem poles (to preserve history and tell stories of Aboriginal families and clans) and Blackfoot people enjoy doing beadwork. Initiate a discussion that allows students to share their opinions on the different kinds of art, what they like, what they find interesting etc.

The following lesson allows students to practice beadwork—a traditional pastime of Blackfoot women. The Blackfoot liked to produce colourful geometric designs using beads. Quill work influenced bead work, and embroidering after beads was introduced during the fur trade era. During the early days, Porcupine quills were chosen with preference given to the quills from the back and sides of the pocupine. They were coloured red, green or blue by using plant dyes. Quills were most commonly applied to men’s shirts, leggings and buffalo robes in a series of narrow parallel bands. Beads were applied to garments using the same geometric patterns that were used with quill design. Initially, embroidery beads were much larger than those used today and were much more expensive so they were used sparingly. Traders supplied beads in six different colours—light blue, dark blue, dark red, deep yellow, white and black. Blackfoot people preferred the blue and white beads, the women commonly alternating bands of blue and white beads when they decorated their own dresses. Men also wore beaded cuffs as a part of their ceremonial clothing.
Lesson
Allow students to recreate Aboriginal art based on their own interpretation and skills. Show students some examples of Blackfoot beadwork designs from the attached Quill and Bead Design worksheet. You can also find examples of Blackfoot beadwork design form the Grade 5 picture gallery section. The Blackfoot were very talented at bead work-show students some examples of Blackfoot bead work on pipe bags, moccasins, clothing and other items so that they can have an idea of what some of the geometric designs looked like. Beads should be provided in the same six colours that were traditionally used by Blackfoot women. Have students use the beads to create a geometric design. Then have them work individually to create a product that follows the following guidelines (as to maintain Blackfoot tradition).

- Must have more than three lines of squares
- Must be constructed around a middle line which contains an odd number of coloured squares
- Must use more than one colour

When the students are finished, put their artwork on display.
Origin and Settlement - Blackfoot Quill and Bead Design

Common Design Units

Common colors and arrangements

Create your own designs. Use some of the above units, patterns and colors or create your own!