

OJIBWEMOWIN: “Ojibwe Oral Tradition”

Teaching and Research Viewer Guide

PBS eight's landmark series, *Ojibwe/Waasaa-inaabidaa: We Look In All Directions*, celebrates an extraordinary Native American culture of the Great Lakes region. We hope the *Ojibwe/Waasaa-inaabidaa: We Look In All Directions* television series and the teaching and research guides for each program will reflect the richness and resiliency of past, present and future *Ojibwe* life. These guides were constructed for use in middle school and high school social studies classes, but they are very usable and appropriate for adult viewers as well. The series illuminates a vibrant, important, indigenous culture of the Great Lakes region with much to share and teach.

The teacher guide for this program consists of:

- Discussion questions and related activities to engage students with program-specific concepts prior to viewing the program
- Guide questions to help focus the student viewing experience
- An Ojibwe story, written in English and spoken in Ojibwemowin
- Relevant curriculum correlations for the states of Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin
- Discussion questions and related activities to reinforce or extend learned concepts following the student viewing experience
- Assessment of learning suggestions

“Ojibwemowin:,” the final program of the series, focuses on the use of language to convey the Ojibwe culture’s philosophy, basic teachings, world view, and spirituality. To a large extent, a culture is defined by the expressive content and use of its language. What happens, then, to a culture whose language is forcefully suppressed? The answer to this question forms the dramatic context of “Ojibwemowin:”

The following themes are central to using “Ojibwemowin:” as a learning activity:

- **The Ojibwe are an indigenous American culture of the Great Lakes region, with a long oral tradition of language.**
- **Ojibwemowin is a living sacred language in continual transition that expresses the culture as it changes over time.**

- **Ojibwemowin was forcefully suppressed for more than 100 years by military, governmental, and societal forces outside the Ojibwe culture.**
- **Ojibwemowin survived because of the resilience of the Ojibwe culture and the determined efforts of tribal members to maintain both language use and cultural identity .**

Suggested Discussion Questions and Activities *before* Viewing Program

1. On a map of North America, locate the general areas of the Ojibwe communities before European contact. Have students brainstorm a list of words (put these on the chalkboard) they think are descriptive of life in these areas (climate, terrain, food, housing, clothing, etc.) for anyone who must make or obtain all necessities of life from the land. Students read (or it can be read aloud) an account of Ojibwe life before contact with Europeans. Students write down key words and phrases from this account and compare it to what is listed on the chalkboard. What accounts for any differences?
2. The students examine their own cultural backgrounds and determine the languages that were spoken by their ancestors. What language traces (continued use of words or phrases from an ancestral language) or other cultural artifacts (holidays, clothing, cooking styles, traditions, etc.) remain in the family? Why hasn't more survived? If the students are divided into small groups, each group could list the languages from their backgrounds and the discussed reasons for discontinuance of language use by their families.
3. Students in Tribal Schools divide into groups and brainstorm words and phrases that have recently become part of Ojibwemowin. Examples include words for recent technology like television, computers, space travel, etc. The groups share the results of their brainstorming and a master list of newly adopted Ojibwemowin words and phrases is formed. An interesting addition to this project is having students interview older Tribal members on changes in the language that have occurred during the interviewed person's life span. Words and phrases that were frequently used during the youth of the interviewed person that are no longer in common use can be determined from these interviews. Once a listing of such discontinued use of words and phrases is obtained, a discussion can take place about the concepts that were verbalized with these words that are no longer used? Have new words or phrases been developed for

these concepts or have the concepts as well as the words for them been lost?

4. The students divide into cooperative groups and brainstorm why language is so important to a culture. This is a difficult abstract concept, and the students will need some beginning questions to examine, like “How do we know we belong to a certain group or culture?” “How do we know what is important to our culture?” “How do we express our thoughts and feelings in our culture?” Each group should come up with at least one broad reason for the cultural importance of language. These reasons are listed on the chalkboard. The students discuss the importance of these reasons – why the groups chose them. This is an excellent way to prepare students for a beginning understanding of the impact of language suppression. It is also an opportunity to deepen understanding of the significance of language to the concept of identity. Every generation partially defines itself by language use. Ask students to make a listing of words and phrases they think are used and understood by people their age but not by older adults. From this perspective, how important is language to the student’s sense of personal and group identity? Challenge the students to take part in a cultural experiment: avoid use of any of the listed generational words and phrases for three days. At the end of this time period, the students discuss in small groups their thoughts and feelings about the suppression of even a small part of their language use.

