

# Why Treaties Matter

Self-Government  
in the Dakota and  
Ojibwe Nations



## Educator Guide for Grades 6-12

### Traditional Anishinaabe Economy

A partnership of the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council  
and the Minnesota Humanities Center

**BANNER TITLE**

A Deep Connection to Place

**BANNER #**

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*Why Treaties Matter* educator guides are intended as supplementary resources for your curriculum or stand-alone as lessons. This guide contains estimates of preparation and instructional time, a materials list, background information, preview strategies, assessment options, extension activities, a vocabulary list, web resources, bibliography, and related reading.

**PREPARATION TIME**

One hour depending on previous familiarity with the topics

**INSTRUCTIONAL TIME**

Two class periods

**MATERIALS**

- Student Reading: “Traditional Anishinaabe Economy” ([Appendix A](#))
- Study Questions ([Appendix B](#)) and Suggested Answers ([Appendix C](#))
- Student Activity: Moons of the Year in the Northern Anishinaabe Seasonal Round ([Appendix D](#))
- Vocabulary list ([Appendix E](#))
- Ruler, markers, paper

Note: See [Terminology Primer](#) for an explanation of the terms Ojibwe, Chippewa, and Anishinaabe.

## TEACHER BACKGROUND

The traditional Anishinaabe economy was based on the food, clothing, and housing materials that were available in the forest and lake country. The Anishinaabe relied on fish; animals, such as deer and moose; plants, such as berries; and the harvests of wild rice, maple sugar, corn, beans and squash.

The Anishinaabe followed a seasonal round where food, clothing, shelter, and tool resources were available at particular seasons of the year. In winter, hunting of game animals was a priority and the Anishinaabe lived in protected woods as small family groups. In spring, the people moved to groves of maple trees where they had a traditional right to harvest, and for a month or more, they made enough maple sugar to last until the following year. In summer, the Anishinaabe returned to their summer lakeshore villages to fish, hunt, gather, and harvest a variety of foods. In early fall, they gathered and harvested wild rice. Late fall brought on net fishing activities for the women and trapping of fur-bearing animals for the men.



In traditional life, the Anishinaabe did not have a commercial or for-profit capitalist economy. Instead, they had their own way of preserving surplus and distributing food and other valuable materials. They placed surplus food in birch bark lined cache pits. They used this surplus when needed and shared with those who might have been short of food. In addition, they used the economic principle of reciprocity (gift giving) to transfer produce from one group to another. Large scale gift-giving took place at trade fairs where, for example, woodland products such as maple sugar and wild rice were traded for buffalo meat and hides.





## LESSON

**Preview Strategies:** KWL – Ask students what they already know (K) about how the Ojibwe of Minnesota lived before contact with Europeans, what they want to know (W), and finally, at the end of the lesson, what they have learned (L).

### Activities:

- Students read “Traditional Anishinaabe Economy” ([Appendix A](#)) and complete the study questions ([Appendix B](#)).
- Students complete the activity: “Moons of the Year in the Northern Anishinaabe Seasonal Round” ([Appendix D](#)). They note which moons depict food getting activities. Based on the student reading, each student draws a picture showing an activity for one of the moons of the seasonal round. As a class, compile all the pictures into a circle that shows the full seasonal round.
- Students write a short reflection essay about what they have learned by participating in the lesson.



**Assessment:** Students demonstrate an understanding that traditional Anishinaabe economy followed a seasonal round where food, clothing, shelter, and tool resources were available at particular seasons of the year. They do this by answering the study questions that accompany the student reading, completing the “Moons of the Year in the Northern Anishinaabe Seasonal Round” activity, using words from vocabulary list, and writing a short reflection essay about what they have learned.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Students conduct research on the Dakota moon calendar and compare seasonal economic activities between the Anishinaabe and Dakota.
- Students conduct research to locate a Anishinaabe story about one of the foods important in the traditional Anishinaabe economy.

