

The Mohican People Their Lives and Their Lands



A Curriculum Unit for Grades Four-Five



**THE MOHICAN PEOPLE
THEIR LIVES AND THEIR LANDS**

A CURRICULUM FOR GRADES FOUR-FIVE

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Many Trails design by the late Edwin Martin, Tribal Elder



Original print design by Kristina Heath Potrykus, copied from an early Mohican basket in the Arvid E. Miller Memorial Library Museum

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*THIS CURRICULUM IS DEDICATED
TO THE PEOPLE OF THE MOHICAN NATION
AND ESPECIALLY
TO THEIR CHILDREN.*

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INTRODUCTION

THE MOHICAN PEOPLE. THEIR LIVES AND THEIR LANDS

This curriculum is intended to help teachers of the fourth and fifth grade levels to integrate information about the Mohican people into their regular Social Studies curriculum. These Native people inhabited the valley of the mighty Mahicannituck long before Henry Hudson sailed up that river in 1609. Many New Yorkers, as well as people in surrounding states, know little if anything about them, their history or their culture — often because they think they were a people who disappeared.

In spite of James Fenimore Cooper's mistaking them for Mohegans and, in so many words, pronouncing them "a vanishing people," the Mohicans are indeed alive and well and living in Wisconsin. This curriculum is one small effort to bridge that gap of learning for young people who should know that this Native Nation was once a power to be reckoned with in what we now call the northeastern United States.

The story of the Mohicans carries several themes within it, and teachers are urged to emphasize these whenever evidence of them is presented. One is ADAPTATION, most obvious after the arrival of the Europeans and the changes in living styles that were forced on the Mohicans by these invading strangers in their midst. The second is SURVIVAL, which follows from the first. It drove the necessities of adaptation and change as a result of the COLONIZATION of the Mohican people — a process that is meant to result in such control over the lives of the colonized, their decisions and choices, that almost total dependence on the powerful is created. Evidences of RESISTANCE are to be found in the Mohican story also, and they need to be noted when found.

Finally, the REMOVALS of the Mohicans to places, first east to Stockbridge, then west and west again and again, changing forever their lives and lands. Part 6 in its entirety is devoted to these removals. Their importance needs to be emphasized because they are so welded into the meanings of adaptation, survival, colonization and resistance for the Mohican people, their history and their culture.

THE CURRICULUM

This curriculum is meant to accommodate both the fourth and fifth grades with information about the Mohicans. The entire history of the Mohican Nation is meant to be addressed at the fourth grade level, using Parts 1, 2 and 3, then skipping over to Parts 6 and 7. The middle, Parts 4 and 5, are devoted to a more detailed and perhaps more sophisticated approach to the Revolution in terms of its myths and truths, emphasizing the participation of Native, particularly Stockbridge, warriors.

NOTE: The curriculum is three-hole-punched with unbound pages to enable the teacher to remove and return Student Resource Sheets for copying. Also the covers, as well as and the People collages next to them, can be used in bulletin board displays and other purposes, as it is important for children to get used to seeing the Mohican People as their contemporaries.

UNIT

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This approach, preceded by a quick review of the fourth grade history of the Mohican Nation, is meant for fifth grade Social Studies in order to solidify not only students' knowledge of Mohican history and culture but their understanding and critical thinking about what they read in American history texts and other books. Of course, the particular needs of the individual school and its curriculum will assist in the decision about which grade level tackles which part of this curriculum.

The curriculum is based on several principles of progressive educational practice. In terms of its content, it values issues of social justice, multicultural perspectives, translation of dry facts into stories about the people who created the facts, anti-racist curriculum and so on. Regarding its process or classroom strategies, it is geared toward learning that is relevant to children's own lives, group work and experiential activities, peer teaching, analytical reading and thinking, respect for the varied intelligences and talents of children, a democratic classroom and so on.

