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FORESTS OF THE FIRST STEWARDS

6th - 8th Grade Discussion Guide

Episode/Lesson Plan # 1 – The History (Grades 6-8)

INTRODUCTION

From above, it looks like a sea of green stretching across northeastern Wisconsin - so large and healthy it can even be seen from space.

The Menominee Nation is located in northeastern Wisconsin, with its tribal government centered in the Village of Keshena. The Menominee people are Indigenous to this region and have lived in relationship with these lands for more than 10,000 years.

Their origin story begins at the mouth of the Menominee River, east of today's reservation, and is tied to the creation of their five clans: Bear, Eagle, Wolf, Moose, and Crane. Historically, the Menominee occupied a vast territory of over 10 million acres across what is now Wisconsin and Upper Michigan.

Today, the Menominee Forest remains a powerful example of long-term forest stewardship. It is one of the few continuously managed Tribal forests in the United States and reflects a balance between cultural knowledge, ecological care, and economic sustainability. Within this forest, species such as maple, birch, hemlock, ash, basswood, red oak, and white pine thrive. Some trees are over 200 years old!

For generations, the Menominee have practiced sustainable forestry guided by values of respect, responsibility, and balance. These practices include leaving portions of the forest unharvested, protecting sacred and ecological sites, and combining Traditional Ecological Knowledge with modern forestry science. Research has shown that, over time, the forest has remained healthy and resilient even after more than a century of harvesting.

In this lesson, you will explore how history, culture, and forestry are deeply connected through the Menominee Nation's relationship with the forest - and how those connections continue today through education, forestry practices, and cultural traditions such as maple syrup harvesting.





LEARNING OBJECTIVES (GRADES 6-8)

1. Analyze the historical relationship between the Menominee Nation and their forest lands.
2. Explain the cultural, ecological, and economic importance of maple trees and syrup production.
3. Evaluate how traditional stewardship practices influence modern sustainability.
4. Demonstrate understanding of key concepts from the lesson.

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

This lesson aligns with the following standards:

1. NGSS (Science)

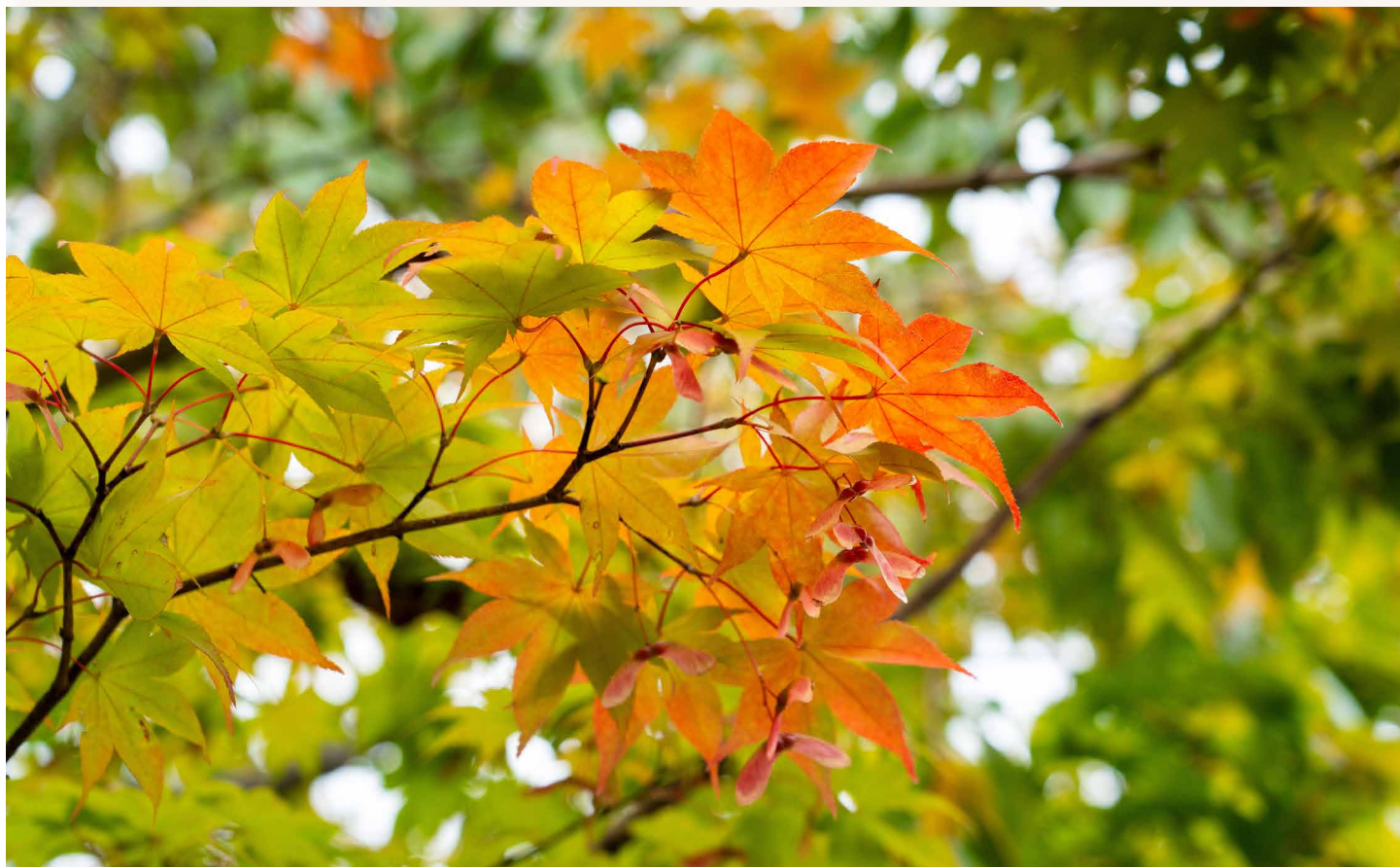
- a. MS-ESS3-3: Apply scientific principles to design a method for monitoring and minimizing human impacts on the environment.
- b. MS-LS2-1: Analyze and interpret data to provide evidence for the effects of resource availability on organisms and ecosystems.

