



The Six Seasons of the Woodland Cree: A Lesson to Support Science 10

by
Duane Johnson

2008

S106.22

Teaching Materials
from the
Stewart Resources
Centre



Government of
Saskatchewan



These lessons were developed by the following team of teachers, Elders, and cultural advisors: Yvonne Chamakese, David Hlady, Anna-Leah King, Duane Johnson, Marcia Klein, Lana Lorensen, Sally Milne, Joseph Naytowhow, Lamarr Oksasikewiyin, Stuart Prosper, Ron Ray, Ted View, John Wright, and Laura Wasacase. Support was provided by Dean Elliott from the Ministry of Education, and Margaret Pillay from the Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit.

All resources used in these lessons are available through the Stewart Resources Centre:
http://www.stf.sk.ca/services/stewart_resources_centre/online_catalogue_unit_plans/index.html

Information regarding the protocol when inviting Elders into the classroom can be found in the document: *Elders in the Classroom* by Anna-Leah King (attached as Appendix A). Further information can be found in the Saskatchewan Learning document: *Aboriginal Elders and Community Workers in Schools*.

Table of Contents

Overview	4
Foundational Objectives	4
Timeframe	4
Resources	4
The Six Seasons of the Woodland Cree.....	5
• Foundational Objectives	5
• Key Understandings	5
• Essential Questions	5
• Learning Objectives	5
• Assessment Evidence	5
• Notes to the Teacher	6
• Lesson Plan	6
○ Possible Activities	7
○ Possible Discussion Topics.....	7
• Six Seasons Poster	8
• Oral History of the Six Seasons	9
Appendix A – Elders in the Classroom	10



Overview

This lesson incorporates foundational objectives from the unit entitled Earth and Space Science: Weather Dynamics (WD) in the *Science 10 Curriculum Guide*. Students will examine cultural perspectives regarding weather and, specifically, the seasons of the year. The focus here is on a six-season model used by the Woodland Cree. This lesson could be presented as an introduction to the topic of weather.

Foundational Objectives

WD3 Explain the principles of weather.

WD4 Forecast local weather conditions.

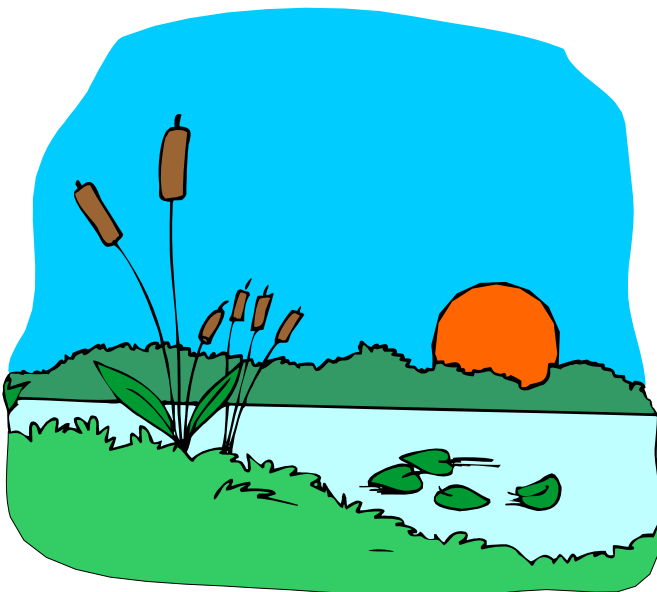
Source: This and other objectives are found in the following document:
Saskatchewan Learning. (2005). *Science 10 curriculum guide*.
Regina: Saskatchewan Learning.

Timeframe

2 hours.

