

Story of the Beaver

Timeframe

1 Fifty minute class period

Target Audience

Elementary School (4th-6th)

Materials

- Beaver story cards
- Storyboard template
- Colored pencils

Description

Students will learn about the beaver and its history in Oregon by reading about it and then creating a cartoon strip that retells its story. Students will put their comic strips together to create the larger story of the beaver.

Objectives

Students will:

- Learn basic characteristics of the beaver
- Gain an understanding of Oregon's fur trade as it relates to beavers
- Discuss ways in which the removal of beavers impacted the ecosystem

Guiding Questions

How does the use of natural resources affect people and the environment?

- How and why do people use natural resources?
- What factors influence how we use our natural resources?
- In what ways can people use resources sustainably?

Contact:

SMILE Program

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Activity Introduction

Let students know that they are going to learn more about the beaver and its history in Oregon through a fun and artistic activity. Tell them that they will break into groups and be given a short paragraph with information about the beaver. Their job will be to use a storyboard to retell the information that they were given.

Activity

1. Break students into 5 groups and give each group a beaver card to read and a storyboard template.
2. Once students have read their card tell them that they must take the information from the paragraph and put it into a short cartoon story about the beaver. Encourage them to add labels or dialog bubbles that represent what they read, and to be creative and use humor!
3. When students have finished their drawings, have them work together to create the bigger story of the beaver by putting their comic strips into a timeline of events.

Discuss

- How did people view the beaver?
- How did trapping beavers change the ecosystem? (think about the land and organisms)
- Could there have been a sustainable way to harvest beaver that would have had less of an impact on the ecosystem?

References

- <http://www.oregonwild.org/wildlife/beaver>
- http://library.uoregon.edu/sites/default/files/data/digliblessonplan_fur_trade_beaver_ecology2.pdfbiodiversity.html

Next Generation Science Standards

DISCIPLINARY CORE IDEAS:

LS.A: Interdependent Relationships in Ecosystems

PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS:

MS-ESS3-3. Explain how people have adapted to or changed the physical environment in the Western Hemisphere.

OREGON SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS:

Geography

4.12. Explain how people in Oregon have modified their environment and how the environment has influenced people's lives.

Social Science Analysis

5.22. Identify characteristics of an event, issue, or problem, suggesting possible causes and results.

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John Romansic

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Beaver Story Cards

The Beaver is the largest living rodent in North America. The average weight of an adult is 40 pounds and they can be more than three feet long, including the tail. Beavers have webbed hind feet, a nose and ears that seal out water, large incisor teeth and a broad flat tail. Though their eyesight is poor, they have excellent hearing and sense of smell. Beavers use their sharp incisors to cut trees and peel bark. Beavers live in family units called colonies and construct large dams out of sticks, stones, and mud. A single family of beavers can turn a small, rushing stream into a deep pond, in just a matter of weeks. These ponds provide habitat for birds, turtles, frogs, and other animals.

Beavers were abundant in Oregon because of the many streams, which made good habitat for them. The Native Americans trapped the beaver for their pelts and meat, but did not take an excessive amount. Many of the animals taken by the Natives were not caught in traps but by digging into their lodges. Tribes would work together to block the entrance to a beaver lodge and then dig into the lodge using stone spears and axes to get the beaver inside.

Beaver fur was the first of Oregon's natural resources to be recognized by early explorers. Initially the traders in Oregon got their furs by bartering with Native Americans. While the explorers desired the furs of many wild animals, initially they did not trap them themselves. At first, they relied on the Native American who were very skilled in capturing wild animals. However, as the huge value of the northwest's fur resources quickly became more apparent, fur companies decided to start hiring their own trappers to hunt beavers.

Beaver furs were highly valuable because the inner layer is extremely dense and warm and were great for making felt hats. Early explorers of the northwest reported that the region's many rivers and streams supported a large population of beaver. When people heard about this, they knew that they could make a lot of money from beaver fur. Large and powerful fur trading companies began establishing trading posts in Oregon. This led to the establishment of numerous trapping routes where fur trappers would set traps along the animals' habitat in order to catch them. These early trapping routes eventually became the area that is identified as The Oregon Trail.

Oregon's nickname, "The Beaver State", originated during a time when fur hats were fashionable and Oregon streams were an important source of beaver pelts. Such massive hunting of the beaver led to a sharp decline in its population. This led the Oregon government to intervene before they were hunted to extinction. Through management and partial protection, the beaver was reestablished throughout Oregon. Oregon designated the beaver as the official state animal in 1969.

Beaver Comic Strip

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