**Vocabulary:** See the vocabulary list included in this guide ([Appendix E](#)). You may wish to modify the list based on your knowledge of your student’s needs or the subject you are teaching. Pretesting vocabulary individually, or in small groups, or with your entire class can be an effective preview strategy.

### Web Resources (all links were active at time of publication):

Manoomin.com – Ojibwe Wild Rice [www.manoomin.com](http://www.manoomin.com)

Intersecting Ojibwe Art Curriculum: Ojibwe Unit: A Year-Long Study (Part 2-Seasonal Economy) <http://intersectingart.umn.edu/?lesson/51>

Indian Country Today article: “Poet Heid Erdrich Turns Talents to a Cultural Cookbook Celebrating Indigenous Foods”

<http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/11/26/poet-heid-erdrich-turns-talents-cultural-cookbook-celebrating-indigenous-foods-152429>

The Four Seasons of the Dakota lesson plan

<http://humanitieslearning.org/resource/index.cfm?act=1&TagID=o&CatID=o&SearchText=four seasons of the dakota&SortBy=1&mediatype=o&lurl=1>

## RELATED READING / BIBLIOGRAPHY

Broker, Ignatia. *Night Flying Woman: An Ojibwe Narrative (Native Voices)*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1983.

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Rogers, John. *Red World and White: Memories of a Chippewa Boyhood (The Civilization of the American Indian Series)*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974.

Treuer, Anton. *Ojibwe in Minnesota*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2010.

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Wittstock, Laura Waterman. *Ininatig's Gift of Sugar*. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications, 1993.



**STUDENT READING:****The Origin of the Robin: An Ojibwe Story**

In the century that preceded Minnesota statehood, the *Anishinaabe* way of life relied on seasonal resources available in the natural environment. These resources were intricately woven with the cycles of the seasons or phases of the moon. A good account of the traditional Anishinaabe economy can be found in the book *Chippewa Customs* by Frances Densmore. Prior to the boom of the fur trade, the economy of many tribes, including the Anishinaabe, was aimed at communal good vs. independent gain. Wealth, many times, was measured by how generous someone was with their bounty. *Noodinens*, an Anishinaabe elder, lived a traditional lifestyle near Mille Lacs in the 1850's. She told Densmore that her family “worked day and night and made the best use of the material we had.”

Although the Anishinaabe had already been in increasing contact with Europeans by the time Noodinens was growing up, one thing stayed consistent—dependency on the forests, rivers, and lakes that provided them with everything they needed to survive. Noodinens' personal account describes the activities that her family would engage in each season. Let's follow Noodinens as she describes traditional Anishinaabe life, and what each season provided to her and her people.

***Ziigwan* (Spring)**

In the springtime, when the snow would begin to melt and the weather would start to warm up, the Anishinaabe would move to their sugarbush camps for *Iskigamizige-giizis*, or maple sugar moon (April). Noodinens and the Anishinaabe knew that springtime was the time to tap the maple trees for their sap, so they could make maple syrup or sugar. *“Toward the last of the winter my father would say, ‘one month after another month has gone by. Spring is near and we must get back to our work’. When we got to the sugarbush we took the birch bark dishes out of the storage and the women began tapping the trees.---Our sugar camp was always near Mille Lac(s), and the men cut holes in the ice, putting something over their heads and fished through the ice---A food cache was always near the sugar camp. We opened that and had all kinds of nice food that we had stored in the fall. There were cedar bark bags of rice and there were cranberries sewed in the birch bark makakoon (containers) and long strings of dried potatoes and apples (products of the fur trade). Grandmother had charge of all this, and made the young girls do the work. As soon as the little creeks opened, the boys caught lots of small fish”.*

