



# LESSON 1

## Native Americans and the Forest

### BIG IDEAS

- Wisconsin’s forests provided basic resources (e.g., food, clothing, shelter) for Native Americans and European settlers. (Subconcept 19)
- Forest management is the use of techniques (e.g., planting, harvesting) to promote, conserve, or alter forests to meet desired outcomes. (Subconcept 34)

### OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- List ways that forests provided for the basic needs of Native Americans.
- Define the term “forest management.”
- Indicate how Native Americans managed forests to meet their needs.

### SUBJECT AREAS

Arts, Language Arts, Social Studies

### LESSON/ACTIVITY TIME

- Total Lesson Time: 70 minutes
- Time Breakdown:
  - Introduction.....5 minutes
  - Activity 1 .....15 minutes
  - Activity 2 .....30 minutes
  - Conclusion.....20 minutes

### TEACHING SITE

Classroom

### FIELD ENHANCEMENT CONNECTIONS

This lesson ties closely with Field Enhancement 1, *Unlocking a Forest’s Past*.

### NUTSHELL

In this lesson, students learn what Wisconsin’s forests were like before European settlement and discover how Native Americans altered forests to provide their basic needs. To accomplish this, students read a journal of an explorer, note specific details, and draw an illustration.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There is an old saying, “You can’t see the forest for the trees.” At first glance, trees seem to define the forest. Although they are the dominant organisms present, trees are just one of the many living things found within a forest ecosystem. The living things that are found in an ecosystem depend on the nonliving factors that exist. These include soil, climate, and topography.

Since their arrival (an estimated 11,000 years ago), humans have influenced Wisconsin’s forest ecosystems. Approximately 60,000 to 70,000 native people are estimated to have lived in Wisconsin in 1492. Between 1492 and 1634, the population was reduced to 4,000 due to European disease and war. Prior to this population collapse, native people had significant impact on forest ecosystems. Estimates indicate that these early residents influenced approximately half of the total land surface of Wisconsin.

These early inhabitants, referred to as Woodland Indians, influenced the makeup of forest ecosystems in a variety of ways. Humans used fire to encourage the growth of forest vegetation that would attract large game species such as deer, elk, and bison. A few widely scattered groups of humans could start enough intentional and accidental fires to regularly alter the forest.



## MATERIALS LIST FOR EACH STUDENT

- Copy of the Student Pages  1A-D, *Journal of an Explorer*
- Markers, colored pencils, or crayons

## TEACHER PREPARATION

- Familiarize yourself with Student Pages  1A-D, *Journal of an Explorer*

Concentrations of large game animals additionally affected the ability of some plants in the forest to grow. Food gathering pressures also directly eliminated some plant species. To supplement their diet and economy, early inhabitants also engaged in some agricultural practices. Areas of forest were removed to create fields and gardens for growing corn and other foods. Many plants were introduced, both intentionally and accidentally, from outside Wisconsin. Some of these trees and shrubs include hackberries, walnuts, hickories, oaks, and hazelnuts, which were planted to supplement their diet and attract wild game species.

Woodland Indians practiced **forest management** to promote or alter forest composition. They used these practices to ensure that the forest would provide for their basic needs. The forest provided food and raw materials for shelter, tools, travel, clothing, and trade. Woodland Indians lived in wigwams that consisted of a framework of peeled, bent saplings, tied together with green basswood fiber, and covered with large sheets of bark. They made utensils and tools out of wood and used them to collect wild game and plants from the forest for food and medicines. They traveled the waterways of northern Wisconsin in canoes made of birch bark and traded forest items to other tribes. To early inhabitants, forests were like large superstores; they provided everything needed to support life.

## VOCABULARY

**Empire:** Vast areas controlled by one government or group.

**Forest Management:** The use of techniques (e.g., planting, harvesting) to promote, conserve, or alter forests to meet desired outcomes.

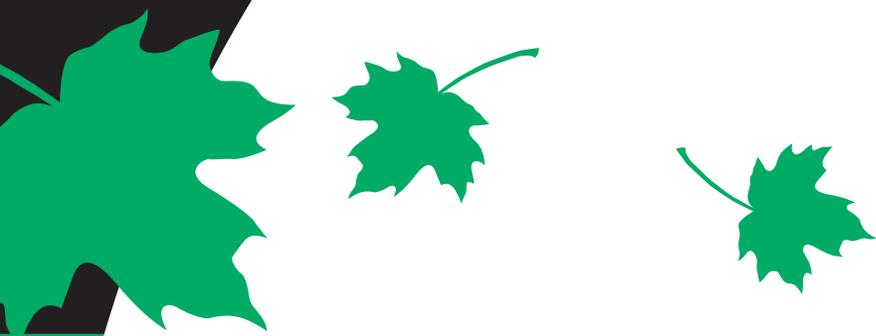
**Need:** Something necessary for life, like food and water.

