WEEK 4
Songs, Myths, and Games
Perhaps the greatest thing about canoeing is that it offers you the time to just sit and think about things. There aren’t any distractions to keep you from making up a story in your head, or taking in all of the scenery.

Everyone who has ever visited the boreal forest is amazed at the quietness and solitude of the land. A canoe is the perfect craft to appreciate nature, and to appreciate the quietness. Dave and Eric have to be careful and quiet in order to see wildlife, and when we’re quiet, we have a better appreciation of our surroundings.

**Ojibwe Myths and Stories**

The Ojibwe obviously had the time to appreciate the wilderness as well (archeologists have found human remains in the area dating back to 10,000 years ago!). They were thankful to be in the forest, even though their lives could be difficult due to the harshness of their surroundings. It’s beauty and solitude are appreciated in all of their myths or stories. Stories were used by the Ojibwe to explain natural occurrences and also to entertain. Since there was no television or X-Boxes to keep them entertained, they needed stories to pass along information and to teach their history and culture.

The Ojibwe hold strong connections to the earth. Their connections are reflected in all of their stories. Since the stories were told orally (by spoken words), many of the stories have elements of scientific and historic truth and fantasy. Some stories have talking animals, which are fantasy. However, other stories talk of giant lakes drying and temperatures rising, hints of glaciers that swept through the region, creating all of the lakes that Dave and Eric are now paddling.

Basically there are three types of stories told by the Ojibwe. There were stories that told of the creation of the earth and its first people (history and religion), stories about Winabojo, and then stories told for entertainment, like fairy tales.

Every natural occurrence and historical event that took place in the Ojibwe civilization had a story. Part of the reason the stories came about were so that these events could be remembered. If you tell an interesting story, people are more likely to remember it, right? These stories also provided lessons that the Ojibwe could use to keep themselves safe in their environment. Staying safe meant that the Ojibwe had to respect the land. The Ojibwe knew that the earth would not like it if they took more than they needed. Even though there are millions of trees in the forest, the Ojibwe knew that they weren’t the only ones using the trees.

According to the Ojibwe, the soil we now live on was brought up from the bottom of a huge ocean on the paw of a muskrat. A giant turtle shell was the rock that the muskrat put the soil on top of. According to the Ojibwe, the world we live in today is the second earth. The first earth was called Ca’ca, and was full of people who weren’t too smart. Slowly but surely, these not-so-smart first people learned how to heal the sick, how to clothe themselves, and how to live well within the forest.

There were also stories that told of the adventures of Winabojo, or the master of all life. Winabojo had the ability to become any living creature: person, plant, or animal. Winabojo was a trickster. He would play tricks on people by trying to out-smart them. He would become a rock or a beaver to show the Ojibwe how things worked. He taught them to look to the east for the sunrise and to look toward the west at sunset. Winabojo gave the Ojibwe the ability to find
food, shelter, clothing, and medicine in the forest, and also helped the animals to disguise themselves from predators.

The Ojibwe looked to Winabojo for guidance, and considered him to be a very kind being. The people who were in charge of telling the stories were very respected in the Ojibwe villages and camps. They were probably like today’s teachers and heads of churches rolled into one person. These stories were passed down from generation to generation so they wouldn’t ever be forgotten. Since the Ojibwe didn’t have any books, the stories were told from memory. Story-telling was usually done at night, and it was customary to invite the story-teller, or orátor, into a family’s wigwam. The family would prepare a feast for the story-teller. Once the story-teller began telling the story, he didn’t stop. He had to practice telling the story very often, so he wouldn’t leave any part out, because every part of the story was very important.

The Ojibwe stories that we have access to today have obviously changed. With the first contact with European traders and settlers, the Ojibwe myths became influenced by new stories told by the Europeans. Generally the stories told by the Europeans, including the Voyageurs, were taken from the Bible and from traditionally European fairy tales.

