

Adapting to Survive

Lesson on how climate and environment affect people in Alaska.

Grade:

6th – 9th

Duration:

Flexible. Up to the teacher. This lesson could take up to a week. 30 minutes to 1hr a day.

Goal:

This lesson is an introduction to a study of Native Alaskans of the past. In order to survive, humans have always had the same basic physical needs. The physical characteristics of the land determine in large part how we satisfy those needs, and as the earth changes we must also adapt to survive. The objectives of this lesson are:

1. To increase the student's knowledge of climate differences in the different regions of Alaska.
2. To increase the student's awareness of the relationship between the physical characteristics of the land and the ways in which people adapted in that area.
3. To increase the student's awareness of the importance of traditional knowledge.

Alaska State Content Standards:

Science: A-14, A-15

English/Language Arts: A-1, A-2, A-3, B-1

Geography: A-1, B-1, C-1

Materials:

Map of Alaska

Use of computers with Internet

Books, magazines, textbooks with information on the different regions of Alaska and the Alaska Native peoples that are from each region.

Introduction:

Climate plays an important role in determining the physical characteristics, the ecosystem, the vegetation of a region. People everywhere have to adapt to the physical environment around them in order to survive. This was especially true in the past, before all of the modern conveniences we have today. Think about what it must have been like for Native Alaskan people in the past when basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter were determined by what people found in the natural world around them and their skill at adapting it to their needs.

Activity 1:

Climate

Looking at a large map of Alaska, point out the 5 different regions in Alaska, the Southeast, the Aleutian Chain, the Interior, the North Slope, and the Western region of Alaska. Discuss differences in climate, weather, and environment in these regions. Discuss with the class how climate can affect the environment. Have the students tell you what they know about each region.

Teachers: Have the students do research using either textbooks or the Internet. Have them first find out what climate is, and then research and discuss how it affects the different regions in Alaska. What do the natural surroundings in these 5 regions look like? What are the differences between these 5 regions? Have your students:

1. Write a paragraph on what climate is.
2. Write either a short paper or give a presentation to the class on the differences in climate in the 5 Alaskan regions.

Activity 2:

Traditional Knowledge

How did people who lived in these regions in the past adapt to survive? Every society in the world has evolved a useful and fitting adaptation to the surrounding environment. That adaptation is what helps to create culture. In traditional times, Native Alaskans knew that adaptation to hardship or changes in the environment were important in order to survive.

Discuss ways in which Native Alaskan people took objects they found in the natural world and made things that were necessary for survival such as tools, home building materials, and clothing. Discuss some of the differences of living and surviving that Native Alaskan people used in each of these 5 regions.

Teachers: Have the students now write a short paper or give a presentation on traditional knowledge and ways of living and survival in the past in Alaska. You can break the class into 5 groups and have each group of students focus on one of the 5 regions.

Other Related Classroom Activities:

1. Students write a paragraph about how they would use their natural surroundings to survive. What would they eat? What would they use for shelter? Clothes?
2. Invite an elder from your community into the classroom to talk about some of the traditional knowledge useful for survival in the area.