All of these strategies are rooted in respect for the students, a firm belief that every child can learn, and that the center of the learning process is the child. But, from another perspective, they are also based on the conviction that the most significant factor in the mix of learning by children is the teacher. Without her or his judgment, guidance, and knowledge of each student's abilities and preferences in the classroom, students can neither enjoy learning nor grasp its relationship to their every day experiences. So the curriculum trusts teachers' judgments and choices about what the young people can grasp, be affected by, and thus remember, and, most importantly, the teachers' accommodations of what may be suggested in the curriculum's "procedures" to fit their needs.

The ideal learning situation, of course, embraces both — the knowledge that the real strength of successful learning is a partnership of the child and teacher where trust creates the bond of learning from each by each.

Teacher Resource Sheets are meant to supply as much background as is necessary, leaving it to the teacher to make judgments about what is needed to share with students. In some cases, a good deal of reading and preparation by the teacher is necessary to provide accurate and useful X information for the children, keeping in mind that, of all groups in society, Native people have endured every form of stereotyping imaginable since the coming of the Europeans — and still do. Difficult as it may seem, stereotypes can be replaced with accurate images if they are consistently offered to children over a period of time. That is no small task, as we all find out soon enough from our own experiences in the classroom. And finally, we teachers need to remember that we all carry in our heads stereotypes about people different from ourselves. X

Student Resource Sheets are for the use of the students, and the teachers are the ones who can translate their use into a variety of ways to transfer power to them. For example, in Part 2 students in groups may read a given selection in the text, decide for themselves what the main idea is in that selection, transcribe their own way to express that idea into their notes, then share with

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* 5th grade
curr. in U.S.
all tribes -

the others their own expressions of ideas. Added to this, peer teaching might be explored when using Student Resource Sheet #3.1 in Part 3. The reading comprehension here may be a little more difficult for some students, so the use of the content outline might be helpful, with students in their pairs or groups reading their selection together, then each one fleshing out the group's subtitle with oral discussion of, say, one thing each thinks it is important to remember. } *same?*

There is usually a tension of sorts when trying to democratize a curriculum's processes. Where learning about Native history is concerned, there is much to be de-learned. In that case, for example, the information about the destructive effects of alcohol in Native societies on Teacher Resource Sheet #3.1 is for the teacher, who might choose to impart information but not encourage discussion on the matter in class in order to protect the privacy of family members or customs.

FINDING MEANINGS IN THE STORIES

What history comes down to, of course, is a story — not "his" story or "her" story but both their stories, the People's story. Many history curricula are written well, are perfectly suited for the ability and comprehension levels of the students and so on. What is often lacking in the rendition of these stories in the schools, however, is any connection to the students' feelings about how these storied events affected the people at the time or what they mean to the people who now hold them in their memories.

For this reason, we called upon three experiential learning teacher/counselors and asked them to help us out. They did, with enthusiasm, lots of discussion and their characteristic wisdom about how children learn and remember. Laurie Frank, Barbara Miller and Kasey Keup shared their wisdom and experience in the field by developing activities that will help students discover the meanings deep within the stories. This will be done not simply by asking children what they think the Mohicans must have felt during and after a particular experience, but by having students go through an experience simulating, as much as possible, the real experience of the Mohican People. ?

Need actual 4/5 grade instructor input -

For example, in Part 1 students are asked to go through the activity titled "Moving, Moving, Moving" to help them get an understanding, however slight, of what the Mohican People must have felt on the removals they were coerced into experiencing for one reason or another. So, the "success" of the activity might be determined by the responses to the teacher's questions about **how the students felt being removed many times and without control over the experience.**

It may be a first for fourth grade students to be asked to reveal such feelings during a history lesson, but it is an important part of the learning process if students are to learn about, share and especially remember the meanings of the experience for a whole Native Nation living in the 21st century. For these reasons, teachers are encouraged not to ignore or avoid these activities in each Part of the curriculum but to embrace the realities and risks of guiding students through them.