**Ojibwe Song and Dance**

The Ojibwe used songs and music for a variety of purposes. Songs and dances were used to heal the sick, entertain, and add courage and strength in war. There are love songs, songs that tell stories, and simple children’s songs. Mostly the songs were sung with only a drum or rattle as an accompaniment. Some songs however, were sung and played with a wooden flute as well. These wooden flutes were made with six holes for the fingers. The flutes were not all the same size. The flute was made specifically for the player. The size of the flute was judged by the player’s hand size. They were usually 16-20 inches long.

The Ojibwe used dance ceremonies for a variety of purposes. These dances were passed down from generation to generation. Dances were used to signal a change in the seasons, and were thought to bring luck or health to the dancers and to the overall tribe. Each dance had its own purpose and often involved feasts and the exchange of gifts. Dances were performed to initiate young men and women into adulthood.

When do you dance? Do your dances involve ceremonies or rituals? Think about the occasions when you’re likely to dance.

**Ojibwe Games**

The Ojibwe, like you, loved to play games. Modern sports like lacrosse and hockey are originally Ojibwe games. Usually, young boys and girls were the ones who played the games. The games were designed to teach lessons and also to strengthen their bodies for the harsh climates and to prepare for adulthood. In all of the outdoor sports, girls were
just as good as the boys. Most of the games were played by both girls and boys, though some games were played by only girls, and other games played only by boys.

As with any girls and boys who live near water, swimming was a very important part of summer’s fun. An old woman once said, “The children were like ducks, in and out of the water all day. They never stopped to take off the clothing they had on, and their clothes dried on them when they came out of the water.”

During the winter, boys and girls played a game called Coasting Erect. To play this sport, or contest, the player strapped a strip of slippery elm bark. The strip of wood was about 3 feet long and was curved up at the front. It was basically a short toboggan. The player would hold a rope attached to the front of the toboggan. The rope was used to steer and to help the player balance. The boy or girl would then stand on the top of a hill and speed down the snowy slope with the wood planks attached to their feet! I can think of at least a few winter sports today that are very similar to this game. Can you?

The most popular game played only by girls and women is called The Women’s Game. The game was like soccer, only instead of a ball, the game was played with sticks. Each player had two long, skinny sticks. The players were divided into two teams. Each team had a leader. At the beginning of the game, one of the team leaders would use their long, skinny sticks to throw two short sticks that had been tied together up into the air. The other team would then try to pick up the sticks that were tied together and run them to the other team’s goal. There were two poles on either end of the field. When a woman carried the bundle of sticks to the opposing goal and touched them, a point was scored.

**Voyageur Song and Dance**

While they were paddling, the Voyageurs usually sang. Singing helped to keep the men paddling in rhythm with each other. Their paddle strokes kept time with the music and often helped to keep group morale high. Usually it was the job of the steersman (the person paddling in the stern, or rear, of the canoe) to pick the song and key. The voyageurs knew many different songs, and would help the steersman sing on the chorus of each song. Of course, because they spoke French, all of the songs were sung in French. The songs they chose were mostly about what they encountered each day. They sang songs about their homes, their canoes, wild rivers, famous people, and lost loves. Some of the songs were very sentimental, while others were very funny and poked fun at other members of the canoe.
Below is an example of a song written by a voyageur, talking about his canoe.

Mon Canot D’Ecorece

Dans mon canot d’ecorce, assis a la fraicheur du temps,
Ou j’ai brave toute les tempetes, les grandes eaux de Saint Laurent

Mon canoe est fait d’ecorces fines
Qu’on pleume sur les bouleaux blancs;
Les coutures sont faites de raciness,
Les aivrons de bois blanc

Je prends mon canot, je le lance
A travers les rapides, les bouillons.
La, a grands pas il s’avance
Il ne laisse j mais le courant.

C’est quand je viens sur le portage, je prends mon canot sur mon dos
Je le renverse dessus ma tete: c’est ma cabane pour la nuit.

J’ai parcouru le long des rives, tout le long du fleuve Sain-Laurent
J’ai connu les tribus savages et leurs langages differents
-Tu es mon compagnon de voyage!-
Je veux mourir dans mon canot
Sur le tompeau, pres du rivage,
Vous renverserez mon canot

Le laboureur aime sa charrue, le chasseur son fusil, son chien;
Le musicien aime sa musique; moi, mon canot, e’est {tout} mon bien!