The reason that the Anishinaabe moved to the sugarbush in the spring, is because they knew that the best time for the sap to flow is when it gets above freezing during the day and below freezing at night. When it gets colder at night, the sap flows back down into the roots to gather more moisture, then when it warms up during the day, the sap flows up the tree again. The traditional methods of gathering the sap would be to cut a V shape into the bark at the base of the tree, and then pound a flat wooden tap underneath for the sap to drip down. A *makak*, or birch bark basket, was placed under the tap to collect the sap. The sap was then poured into birch bark containers or cast iron kettles (acquired in the trade) to be boiled down. As the sap boils, and the water evaporates, it becomes thicker and darker, until it has the consistency of syrup. Boiling the syrup longer causes it to rise up, get very light and airy, and then it is taken out of the kettle and granulated into sugar. Since most of the sap is water, it takes anywhere from 30 to 40 gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup or about a pound of sugar. After three or four weeks, the sap will start to get cloudy, which signals the end of the sugarbush. The sap boils down thicker and has a bitter taste, and does not make the same sweet syrup and sugar as the clear sap.

Another important activity of the spring time, that Noodinens included in her account was the gathering of the inside bark of the cedar tree. “This can only be gotten in the spring,” she related, “and we got plenty of it for making mats and bags.” Once they left the sugarbush, they would start to move toward their summer camps, near the shores of a lake to catch fish.

### ***Niibin* (Summer)**

The summertime was a busy time of the year as the Anishinaabe spent much of their time fishing, collecting a variety of herbs, berries, and roots, harvesting different barks, and gardening during *ode'imini-gizis* or strawberry harvest moon. Noodinens describes the summer scene:

*“Camps extended along the lake shore, and each family had its own garden. We added to our garden every year, my father and brothers breaking the ground with old axes, bone, or anything that would cut and break up the ground. My father had wooden hoes that he made, and sometimes we used the shoulder blade of a large deer or moose, holding it in the hand. We planted potatoes, corn, and pumpkins. These were the principal crops---The gardens were never watered. A scarecrow made of straw was always put in the garden.”*

An important resource that was harvested in the summer, usually late in June or early July, was *wiigwaas*, or birch bark. When it is hot and humid, during the time that the deer flies are biting, is the best time to harvest birch bark. The outer bark can be removed, and it doesn't hurt the tree and actually it replenishes itself. Birch bark was used as a covering for the lodges, fashioned into baskets and containers and also used to make birch bark canoes, the main mode of transportation for the Anishinaabe. Noodinens talked about how busy summertime was for her and her family.

*“There was scarcely an idle person around the place. The women made cedar-bark mats and bags for summer use. By that time the reeds for making floor mats were ready for use. They grew in certain places and the girls carried them to the camp. We gathered plenty of basswood bark and birch bark, using our canoes along the lakes and the streams. We dried berries and put them in bags for winter use. During the summer we frequently slept in the open”.*

### ***Dagwaagin* (Fall)**

Towards the end of the summer Noodinens and her family would start to get ready for *manoominike-gizis* or the ricing moon (August), which was the time for harvesting wild rice off the lakes and rivers near Mille Lacs. “Next came the rice moon” Noodinens related, “The rice fields were quite a distance away and we went there are camped while we gathered rice.”

Wild rice is not found in every lake or river; it needs a certain temperature and depth that is suitable for its growth. Wild rice also needs to grow where there is a free flowing current, as in a river or near the inlet of where a creek, river, or stream enters into a lake. There is a small window of opportunity to harvest the rice since the season lasts only about four weeks from the time the rice is ripe enough to harvest, until it gets too ripe and falls back into the lake.

To get wild rice off the water, two people go out in a canoe into the wild rice beds. The “poler” stands in the rear of the canoe, with a long pole, up to 14 feet long, and pulls the canoe through the water. The person kneeling down in the front of the canoe uses tapered cedar “knockers” to pull the wild rice stalks into the canoe with one knocker, while the other knocker is used to knock the rice kernels into the canoe. Once the



bottom of the canoe is full of rice, it is brought ashore to be processed.

The first step in processing the rice is to parch the rice. Parching requires heating the rice in a kettle over a low fire and constantly stirring the rice to make sure that the outer husks covering the rice kernels don't burn. The purpose of parching the rice is to dry the rice out, as most of it will be put into storage for future use, and it also dries the husks and causes them to crack open.

