



SOCIAL SCIENCES

Places of Learning

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- **Sovereignty**
- **Lifeways**

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Student will understand

- that learning happens in many places,
- that families, communities and land are all important to learn from, and
- culture and family traditions are a part of learning.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- What are different places of learning?

TIME REQUIRED

- 45 minutes

Overview

This lesson introduces students to ideas about learning held by Native peoples in Oregon. It addresses the value of place-based learning, and the idea that learning occurs in many different places—not just in school buildings. Students will explore how people also learn at home and outdoors, with family, in community gatherings, and through culture and traditions. The lesson includes examples from specific Tribes in Oregon and how their traditions and connection to land inform their ways of learning. All students will reflect on where they feel safe, supported, and proud to learn.

Background for Teachers

Since time immemorial, Oregon Tribes have approached teaching and learning as a process integrated into daily life, family, and community. Native children are traditionally expected to learn



through everyday engagements with elders and in a variety of settings, including in their homes and local environments.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, many Native children were forced to attend government- or church-operated boarding schools, disrupting this traditional way of learning and passing down of culture. Families oftentimes faced imprisonment if they refused to send their children. This resulted in a loss of culture and language. At the boarding schools, children were forbidden to speak their Native languages in efforts to erase Native traditions and replace them with European American customs. Many children experienced harsh discipline, abuse, and separation from their families. Many never saw their parents or communities ever again.

Across the country today, Native American Tribes are exercising their sovereign rights by designing and leading educational systems that reflect their unique languages, histories, and cultural values. These efforts are a powerful expression of self-determination and a vital step toward educational equity and cultural revitalization. As educators, it's essential to recognize and support the sovereignty of Native nations—especially when it comes to education.

Educational sovereignty means that Indigenous communities have the authority to make decisions about what their children learn, how they learn, and which cultural teachings are included. Many Tribes have developed their own schools, curricula, and language programs that seamlessly integrate Indigenous knowledge with academic standards—creating holistic and culturally grounded learning environments to sustain their language and culture.

STANDARDS

Oregon Social Science Standards

- **K.10 (2018 standard):** Locate, identify, and describe places of importance to self, family, school, and culture. (Geography).
- **K.C.PI.1 (2024 standard):** Explain the goals and purpose of public school.

KEY WORDS and IDEAS

- **Community:** A group of people who live, work, or do things together.
- **Tradition:** A way of doing things that is passed down from parents, grandparents, and great grandparents.
- **Learning:** Finding out new things or getting better at something.



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 discussion of where children learn and learning through observation.
- 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 clear that the teaching and learning traditions of Oregon Tribes continue to be practiced today.
- Avoid generalizing across all Native American groups.
- Ensure your teaching practices are accessible and appropriate for Native and non-Native students.

MATERIALS

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

- Chart paper and markers
- Drawing paper and crayons
- Props or printed picture cards
- Student self-assessment
- Materials to represent ‘places’

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

Success Criteria

- I can name different places where kids learn.
- I can say what is special about different places of learning for Oregon Tribes.

Lesson Activities

Note: This lesson requires some preparation ahead of time for the walk-the-room activity. Prior to the lesson, place 4–5 simple objects or images around the classroom that represent different "learning spaces". These can include, for example:

- *Spoon or food = kitchen*
- *Leaf or nature photo = forest or meadow*
- *Shell or body of water photo = creek or ocean*
- *Swing photo = playground*
- *Book or classroom photo = school*
- *Drum picture = celebration or ceremony*

Also put chart paper on the wall by each image and crayons for students to use.

Opening

Time: 20 minutes

Step 1:

Say to students, "Today we are going to talk about learning OUTSIDE of school!"

Ask students, "Where do you learn outside of school?" Encourage students to close their



eyes and think about where they were when they learned something new.

Say to students, “Tell the person next to you about a place you learned something and what you learned”

Have students turn and talk to a partner. You can provide them with a sentence stem to help scaffold their conversations, such as: “I learn ____ at ____.”

(Examples of student talk using the sentence stems: I learn about trees at the park. I learn to cook at home.)

Step 2:

Introduce students to the lesson topic. Share with students that today they are going to learn a little about how Native Americans in Oregon traditionally teach their children about the world and how to do things. Explain (as needed) that Native Americans are the first peoples of Oregon who have been here since before anyone can remember.

Share that for many Native peoples in Oregon:

- Learning happens in lots of ways—not just in school. Children learn during ceremonies, where songs, dances, and prayers help teach important values. They learn at family gatherings, where everyone shares food, stories, and their Native languages.
- Elders and family members are considered loving teachers. They help children learn about their history, their culture, and how to care for the land. The rivers, trees, and mountains are also teachers. They show people how to live in a good way and take care of the Earth.

Explain that these ways of learning help keep Native cultures strong, so families and communities stay connected for many, many generations.

