SECTION 1: BEFORE 1701 – THE PEOPLE OF THE THREE FIRES

INTRODUCTION:
This unit helps third grade students understand the life and culture of the Native Americans that lived in Michigan before the arrival of European settlers in the late 17th century. This unit includes a comprehensive background essay on the Anishinabeg, as well as three lesson plans. The lesson plans include viewing and analyzing primary sources such as maps, objects and narratives. The unit includes a list of additional resources and copies of worksheets and primary sources needed for the lessons.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:
• What was life like for the Native Americans who lived in Michigan before the arrival of Europeans?
• What are key cultural traits of the Native Americans who lived in Michigan before the arrival of Europeans?
• How has Detroit changed between the late 17th century and today?

MICHIGAN GLCES – GRADE THREE

Social Studies:
• H3 – History of Michigan Through Statehood
  o 3-H3.0.2 – Explain how historians use primary and secondary sources to answer questions about the past.
  o 3-H3.0.4 – Draw upon traditional stories of American Indians who lived in Michigan in order to make generalizations about their beliefs.
  o 3-H3.0.5 – Use informational text and visual data to compare how American Indians and the first European explorers in the early history of Michigan adapted to, used and modified their environment.
• G1 – The World in Spatial Terms
  o 3-G1.0.1 – Use cardinal directions to describe the relative location of significant places in the immediate environment.
  o 3-G1.0.2 – Use thematic maps to identify and describe the physical and human characteristics of Michigan.

English Language Arts:
• R.NT.03.01 – Explain how characters express attitudes about one another in familiar classic, multicultural, and contemporary literature recognized for quality and literary merit.
• R.NT.03.02 – Identify and describe basic elements and purpose of a variety of narrative genre including folktales, fables, and realistic fiction.
• R.NT.03.03 – Identify and describe characters’ thoughts and motivations, story level themes, main idea, and lesson/moral.
• W.GN.03.01 – Write a cohesive narrative piece such as a fable, folktale, or realistic fiction using personification, setting, actions and thoughts that reveal important character traits.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

Students will:

• Explore the geographic and cultural attributes of area known as Detroit.
• Compare and contrast the Detroit area today with Detroit before 1700.
• Read maps to obtain information and make inferences from them.
• Learn what Native American groups traveled through and lived in and near the Detroit area before European settlement.
• Learn which Native American groups lived and still live in Michigan.
• Analyze information about natural resources and how the Anishinabeg use them.
• Explore how the Anishinabeg learn about the past and the world around them.
• Compare and contrast a modern student’s way of learning to that of an Anishinabe child.
• Apply the oral tradition to the student’s own family life.

**BACKGROUND ESSAY:**

The banks of the Detroit River have been a natural gathering place for over six thousand years. People began visiting the Detroit area thousands of years ago, but not much is known about them because they left no written evidence of their lives.

Several Native American groups lived in Michigan over three hundred years ago when the first Europeans arrived in Detroit. At that time, Detroit was an open land of rich soil, forests and grasses. Large fruit trees like crabapple and black cherry grew wild. Animals such as squirrels, muskrats, beavers, deer and bear roamed free and fed on the grasses, while swans, turkeys, quail, geese, doves and other birds travelled in flocks. The Detroit River was a clear flowing waterway, and schools of fish jumped in and out of the water.

Michigan’s rich land, beautiful water and bountiful wildlife created the perfect land for the Anishinabeg – the people who were living here in the 1600s. The Anishinabeg were also called the People of the Three Fires because they included three different groups, the Ojibwa (Chippewa), the Ottawa, and the Potawatomi. The groups spoke the same language and shared a similar heritage. The Anishinabeg people were devoted to passing on the belief system, legends and culture of their ancestors. They also moved in groups with their families from place to place. They lived in different places for each season, depending on what natural resources were available, to hunt, plant, gather and fish.