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APPENDIXES

There are three appendixes following the end of the curriculum. Appendix A includes the bibliography of Mohican resources recommended by the Stockbridge-Munsee Historical Committee, with the addition of materials quoted in the curriculum. Appendix B provides those Wisconsin Social Studies Standards that can be met in this curriculum, and Appendix C does the same with the New York Social Studies Standards. In these latter standards, World History is included because connections need to be made between the invasion of the so-called "New World" by European peoples and the Native Peoples' colonization and subjugation to European power — and how all of these societies were changed by this. Again, this is a very important aspect of Mohican history and needs to be emphasized with students whenever possible.

* * * * *

It is sincerely hoped that the results of using this curriculum with youngsters in elementary school may yield the most surprising and gratifying reward of all — not only their **learning about** but also their **remembering** the Mohican People, their lives, their struggles and their lands.

Ruth A Gudinas, Editor
February, 2008

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The first to produce a fourth grade curriculum of the history of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians was the School District of Rhinelander, Wisconsin, through a federal grant from Title IV-C of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (1979-1982), with assistance from the Great Lakes Intertribal Council and the Wisconsin Indian Tribes. It was written by Shelley Oxley for a team of educators in the Rhinelander Schools and was part of a series of curricula on Wisconsin Indian Nations for the Wisconsin Woodland Indian Project sponsored by that school district from 1981 to 1984. On June 2, 2005 the Rhinelander School District relinquished all participation in any decisions about the publication called *THE HISTORY OF THE STOCKBRIDGE-MUNSEE BAND OF MOHICAN INDIANS*, Second Edition, since the Stockbridge-Munsee Historical Committee's revisions had substantially changed much of the content. Nonetheless, this curriculum probably owes its existence to that group of dedicated curriculum developers who first responded to calls for "what to teach our children about Wisconsin Indians."

This work, as is true of so many others, is truly a work of many. Its primary author is Dorothy Davids, Mohican Elder, who over the years has authored the original and all revisions of the *BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MOHICAN NATION STOCKBRIDGE-MUNSEE BAND*, with the input of the Stockbridge-Munsee Historical Committee and the tribe's Department of Education. In this curriculum, many of its pages are simply duplicated on the Student and Teacher Resource Sheets in order to preserve what is often forgotten in scholarly readings and research — the **voice of the People themselves**. Thanks to you, Dorothy, for your constant and consistent work writing and documenting the history of your people for all of us.

Other co-authors are Ruth Gudinas, who also edited the entire curriculum and is co-publisher with Dorothy for Muh-he-con-neew Press, and the three experiential education specialists mentioned in the Introduction: Laurie Frank, Barbara Miller and Kasey Keup. These three women left homes and families to spend three days at the Press putting, first, their heads and hearts, and then their writing skills together to produce the experiential activities integrated into the informational parts of the curriculum. The use of these activities, we feel, will be critical in helping fourth and fifth graders find the meanings hidden within the experiences the Mohicans endured and struggled with over the centuries following that fateful trip of Henry Hudson up the mighty Mahicannituck. Thanks to all the co-authors for their work!

Much gratitude to the members of the Stockbridge-Munsee Historical Committee — Cindy Sparks, Jungenberg, Leah Miller, Molly Miller, Sheila Miller Powless, and to all the members of the Historical Committee who took the time to read and critique the ninety-some pages of the curriculum, meet with the editor and help her understand the perspectives that the study of Mohican history has given to them over the years. To those who wrote the texts for Student Resource Sheets 1-J through 1-M, thanks for your research and good writing. And to Nathalee and Cindy many thanks for lending Muh-he-con-neew Press photos for Student Resource Sheets #1.J, K, L and N.

from Heather

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- Kristina Heath Potrykus, whose design graces the corners of most of these pages. It can be found on buildings, signs, books and displays on the Reservation and is a powerful reminder of the ancestors who decorated their baskets with potato-printed designs. For their artistic work, we owe a debt of gratitude to the Mohicans who have gone before, as well as to those who share their contemporary works with us today.
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