

Indigenous Languages

Lesson Plan

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Rationale:

This lesson will introduce students to local Indigenous languages and give them the opportunity to speak one of these languages and practice oral storytelling.

First Peoples Principles of Learning: Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities; learning is embedded in memory, history and story; learning involves patience and time; learning requires exploration of one's identity

Curriculum Connections:

Grade 1–3 English Language Arts

Big Ideas: Through listening and speaking, we connect with others and share our world; stories and other texts help us learn about ourselves, our families, and our communities

Curricular Competencies: Show awareness of how story in First Peoples cultures connect people to family and community

Content: Oral language strategies, elements of a story

Grade 4–5 English Language Arts

Big Ideas: English language arts: Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world

Curricular Competencies: Demonstrate awareness of the oral tradition in First Peoples' cultures and the purposes of First Peoples' texts

Content: Features of oral language

Estimated Time Required: 45 minutes

Lesson Activities:

The following activity was designed using the Hul'q'umi'num language and stories, but it can be adapted to be used with different Indigenous languages, stories and experiences.

1. Begin class by playing the cradle songs found under the [listen](#) section of the Our Living Languages pathway. This will serve as a hook and gain the students' attention. Once the songs have finished (after approximately seven minutes), ask students what language they think these songs and prayers were sung in. Was there more than one language? Have they ever heard these languages before? Tell students that these were songs in the following First Nations languages:
 - i. SENCÓTEN (WSÁNEĆ, Strait Salish): 13 Moons Song; Making Soup Song
 - ii. Halq'eméylem (Stó:lō, Coast Salish): Prayer
 - iii. Nuučaanuł (Nuu-chah-nulth): Grandmother Hunting Song
 - iv. Nsyilxcən (Okanagan, interior Salish): Lullaby

2. Ask students if they know the name of the Indigenous language spoken where they live. Have students use the [First Voices](#) website to identify the Indigenous language spoken where they live or where they come from. Having students identify the language and Indigenous group will give them a greater understanding of where they live or where they come from. This could also inspire pride in the Indigenous students in your class as others recognize their community and language.

3. Tell the students the names of the different characters in the story you will tell of the *Thunderbird and the Orca Whale* (as told by Joe Jack; included at end of this lesson plan). The following translations are in Hul'q'umi'num, the language spoken by the Cowichan people, from whom the story comes.

Thunderbird: tzinquaw
 Orca: q'ul-lhanumutsun
 Salmon: stseelhtun
 Cowichan: Quw'utsun

For help with pronunciation or to find the words in your local Indigenous language, visit [First Voices](#)

4. Read *The Thunderbird and the Orca Whale*, a story that has been passed down for generations by the Cowichan people. As you are reading, encourage students to say the words they have just learned with you when they come up in the story. You could divide the students into groups and make each group responsible for saying one character's name in Hul'q'umi'num when it comes up in the story.

5. When you are finished reading, ask students if they have ever heard stories similar to this before. Tell students that this story has been told to many generations of First Nations children. These stories are hundreds of years old and have been passed down in First Nations communities through oral storytelling. Ask students if there are any stories that their families have passed down or shared from generation to generation.

Fully immerse yourself in the Royal BC Museum’s Learning Portal by making a [playlist!](#)

Works Cited:

Jack, Joe. 2017. “The Cowichan Thunderbird and Orca Legend.” Coast Salish Art,

The Cowichan Thunderbird and Orca Legend

Reproduced with permission from Joe Jack.

One of the earliest legends in the history of the Cowichan (Quw'utsun) Tribes is the legend of the Thunderbird (Tzinquaw) and Orca (q'ul-lhanumutsun).

Life along the Cowichan (Quw'utsun) River was one of plenty and good fortune for the Cowichan (Quw'utsun) People. The Cowichan (Quw'utsun) Bay and Sansum Narrows was full of crabs, clams and oysters. The Cowichan (Quw'utsun) and Koksilah Rivers were rich with salmon (stseelhtun), trout and steelhead.

However, there was one time in the history of the Cowichan (Quw'utsun) people when the rivers went silent.

The Cowichan (Quw'utsun) people realized that there was something wrong; there was no salmon (stseelhtun) in the Cowichan (Quw'utsun) and Koksilah river system. The people gathered along the shores and then worked their way down to the mouth of the rivers trying to find the cause. At the mouth of the river they discovered the cause of the disappearing salmon (stseelhtun); to their horror a Supernatural Killer Whale (q'ul-lhanumutsun) had set claim to the mouth of the Cowichan (Quw'utsun) River, and the salmon (stseelhtun) were all being eaten.

The Cowichan (Quw'utsun) people paddled their huge war canoes out to the Orca (q'ul-lhanumutsun); banging on the sides of their canoes, trying to rid their waters of this mighty creature, but try as they might; they were unable to drive the Orca (q'ul-lhanumutsun) away.

The Medicine people of all the Cowichan (Quw'utsun) villages joined together to call upon the powerful support of a supernatural creature known as the Thunderbird (Tzinquaw).

Soon the Thunderbird (Tzinquaw) appeared, and was quickly in a battle with the Orca (q'ul-lhanumutsun). The Thunderbird (Tzinquaw) was victorious and carried the Orca (q'ul-lhanumutsun) onto Mount Tzouhalem. The salmon (stseelhtun) run was saved.

The respect of the traditional lands, the animals, the fish and the supernatural has always been a way of life for all Indigenous people.

This is an old oral historical Coast Salish legend that originates from time immemorial.