

Lesson – The Ties Between Nature and Culture in Washington State

[using CD-ROM of Folk & Traditional Artists of Washington]

Learning Objectives

Students will demonstrate an understanding of the links between cultural communities and the natural environment in Washington state.

Lesson Summary

Students use CD-ROM to learn more about cultural traditions that are practiced by different Washington folk and traditional artists. They then find traditional artists whose expressive art form is directly tied to the natural environment. [Many of Washington's cultural communities have close relationships with their local natural environment]

Lesson Outline

1. Students are asked to come up with a list of natural environments and/or resources that can be found in Washington state. Examples would be: forest & woodlands, maritime (ocean and Puget Sound), mountains, etc. They use this list when searching traditional artist pages on the CD-ROM
2. Individual students or small groups of students (or 2 or 3) are then given a copy of the CD-ROM, which they open on computer. [It's also possible to do this activity as a full class if there is a projector available for presenting the CD-ROM on a screen].
3. Students can either begin by selecting a natural environment or resource and then searching for traditional artists who have ties to that specific environment or resource. Alternately they can simply begin by randomly searching through the traditional artist pages (containing photos, bios, and in some cases audio samples).
4. As students look through traditional artist pages and information they look for clues to suggest direct cultural ties to nature. Some excellent examples will be found with most – if not all – of the Native American traditional artists, who have clear ties to the local forests (as woodcarvers, basketmakers, etc.) and to the ocean (storytelling, subject matter of art work – such as totem poles or other carvings of orcas, patterns of whaling designs on baskets, etc.). Some of the cultural communities that are tied to a specific occupation will also have ties to nature. Some examples would be fisher poets, logger poets, saddlemakers (for cowboys or ranchers).
5. A list of discoveries that students have made would then be written on a piece of paper and submitted, or discussed with others in class. Students could identify very specific artists they have found on the CD-ROM. For instance, Elaine Emerson is a Native American folk artist from eastern Washington who harvests local grasses and tree bark, etc. for use in making her baskets.

Questions for Discussion:

What are some Washington state cultural communities who are very closely tied to their natural environment?

What other kinds of artistic or cultural expression could be linked to nature?

Is it possible that some of these traditional art forms (and by extension, even cultures) may be endangered because of either a depletion of a certain natural resource or of restricted access to that resource?