An alphabetical glossary of cultural terms and Ojibwe words and phrases should be available for teachers and students to use for a variety of activities (for instance, labeling those English words descriptive of life in the Great Lakes region with Ojibwemowin words and phrases). If possible, all Ojibwemowin words and phrases should be slowly and clearly spoken to aid in pronunciation. If the Ojibwemowin words and phrases can be pictorially depicted, this, too, will help with learning vocabulary.

A partial glossary would include:

- Anishinaabeg
- band
- Chippewa
- Civilization Fund Act of 1819
- Gitchi-manidoo
- glottal stop

- Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1819
- “Long Knives”
- Ojibwe
- Ojibwemowin
- Sweetgrass First Nations Language Council
- “Three Fires” tradition
- Tribe
- Turtle Island
- A partial listing of common words and phrases

Maps:

- Map of North America showing location of Ojibwe settlement prior to contact with Europeans
- Map of North America showing location of Ojibwe Reservations today

Guide Questions to Focus Viewing

1. What impresses you most about the Ojibwe culture as represented in this program?
2. List at least three examples of cultural differences between the Ojibwe and the general culture of the United States that are evidenced in this program.
3. Why is the Ojibwe language (Ojibwemowin) so important to the culture?
4. How was Ojibwemowin suppressed?

Discussion Questions and Activities *Following Viewing the Program*

1. Divide the students into cooperative groups and have the students analyze why the state and federal governments wanted to suppress Ojibwemowin. Each group will list the reasons and give examples/facts to support their analysis.
2. As a research project, examine the Civilization Fund Act of 1819 and other U.S. government acts that legally attempted to suppress Ojibwemowin. List the titles and the primary actions of each listed act.
3. As a research project, examine the Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978. List what was different about this act from earlier government acts. What impact did this have on language use?
4. Each student mounts a picture of themselves on a piece of paper. Using labels, Ojibwemowin words and phrases are used by the student to make

- a statement about their personal attributes, concepts/ideas important to them, and other determinants of personal identity and group culture. Are there concepts for which there is no Ojibwemowin counterpart?
5. An Ojibwe migration story is retold on the web site. The story is printed in English (with illustrations, if at all possible) and spoken in Ojibwemowin by a skilled story teller. Each student is responsible for filling out the following form: Story moral or point; Characters; Setting; Problem; Solution to the problem from the story. Whenever possible, Ojibwemowin words and phrases should be used. A Venn Diagram comparing/contrasting the migration story with other migration stories can be made by each student.
 6. An Ojibwe song is sung on the web site, with the words in both English and Ojibwemowin. Each student makes a Venn Diagram comparing/contrasting the song with another song known by the student.

The Migration of the Anishinabe (from *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway* by Edward Benton-Banai)

When the seven prophets came to the Anishinabe, the nation was living on the shores of the Eastern Great Salt Water. “The people were so many and powerful that if one was to climb the highest mountain and look in all directions, they would not be able to see the end of the nation.” There was plentiful food from the land, the sea, and the rivers. The Anishinabe used canoes to travel by river and sleds and dog teams to travel overland. The nation was governed by its Clan System.

It was a time and a place of great plenty. This made many of the Anishinabe doubt at first the predictions of the seven prophets about migration to the West. The nation held large meetings to discuss the predictions. The prophet of the First Fire informed the people “If you do not move, you will be destroyed.” He also told the people that the first of seven stopping places during the long migration would be a turtle shaped *mi-ni-si*’ (island). This, too, caused much discussion until a woman about to give birth had a *ba-wa-zi-gay-win*’ (dream) about a turtle-shaped island in a river pointing toward the setting sun. The elders of the Midiwiwin Lodge instructed the Anishinabe to locate this island. It was finally found in the St. Lawrence River near modern-day Montreal. The people had many cleansing and Spirit ceremonies to ready themselves for additional instructions from the Creator.

