Building a Wicwam

Unit: Dancing with the Hudson

Destination(s)

Storm King Art Center

(845) 534-3115
1 MUSEUM ROAD

New Windsor, NY 12553
www.stormking.org

County
Orange

Grades
12th Grade, 11th Grade, 10th Grade, 9th Grade, 8th Grade, 7th Grade, 6th Grade

Author
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Summary

While hiking, students learn to identify local tree species and to select an appropriate location for a wicwam. They cut saplings, strip the bark, and lash them together to create a frame and then cover it to complete the structure. The class also may imagine and/or role-play a piece of the life of a Wappinger tribe member. This lesson can be done on school grounds if hiking trips are not possible.

Question

- How did Wappinger people use local resources to make their homes?
- What were pros and cons of this type of shelter compared to today's?

Content Understanding(s)
How to identify local tree species
How to choose, cut, strip, place, and lash saplings into a wicwam frame

Concept Understanding(s)

- How the Wappinger people developed skills related to or in response to available resources
- At this time, prior to the 1600s, available resources were primarily local and needed to be used sustainably

Vocabulary

Renewable resource, Hardwood, Softwood, Sustainability

Suggested Time Frame(s)

- 1 or more class periods for tree identification and wicwam siting hikes.
- 3 or more 1 ½-hour class periods to construct wicwam depending on size

Professional Development/In-Service

If you are not familiar with Native American culture and history, you may want to do some research before teaching this lesson. A good place to start is Do All Indians Live in Tipis? Answers from the National Museum of the American Indian. Published by the museum in 2007, the book's well-researched, thoughtful, and informative answers are grouped into categories such as identity, origins and histories, popular myths, clothing, housing, food and health, ceremony and ritual, animals and land, language and education, love and marriage, and arts. Paper: $15.

Narrative

Prior to first hike give students a homework assignment to list environmental resources and features that a Wappinger person -- before the 1600's -- might consider when choosing a location for a fishing encampment. Then, lead a class discussion using the lists. Throughout this project, middle or high school students can be assigned to read some or all of The Last Algonquin.

Hike the area where you'll be building the wicwam, stopping often to identify local tree species. If you can't take a trip, consider building the wicwam on school grounds.

Conduct a lesson on tool safety. Students will need to know how to use hatchets, bow saws, draw knives, tree pruners, and -- if age and group appropriate -- pocket knives. Stress that a circle of safety must be maintained at all times or tools will be removed.

Construct your wicwam. If possible, students cut saplings with hatchets, draw knives, bow saws, and
pruners, but teacher will probably need to provide saplings. We used mostly maple saplings of 1-2" diameter at their bases and at least 10' tall, though even large or rigid or softwood species can be used for some horizontal frame members.

Students use draw knives, linoleum cutting knives, pocketknives, or sharp edges of rocks to strip bark; this helps the wood stay dry and not rot. Students lash frame together: first pairs of upright posts, then end posts, then horizontal posts. Students cover wicwam, temporarily or permanently, with painted heavy-duty canvas, tarp with grommets, animal hides, or wool blankets.

Possible extensions

- **Native American Art:** Have students look at books on native crafts and view functional artwork such as beaded back packs, pottery, and shelters. Students may then recreate patterns they've seen, or designed themselves, using strips of paper. Ideas should be drawn from nature. The strips can be laminated and used to wrap around trees or to personalize the wicwam.

- **Visit Storm King Art Center** to see Goldsworthy's Storm King Wall built in 1997-8.
- **Plant a three sister's garden.**
- **Environmental Art.** Students look at the work of an artist such as Andy Goldsworthy, discuss how they could use natural objects such as rocks and leaves to make art pieces; and create an artwork. (Goldsworthy, a sculptor, photographer, and environmentalist, produces site-specific sculpture and land art using natural and found objects creating temporary and permanent sculptures that draw out the character of their environment.
- **Explore Native American storytelling and/or drumming.**
- **Research and gather wild foods.**

**Supplies Used**

See narrative.

**What Should Students Know At The End of This Lesson**

See essential questions and understandings above

**What Should Students Be Able To Do at the End of This Lesson**

Construct a wicwam

**Site Tips**

Storm King Art Center features Andy Goldsworthy's "Storm King Wall" and a visit makes a nice extension to this lesson. The Center is open Wednesday through Sunday, April through November. Admission is discounted for educational groups of 15 that reseerve in advance. Admission includes a guided tour. You must schedule at least two weeks in advance and arrive together in a bus or van. Call the education secretary, 845-534-3115, ext. 110, for reservations or more information.
Storm King Art Center celebrates the relationship between sculpture and nature. Five hundred acres of landscaped lawns, fields, and woodlands feature postwar sculptures by internationally renowned artists. Sky and land define the exhibition space and the Hudson Highlands' undulating profiles surround the grounds creating a panorama integral to the viewing experience. The sculptures are affected by changes in light and weather, so no two visits are the same.