Resources

- Carriere, K. (2002). *The bulrush helps the pond: Otawask wicihtaw tawanipeyanik*. Saskatoon, SK: Gabriel Dumont Institute.
- Lac La Ronge Indian Band. (2005). *Seasonal calendar used by the Woodland Cree people*. Retrieved January 29, 2008, from <http://www.kitsaki.com/October%202005%20LLRIB%20Policy%20on%20Traditional%20and%20Contemporary%20Land%20Use.pdf>
- Lac La Ronge Indian Band. (n.d.). *Six seasons poster* (copy included).



The Six Seasons of the Woodland Cree

Foundational Objectives

WD3 Explain the principles of weather.

WD4 Forecast local weather conditions.

Key Understandings

- Experiential learning creates the basis of self-knowledge by continually internalizing the knowledge gained through the process of being sensitive and aware of the natural world.
- Knowing what the weather would bring was important to those who lived off the land, and is important to a variety of people today.
- All cultures developed ways of identifying seasons based on their lived experience.

Essential Questions

1. Why is it important to understand seasonal changes?
2. How do the seasons' changes impact our lives?

Learning Objectives (LO)

Students will be able to:

WD3 LO1 Identify weather-related questions that arise from practical problems and one's previous life experiences.

WD3 LO3 Explore cultural and historical views on the origins and interpretations of weather.

WD4 LO5 Explore various cultural and historical perspectives related to weather forecasting.

Assessment Evidence

- The teacher may choose to use a checklist to assess the activities provided during the lesson.
- Other possible assessments may include:
 - Initial brainstormed information placed into model.
 - Family research completed at home.
 - Family research incorporated into model.
 - Students shared their history with the class.
 - Model completed using their beliefs of the Cree perspective.

Notes to the Teacher

Many cultures in Saskatchewan have their own perspective on the weather cycles. One of these relates to the seasons. The length of each season may vary from culture to culture, according to these different perspectives. The origins of the seasons may be related to the different geographic locations in Saskatchewan that determine the beginning of each season. The following lesson focuses on the differences in seasonal perspective. Students will be given the opportunity to develop their understandings of the six season model used by the Woodland Cree.

In the Cree language, the place name of Saskatchewan translates into the action of water surging forward, with a strong undercurrent and a great capacity to advance objects. The constant flux and flow within the environment is how the seasons infuse seamlessly into each other.

Lesson Plan

1. The teacher will introduce the concept of differing perspectives about the seasons. A template of the six-season model (included), explaining the names of the seasons and the appropriate length of each season, will be shared with students. Students will brainstorm activities they are involved with for each of the six seasons from their own environments.
2. Brainstormed activities will be incorporated into the model of the six seasons provided by the teacher.
3. Students will be asked to complete personal research related to the seasons from their own historic backgrounds. They will ask for information from their family members, including the number of seasons, activities their families were involved in during each season, and any other relevant information. Students are encouraged to ask their grandparents or seniors in the community about the importance of preparing for the approaching seasons. What activities preceded the seasons?
4. Each student will create a model using his or her family heritage. These models should be in a circular format as in the Woodland Cree example. Models will be presented to the class.
5. The teacher will discuss possible differences and similarities in the models presented. Discussion topics may include cultural differences in the number of seasons, the length of seasons, the lack of seasons, southern and northern locations, etc. For example, southern locations might have longer summers and shorter winter seasons.
6. The teacher will ask the students to place themselves into the location of the Woodland Cree people to develop a perspective on how to survive in each season. Students will be asked to complete the following questions through a think, pair, and share activity.