TRANSLATION

My Birch Bark Canoe

In my birch bark, canoeing, in the cool evening I ride,
Where I have braved every tempest St. Lawrence’s tide. (repeat)

My canoe’s of bark, light as a feather,
That is striped from silvery birch;
And the seams with rots sewn together,
The paddle white made of birch.

I take my canoe, send it chasing,
All the rapids and billows across;
There so swiftly see it go racing
And it never the current has lost. (repeat)

It’s when I come on the portage, I take my canoe on my back,
Set it on my head topsy-turvy; it’s my cabin too for the night. (repeat)
Along the river banks I’ve wandered, all along the St. Lawrence’s tide
I have known the savage races and the tongues that them divide.

-You are my voyageur companion!-
I’ll gladly die within my canoe.
And on the grave beside the canyon,
You’ll overrun my canoe

His cart is beloved of the ploughman, the hunter loves his gun, his hound;
The musician is a music lover – to my canoe, I am bound. (repeat)

Compare the French version of this song to its English translation. What words do you recognize even if you don’t speak French? What words are similar? What makes them different?

Generally voyageurs told stories around their campfires. These stories were usually told in the first person, with a great degree of exaggeration. Things that happened to other men, suddenly happened to the story-teller, and the ability to tell a good story was cherished by many voyageurs. The voyageurs usually told stories to make themselves seem stronger or better at their job, however, these stories, because of their exaggerations were entertaining and sometimes unbelievable.
Can you think of a story that is fun to hear, but not very believable? What makes this story interesting? What happens in the story that isn’t likely to happen in real life?
Activities for the Classroom

Divide up into partners. Think about a story that you’ve heard many times. It could be a story that most people know (like Jack and the Beanstalk), or it could be a story that only your family knows. What makes this story special? What makes this story worth telling? Is there a lesson in the story, or is it simply entertaining? Where did you first hear the story? Who told you the story?

All of these questions are important to think about when you’re telling a story. Now, tell the story to your partner as best you can. Try to work out the details in your head before you start telling the story. Remember that you’ll have to listen to your partner’s story so be a good audience.
**USING MYTHS TO EXPLAIN NATURAL PHENOMENONS**

Take turns reading aloud the following Ojibwe story told by Carl Gawboy. Then try to understand its importance. Think about when or why this story would be told.

*How the Fisher Got Stuck in the Sky*

*Once Fisher and his friends were out on a hunt. The hunt lasted weeks and weeks. The hunting was very difficult because the snow and cold would not leave them alone. Fisher’s friend, Bear, began to worry.*

“Winter has lasted too long,” he told Fisher. “If spring does not come soon we will all starve. The moose and caribou will have nothing to eat. The beaver will have no lily roots or fresh aspen bark. Something has happened in the sky world to stop the seasons from turning as they should.”

“Let us send the Wolverine up to the sky world to find out what the matter is,” Fisher said.

*They sent Wolverine. He agreed to go, and ascended to the sky world by way of a great pine tree. He was gone for many days. Finally he returned.*

“A great ogre beyond the edge of the sky has captured all the birds,” Wolverine reported. “He has imprisoned them in great birchbark makoks (baskets). That is why winter will never end.”

“Who is the ogre?” asked Fisher.

“He is bigger and more cruel than any being here in this world.” Wolverine said. “Worse, he has his brothers with him to guard the birds.”

“We must kill him and free the birds,” said Fisher.
Having said this, he strapped on his quiver and knife, picked up his bow, and set out. He came to the great pine tree and climbed it. From the top of the tree it was but a short leap to the opening in the sky.

Once through the opening, Fisher found himself in a wonderful world. It was warm, flowers were everywhere, and the air was alive with the buzzing of bees. Moving across the land, Fisher soon came to the ogre’s encampment.

The two guardians turned to face him. Realizing the quickness was his only chance, Fisher dashed between their legs. He ran as fast as he could to the huge baskets and threw them open. Out poured the birds: flickers, jays, robins, chickadees, ducks, geese, and swans; up they spiraled in a great black cloud that darkened the entire sky. Then, in a tornado of wings, they plunged down through the hole in the sky and entered the world below.

