



HEALTH

Potlatch: Supporting One Another

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- **Tribal Government**

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Student will understand

- what a potlatch is,
- how Oregon Tribes use potlatch to show care for their community, and
- why sharing is important.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Why is it important to Oregon Tribes to practice potlatch?
- How does the potlatch tradition support care for community members?

REQUIRED TIME

- 30 minutes

Overview

In this lesson, students learn about the potlatch tradition. Potlatch is practiced by many Tribes throughout Oregon. This lesson features the Coquille Tribe (say: ko-KWEL) as one example among many, showcasing governance and community care. This lesson introduces students to the concept that tribal governments, like that of the Coquille Tribe, have many systems to take care of their community members. Students listen to a story or watch a video, engage in potlatch-like activities and reflect on their experience.

Background for Teachers

The potlatch is a significant ceremony practiced by several Oregon Tribes focused on giving and sharing. During a potlatch, tribal leaders distribute goods and resources to community members, demonstrating responsibility toward their people. The word "potlatch" comes from a Chinook trading language meaning "to give away." Historically, potlatches were elaborate



events where tribal leaders would distribute food, goods and other resources to community members, often accompanied by ceremonies, dances, and storytelling. The potlatch was a way to redistribute wealth, ensure no one in the community went without necessities and to publicly recognize important life events like naming ceremonies, coming-of-age celebrations and memorial services.

The United States government banned potlatches from 1884 to 1951, viewing them as obstacles to assimilation. Despite this ban, many Oregon Tribes maintained these traditions secretly or adapted them. Today, the Coquille tribal government, like those of other Oregon Tribes, continues the potlatch tradition and incorporates potlatch values of community care and redistribution of resources into their modern governance structure and social programs. Some of these practices include:

- Hosting events the public is invited to, such as the Restoration Celebration and Salmon Ceremony, where the Tribe will feed and gift those in attendance.
- Investing in healthcare and education for both Tribal members and non-members.
- Providing community funds to support organizations directly benefiting the community.
- Contributing to the local economy as major employers.

STANDARDS

Oregon Health Education Standard

- **HE.1.4.6:** Identify how family, school and community influence how individuals learn about and describe their feelings.

KEY WORDS and IDEAS

- **Potlatch:** A ceremony and tradition of gift giving practiced by many Native American Tribes across Oregon.
- **Tribe:** A group of Native American families who share the same culture, language and history.
- **Community:** A group of people who live together and take care of each other.
- **Tribal Government:** A group of leaders chosen to take care of the Tribe.



- Engaging in charitable initiatives and community development projects.

These actions reflect the enduring influence of potlatch traditions, emphasizing generosity, community support and the affirmation of cultural identity within the context of contemporary society.

Considerations for Teachers

Practices

While teaching this lesson, the following principles can help guide your decision-making and engagement with students.

- Focus on teaching the Essential Understandings through exploration of the potlatch traditions.
- When sharing content with students, address the why, not just the what.
- Highlight the strengths and struggles of Oregon's Indigenous peoples today while also acknowledging their history and tradition.
- Ensure your teaching practices are accessible and appropriate for Native and non-Native students.
- Be sure that students understand that the potlatch is a tradition practiced by many Tribes across Oregon and not just the Coquille Indian Tribe.

Assessment

During this lesson, observe and listen to students during discussions and as they work independently and collaboratively to determine how their learning is progressing. Write down what you notice about what students say and do in relation to the Success Criteria. Use this formative information to provide feedback to students and plan next steps.

At the end of the lesson, provide students with an opportunity to reflect on their learning through a self-assessment. Students can indicate their level of learning in

MATERIALS

What materials are needed for students to engage in this activity?

- Slide deck
- Student self-assessment



relation to specific Success Criteria. They can also write out an explanation of why they feel they are at that learning stage.

Success Criteria

- Students can describe what a potlatch is.
- Students can explain why a tribal government holds a potlatch.
- Students can discuss feelings around sharing.

For the following activities, use the slide deck to support your implementation.