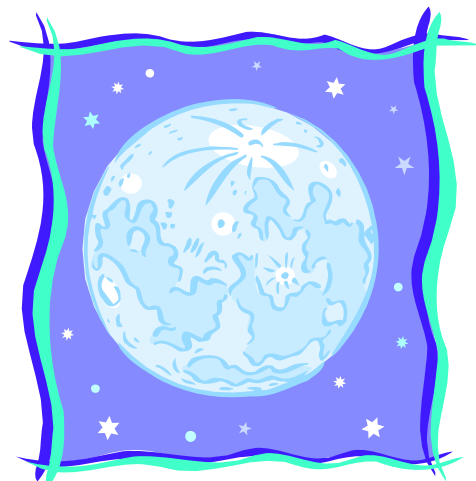
- Questions:
 1. How would you prepare to survive during each of the seasons, including obtaining food, shelter, and water?
 2. What activities might you be participating in during each of the seasons, apart from those already listed (sports, for example)?
 3. What might some of the challenges be to surviving during each season?
 4. How might you overcome these challenges?
- 7. Students will complete the model of the six seasons from the Woodland Cree perspective, using the information that they have gathered through the think, pair, and share activity.
- 8. The teacher will distribute the diagram from the Woodland Cree perspective and students will compare their model with the model provided. The teacher will lead a discussion of new information discovered through the introduction of the Woodland Cree model.

Possible Activities

1. Invite an Elder or cultural advisor to discuss his or her knowledge regarding this model of seasons, or one used by the First Nations or Métis group to which he/she belongs. (See Appendix A - Elders in the Classroom.)
2. Students may develop a new seasonal model based on the theory of global warming. Students will need to complete research into the effects of global warming on the lengths of the seasons in their area over the next few years. Students may find an increasing length of the summer season.