The great ogre shouted in rage. He and his brothers ran toward the brave little fisher. Once again Fisher used his speed and quickness. He dashed between their legs and raced to the hole in the sky. Without hesitating, he threw himself through it. Far below he could see the earth. And before his eyes it was changing from white to green. Down he fell, the ogres’ arrows whizzing all around him.

Fisher was lucky. None of the arrows found its mark, and he landed on soft, mossy ground. He knew the ogres would not be far behind him, so he made his escape fast. He ran this way, he ran that way, he dodged terrible flights of arrows. But, try as he might, he couldn’t lose the ogre or his brothers. In fact, they were getting closer.

In desperation he raced back to the great pine tree, thinking he could fool them by climbing into the sky world, then doubling back to earth. Quickly he climbed the tree, but it wasn’t fast enough. The ogres saw him, and a great volley of arrows whizzed by, missing him by inches. At the top of the pine tree Fisher leapt northward. Here one of the arrows found its mark and pinned him to the sky. Around and around he turned, and there he is to this very day.

With the freeing of the birds the ogres lost their power over the earth. So, they left by way of the great pine tree, back through the hole in the sky, back to their world. They have never bothered the inhabitants of the earth again.

What happens in the story? What makes this story unique? Have you ever heard a story like this one?

Think about all the animals mentioned in the story. They all play an important role. Why would the birds being captured stop spring from arriving?

Other than the story, how do you know that the Fisher was pinned to the sky? What could this story possibly explain? If you were to look up into the sky tonight, do you think that you could imagine the Fisher? What other animals or objects are thought to be “pinned” in the sky?

Tonight think about all the stars in the sky. Go outside, if you can, and pretend to connect the dots. Create your own story about a constellation. How did the animal get up into the sky? Is this an animal that you could find today? Maybe your animal has never been to earth. Describe it using only words? What’s its skin made out of? How many legs does it have? Etc. Put as much detail as you can into the story.
How the Seasons Change

The following story was first told by an Ojibwe woman, Bineshiikwe, many, many years ago:

“Ojibwe women lie on a circle of time, a circle defined by the four seasons of Mother Earth. Somewhere on that circle walks my grandmother, walks me, walks all Ojibwe women. Throughout the year each Ojibwe woman has many different responsibilities to the tribe, clan, and people. But in the end we are all the same, we are Women of the Land – and that says it all.”

We Ojibwe women have much responsibility and many duties, for it is we who lead our people through the four seasons of our year.

The Ojibwe year begins with the death of the Wintemaker. When he falls from the sky, we know it is time to leave our winter camp and travel to the sugarbush village to be with other clan members and to make maple sugar.

We women are in charge of collecting the maple sap in birchbark troughs and boiling it down to sugar. We make either granulated sugar, by stirring the thick syrup with wooden paddles, or hard cake sugar, by pouring the syrup into carved wooden molds or birchbark canoes. This sugar we use a spice much more freely than the Americans use salt; we also use it to sweeten meats, fish, stews, and soups. In the summer we dissolve it in water for a cool, sweet drink, and it can be mixed with medicine for the children. Our family makes five hundred to eight hundred pounds in four to six weeks, and this is more than enough for the entire year.

Spring is also the time for the making of the new canoes, our main form of transportation. It has been said the Dakota have their horses, the white their trains, and the Ojibwe their birchbark canoes. Our birchbark canoes are easily portaged, float high on shallow streams, and travel easily through the rough waves of big lakes. Our canoes and knowledge of the waterways have enabled my people to prosper for hundreds of years; with our canoes we trade, hunt, fish, gather wild rice, explore the land, and travel from berry patch and beaver meadow to the places where the wild plants grow.

We make canoes in the spring and early summer, for this is the time when the birchbark is soft and pliable. Both men and women work together, and we teach our skills to the younger ones who assist us. Our family, like most, own several canoes, all of different sizes, some built for speed, others to travel across big lakes, and yet others to carry much weight.

In the summer, which we call budding seeds time, we women plant and tend to the gardens, which includes keeping pesky birds away. In these we grow potatoes, squash, pumpkins, corn, beans, and sunflowers. I also plant peas, which I like very much, and parsnips from seeds I get through trade.