Opening

Time: 5 minutes

Step 1:

Let students know that they will be learning about Native American lifeways in Oregon. Lifeways means how people choose to live, work and play together.

Step 2:

Gather students in a circle. Bring a small basket with items to share (like stickers, pencils or small healthy snacks).

- Ask: "Has anyone ever shared something special with you? How did it make you feel?"
- Allow two or three students to share briefly.
- Say: "Today, we're going to learn about a special way that leaders of Tribes across Oregon share with their community members. This tradition is called a potlatch. Today, we're going to learn how one Tribe practices potlatch. That Tribe is called the Coquille Indian Tribe."

Step 3:

Read the Essential Questions aloud to students. Give them an opportunity to answer question and wonder.

Share the Learning Outcomes and Success Criteria with students.

Review the Key Words and Ideas.

Main Activity

Time: 20 minutes**Step 1:**

Read the text to students explaining the Coquille potlatch ceremony. The text is in the handout and on the slides.

Step 2:

Play the following video about a Coquille potlatch ceremony, [The Coquille Tribe Potlatch](#) (watch from 2:06 to 3:10 min) with students. Explain that for many years, the Tribes in Oregon were not allowed to have potlatch ceremonies.

Ask students to turn and talk and explain in their own words what a potlatch is.

Then, lead a discussion after the students have watched the video. Ask them questions such as

- What kinds of things did the Coquille Tribe share at the potlatch?
- Why do you think the Tribe shared what they had with others?
- How do you think people felt when they received gifts?

Step 3:

Give each student three small items (stickers, erasers, etc.) and let them know they will be giving them away to classmates.

Ask them to think about each item and how to share fairly.

Explain to students that they will practice the potlatch tradition of sharing. Ask them to



think about which friends might like their items. Ask them to find friends who haven't received any items yet.

Direct students to take turns giving away their items to classmates.

Gather students back in a circle after everyone has received something.

Closing

Time: 5 minutes

Step 1:

Lead a group discussion. Ask students the following questions:

- How did it feel to receive something from your classmate?
- How did it feel to give something away?
- Why is sharing important in a community?
- Why do you think Native communities in Oregon believe sharing is important?
- When leaders share with their community, how does this help take care of everyone?

Step 2: Self-Assessment

Have students do the self-assessment based on the Success Criteria. Go over the Success Criteria as needed.



Student Handout

The Coquille Tribe and Their Potlatch Tradition

The Coquille Tribe (say: ko-KWEL) lives in Oregon.
They have a special tradition called a **potlatch**.

A potlatch is a big party where people give gifts.
Long ago, the Coquille had potlatches on the beach near Bandon.

They got ready for a long time.
They gathered food.
They made baskets and other gifts.

People came from far away—even from the Rogue Valley!

At the potlatch, everyone wore their best clothes.
They ate yummy food from the ocean and forest.
They sang songs and danced.
Kids met new friends!

The best part? Everyone got a gift!
No one went home empty-handed.

Today, the Coquille Tribe still loves to give.
They help schools and food banks.
They give money to museums.

At a recent celebration, they gave away over 2,000 gifts!
Some gifts were necklaces, T-shirts, blankets, mugs, and even salmon.

The Coquille Tribe works hard to keep this tradition alive.

They believe: "When the water rises, all canoes go up."
This means: when everyone does well, we all do well!

Reference



The World. (2019, May 15). *Potlatch means sharing: Tribe carries on ancestral tradition of generosity*.
https://theworldlink.com/potlatch-means-sharing-tribe-carries-on-ancestral-tradition-of-generosity/article_ad4a813d-0a1e-5777-b83b-ca279541b3a1.html



Student Self-Assessment

Name:

Directions: Read the lesson Success Criteria below. Then choose Not Yet or Yes to answer each question. Write down what you did well and what is a next step you can take.

Success Criteria	Not Yet	Yes
		
Can I describe what a potlatch is?		
Can I explain the role of the potlatch in the Oregon Tribes' cultures?		
Can I discuss feelings around sharing?		



What did I do well, and what is a next step I can take?