2. Common Core (ELA)

- a. RI.6-8.3: Analyze how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced and developed in a text or media.
- b. SL.6-8.1: Engage effectively in collaborative discussions, building on others' ideas and expressing ideas clearly.

LESSON TIME ESTIMATE AND SUMMARY

(lesson time estimate 60 minutes))





Learning Objective	Activity	How Students Show They Learned	Time Estimate
Analyze the historical relationship between the Menominee Nation and their forest lands	Activity 1: Watch the Cultural Preservation Museum and Logging Camp segment; identify how history, land, and stewardship are connected	Students cite 2–3 examples from the episode showing how cultural values influence forest stewardship; share in partner discussion	10-12 min
Explain the cultural, ecological, and economic importance of maple trees and syrup production	Activity 2: Watch the Tribal School segment focused on maple tapping; explore how maple trees support the Tribe	Students create a simple “culture–ecology–economy connection map” using evidence from the episode and discuss findings	15-18 min
Evaluate how traditional stewardship practices influence modern sustainability	Reflection: Reflect on key ideas from both segments and connect them to modern forestry and sustainability practices	Students participate in the reflection and discussion prompts within the class using evidence from the episode	10-12 min
Demonstrate understanding of key concepts from the lesson	Assessment: Short quiz or presentation (group or solo) demonstrating what was learned in today’s segments	Students answer 5 questions or share a presentation with takeaways from this episode	12-15 min

BEGINNER VOCABULARY

1. **Silviculture:** The practice of managing and caring for forests to ensure their long-term health, growth, and sustainability.
2. **Forest stand:** A group of trees in a specific area that share similar characteristics, such as species, age, or size, and are managed together.
3. **Natural regeneration:** The process by which a forest renews itself naturally through seeds, sprouts, or root growth without direct human planting.
4. **Selection harvest:** A forestry method where specific trees are carefully removed, often older or less healthy ones, while leaving the rest of the forest intact to promote continuous growth and diversity.
5. **Maple Syrup Tapping:** The process of collecting sap from maple trees, which is then boiled down to produce maple syrup.