It is not known how the People of the Three Fires came to live in Michigan. They may be the descendants of pre-historic peoples who lived here thousands of years ago, or they may have traveled from another place. Native American oral histories say that the groups came from the northeast coast of North America, from present day Canada and New England.
When Europeans arrived in the 1600s, they found that Michigan's Anishinabeg were split into three groups. The Ojibwa first settled on the eastern shore of Lake Superior. They were good hunters, fishers, and gatherers of maple syrup and wild rice. The Ottawa lived on the eastern shore of Lake Huron. They were primarily trading people. They sometimes travelled hundreds of miles to exchange goods with other tribes. The Potawatomi lived in southwestern Michigan. They were known for their hospitality and good relations with other Native American groups.

All of the Anishinabeg groups were fishers, hunters and gatherers. They hunted for animals such as deer and beaver. They gathered fruits, nuts, wild rice and roots. Sometimes they grew corn, gourds, squash, beans and rice. They had great respect for animals and plants and learned all they could about them. They believed that they should only use from nature what they needed to live.

Since they had such great respect for nature, the Anishinabeg never let any part of an animal go to waste. They used animal bones to make needles, weapons and beads. Skins were used for clothing, moccasins, shelter coverings, sacks, box hinges and rope. Tendons of the animals, called sinew, made very durable thread.

The Anishinabeg also used plants in many different ways. Cornhusks made good bedding, while corncobs made pegs and pipes. Birch tree bark was used to make canoes or to cover their homes, which were called wigwams. Wigwams were built by placing birch bark over a rectangular dome shaped structure. They also used birch bark to make containers by sewing together pieces that then could hold water, food or supplies. Branches of trees made frames for canoes, wigwams and snowshoes, as well as bows and arrows. Sweet grass was woven into baskets and sometimes used as a thread. The earth was also used. Rocks were made into arrowheads, farming tools and mallets. The clay earth made pots.

Anishinabeg children did not attend formal school. Instead, they learned by watching and listening to adults and elders. Children joined their families to help make or repair tools for hunting and gathering food or to prepare it for storing and eating. They participated in daily living activities depending on their age and gender. It was very important for children to pay attention to what they could learn from adults. They learned to have respect for, and knowledge of, the world around them. They admired adults, elders, storytellers and others with special talents and skills because they had knowledge.

Children also listened to stories and legends that the elders told. Elders could be anyone in the group or band recognized as being important, respected or skilled. These stories sometimes took the form of myths. They were a very important part of the ethic system of the group, and described how they understood the world. Today, we may call an ethic system "religion", but the Anishinabeg and other Native American groups did not have the same vocabulary and way of looking at their world.

Instead of looking through picture albums or reading history books, the children learned about the past through the elder’s stories. These stories taught lessons and helped children develop life skills. The children loved to hear the stories over and over. Soon they knew the stories from memory and told them to others who were younger. This way of learning about the past is called an oral history tradition. Oral history is important for passing down information from one generation to another. Oral history was crucial for the learning of life lessons and for developing the skills needed to live. Oral history is still practiced by many cultures today.

Native American children also learned through trial and error. If something worked, they did it again. If it didn’t work, they might have tried again or done something different. Anishinabeg children and young adults
also learned through intense training. Many activities in the groups called on special skills and required years of training. These included making tools, decorations, and learning how to administer herbs and other natural resources for healing.

The Detroit area was very important to the Anishinabeg and other Native American groups (including the Wyandot, Iroquois, Fox, Miami, and Sauk) because it was a natural gathering place that was easy to reach. Tribes could reach Detroit from Lake Huron in the north, Lake Erie from the south, and from several other rivers and streams that emptied into or near the river. For thousands of years before the Europeans arrived, many Native American groups came to the river to gather, hunt and fish and to trade with each other. They also gathered to discuss important matters or share news.

The Anishinabeg called the area that is now Detroit the “Bending River.” In the 1600s, there weren’t Native American settlements along the river. Instead, it was a meeting and hunting ground.