The Anishinabe finally resumed their journey West. They knew if the teachings of the Midewiwin continued to guide them, they would remain strong and reach the end of the migration. These teachings included respecting the people encountered on the way but fearing none. The Anishinabe came in peace but defended themselves when necessary. A major adversary at the beginning of the migration was the *Nah-du-wayg'*, the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy.

A group of men maintained the *Manido ish-ko-day'* (the Sacred Fire), which was never allowed to die. All of the campfires of the Anishinabe came from coals taken from the Sacred Fire. This represented the continuity of life among the Anishinabe. Some clan and family groups, however, thought the migration was over and settled along the way. These groups, too, were given coals from the Sacred Fire.

The second major stopping place was near the place of water and thunder the Ojibwe later called *Kichi-ka-be-kong*. It is also known as Niagara Falls. The Sacred Fire was moved here. It was here that peace was finally established between the Anishinabe and the Iroquois, who gave the people a wampum belt made out of a special type of shell. The *O-pwa'-gun* (pipe) was shared among the two nations.

The third major stopping place was near the Detroit River, which connects Lake St. Clair and Lake Huron to Lake Erie. At each stopping place, the Sacred Megis (turtle shell) appeared to the people.

During the migration, three important groups developed in the Ojibwe Nation, each group responsible for tasks necessary for the survival of the Anishinabe people. The *Ish-ko-day'-wa-tomi* maintained the Sacred Fire. These people were later called the *O-day'-wa-tomi* and even later called the *Potawatomi*. The *O-daw-wahg'* provided food goods and supplies to the people. These people were later called the *Ottawa*. The *Ojibway* were the people's faith keepers, entrusted with the sacred scrolls of the Midewiwin and the Waterdrum. These people were mistakenly called the *Chippewa*. The Anishinabe became known as the Nation of the Three Fires because of the emergence of these three important groups. Large gatherings of the Three Fires were held to discuss peace, military action, and the spiritual origin and purpose of the Three Fires.

The migration continued as the people picked up the Waterdrum and continued moving West. They met hostile groups along the way, but the people continued until they came to a large body of fresh water. This was the place spoken of in the prophecy of the Second Fire. It was probably Lake Michigan. Again, some of the people stayed and some drifted South. As foretold in the prophecy of the Second Fire, some of the people began to wander from the path of the teachings of the Midewiwin Lodge. A small number of people, mostly the tribal elders, kept the Sacred Fire from going out.

There was a prophesy that said “a boy would be born to show the Anishinabe back to the sacred ways.” The boy was born among the people, and he had a dream of stones leading across the water. The dream led the people to the islands that led across the great northern fresh water sea. Thus, the prophesy of the Third Fire came true and the way to “the path to their chosen ground, a land in the West to which they must move their families” was found where the Anishinabe would find “the food that grows on water.” The Sacred Megis appeared on the largest island in the chain, Manitoulin Island. This became the capital of the Ojibwe nation. The Midewiwin Way once again was known to the people and the Clan System became important. Manitoulin Island was the fourth major stopping place of the Ojibwe migration.

The fifth stopping place was *Baw-wa-ting'*, near Sault Ste. Marie. This was a place of plentiful food and, later, trade with the Light-skinned race. The migration split into two groups here, one following the northern shore of Lake Superior and the other the southern shore. Both groups left rock carvings. The northern group of Anishinabe went to the western end of what is now called Lake Superior and found Spirit Island. The Sacred Shell rose up to the people here. Parts of the southern group came here, too. Near Spirit Island is where the prophesy was fulfilled and the Anishinabe people found “the food that grows on water.” *Ma-no'-min* (wild rice) was the sacred gift from the chosen ground. Spirit Island was the sixth stopping place of the migration.

The elders of the Midewiwin Lodge thought the journey wasn't quite over. An ancient prophesy spoke of a turtle shaped island at the end of the journey. The southern group of Anishinabe had found an island meeting this description. *Mo-ning-wun'-a-kawn-ing* (Madeline Island)

was found by the people, the Sacred Shell rose out of the water, and tobacco was placed on its shore. The Waterdrum had found its home in this, the seventh and final stopping place of the migration. The Sacred Fire was carried here and continues to burn brightly.