**Spawning:** What fish do when they mate and lay eggs.

**Want:** Something nice to have, but not a necessity.

When Europeans arrived in Wisconsin, the northern mixed forests were dominated by old sugar maple and eastern hemlock. Mixed throughout the forest, however, were patches of aspen and birch. These patches were present because of disturbances such as windstorms, fire, and human activity, which created openings in the forest. Aspen and birch are considered early successional species. This means they need sunny, open areas to grow and are the first tree species to sprout or grow in an area after a disturbance.

Before European settlement, forests covered an estimated three quarters of Wisconsin's landscape. When early explorers arrived in Wisconsin in the 1630s, they found a greatly reduced population of human inhabitants. The forests that early settlers saw were likely much different than they were one or two hundred years earlier. With fewer people, less human altering of the forest occurred.



## PROCEDURE INTRODUCTION

Discuss with your students what humans need to survive. Start by asking if anyone can define the word “need.” (*Something you can’t do without.*) Brainstorm with the class the things that they need in order to live where they do in Wisconsin. List all ideas on the board. Ask if all are truly needed. Often they will include things that are “wants” instead of “needs.” Introduce the term “want” and ask if someone can define the word “want.” (*A want is something that makes life easier or more enjoyable. It is not necessary to survive.*) If there are “wants” listed on the board, ask students to differentiate those things that are “wants” from those things that are “needs.” (*Basic needs include food, clothing, shelter, air, and water.*)

Tell the students that during this unit, they will be looking at forests and how they have provided and continue to provide for our “needs” and “wants.” Now have the students brainstorm a list of “needs” and “wants” that forests provide us today. Again, have them differentiate “needs” from “wants.”

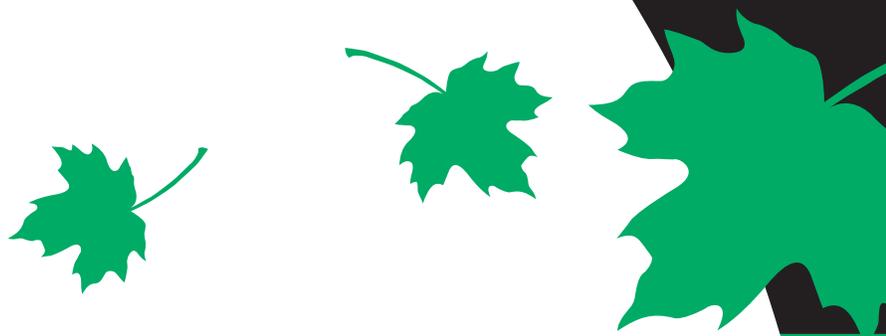
### ACTIVITY 1

1. Tell the students that today they are going to look at what needs Native Americans got from forests and how Native Americans managed forests to better meet their needs. Ask if anyone can explain what it means to manage something. (*To take care of something and make decisions about its future.*) Ask if anyone knows what it means to manage a forest. (*Deciding what we want to get from a forest and taking steps to make that happen. For example, planting trees, cutting trees, and creating wildlife habitat.*) Tell your students that for the next few minutes they will be reading a story about what Wisconsin’s forests provided for the Native Americans who lived there.

2. Write on the blackboard the words “provide” and “manage.” Underline the word “provide” and circle the word “manage.” Hand out copies of Student Pages **1A-D**, *Journal of an Explorer* to each student. (**NOTE:** The *Journal of an Explorer* is historical fiction. It represents current understanding of the relationship between some Native Americans and forests.) Tell students that they will be taking turns reading the story aloud while the rest of the class reads along silently. Ask the students to look at the blackboard. Tell them that as they go through the story, they should underline words that describe what forests provided for Native Americans. Tell the students to additionally circle any sentences that describe how Native Americans managed or altered the forest to meet their needs.
3. Have students take turns reading the story aloud.