6. **Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK):** Knowledge developed by Indigenous communities over generations through direct relationship with the environment.
7. **Sustainable Forestry:** Managing forests in a way that meets current needs while maintaining their health and resources for future generations.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Menominee Nation and Their Forests

The Menominee Nation is located in northeastern Wisconsin, with its tribal government centered in the Village of Keshena. The Menominee people are Indigenous to this region and have lived in relationship with these lands for more than 10,000 years.

Their origin is rooted at the mouth of the Menominee River, where their five clans - Bear, Eagle, Wolf, Moose, and Crane - were formed. Unlike many Indigenous communities who were displaced from their homelands, the Menominee continue to live near their place of origin, maintaining a deep cultural and historical connection to the land.

Forest Description

The Menominee Forest is a rare example of a continuously managed forest that reflects what much of the Lake States region looked like before widespread logging.

The forest includes a diverse mix of species such as maple, aspen, birch, hemlock, ash, basswood, red oak, and white pine. Many trees are more than 200 years old, and the forest itself is so extensive and healthy that it can be seen from space.

Sustainable Forest Practices

The Menominee manage their forest using a combination of Traditional Ecological Knowledge and modern forestry science. Their approach focuses on long-term forest health, biodiversity, and sustainability.

Key practices include:

- Sustained-yield harvesting: Carefully managing how much timber is removed to ensure the forest continues to grow and regenerate over time
- Selection harvest: Removing specific trees while leaving the overall forest structure intact
- Natural regeneration: Allowing forests to regrow naturally from seeds, sprouts, and root systems

In addition, approximately one-quarter of the forest is intentionally left unharvested to protect ecological balance and long-term resilience.

Cultural and Economic Importance

For the Menominee, the forest is more than a natural resource; it is central to cultural identity, community well-



being, and economic stability.

Sacred sites, wetlands, and wildlife habitats are protected as part of forest management. Since 1908, the Neopit sawmill has provided steady employment for Tribal members and remains an important part of the local economy.

Maple trees also play a significant cultural and economic role. The practice of tapping maple trees for syrup connects generations through shared knowledge, seasonal traditions, and a continued relationship with the land.

Teacher Note

Research conducted by Dartmouth College and the University of Wisconsin–Madison found that, even after more than a century of timber harvesting, the Menominee Forest is more ecologically mature, with greater tree volume and fewer invasive species than surrounding non-Tribal forests - demonstrating the long-term effectiveness of their stewardship practices.

LEARNING PROCEDURE

1. Introduction

- Begin by showing a short clip or image from the Cultural Preservation Museum or logging camp.
- Ask students to observe silently before discussing.
- Guiding prompts:
 - What do you notice about how this forest is being shown or used?
 - What questions do you have about the people connected to this place?
 - What do you think it takes to care for a forest over a long period of time?
- Introduce the Menominee Nation and explain that students will explore how history, culture, and forest stewardship are connected.

2. Activity 1: Learn about Menominee History and Forest Practices

- Students explore Menominee history and forest stewardship practices through video and guided discussion.





3. Activity 2: Discover Maple Trees and Syrup

Students engage with a traditional Menominee teaching story about the maple tree and the elder who gave themselves for the wellbeing of the people.

4. Reflection/Discussion

- Students share key takeaways and learnings from this episode and lesson.

5. Assessment (Quiz or Presentation)

- Facilitate a discussion:
 - What surprised you most about the Menominee forest?
 - Why is it important to take care of forests?
- Students share one thing they learned or one story they created.

6. Teacher Tips:

- Encourage students to support their ideas with evidence from the episode or discussion.
- Use guiding questions to deepen thinking rather than providing direct answers.
- Allow flexibility for discussion time, as middle school students benefit from processing and sharing perspectives.

ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: Learn about Menominee History and Forest Practices

- Objective: Analyze how cultural values, history, and land stewardship are connected in Menominee forest management.
- Materials: Cultural Preservation Museum and Logging Camp video segment, whiteboard or chart paper, student notebooks or reflection sheets.
- Steps:
 - Students watch the Cultural Preservation Museum and Logging Camp segment featuring David Grignon and other Tribal perspectives.
 - Teacher pauses at key moments to highlight:
 - Menominee history and land connection
 - Forest management practices over time
 - Cultural values guiding stewardship decisions
- Students discuss:
 - How is the relationship between the Menominee Nation and the forest described?
 - What values guide forest stewardship decisions?
 - How do history and culture influence how the forest is managed today?
- Students identify 2–3 pieces of evidence from the episode that show how culture influences forest stewardship.
- Student Output:



- Short written or verbal explanation using evidence from the video
- Pair or small group sharing

Activity 2: Cultural Story of the Maple Tree

- Objective: Interpret how traditional cultural stories communicate values about responsibility, land stewardship, and ecological relationships.
- Materials: Video of Menominee maple tree teaching story and drawing materials.
- Teacher note: This story should be shared as a cultural teaching that reflects Menominee values of responsibility and relationship with the natural world. It should be treated as a meaningful cultural narrative, not fiction.
- Steps:
 - Teacher shares the Menominee teaching story of the maple tree and the elder who gave themselves for the wellbeing of the people.
 - Teacher frames the story as a cultural teaching that reflects values of reciprocity, responsibility, and relationship with the natural world.
 - Students listen or engage with the story.
- Guiding questions:
 - What lessons does this story teach about the relationship between people and the forest?
 - What values are expressed through the story?
 - How does this story help explain the importance of maple trees culturally and ecologically?
- Student Task (Students respond to the story through one of the following):
 - Short written reflection
 - Small group discussion
 - Illustrated storyboard with captions
 - Storytelling journal entry from the perspective of the elder, forest, or maple tree
- Discuss in small groups and record key themes and ideas from the class.
- Optional extension: How does this story help explain why forest stewardship is long-term and reciprocal?

Reflection and Discussion

Students reflect on how history, culture, and forest stewardship are connected in the Menominee Forest.

Students may respond through written reflection, small group discussion, or whole-class sharing.

- Reflection prompts:
 - How does the Menominee Nation's relationship with the forest show a connection between culture, ecology, and economy?
 - Why is it important to consider long-term stewardship when managing forests?
 - What is one idea from this lesson that changed or deepened your understanding of forests?
- Discussion questions:
 - How are maple trees connected to culture, ecology, and economy?
 - What does it mean to manage a forest sustainably over time?
 - What can modern forest management learn from the Menominee approach?



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Assessment (Short Quiz or Group Presentation)

Student understanding will be evaluated through a combination of written responses, discussion participation, and application of key concepts.

Students will demonstrate their learning by:

- o Using evidence from the episode to support ideas
- o Explaining connections between culture, ecology, and economy
- o Developing claims about forest stewardship over time

Short Quiz

1. What is one way the Menominee Nation has managed their forest sustainably over time?
2. What is Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)?
3. How does maple syrup production connect to both culture and economy?
4. What is one similarity between past and present forest practices?
5. Why is long-term forest stewardship important?

OR

Group Presentation

Students work in small groups to create a short presentation explaining how the Menominee Forest demonstrates connections between culture, ecology, and economy.

- Requirements:

1. Include at least two examples from the episode
2. Explain one historical and one modern practice
3. Describe why these practices matter for sustainability
4. Use at least one vocabulary term from the lesson
5. Presentation format options:
 - a. Poster
 - b. Slides
 - c. Verbal presentation with notes
6. Evaluation criteria:
 - a. Use of evidence from the episode
 - b. Clarity and accuracy of explanation
 - c. Connection between concepts
 - d. Group collaboration and participation



References

For additional information:

- <https://menominee-nsn.gov/CulturePages/BriefHistory>
- <https://www.menominee.edu/sustainable-development-institute>
- <https://www.mtewood.com/>

Additional Resources from LEAF: Wisconsin's K-12 Forestry Education Program:



LEAF-Wisconsin's K-12 Forestry Education Program
College of Natural Resources
University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point

- [Lesson 1: American Indians and the Forest](#)
- [Lesson 7: Sustaining Our Forests](#)
- [Career Profile - McKaylee Duquain](#)
- [Wisconsin Forest Tales](#)
- [K-1st Grade Field Enhancement - Sensing the Forest](#)
- [2nd-3rd Grade Field Enhancement - Observing Forest Interactions](#)
- [4th Grade Field Enhancement - Unlocking a Forest's Past](#)
- [5th-6th Grade Field Enhancement - Studying Forest Layers](#)
- [5th-6th Grade Field Enhancement - Woods Worth](#)
- [5th-6th Grade Field Enhancement - Competition in the Forest](#)