

Activity 14 Bears in Myth and Legend

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Describe how animals are important in the lives of Aboriginal Peoples in BC
- Describe activities of Aboriginal peoples during seasonal cycles
- Demonstrate awareness of BC's and Canada's diverse heritage
- Assess the relationships between cultures and their environments

Method:

Students analyze Aboriginal peoples' relationship to nature and bears after reading or listening to a story or legend about bears.

Background:

For hundreds of generations people in British Columbia have lived with bears. Although historically Aboriginal people did not have a written culture, it is a testament to the power of their oral culture, and to the bear itself, that so many stories about bears have survived and continue to be a vital part of living cultures today.

One of the most well-known old stories about bears in British Columbia has been told and re-told by the Haida, Tlingit, Tsimshian people and others. The core of the story involves a girl who is captured by bears and forced to live with them because she has been disrespectful. The girl eventually marries and has children with one of the bears. A vivid retelling in picture book format was published by Barbara Diamond Goldin in *The Girl Who Lived with the Bears*.

The Sechelt people tell a story of an Elder who named his great-grandson after a grizzly bear. This legend is told in *Mayuk, The Grizzly Bear: A Legend of the Sechelt People*. In this story, there is reference to a bear dog. The Tahltan bear dog was bred by some Aboriginal people to help them hunt bears. The dogs sometimes worked in pairs, distracting the bear until the hunter could reach the animal.

There are many similarities between beliefs and stories about bears within Aboriginal culture. However, as with any culture, especially one as diverse as Aboriginal culture, there are also many differences between communities and individuals.

Activity Information

Grade: 1-6

Subject: Language Arts, Science, Social Studies

Skills: analysis, description, discussion, imagining, listening

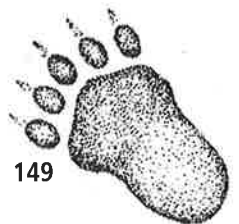
Duration: 30 - 60 minutes

Group Size: any

Setting: indoors

Key Words: Aboriginal, First Nations, environment, nature, seasons

Materials: suggested book titles, drawing paper, crayons or pencil crayons (grades 1-3), comparison charts (grades 4-6)



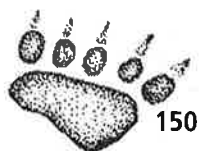
Procedure:

Grades 1 - 3

1. Select one Aboriginal story about bears to read to students (see title suggestions below).
2. After reading the story, use the following questions to guide class discussion:
 - In what season does the story take place? How do you know this?
 - What are some of the activities the people are doing in this season?
 - How do you think the people in the story think and feel about bears, other animals, plants, or nature?
 - Did the bears teach the people something, if so, what?
 - What are some differences between the people in the story and the people you know? What are some similarities?
 - If the story tells about a culture different from your own, how is it different?
 - Describe how you think the people in the story feel about animals and nature. Why do you think this?
 - Why do you think Aboriginal people have stories about bears and other animals?
 - How were animals important in daily life for Aboriginal people in the past?
 - How are animals important to Aboriginal people today?
3. Ask students to create an illustration of a bear from the story, or a portion of the story that relates to bears, the seasons or Aboriginal culture. If the story had illustrations, ask students to re-imagine the story, or a portion of, with their own artwork. You may wish to have students create new illustrations for each page of the story and combine them with the rest to make a classroom book. Encourage students to include as much detail as possible to show their understanding of cultural identity in the story.

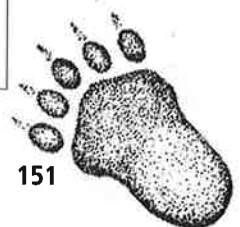
Grades 4-6

1. Select at least two Aboriginal stories about bears to read to students, or have students read stories on their own (see title suggestions below).
2. After reading the story, use the following questions to guide class discussion:



- In what season does the story take place? How do you know this?
 - What are some of the activities the people are doing in this season?
 - How do you think the people in the story think and feel about bears, other animals, plants, or nature?
 - Did the bears teach the people something, if so, what?
 - What are some differences between the people in the story and the people you know? What are some similarities?
 - If the story tells about a culture different from your own, how is it different?
 - Describe how you think the people in the story feel about animals and nature. Why do you think this?
 - Why do you think Aboriginal people have stories about bears and other animals?
 - How were animals important in daily life for Aboriginal people in the past?
 - How are animals important to Aboriginal people today?
3. Ask students to create an illustration of a bear from the story, or a portion of the story that relates to bears, the seasons or Aboriginal culture. If the story had illustrations, ask students to re-imagine the story, or a portion of, with their own artwork. You may wish to have students create new illustrations for each page of the story and combine them with the rest to make a classroom book. Encourage students to include as much detail as possible to show their understanding of cultural identity of the story.
4. Ask students to design a chart to compare and contrast at least two stories. You may wish to have students use the sample chart below or have them create their own categories.

Categories	Book Title #1	Book Title #2
Bears (how bears were described in this story, by this culture)		
Attitudes (what were the people's attitudes towards bears, other animals or nature in this story?)		
Seasons & Environment (what season was it, how did the people live with the seasons and with nature, were there certain seasonal activities?)		



Suggested Titles for This Activity:

The following is only a suggested list of titles. You can strengthen this activity by sharing local or regional stories with your students. Ask school librarians, public librarians and First Nations band offices for other books and stories. Many school districts also have an Aboriginal education office.

Bruchac, Joseph & Murv Jacob

- 1995 **The Boy Who Lived with Bears and other Iroquois Stories**, HarperCollins Publishers. New York (Not B.C. based but at least two stories feature bears).

Bruchac, Joseph & Thomas Locker

- 1995 **The Earth under Sky Bear's Feet**, Native American Poems of the Land. Philomel Books, New York. (Many of the poems feature the Sky Bear constellation).

Craigan, Charlie

- 1993 **Mayuk, the Grizzly Bear: A Legend of the Sechelt People**, Nightwood Editions. (Tells how a young boy is named after a bear).

Gessler, Trisha

- 1983 **Bears and Berries**, UBC. (Re-telling of the mother-bear myth).

Goldin, Barbara Diamond

- 1997 **The Girl who Lived with the Bears**, Harcourt Brace & Company, San Diego. (A colourful re-telling of the mother-bear myth in picture book form).

McLennan, Joe

- 1991 **Nanabosho Dances**, Pemmican Publications Inc. Winnipeg, Manitoba. (Not B.C. based, telling of how and why bears are respected by the Ojibwa people).

Assessment:

Gather illustrations and assess for

- Awareness and appreciation of different cultures
- Description of seasons

Gather charts and assess for

- Awareness and appreciation of different cultures
- Description of seasons
- Awareness of different attitudes
- Assessment of relationship between cultures and their environments



Extensions

Suggestion: Doucette Index
www.educ.ucalgary.ca/litindex/

This is a teaching resource produced by the University of Calgary. It provides suggestions for K-12 literature-based teaching activities. Type in the title or author of the book you are thinking of using in the classroom. It is useful for books beyond a regional scope.

Invite an Aboriginal Elder or storyteller from your community to come in and tell a story that relates to bears, or depicts a particular cultural view of bears and/or nature.

Have students write a personal story about bears, either fiction or non-fiction.