### ACTIVITY 2

1. Upon completion of the story, ask students what “needs” the forest in the story provided for the Ojibwa. (*Forests provided food, medicine, and materials for shelter, clothing, tools, firewood, and canoes.*) Ask how the Ojibwa altered the forest to better meet their needs. (*The Ojibwa used fire to alter the forest and planted trees and plants not normally found there.*) Ask students what “wants” the forests provided for. (*Non-necessity items like baskets, sleeping mats, and toys.*)
2. After discussing the importance of forests to the lives of the Ojibwa, tell the students that their job is to illustrate the story. Instruct them to draw a picture that depicts what forests provided for Ojibwas in the story and how the Ojibwas managed the forest to better meet their needs.



## CONCLUSION

After students have completed their illustrations, have students share their work with the rest of the class and have them describe two things the Ojibwa got from the forest and one way they managed the forest to better meet their needs.

## CAREERS

The career profile in this lesson is about Kim Potaracke, Archeologist, USDA Forest Service. Career Profile 3A.AT is found on page 18. A careers lesson that uses this information begins on page 140.

## SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Ask your students to pretend that they are explorers. They have just landed in their family's front yard. Have them write a journal entry that describes how their family lives, how their home is built, what they eat, and how forests supply some of these needs and wants. Have students report to the class on how their use of forests compares to the Native Americans in the story.

## REFERENCES

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# RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

## ●● BOOKS/ACTIVITY GUIDE ●●

Digging and Discovery: Wisconsin Archeology by Diane Holliday, PhD and Bobbie Malone, PhD (Madison, WI: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1998.) This book and accompanying teachers' activity guide explains how examining bits and pieces left by past residents of Wisconsin gives us clues as to the way they lived. Learn more under the School Services section of the Wisconsin Historical Society website: [www.wisconsinhistory.org/index.html](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/index.html)

Wisconsin Indians by Nancy Oestreich Lurie. (Madison, WI: The Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2002.) This book provides a wide range of information, both historical and current, about Wisconsin's Native American tribes.



Digging for artifacts can be exciting and a lot of hard work.

## KIM, ARCHEOLOGICAL TECHNICIAN

Meet Kim Potaracke. Kim is an Archeological Technician at the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest in northern Wisconsin. Her job is to help archeologists find, research, and protect historical sites and artifacts. The artifacts Kim finds are usually objects that belonged to people who lived or worked in forests in Wisconsin. Kim does a variety of things for her job. She views photographs taken from airplanes and old maps to look for places where people used to live in the forest. Kim also draws maps (by hand sometimes, but more often with a computer) and writes reports. All these things help people like foresters and wildlife biologists know where historic places are so they don't damage them. Kim's work also helps people all over the country because everyone can visit the historic places and look at the objects she helps to protect.

For Kim to become an Archeological Technician, she studied Biology and Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. During college, Kim helped research and dig a (pre-European) Native American Indian farm field near the Mississippi River.

Kim says the best part of her job is "that each day is different and it can change in an instant." She also likes that her job gives others a chance to learn about the past.

If you think Kim's job sounds like something you would like to do, Kim has some suggestions. One thing you could do is write down stories your grandparents tell you about when they were kids. She says you should get involved with a local historical society, visit museums, read historical books, and surf the Net!

# JOURNAL OF AN EARLY EXPLORER (A)

May 15, 1640

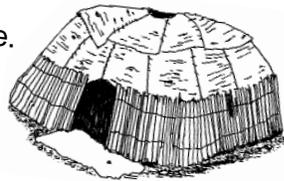
Today our group set foot on a wooded land south of the Great Lake called Kitchigami. We traveled on foot nearly ten miles through a forest to a village of native people. They refer to themselves as Anishinabe. Their neighbors call them Ojibwa.

The village is located in a small opening in the forest near a river. Tall pines, spruce, and firs surround the village. There was much excitement as we entered the village. We brought some goods to trade and they were happy to see us.

The village consists of eight homes called wigwams. These dome-shaped houses are constructed from materials found in the forest. Each wigwam is about 14 feet by 20 feet. They consist of a bent sapling framework that is tied together. Bark strips about 20 feet long and 3 feet wide cover these frames. The strips are held in place by poles and basswood cords. An elk hide lays in front of the doorway and can be used to cover the opening.

I was invited inside a wigwam. Mats woven from a plant called bulrush covered the floor. Deer and bear hides were rolled up and arranged along the walls to sit on. At night, these hides are used as sleeping blankets. On one end was a fireplace that heated and lit the wigwam. Eight family members live in here very comfortably.

