

Grades: 6th - 8th Grade

Lesson: 2

Unit: 4: Building a positive future in Indian communities

Subject: History/Social Studies

Additional Subject(s): Science

Achievement Goal: Students will identify wild rice as an important historic food source for Ojibwe people, how wild rice was harvested and processed, and the important cultural significance wild rice has for the Ojibwe people.

Time: Multiple class periods

Lesson Description:

Students will create posters or presentations to describe the processes of wild ricing.

Teacher Background:

Wild rice is the edible grain of a tall aquatic grass. It is one of the most important foods to the Ojibwe and other American Indian tribes. The Ojibwe name wild rice is mahnomen (mah-no-men). Wild rice grows in shallow mud bottom lakes, ponds, and streams, primarily in the Great Lakes region of the United States and Canada. Wild rice is harvested in the late summer early fall. Our traditional stories tell of how wild rice played a large part in the migration of the Ojibwe people from the Great Salt (Atlantic Ocean) to areas we call home today.

Traditionally, the harvesting of wild rice was an important event of the year. When the elders in charge of the harvest decided the time was right, each family set up camp near the ricing fields. Individual families did not own these fields, but rather, they had the right to use certain sections. Since wild rice does not ripen all at the same time, it was important to rice carefully not to damage the unripened rice in the harvest process, so the area could be harvested again the same year. Ojibwe ricers always made sure that some of the grain fell back into the water to reseed for the following year.

The harvest process began with tobacco being offered along with a prayer of thanksgiving. The outcome of this harvest meant the difference between having enough food for the winter or people going hungry.

The process itself has many steps:

1. Harvesting the rice by “knocking” the seeds into the canoe.
2. Drying the seeds by spreading them on a sheet of birch bark to expose them to the sun and wind.
3. Parching the seeds by placing them in a large iron kettle and stirring them over a low fire to remove more moisture.
4. Threshing the seeds to help remove their husks by digging a hole, covering it with deer hide and softly walking on them with new moccasins (jigging).
5. Winnowing the rice to remove the chaff from the seeds by placing portions of the threshed seeds in a winnowing basket and tossing them carefully in the air to have the wind remove the chaff.

A more detailed description with pictures is available at Manoomin.com.

After the harvest, the families who riced together would have a harvest celebration. Prayers of thanks were offered for the gift of rice.

Today, wild rice continues to be an important part of Ojibwe culture and families rice in a traditional way; however, they often use aluminum boats and gasoline powered engines to help with the threshing process.

Teacher Preparation Resources:

- Gather poster-making supplies or prepare slide presentation software such as PowerPoint for student use.
- Make the information about Harvesting and Processing at Manoomin.com available for students.
- Obtain a copy of *Wild Rice and the Ojibway People* by Thomas Vennum, if possible.

Student Activity:

1. Review the information in the Teacher Background section with students.
2. View, or let students view on their own, the information at Manoomin.com.
3. Distribute excerpts from Thomas Vennum's *Wild Rice and the Ojibway People*, if available.
4. Have students create a poster or slide presentation that describes the steps in the process of wild ricing.

Evaluation:

Evaluate how well students are able to:

1. Identify wild rice and where it grows.
2. Correctly state fall as the time wild rice is harvested and the process used to harvest wild rice.
3. List and describe the four steps in processing wild rice, drying, parching, threshing, and winnowing.
4. Make a comparison of "paddy rice" and wild rice and discuss the importance of wild rice to Ojibwe people today.

Lesson Resources:

- [Manoomin.com: Harvesting & Processing of Ojibwe Wild Rice](http://Manoomin.com:Harvesting&ProcessingofOjibweWildRice)
- Vennum, Thomas. *Wild Rice and the Ojibway People*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988.

Source URL: <http://www.lessonsofourland.org/lessons/wild-rice>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.manoomin.com/Harvesting.html>
- [2] <http://www.lessonsofourland.org/grade-level/6th-8th-grade>
- [3] http://www.lessonsofourland.org/flag/flag/lessons/399?destination=printpdf/399&token=XtcMiikuHLIUn8ezmiNA0BFKS4znKULItc_L0ttDuKU
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