Once the gardens are planted, most of us women and children take our canoes and go off to pick berries. We eat many of these fresh, but many more we boil down and sun-dry for winter use.

We also pick wild ginger, mint, and bearberries to use for seasonings. We add wintergreen, spruce moss, raspberries, and twigs of the wild cherry to our water for flavoring, and we eat the flowers of milkweed, roots of bulrushes, sap of the basswood and aspen, and moss of the white pine, along with delicacies like fiddleheads, marsh marigold leaves, and wood sorrel. To our soups and stews we add cornsilk and pumpkin blossoms, which thickens them and adds flavor.

We always have a great celebration and feast for the first fruits of the summer. During this feast we always ask Manidoo (also known as Manitou) for health, long life, safety, and good harvesting.

We women also take part in the spring and fall fish runs. We use nets that we make out of nettle-stalk fiber. I am not one to brag much, but we women catch as many fish as the men with their hooks and lines, their traps, and their fierce-looking spears.

I must admit though that seeing the men spear fishing is a beautiful sight. They fish this way at night and by torchlight, suspending fire baskets from the bows of the canoes, which makes the water transparent to a great depth.

We eat some of the fish we catch fresh, but most we smoke and store for later use.

Summer, in the old days, was the time to make war. War, for us Indians, was always restricted in time and in place. By mutual consent our wars had to fit between canoe-making and garden harvest. I imagine
Americans and Europeans will thin this very peculiar, for it contradicts their talk of us as fierce warrior societies. Our wars would stop when it was time to gather the pumpkins! This is how it was and how it had been for as long as the wolf has hunted in the north woods.

No matter, for war is still war, and people die. Hearts are broken, there is much sadness, and there are families with no one to hunt for them. Our wars were not games, but I think there could be a better word for our conflicts than the term “war.”

Enough said about those things. I will tell now about a wonderful fall season, which belongs to the lakes and the Manomin (good berry), or wild rice.

I once heard someone say that we Indians who harvest wild rice are as well off as most gardeners at harvest time, for we have a crop that will last through the winter. It is also true that we Indians who eat wild rice are noted for good health.

Our family always goes to the same lake and the same marsh to harvest the rice. Our part of the lake is marked with our stakes and clan totem. We women go to the marsh in late August or early September to tie the standing stalks into bunches, making it harder for the birds to get at the ripening grain, and easier for us to harvest.

Harvest time brings with it a first fruits ceremony, and all the ricers on the lake take part. We hold this to thank the spirits who inhabit the plants, the water, and the earth. On the first trip to our rice marsh we always leave a tobacco offering on the water and thank the spirits for their great gift to our people.

As it does for many things, it takes two to gather the rice. One person guides the canoe with a long pole, but sometimes the rice plants are so thick and so close together, the canoe sometimes has to be pulled through them, one rice clump at a time. The second person, usually one of us women, bends he tied seedheads over the canoe, and with wooden sticks knocks off the rice kernels onto woven mats that line the canoe’s bottom. This is done about as fast as the loon swims, so there is a constant sprinkle of seeds onto the bottom of the canoe. Much rice is lost to the water spirit. But that is as it should be, for it gives food to the geese and ducks, and seeds the marsh for next year’s crop.

It is said that it was 1,000 years ago when we Ojibwe discovered how to harvest and preserve rice. The kernels are roasted and then threshed (beaten), the hard hulls being winnowed away by the blowing wind. If properly stored, such rice will keep for many seasons. I thin our Indian diet of wild rice, maple sugar, meat, fish, vegetables, and herbs is as healthy as any in North America.

I love the wild rice harvest, the smell of the roasting rice in the crisp fall air, the music of the flailing sticks, and the dances and songs of the powwow. These are happy, satisfying times, but also sad times. Sad because the rice camp marks the end of the time our people will live together in large groups until the following spring. The days slowly grow shorter and colder; winter, our harshest season, our time for family groups and small camps, is fast approaching.