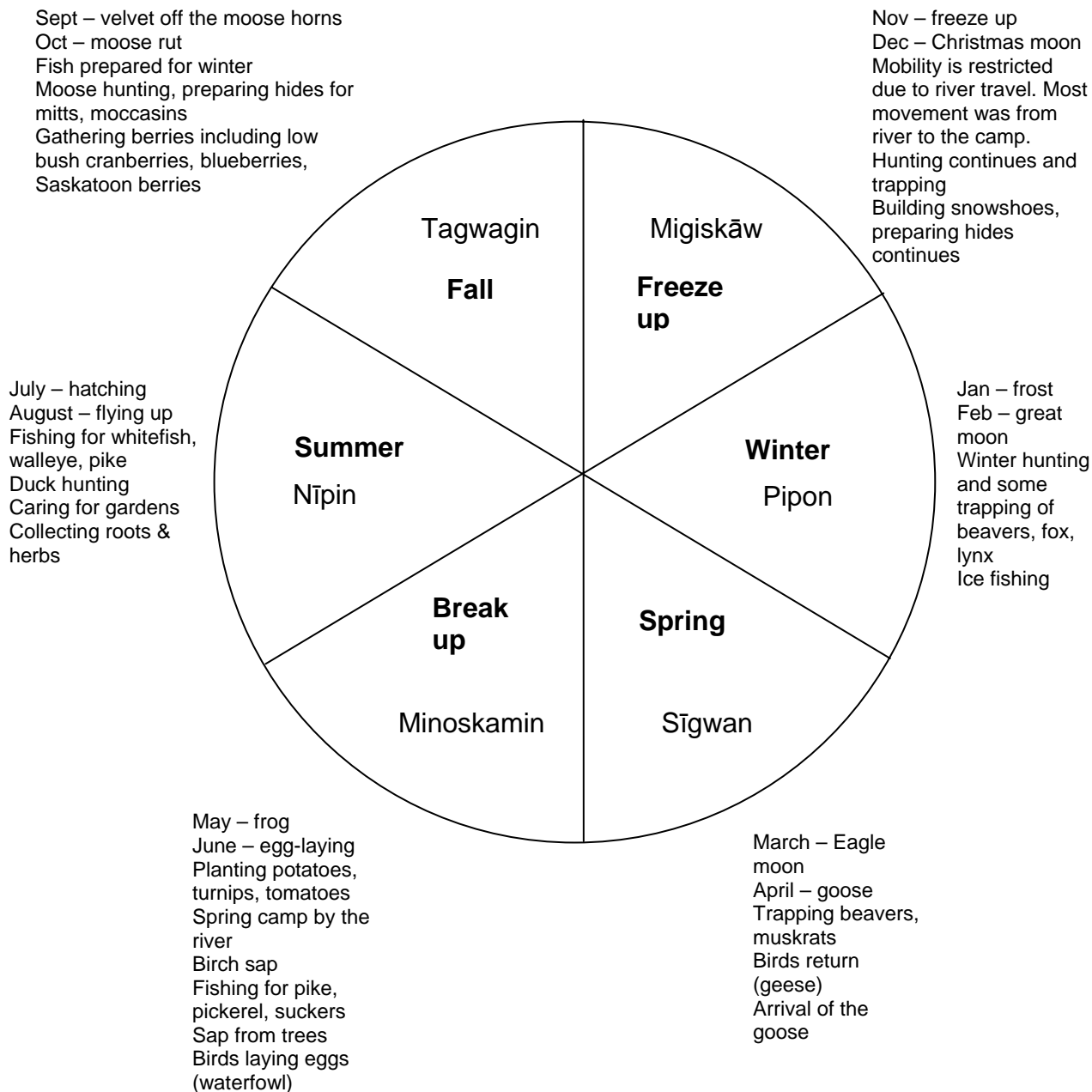
Possible Discussion Topics

1. Discuss possible reasons why the Cree people would use a six-season cycle.
2. How would the theory of global warming change the cycles of the Woodland Cree?
3. Why would the seasons change with the moon cycle?
4. What is the difference in perspective involving the effects of seasons on urban people vs. traditional Aboriginal people?



Lac La Ronge Indian Band Six Seasons Poster

Woodland Cree (Churchill, Reindeer Lake, Sandy Bay Areas)



Oral History of the Six Seasons

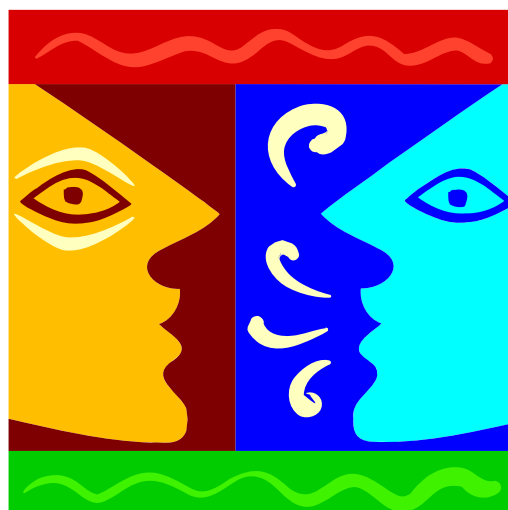
The Woodland Cree bands on the Churchill River system in Saskatchewan use six seasons during the year. The cycle includes winter, spring, break up, summer, fall, and freeze up. The moon cycles determine the changing of the seasons. Every two months - every second moon - a new season begins. Each season has an equal length of time. The moon is given a particular descriptor relating to activities during that particular time of the year. For example, March moon refers to the return of the eagle and it is called the Eagle Moon.

The Swampy Cree bands from Cumberland and Red Earth areas follow a similar seasonal cycle, but the winter and summer seasons are longer than the rest of the seasons.

The two seasons of freeze up and break up involve the migration of the people. Cree people were very understanding of the river freezing and the inability to travel on the river during these periods of time. They would move from camp to camp as the seasons changed, and the animals moved with the people. The Woodland Cree people would move through seasons as they hunted moose, caught fish, picked berries, or planted potatoes. Travel was restricted on the river during the seasons of the river freeze and break up due to the unstable ice.

The six season cycles have the same visual representation as the medicine wheel. The wheel begins by entering through the east side of the wheel, then continuing clockwise through each of the seasons.

Spoken contribution of Sally Milne, Woodland Cree Elder, through an interview on March 16, 2007 in Saskatoon.



APPENDIX A

Elders in the Classroom

by
Anna-Leah King

It is the Elders' responsibility to guard sacred knowledge and to maintain the ceremonial oral tradition of knowledge transmission. In Saskatchewan, the territory is home to four First Nations, namely Cree, Saulteaux, Dene, and Ojibwe - Dakota/Nakota/Lakota.