Outside the wigwam were birch bark baskets that contained food. A deer hide was stretched on the ground. It was being made into something called rawhide. This rawhide was being made to repair a snowshoe.



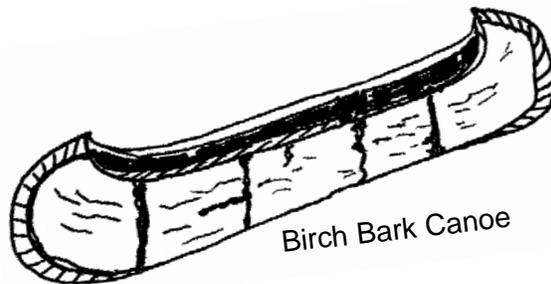
Small Wigwam

# JOURNAL OF AN EARLY EXPLORER (B)

Nearby, a woman sat sewing clothing made from tanned hides. She was using a sharp, pointed wooden item called an awl to make holes in the hide. She was dressed in a deerskin dress, leather leggings, and moccasins. She wore a leather belt around her waist. A pouch on her belt was decorated with dyed and woven porcupine quills. Her long black hair was braided and kept smooth by working bear or deer grease into it.

In the center of the village sat a canoe that was being built. The wood frame was covered with birch bark. The bark had been sewn on with roots from a spruce tree. Pitch from pine trees had been used to seal the seams. A craftsman was shaping ribs and floorboards from white cedar trees.

By now it was late in the day. We were asked to stay for supper and camp near the village. We have been invited to travel overland to a nearby village tomorrow. Supper consisted of dried fish, wild rice, and a sugar substance made from the sap of a maple tree. This was a real treat after six weeks of the dried peas and salt pork we have eaten since we left the fort.



Birch Bark Canoe

# JOURNAL OF AN EARLY EXPLORER (C)

May 16, 1640

I awoke this morning to the pitter-patter of light rain. Jean Paul was up cooking dried peas and salt pork. Smoke was hanging amongst the trees. After breakfast, we left camp and went to the village. Several men from the village we visited yesterday agreed to take us to the neighboring village. The village is about five miles away.

The men tell us that we have arrived at a good time. Recently, the family groups have returned from the maple grove or sugar bush. While they collected the sap from the trees, many people were away from the main village. The villages have now moved to sites where the lakes and streams are clear. It is time to spear and net fish.

The trip to the other village took us through a tall pine and maple forest. Occasionally, we came across open fields. Most were black with ash and appear to have been burned. The men tell us that the people of the village burn these areas to keep the trees from growing. It seems these open areas are important for the food the Ojibwa eat.

The edges of these open areas have many signs of deer and elk. One man told us that burning the area helped certain plants grow. These plants attract wild game. He said the open areas were also used to grow crops such as corn and squash. Blackberries and raspberries were thick on the edge of the openings.

Near these open fields were other areas with many aspen trees. The men told us that these areas were burned years ago. The forest has been allowed to regrow. Deer, elk, and grouse seem plentiful here too.



# JOURNAL OF AN EARLY EXPLORER (D)



The village was similar to the village we had visited yesterday. Six wigwams were located in a circle. Fish were drying on wood racks. Firewood was piled near each wigwam.

Several of the women were planting small trees. The trees were some kind of nut tree that they said doesn't normally grow there. Other women were working at planting small plots with corn. They were using a wooden hoe to till the soil.

The women were full of chatter. It seems a child has been sick with a fever. This morning the child is better. The child had been given a liquid made by boiling the root of a plant from the forest.

Most of the men were gone from the village fishing. They had gone by canoe to the far side of a lake where fish were spawning.

The men were not going to return until evening. We decided to turn back to the first village. Along the way, I noticed an area where many of the tall pines had blown down. The men told us that the forest is always changing. They showed us where an old tree had died. The open spot now allowed the sun to shine into the forest. New trees were starting to grow in this spot.

Tonight as I sit and write in my journal, I think back to my European homeland. Our land is poor. It has provided for so many people for so long. Our fields, our game, and our forests are worn out and no longer provide for our people.

This new land is rich. These forests are endless. There are many tall pines that would make fine masts for ships. These forests may one day build a new empire.



**“Everything we have comes from Mother Earth –  
from the air we breathe to the food we eat –  
and we need to honor her for that.**

**In treating the forest well,  
we honor Mother Earth.”**

**— Menominee Elder —**