Like the sugarbush and ricing camps, our winter camp is always in the same part of the forest, for this is our family and trapping area, and it is passed down from father to son. Winter camp is a time of isolation, storytelling, hunting and trapping, and sewing. During these cold months we all wait for the Wintermaker to fall from the sky and again mark the time for our move to the sugarbush camp.

Think about what you already knew about Ojibwe culture and tradition. What does Binesiikwe’s story tell about that you already knew? Talk about how the lives of the Ojibwe are similar to your own. How do the Ojibwe feel about family? How do the Ojibwe measure time? What did you learn about Ojibwe culture and history? What did you learn about the forest? If you were to live in such an area, how would your life be similar to Bineshiikwe’s? Would you do anything differently?
Play The Fur Trade Re-Enactor Game

**Objective:** Students will gain a greater understanding of what specific roles the fur-trading Voyageurs and Ojibwe had during the European expansion.

**Skills Used:** Role-playing, historic re-enacting, develop and strengthen debate skills, public speaking skills, group collaboration, critical thinking, entry level algebra, logic, and reasoning skills.

**Procedure:** Students will divide themselves into groups of two or three. Students will cut out a number of furs and goods from the attached worksheet. The teacher can determine how many of each item each group will have.

Each member of the team will assume a role of Voyageur, Native American trader, or trade shop owner. If there is a group of two, the two members will engage in independent trading as the coureur de bois once did. The students will decide on one of the following geographic locations specific to the North American fur trade. The region will be represented by a place in the classroom (chalkboard= Athabasca region, desk=Grand Portage, etc.). Make sure that each group has their own place in the classroom to go. This will become their trading post. The group will then look at the following table to determine the number of beaver pelts or value of the trade goods according to the prices in Montreal.

As trade goods moved into the Interior, their price rose dramatically. Calculate the price in furs to accurately reflect their distance from Montreal.

Each group member will be responsible for telling why an item sold was important to those in the Interior and what it would be used for. The student must explain or defend their reasoning in writing.

The students will then engage in trading. The Voyageurs must first bring the goods to the trade shop. The more drama that is used, the more successful this game will be. The trade shop owner will host a joyous homecoming/rendezvous. From somewhere else in the classroom, the Native American trapper will come bearing furs.

The game is over, when the price is set and the traders run out of goods to trade. Each member then evaluates each other based on the other team members’ ability to bargain.
What can I get for this Beaver Pelt?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Beaver Pelts</th>
<th>Trade Goods (Value in Montreal)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 strings of beads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 yard of fabric (it takes 4 yards to make a dress)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1 musket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 point blanket</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What if I don’t have a beaver pelt?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANIMAL</th>
<th>Number of Beaver Pelts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wolf</td>
<td>4 beaver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bear</td>
<td>5 beaver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 rabbit</td>
<td>1 beaver</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How Come Things Are More Expensive Than in Montreal?

When goods were brought west into the Interior, they quickly became much more expensive. If you had to carry all of the fabric, muskets, beads, and blankets from Montreal, wouldn't you want more money for them?

If you are trading in the Athabasca region, trade goods cost 20 times as much as they did in Montreal.

If you are trading at Grand Portage or Old Fort William, trade goods cost 10 times as much as they did in Montreal.
WEEK 4 Chat Room Session

Where/When: October 9, 2002 10:00 AM – 11:00 AM, from International Falls, MN

Topic: Fur Trade History

Special Guest: Karl Kostner, Living Historian

Suggested Questions for Students:

Which explorer would you like to be if you got to pick one?

How did the Ojibwe get their goods before the Europeans arrived and traded them for furs?

How did the fur companies become successful? What ever happened to the North West Company?

Why were the French voyageurs and coureurs de bois more successful at trading with the Native Americans than the English?

How do archeologists know that there were people living near Lake Agassiz before it flooded? What clues are there that the Native Americans today are descendants from these early people?

What did the Europeans learn from the Native Americans while they were trying to get into the Interior of the Canadian Shield?

Why was the Northwest Passage so difficult for the early explorers to find? Is it used today?

The explorers had to take crews and supplies to last them a long time. What type of supplies would they bring? How much food would they have to bring?

Any questions you might have about what Karl does and why he chooses to do so.