



ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

How Many People Lived in a Plankhouse?

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- **Genocide**
- **Lifeways**
- **Federal Policy**
- **Laws**

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will understand

- how to count and compare numbers,
- that powwows are important celebrations for many Oregon Tribes, and
- that powwows help people celebrate and express themselves.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What is a plankhouse?
- Why are plankhouse important?

REQUIRED TIME

- 35 minutes

Overview

This lesson introduces students to plankhouses, the traditional homes of many Native American Tribes in Oregon. Plankhouses are large structures that housed multiple families. Students will explore the size of a plankhouse compared to modern homes and practice counting and comparing how many people lived inside.

Background for Teachers

For thousands of years, many Oregon Tribes used plankhouses as their winter homes as well as places to gather, store food, and hold ceremonies. Plankhouses are large structures made of cedar wood ranging from 20 to 60 feet wide and 100 to 200 feet long. Each plankhouse can hold 20 to 50 people or more. In the past, many families (up to 15) shared space inside. Families cooked, slept, and gathered in these homes. However, when the U.S. government forced Native people to move onto reservations, they



were often made to live in smaller houses, separating them from these community living spaces.

Through the lens of plankhouses, this lesson addresses the Essential Understanding, Genocide, Federal Policy, and Laws, which focuses on the U.S government policies, laws and legal actions that resulted in Native peoples' loss of land, life, and culture in Oregon. These These laws and policies began in the Treaty period (1789-1871) and most recently in the Termination & Relocation Period (1953-1988), which resulted in the dissolution of tribal governments and the encouragement of urban relocation. Despite these systemic policies of erasure and assimilation, Native American communities in Oregon have preserved many of their cultural traditions.

This lesson also addresses the Essential Understanding, *Lifeways*, which focuses on the idea that Native cultures and traditions are shaped by their environment, including food, travel, and ceremonies. Lifeways is also about the strong, traditional systems and legacies that Native people have developed and sustained. When teaching the Essential Understanding, *Lifeways*, it is not necessary to know the nuances and complexities of Indigenous lifeways but instead have awareness that Indigenous languages, cultures, and traditions are alive and practiced across Oregon.

STANDARDS

Oregon mathematics standards

- **K.CC.4:** Understand the relationship between numbers and counting.
- **K.CC.5:** Count to answer "how many?" questions about up to 20 objects.

KEY WORDS and IDEAS

- **Plankhouse** – A large wooden home where many Native American families lived.
- **Cedar** – A tall tree that stays green all year and has strong wood that smells nice
- **Reservation** – Land where Native American Tribes were forced to move.

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 an analysis of plankhouses.
- When sharing content with students, address the “why” not just the “what”.
 - Encourage discussion and movement to help students connect with the topic.
- 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.
- Use real-world examples of Oregon Tribes’ communities today.

MATERIALS

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

- Floor mats or tape to create home spaces.
- Small figures, dolls, or cutouts to represent people.
- Pictures of plankhouses before and after federal policies.
- Visuals of Grand Ronde families past and present.

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 relation to specific success criteria. They can also explain why they feel they are at that learning stage.

Success Criteria

- I can count how many people lived in a plankhouse.
- I can compare the size of a plankhouse and other homes.

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- I can describe one way plankhouses were important to Oregon Tribes.

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

Lesson Activities

Opening

Time: 10 minutes

Step 1:

Review the essential questions, learning outcomes, success criteria and key words and ideas with students.

Step 2:

Ask students: "Who do you live with?" Students might say: parents, siblings, grandparents, etc.

Ask students, "What type of home do you live in?"

Create a visual list of student responses.

Step 3:

Show students images of a plankhouse and a picture of a modern home.

Ask students: "How is this home different from your home?"

Share with students that, "Long ago, Indigenous families from western Oregon, such as the Grand Ronde Tribe, lived together in big houses called plankhouses. Extended families shared these spaces. But later, U.S. laws tried to change how Tribes lived together and extended families were forced to live separately in smaller homes."

Ask students: "How many people do you think lived in one plankhouse?"

Let students guess.

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Main Activity

Time: 15 minutes

Step 1:

Place large floor mats or taped-off areas on the floor to represent a plankhouse and a smaller home.

Gather small figures and objects (blocks, counters, or cutouts) to represent people and families.

Step 2:

Together with students, place "people" into each home.

Plankhouse: start with 20 people inside

Small home: only allow 4 or 5 people inside

Count together and ask students:

"How many people are in the plankhouse?"

"How many are in the small house?"

Step 3:

Ask students:

"Which house has more people?"

"Which house has fewer people?"

Visually represent the number of people in each house to show the counts and comparisons.

Ask students, "What would it feel like to move from a big house like a plankhouse to a smaller house?"

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Closing

Time: 10 minutes

Step 1:

Ask students:

“How do you think it felt to have a big family together?”

“How do you think it felt when families had to live in smaller homes?”

I think it may have made them feel ____ when they had to leave the plankhouse.

Explain and share with students that, “The U.S. government made Native families move to smaller homes on reservations. This changed their way of life, but they still work hard to keep their traditions alive today.”

Show a picture of a modern Native family gathering together.

Engage students in a final counting activity. Have students count their own family members and compare the size of a plankhouse group.

Additional Resources

1st grade math lesson by The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, [Traditional Plankhouses](#)

6th grade math lesson by The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, [Plankhouse Building Capacity](#)

Plankhouse Images

achaf-hammi

The plankhouse of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde



How Many People Lived in a Plankhouse?







Images courtesy of Oregon Department of Education's [Plankhouse Read Aloud PDF](#)

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Student Self-Assessment

Name:

Directions for teachers: Read aloud the lesson Success Criteria in the first column to students. Have them indicate if they were able to meet the criteria by marking it in the handout, with hand gestures, or by sharing aloud. Ask students to explain why they chose “not yet” or “yes” to a peer.

Success Criteria	Not Yet	Yes
		
I can count how many people lived in a plankhouse.		
I can compare the size of a plankhouse and other homes.		
I can describe one way plankhouses were important to Oregon Tribes.		

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