Source: Office of the Treaty Commissioner. (2002). *Teaching treaties in the classroom: Participants manual*. Saskatoon, SK: Office of the Treaty Commissioner.

All of these First Nations have a home here and it is entirely appropriate to represent any or all of these First Nations when approaching curriculum content. The Elders bring with them traditional knowledge and perspective passed down from generation to generation through the oral tradition. The reference to Elders' wisdom has lately been termed "Indigenous knowledge" or "traditional knowledge." Their traditional knowledge and wisdom will give insight to teachers willing to reshape curriculum and validating First Nations content and perspective.

Inviting the Elders

Protocol

The Elders would expect to be approached in the traditional way, respecting traditional protocol. They are given a small offering of tobacco in exchange for their commitment to invest their time and energy into the work at hand. They can be asked to lead the gatherings with prayer and ceremony. First Nations gatherings always begin with prayer and ceremony. It is entirely appropriate to ask this of them. It may not be what you are familiar with, but you will soon realize the benefits of respecting First Nations protocol and ceremonial practice. The Elders may want to begin with a smudge on the first gathering and offer prayer for the task at hand and the team that has been brought together. The Elders are well aware that any given group put together is there to learn from one another and so blessings towards this endeavour are prayed for. Sometimes, depending on the size of the project, a pipe ceremony may be requested. Each Elder may have a slightly different approach to opening and closing ceremony. Some may speak for a while. Others will ask you to share so they can become more familiar with everyone. Simply inviting them with an offering of tobacco and asking that they open and close the gatherings is enough. The Elder will take it from there.

Elder Expectation

When you invite Elders, it is important that you are clear on what you expect from them. If you are asking them to contribute with their knowledge, wisdom, and guidance, then say so. They may not all be familiar with education and what teachers and curriculum writers are trying to do, so explaining what curricula is and what is needed of them is essential to a good working relationship. You want them to contribute First Nations and Métis content and perspective. The Elders need to feel confident that they will be of assistance. Let them know that you see their role as wisdom keepers and they need to draw upon their personal experience, cultural knowledge, and teachings to contribute to the process. The Elders will share what is acceptable and give caution for what they view as sacred knowledge that is only to be shared in the context of ceremony.

Elders need time to think before they answer. Do not be impatient and feel they are not answering soon enough, as they will answer your questions in time. Some Elders are reflective, philosophical thinkers. They will review holistically what you have asked of them. A concept that you think is simple and straightforward has many different dimensions to a First Nations speaker, and they must put the concept into the context of the whole and analyze the dimension of its interrelatedness. Sometimes they translate what you are saying to themselves in their language. They think things out in their mother tongue first and then find the words of closest approximation in English. Not all words and concepts are readily translatable. That is why letting the Elder know what is expected of them beforehand is important because it gives them time to think it over and to find some area of common ground.

Elder Care

Elders do not expect anything but it would be nice to assign one person to see to their needs. Offer them a comfortable seat and debrief them on the expectations for the gathering. Introduce them to everyone and generally make them feel welcome. See to it that they have water, juice, coffee, or tea. It is good to have a snack for them at coffee break. Invite them to pray over the food before you eat. Allow them to be first in line for lunch or let them know you will serve them. This is an example of First Nations protocol. These are small things, but kind gestures go a long way with Elders. They appreciate when younger people make efforts to lighten their load. These gestures make the Elder feel welcome and cared for in a respectful way.

Gifts

It is appropriate to have a small gift for the Elders. If they are paid for their time, this would be considered the gift. Some give a small gift in addition to the honorarium, such as a basket of teas or jams.

- Further information can be found in the document: *Aboriginal Elders and Community Workers in the Classroom*, available from the First Nations and Métis Branch of the Ministry of Education.