It is believed the Ojibwe migration began about 900 A.D. and ended 500 years later at the chosen ground. This is a story of a miracle of the Creator and the faith and courage of a great people.

Map of the Migration

Bibliography of source books, language CDs, etc. (should be fairly extensive, with

- *A Long Time Ago is Just Like Today*. Oral Narratives of Ojibwe Elders. Duluth Public Schools Indian Education Program, 1976.
- *American Indian Oral Traditions: Dakota and Ojibwe*. St. Paul Public Schools. Multicultural Resource Center, St. Paul, MN
- *Basic Ojibwe Words*. Seven Lessons in the Ojibwe Language. Numbers, commands, people and pronouns, animals and birds, food and beverages, cultural terms, days of the week. Anoka-Hennepin Indian Education Program.
- Benton-Banai, Edward. *The Mishomis Book*. St. Paul: Indian Country Press, 1981.
- Broker, Ignatia. *Night Flying Woman: An Ojibwe Narrative*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1983.
- Kapler, Charles J. *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*. Vol. 2. "Treaties." Includes copies of all treaties affecting Minnesota's tribes. Available at the Minnesota History Center and most major libraries.

Speaker Resource: (story tellers, elders, etc.)

Curriculum Correlations

Minnesota Graduation Rule

- Students will be able to summarize and explain the significance of American Indian oral tradition in the perpetuation of culture and history (general learner outcome).

- Students will understand the history of treaties specific to Minnesota and comprehend the impact on contemporary life (middle school).
- Students will be able to understand the relationship that languages have to the culture, history and contributions of American Indians (senior high school).
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of the importance that language has to cultural survival (senior high school).
- Students will be aware that language enables people to preserve meanings and experiences and that language is the main vehicle of learning through which culture is transmitted and preserved. The students will also realize the impact of the imminent loss of languages (middle school).

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Concepts:

- Advocates of Indian acculturation and assimilation favored sending Indian children to distant boarding schools to force them to speak only English and to adopt non-Indian patterns of living.
- The boarding school affected the Chippewa's traditional culture and the individual's self-esteem

Michigan Social Studies Standards

- Standard 1.3 Analyzing and Interpreting the Past: All students will reconstruct the past by comparing interpretations written by others from a variety of perspectives and creating narratives from evidence.
- Standard 1.4 Judging Decisions from the Past: All students will evaluate key decisions made at critical turning points in history by assessing their implications and long-term consequences.
- Standard V.1 Information Processing: All students acquire information from books, maps, newspapers, data sets, and other sources, organize and present information in maps, graphs, charts, and time lines, interpret the meaning and significance of information, and use a variety of electronic technologies to assist in assessing and managing information.
- Standard V.2 Conducting Investigations: All students will conduct investigations by formulating a clear statement of a question, gathering

and organizing information from a variety of sources, analyzing and interpreting information, formulating and testing hypotheses, reporting results both orally and in writing, and making use of appropriate technology.

- Standard V1.2 Group Discussion: All students will engage their peers in constructive conversation about matters of public concern by clarifying issues, considering opposing views, applying democratic values, anticipating consequences, and working toward making decisions.

Assessment Suggestions

Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan all advocate performance assessment. The activities listed in the guide for “Ojibwemowin” include a number of performance indicators. These include: homework assignments, class projects, participation in discussion, interviews, completion of web site activities, individual projects. Performance standards are usually described in terms of performance levels which describe where the students stands with respect to achievement in a specific area. These levels are:

1. **Partially Proficient** (demonstrated partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work). This performance level is below what is expected of the student and is generally unacceptable. The student needs to reach a higher level before the work is accepted.
2. **Proficient** (solid academic performance with demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, including subject-matter knowledge, application of this knowledge in meaningful fashion, and use of analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter).
3. **Advanced** (This level signifies superior performance).

This teacher guide was constructed by:

- Dan Corbett, Curricular and educational content
 - Liz Jaakola, Research and cultural consultant
 - Chris Bacigalupo, design
 - Gary Terry, graphics
- Lorraine Norrgard, research