**LESSON 1: COMPARING DETROIT THEN AND NOW**

**Materials Used:**

- Data Elements:
  - DE 1.1: Map: Michigan in 1760
  - DE 1.2: Map: Michigan in 2010
  - DE 1.3: Detroit Descriptions
  - DE 1.4: Photo: Detroit Skyline, 2010
  - DE 1.5: Artifacts: Birch Bark Baskets with Quill Work
  - DE 1.6: Artifacts: Snowshoes and Wampum Belt
- Worksheets:
  - WS 1.1: Map Venn Diagram
  - WS 1.2: Physical Features Venn Diagram
- Chalkboard or white board
- Document camera or overhead projector
- Pencils and paper
- Drawing paper (optional)

**Lesson Sequence:**

1. Explain that today’s lesson will put the students map reading skills to use. They will look at different types of maps from different periods in time. The goal of the lesson is to develop an idea of how Detroit looked in 1700 and compare it to Detroit today.
2. Divide the class into groups of 2 or 3 students. Give each group a copy of DE 1.1: Map: Michigan 1760 and DE 1.2: Map: Michigan 2010. Explain that these maps are the first place they are going to look for information on Michigan during both time periods.
3. Let each group have time to look at each map. As a class, discuss the following questions:
   a. What tribes lived in Michigan? Did any live near Detroit?
   b. What parts of Michigan have the most population today?
c. Compare highway and Indian trails. Are there any that seem to overlap?
d. Look at the overall pattern of Native American trails. Are there more in any particular areas?
e. Which area has the most trails leading to and through it?

4. Give each group a copy of the WS 1.1: Map Venn Diagram worksheet. Have them work together complete it with information they see on the maps.

5. Explain that some information we need to understand how Detroit looked in 1700s can't be seen on a map. We know that the same hills that were around in 1700 are still there today, but how can we find out what Detroit looked like?

6. Explain that in addition to maps, there are other primary sources that can tell us this information. Either ask students to read or read together DE 1.3: Detroit Descriptions. Have a brief discussion about the reading and list their responses on the board.

7. Ask students to brainstorm about what Detroit looks like today. List responses on the board. Sample questions could include:
   a. What do you think of when I say, “Detroit”?
   b. What does the city look like? Does it have many trees, rivers, buildings?
   c. Do very many people live in Detroit? Work in Detroit?

8. Show the students DE 1.4: Photo: Detroit Skyline, 2010. Go over the features in the photograph and compare them to the list on the board.

9. Give each group a copy of the WS 1.2: Physical Features Venn Diagram worksheet. Referring to the two depictions of Detroit in 1700 and today, have them complete the worksheet.

10. End the lesson by holding a group discussion about the differences and similarities of Detroit in 1700 and Detroit today.

LESSON 2: ANISHINABEG CULTURE

Materials Used:

• Data Elements:
  o DE 1.3: Detroit Descriptions
  o DE 1.5: Artifacts: Birch Bark Baskets with Quill Work
  o DE 1.6: Artifacts: Snowshoes and Wampum Belt
  o DE 1.7: Artifacts: Birch Bark Container, Tomahawks, Bone Horsehead Awl and Moccasins
• Pencils and paper

Lesson Sequence:

1. Reread the DE 1.3: Detroit Descriptions. Place students in pairs or small groups, and have them think about what specific items are mentioned in the description. Ask them the brainstorm uses for the different natural items in the list. In other words, what could trees, plants, and animals be used for to make life easier for Native Americans who lived at this time?

2. Ask the students what ideas they have for using the resources for making tools, clothing, food and other products from nature.

3. Pass DE 1.5 – DE 1.7 to the students and discuss the following questions:
a. What resources are used to make the objects you see?
b. What were they used for?
c. Who would have used them? Men, women, children?
d. Do we still use items similar to these today? If yes, what are they? If no, why not?

4. Explain that the items in the pictures represent tools and items the Anishinabeg needed to use in their daily lives. However, they also made items from natural resources that were meant to be beautiful and to express their beliefs. Ask them if they see any markings that are meant to be decorative or pretty in the object photos. (e.g. moccasin beads, horsehead awl, quill work in baskets, etc.)

