

The Ojibwe Clan System

I. Curricular Areas

Social Studies/History
Language Arts

II. Learner Goal

Students will understand how the Ojibwe people used the clan system to bring order, strength and a sense of cooperation to their communities.

III. Learner Outcomes

1. Students will understand that the Ojibwe clan was inherited from the fathers.
2. Students will list each of the five original animal ancestors and how they helped the Ojibwe people
3. Students will compare the needs of their communities and that of the Ojibwe.

IV. Teacher Background Information

The Ojibwe, like most Algonquian-speaking groups in North American, base their system of kinship on patrilineal clans or totems. The Ojibwe word for clan is O-do-i-daym.

All Ojibwe people belong to a clan. Each person has a family mark or clan mark. This mark represents a person's animal ancestor. At one time there were at least twenty one different animal ancestors each with their own valuable characteristic to help the Ojibwe people live in balance and harmony.

The clans were instrumental in traditional occupations, inter-tribal relationships, and marriages. Today, the clan remains an important part of Ojibwe identity.

The Clan system , like many aspects of American Indian culture varies from group to group, location to location. The following lesson is one way to explain the complexities of the Clan System to your students . Please note, because of many different teaching, some people may group animals and characteristics in different ways.

This lesson was adapted from *The Spirit Within* by the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center and was adapted from Robert Desjarlait's *O-do-i-daym: Clans of the Ojibway Coloring Book*

V. Student Activity

Materials needed: crayons, scissors, paste and worksheets 1&2

1. Students can color the animals and then cut them out.
2. Students will arrange the animals in the circle as you progress with the lesson, labeling around the circle the characteristic that the animal brought to the Ojibwe people.

3. At the end have your students mix up the animals in the circle and arrange them in the order of their characteristic and glue them into their circle.

Teacher will read the following and place the appropriate animal in the circle as he/she describes it, writing the animal's characteristic above the animal, outside the circle.

The Ojibwe Clan System

Tell the children that at one time long ago, all Ojibwe belonged to a clan. A clan is like a large family that, in traditional Indian culture, helped the entire village or community get along and work together. Each clan is represented by an animal ancestor that brought certain characteristics or qualities to help the people. There were five original clan animals:

1. The Cranes could speak in a way that people could understand. They are the **leaders**. They helped people make good decisions for the whole community.
2. The Bears are the **protectors**. It was their job to defend the entire community. They helped people be great warriors.
3. The martens are the **hunters**. It was their job to teach people how to be great hunters so people would have food and clothing.
4. The catfish are the **teachers**. Catfish live to be very old and achieve wisdom and it was their job to teach people about their past, tell stories, pass on values and beliefs from one generation to another.
5. The turtle was the animal ancestor of the **medicine** clan. They helped people learn about medicine and healing. They helped people stay healthy.

There are rules to follow concerning your clan:

1. Since your clan is part of your heritage and identity you must try to emulate the quality or character of your clan animal - ancestor.
2. You are related to every person that shares your animal ancestor even if they are from another location or Tribe, you are connected by your animal ancestor, and because of this people were never allowed to marry a person that shared their animal ancestor. It would be like marrying your brother or sister.
3. Since you are related to your animal ancestor you are not allowed to kill that animal or eat meat that comes from that animal.

VI. Extended Activity

Have student discuss and compare the needs of their community to that of the Ojibwe. Who in their community are?

The Leaders
The Protectors
The Hunters

The Teachers
The Medicine People

How would a community function without people taking on these particular roles? Are there other roles that are necessary in a modern community? What would they be?

The Clan System