Tell students that today they will also get to think about all the different ways and places that they themselves learn.

Step 3:

Explain to students that next they’re going to hear a short story where characters learn something important—and it’s not at school!



Read the following story aloud to students. Let students know that this story is by an author named April Chavez from the Diné Nation and Kewa Pueblo in New Mexico about an experience she had with her grandmother when she was little.

Pause and check for understanding during the reading.

Grandma's Kitchen

Delores woke up to the smell of something warm and yummy. She rubbed her eyes, stretched like a cat, and followed her nose into the kitchen. "Good morning, little one," said Grandma, stirring a big pot on the stove. "Want to help me make stew?"

Delores smiled and nodded. "Yes, please!"

Grandma handed Delores a wooden spoon. "Today, you'll learn how to make our family's Three Sisters Stew."

"Three sisters?" Delores asked, giggling. "I don't see any of my sisters in the pot!"

Grandma chuckled. "The three sisters are corn, beans, and squash. They grow together and help each other, just like family." Delores looked at the colorful vegetables on the table.

"Wow! They're like best friends!"

"That's right," said Grandma. "Corn stands tall. Beans climb up the corn. And squash spreads out to cover the ground and keep it cool. They all take care of one another."

Delores helped wash the corn. She learned how to scoop beans with a cup. Grandma instructed her on how to pick out the dirty and wilted beans. Grandma showed her how to peel squash with careful hands. Grandma told stories as they cooked — stories about when she was little, and how her grandma taught her in this very same kitchen. She shared the names of each vegetable in their language.

"Wow! This kitchen is like a school!" Delores said.

Grandma smiled wide. "Yes, my little one. We learn a lot here—how to cook, how to listen, and how to share our stories."

When the stew was ready, Delores and Grandma sat down to eat. The warm bowl made



Delores' tummy and heart feel full.

"I learned so much today," Delores said proudly. "And I'm not even at school!"

Grandma nodded. "That's the magic of the kitchen. That's the magic of family. We learn by doing things together."

Story by April Kateri Chavez (Diné Nation and Kewa Pueblo). It is dedicated to her grandmother and used with permission.

Step 4:

Facilitate a discussion about the story. Support student understanding of the idea that people connect and learn in the kitchen while cooking. In many Native American communities, cooking with family is a way to learn traditions and stories. Reinforce the idea that among Oregon Tribes, parents, grandparents, and other elders are also considered teachers.

Main Activity

Time: 20 minutes

Step 1:

Engage students in a group activity where:

1. students walk to different "learning spaces" in the classroom where you've placed the pictures or objects representing different places
2. students share with a friend a time where they learned in a place like that
3. students draw a picture to represent their experience

Say to students, "Around the room, I've placed special pictures (or objects). Each one shows a different place we learn." Show students where you've placed the picture or object and what it represents. For example,

- Spoon or food = kitchen
- Leaf or nature photo = forest or meadow

- Shell or body of water photo = creek or ocean
- Swing photo = playground
- Book or classroom photo = school
- Drum picture = celebration or ceremony

Let students know they will get to walk over to one of the places and think about what they may have learned, e.g., in their own kitchen or at a celebration. Tell students that then they will pair-share their experience with a friend and do a drawing.

Model the process for students by walking over to one of the spaces, doing a think aloud of a learning experience you had, and then adding a drawing to the chart paper.

Step 2:

Assign students to one of the different “learning spaces” so there are approximately even numbers of students at each one. After students to walk over to their assigned “learning space”, ask them to share with a friend something they learned there, e.g., at the ocean.

Ask students to use the crayons and contribute a drawing on the chart paper of themselves learning in that place.

Closing

Time: 5 minutes

Step 1:

Bring students back together. Ask students to share about different learning experiences they’ve had in different places and to reflect on their importance. Remind students that people learn in so many wonderful ways and in Native communities, learning from family, nature, and traditions is just as important as learning at school.



Step 2:

Support students to complete the self-assessment. Review the success criteria as needed. This process enables students to take more ownership over their learning.

Additional Resources



- K-1st grade ELA lesson by [The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians](#), [Introduction to Dee-ni Wee-ya'](#)
- Kindergarten ELA lesson by [The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde](#), [Coyotes](#)
- 1st grade science lesson by The Klamath Tribes, [C'waam and Koptu Lessons](#)
 - Video: [Saving the C'Waam](#)



Handout: Student Self-Assessment

Name:

Directions: Read the lesson success criteria in the first column to students. Have them indicate if they think they can do each of the success criteria or not yet. Students can use hand gestures, share verbally, or mark their answers in the handout. Then have students share with a peer why they think they reached the success criteria or are still on their way.

Success Criteria	Not Yet 	Yes 
I can name different places where kids learn.		
I can say what is special about different places of learning for Oregon Tribes.		