5. Explain that some of the items also show how Europeans influenced the Anishinabeg. For example, the beads on the moccasins and the metal point of the awl were brought from Europe.

6. As a group, brainstorm a list of materials that are used to make clothing and household goods today. Have them consider their clothing, school supplies, games and toys. Write their answers on the board.

7. Lead a discussion about the differences and similarities of production between Anishinabeg personal items and items today. For example
   a. How did Anishinabeg make most of their items? How are most of our personal items made today?
   b. What materials do we use today that the Anishinabeg also used?
   c. What new materials do we use that the Anishinabeg didn’t have?

8. Conclude the lesson by having the students draw a picture or write a paragraph about how they use natural resources in their lives every day.

LESSON 3: ANISHINABEG ORAL TRADITION

Materials Used:
- Data Elements:
  o DE 1.1: Map: Michigan in 1760
  o DE1.8: Story: The Origin of the Robin
  o DE 1.9: Story: The Three Cranberries
  o DE 1.10: Story: Allegory of the Seasons
  o DE 1.11: Story: Disappearance of the Rose
  o DE 1.12: Story: Ojibwa Creation Story
  o DE 1.13: Story: The Tree of Life
  o DE 1.14: Map: The Migration of the Anishinabe
- Paper and pencils
- Document camera or overhead projector (optional)

Lesson Sequence:
1. Explain to the students that they will study how the Anishinabeg taught and learned about the past. Ask them how they learn about the past today – in a textbook, in school, on television? Ask them how they think the Anishinabe learned about their past. If needed, remind them that they did not have books, photographs, or television. Explain that Anishinabeg children learned from elders within their
tribe. Elders were respected people because they lived through many events and have heard stories from many people.

2. Show the students DE 1.1; *Map: The Migration of the Anishinabe*. Explain that their legends said that their ancestors originally came from the East Coast. They called themselves the Anishinabe. Over many years, they divided into three different groups: the Ottawa, Potawatomi and the Ojibwa (Chippewa). Because they had similar ancestry, they spoke the same language and formed a loose group. They called themselves the People of the Three Fires. If desired, show the students DE 1.1: Map: *Michigan 1760* to remind them where each group lived.

3. Explain that the elders told stories about the world around them, nature, and other lessons they had learned about life. Show them what you mean by telling one of the stories from DE 1.8 – DE 1.13. (NOTE: to be most effective, familiarize yourself with the story ahead of time so that you can truly tell the story instead of simply reading it.)

4. Using a document camera or an overhead projector, show the students the written version of the story you told. As a class or in small groups, discuss the following questions:
   a. Did your teacher leave any parts out or change anything in the story from the way it is written?
   b. What things happened in the story that could be true?
   c. Is there anything in the story that you don’t think could have happened?
   d. What did you learn about nature?
   e. What lessons did you learn?

5. Discuss the responses as a group. Be certain to emphasize the following points:
   a. When someone tells a story from memory, sometimes it can be told in different ways, and things can be added and left out.
   b. Stories and legends (based on things that really happened) are passed on from generation to generation. This is an example of an oral history tradition.

6. Ask the students to talk to their parents, guardians and/or grandparents, about things that happened in the past or about family stories and traditions. They could be about a war or something significant in history, or just an interesting story about their family. In the next few days, ask the students to share their stories out loud for the class. This could also be a writing assignment, but the oral tradition of Native Americans is best understood through storytelling.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

**Books:**


**Links:**


News From Indian Country: [www.indiancountrynews.com](http://www.indiancountrynews.com)

National Museum of the American Indian: [www.nmai.si.edu](http://www.nmai.si.edu)

Great Lakes Intertribal Council: [www.glitc.org](http://www.glitc.org)

National Congress of American Indians: [www.ncai.org](http://www.ncai.org)

Ojibwe Language Society: [www.ojibwemowin.com](http://www.ojibwemowin.com)