

ELEMENTARY
CURRICULUM

CLANS OF THE ANISHINABE

NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES OF WISCONSIN



TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Enduring Knowledge	1
II. Teacher Background Materials	1
III. Before Viewing the Video	3
IV. Expanded Activities	4
V. Final Assessment	4

I. Enduring Knowledge:

- The Anishinabe people's understanding of nature drove their approach to every day living.
- As different cultures arrived in the United States, their approach to the environment was put into question. The Western approach did not understand the Native Americans' belief in the *Circle of Life*. The differences in cultures caused misunderstandings and problems for both cultures.
- Clans can be described in different ways but the structure of the clan was important to governing of the tribe.

Learning Targets:

1. Some Native Americans are returning to their rich heritage and sacred customs of the Anishinabe.
2. The clan system was a form of governing Native Americans.

Vocabulary:

1. **Anishinabe:** original people
2. **Totem:** the emblem of an animal representing a clan
3. **Dodame:** the Ojibwa word for totem/clan
4. **Legend:** a story handed down orally; legends answer important questions we have regarding nature and world events
5. **Cycles:** a series of events that happen again and again in the same order or at the same times; the sun and the moon cycle
6. **Attribute:** a quality or feature of someone or something. The fox has the attributes of cunning and swiftness.
7. **Culture:** the beliefs, customs, practices, and social behavior of a particular nation or people. From early times, Native Americans have constructed their government on systems built around clans.

II. Teacher Background Materials:

Note: *Bolded words are found in the vocabulary list.*

It is important to point out that depending on the different tribe's oral history the material presented on clans maybe a little different. The following is information presented by the clans of the Anishinabe, Ojibwa.

1. The Ojibwa Indians have these beliefs about animals of the earth:
 1. Animals were considered teachers when dealing with issues on the environment—in some stories they taught man where to hunt and fish.
 2. Animals provided food, clothing and shelter to man.
 3. The Ojibwa considered animals and man equal beings in the *Circle of Life*. As a result animals were highly revered by the **Anishinabe** people.
 4. Animals were believed to possess cleverness, wisdom, and exceptional physical ability.
2. The Anishinabe believed the clan system came through the Great Spirit as a form of government to prevent fighting and to end the intense hostilities that existed between certain tribes. The following details are facts about the clan:
 1. Clans took the names of animals and the **attributes** associated with them.
 2. Comparisons were often made between certain animal behavior patterns and the conduct of the person the story was about.
 3. A **totem** is a visual and artistic representation of a clan. A totem can be represented in many ways. A totem pole is one form of this artistic representation.
 4. The Anishinabe projected many animal characteristics onto humans. This led to clans being represented by animals such as the following:
 - The bear clan were war chiefs and were know for their thick black hair that never turned white in old age. Some tribes consider the bear clan to be caretakers of the earth's medicines.
 - The fish clan members believed that they were the first to appear out of the sea.
 - The crane clan members were known for their clear and loud voices and were recognized as famous speakers.
 - The wolf clan were scouts brothers to the Ojibwa ... their paths and fates were intertwined.
 - The turtle clan was responsible for the shifting of the Earth and **cycles** of the moon. The clan's obligation was the environment.
 - The deer clan was considered swift and smart. The members of this clan were gentle people and poets of the people.

- The bird clan pursued the higher elevations of the mind, like the eagle pursued the higher elevations of the sky.
5. A clan is made up of families originating from a common totemic ancestor, and would consider his or her relationship to another member of the same clan similar to the way we consider cousins.
 6. Clans have specific guidelines such as the following:
 - Clan members were not permitted to marry another member of the same clan.
 - Membership in a clan is automatic at birth and follows the father's lineage.
 - Clan membership could determine political succession, inheritance, and property rights.
 7. The number of clans has grown from the earliest of **dodames** among the Ojibwa from between five and seven to twenty.
 8. There is no date that begins the existence of the clan, but early documents signed between Native Americans and the new European settlers were signed using clan symbols.
 9. According to Ojibwa oral traditions during the time the clan was in power the Ojibwa suffered no famine, sickness, or epidemics and the clan system was built on equal justice, voice, law and order. It reinforced the teachings and principals of a sacred way of life.
 10. Currently, a rejuvenated pride in traditional beliefs and customs is becoming more evident in tribal celebrations.

III. Before Viewing the Video:

1. Build a classroom discussion around the understanding that different **cultures** have different ways to govern themselves. The United States has a democracy, some European countries rule their land through royal leadership, and still other countries have dictators. Throughout history cultures have chosen a system of government that helps organize people into systems that keep a society functioning. Native Americans set up the system of clans/totems and this system worked well for them. As you watch the video, discuss why this system worked so well for this culture. The following are some ideas students could bring out in a discussion:
 - Native Americans believed in the *Circle of Life*, and considered animals and man as equal beings.
 - Native Americans lived near nature and depended upon it for their existence.

- Native Americans saw how well nature was organized and that nature had systems within it that allowed it to survive.
 - Native Americans could see that cycles in nature were dependable and constant – cycles of the moon and sun, animal and plant life.
 - Animals were respected for their intelligence, their food and material value.
2. Hand out a list of the animals presented in the video (deer, wolf, fish, bear, turtle, crane, bird). After discussing the word attribute (see vocabulary list) have students write down some attributes people or animals might have. Students can choose attributes from the class list, or add some not on the list, to each animal on their animal list. After the lists are made students might wish to choose an animal on the list that best describes their attributes. As students watch the video they can see if their attributes coincide with the ones given in the video.

IV. Expanded Activities:

1. Start a discussion based on the question asked to the students in the section “Before Watching the Video.” The question asked to the student was, “Why do you believe the Native American system of governing themselves worked for them?”
2. Set up role playing situation based on the Native American system of government. (The core idea is that each person has special attributes to help solve a problem. The individual attributes of these people would be used to make decisions for the whole group.) Have students list several important problems in our society, such as pollution, land use, etc. Then form small discussion groups based on some of these problems. After groups are formed, hand out cards to individual groups that have a problem listed and several animals listed. Students role play one of the animals using that animal’s attributes in solving the problem. Have each group have a different problem or all groups have the same problem. After students have met in their small groups, discuss how working with their attributes helped solve the problem. Did it work for them or what happened trying to solve the problem?

V. Final Assessment:

The assessment can be made by observation of classroom discussions and observing small group work. Some of the ideas that should be presented by the students are the following:

- There are different ways to solve problems and to govern a society. These ways, although they may be different than ours, can be successful.
- Learning about other’s beliefs and ideas allows for a more knowledgeable perspective.
- Some Native Americans are revisiting some of their historical beliefs because they acknowledge the value these beliefs had in the past.