



SCIENCE

# Fish Friends: Learning About Salmon

## ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- **Lifeways**

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will understand

- the physical features of salmon,
- the salmon lifecycle, and
- the salmon's significance to Oregon Tribes.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- Why are salmon special to Oregon Tribes?

## REQUIRED TIME

- 35 minutes

## Overview

This lesson introduces students to salmon as an important fish in Oregon and begins building students' understanding of why salmon matter to Native American Tribes in Oregon. Students learn basic facts about salmon, imitate their movements and begin to develop an understanding of salmon's role in the lives of Oregon Tribes.

## Background for Teachers

In this lesson, students learn about the Essential Understanding, Lifeways, through the lens of salmon. Salmon are an important aspect of Native peoples' lifeways in Oregon. They have spiritual, political, economic, environmental and health significance to Oregon's nine Tribes. Specifically, students will have opportunities to learn about

- the salmon lifecycle and habitat,
- salmon's cultural significance its relation to the idea of first foods, and
- the idea of land stewardship as an important lifeway for Oregon Tribes.



## 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 Understanding, lifeways, through learning about salmon.
- When sharing content with students, address the "why" not just the "what"—explain why salmon matters to Native communities.
- Highlight that Native Americans are living communities with ongoing traditions.
- Acknowledge that salmon are special to many different Oregon Tribes, each with their own specific traditions.
- Ensure your teaching practices are accessible and appropriate for Native and non-Native students

### Assessment

During this lesson, observe and listen to students during discussions and activity participation to determine how their learning is progressing. Note what students say and do in relation to the success criteria and use this information to inform next steps. At the end of the

## STANDARDS

### Oregon Health Education Standards

- **K-LS1-1:** Use observations to describe patterns of what plants and animals (including humans) need to survive.
- **K-ESS3-1:** Use a model to represent the relationship between the needs of different plants or animals (including humans) and the places they live.

## KEY WORDS and IDEAS

- **Salmon:** A special fish that lives in both rivers and the ocean.
- **River:** Moving water that flows to the ocean.
- **Ocean:** A Very big body of water where many fish live.
- **Native American:** The first people to live in Oregon.
- **Tribe:** is a group of families who come from this land and share ways of doing things for a long, long time.

## MATERIALS

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

- Paper, crayons, pens and pencils
- Student self-assessment



lesson, use the self-assessment tool to support students as they gauge their understanding of the lesson learning.

## Success Criteria

- I can identify what salmon looks like.
- I can draw where salmon live (rivers and oceans).
- I can explain why salmon are important to Oregon Tribes.

## Opening

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**Time: 10 minutes**

### Step 1:

Activate students' prior knowledge.

Say to students, "Today we're going to learn about a very special fish called a salmon that lives right here in Oregon!"

Facilitate a quick discussion. Ask students questions such as

- Has anyone seen a fish before?
- What did it look like?
- Where do fish live?

### Step 2:

Have students "meet" the salmon. Show an image of a salmon swimming. (There is one you can use at the end of this document.)

Share that salmon is a special fish in Oregon that lives in both rivers and the ocean.

Ask students, "What do you notice about the salmon?"

As needed, point out silver/pink colors, fins, size.

### Step 3:

Make the connection to Native American Tribes in Oregon. Say to students, "The very first people in Oregon are called Native Americans. They have lived here for thousands of years! Salmon are very important to these families."

## Fish Friends: Learning About Salmon



Communicate that

- Native American people catch salmon for food.
- Salmon helps families stay healthy.
- They are grateful to the salmon and say "thank you" to them.
- Native American people in Oregon still care for salmon today.

Let students know there are many Native American Tribes in Oregon. Two examples of these Tribes are the Confederated Tribe of the Warm Springs and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. Communicate the following information to students about where they live and how they relate to salmon.

Warm Springs Tribe:

- Live in central Oregon near the mountains
- Have fished for salmon in the Columbia River for thousands of years
- Still catch salmon today and teach their children how to fish

Siletz Tribe:

- Live on the Oregon coast near the ocean
- Salmon swim up their rivers from the Pacific Ocean
- They have special ceremonies to welcome the first salmon each year

#### **Step 4:**

Make a connection to today. Say to students, "Native American people in Oregon today still work to take care of salmon. The Warm Springs and Siletz tribes, and many others, want salmon to be here for your children and grandchildren too!"

## Main Activity

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**Time: 20 minutes**

### Step 1:

Show a short 5-minute video of the salmon run: [Lifecycle of the Pacific Salmon](#).

Facilitate a short discussion on what students learned from the video about the salmon lifecycle.

### Step 2:

Engage students in a salmon journey movement activity.

Say to students, "Let's pretend to be salmon on their amazing journey!"

Have all students stand up. Then demonstrate the movements of the salmon while explaining their life cycle. Students copy your movements at the same time.

- **River swimming:** "Salmon are born in rivers! Swim gently in place" (gentle arm movements)
- **Ocean swimming:** "Now they swim to the big ocean! Swim stronger!" (bigger arm movements)
- **Swimming upstream:** "Adult salmon swim back up the river! This is hard work!" (strong swimming motions moving forward)
- **Say to students:** "Salmon are amazing! They swim from rivers to the ocean and back to rivers. That's a very long trip!"

### Step 3:

Ask students to draw and share.

1. Give students paper and crayons.
2. Say to students: "Draw a salmon swimming in a river."
3. While drawing, ask: "What color is your salmon? Where is it swimming?"
4. Students can write or dictate one word about salmon (big, orange, swimming, etc.).
5. Quick sharing: Have two or three students show their drawings.

## Closing

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**Time: 5 minutes**

**Step 1:**

Facilitate a conversation with students to check and affirm learning. Ask students questions such as

- What did you learn about what salmon look like?
- Where do salmon live at different times in their lives?
- Why do Oregon Tribes care about salmon?

**Step 2:**

Engage students in completing the self-assessment aligned with the success criteria. There is a handout at the end of this document to support the process.

## Additional Resources

- 1st grade lessons by the Klamath Tribe, [C'waam and Koptu lessons](#)
  - Slides: [C'Waam and Koptu](#)
  - Video: [Saving the C'Waam](#)
- Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife [salmon photos](#)
- National Park Service [salmon images](#)

## Coho Spawning on the Salmon River





Image source: Bureau of Land Management, Oregon and Washington, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons, [Coho Spawning on the Salmon River](#)



## Handout: Student Self-Assessment

**Name:**

**Directions:** 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, or write it below.

<b>Success Criteria</b> <b>Can I...</b>	<b>Not Yet</b> 	<b>Yes</b> 
identify what a salmon looks like?		
draw where salmon live?		
explain why salmon are important to Oregon Tribes?		



**Why did you choose “not yet” or “yes”?**