Once the rice is parched, it is threshed or jigged. To thresh the rice, a pit was dug and lined with a hide; the parched rice was then placed in the pit. An "A" framed support was attached to a tree, so that the person threshing could use the frame to support their weight as they gently stepped on the rice and twisted their feet, which some people refer to as dancing or jigging the rice. Threshing the rice removes the husk from the kernel of rice and prepares it for the final step of the processing, which is winnowing the rice. Using a birch bark winnowing tray, the threshed rice is tossed lightly in the air and sifted as a repeat motion of tossing and sifting the rice. This separates the husks from the kernels of rice and the husks are thrown out of the tray and into the wind. Wild rice that is processed in this manner will stay good for years if properly stored.

Noodinens talked about what happened after the rice was harvested and processed: "we returned to our summer camp and harvested our potatoes, corn, pumpkins, and squash, putting them in caches which were not far from our gardens---By this time the men had gone away for the fall trapping.

When the harvest was over and colder weather came, the women began their fall fishing, often working at this until the snow came. When the men returned from the fall trapping, we started for the winter camp."

### ***Biboon* (Winter)**

Noodinens and her family would want to be settled into their winter camp by the end of *gashkadino-giizis*, the freezing moon (November). Winter camp was located deep in the forest, nestled into an area with lots of trees and shrubs to protect them from the cold winds and snow. Noodinens described some of the preparations that were made as they moved to their winter camps:

*"My home was Mille Lacs, and when the ice froze on the lake we started to the game field—we took only food that was light in weight, such as rice and dried berries, and we always took a bag of dried pumpkin flowers, as they were nice to thicken the meat gravy during the winter. There were six families in our party, and when we found a nice place in the deep woods we made our winter camp. The men shoveled away the snow in a big space and six wigwams were put in a circle and banked with evergreen boughs and snow. Of course, the snow was always shoveled away in the inside of the wigwam, and plenty of cedar boughs were spread on the ground and covered with blankets for our beds, the bright yarn bags being set along the wall for use as pillows."*

Other activities in the wintertime included ice fishing and spearing, as well as trapping a variety of animals for their furs, like the *wabooz*, or snowshoe hares, that were used to line mittens and moccasins to prevent frost bite. The winter time was also a time to get ready for the coming year, so articles of clothing were repaired or new outfits were made from brain tanned buckskins. The men would go out hunting for long stretches during the winter, for moose, deer and other game. Towards the end of the winter, Noodinens and her family would get ready once again to move to the sugarbush and the cycle of the season would continue.

As more and more Europeans, and then Americans, flooded into Anishinaabe lands, the traditional economy was harder and harder to maintain and gave way to a different economy during the treaty years. This new economy included providing land and resources for the newcomers as well as the traditional economic round.



**STUDY QUESTIONS:**  
**Traditional Anishinaabe Economy**

1. How was wealth measured in a traditional Anishinaabe economy?
2. How were tasks divided up in Noodinens' family in a sugar camp according to age and gender?
3. How much sap had to be collected to make a pound of maple sugar?
4. When did the Anishinaabe people know when it was time to end the maple sugar making?
5. What was cedar bark used for and when was it collected?
6. What kinds of economic activities took place in the summer months?
7. Why was birch bark collected at mid-summer, and what was it used for?
8. Under what conditions does wild rice grow?
9. What processes were involved in processing wild rice for future use?
10. How was the wigwam prepared for winter living conditions by Noodinens' family?
11. What economic activities took place in the winter months?

### STUDY QUESTIONS:

#### **We Have Always Been Sovereign Nations and Continue to Practice Our Sovereignty**

1. How was wealth measured in a traditional Anishinaabe economy?  
**It was measured by how much a person could give away.**
2. How were tasks divided up in Noodinens' family in a sugar camp according to age and gender?  
**The women were in charge of the sugar making and the girls carried the sap to the kettles. The men went ice fishing and the boys fished in streams that were opening up.**
3. How much sap had to be collected to make a pound of maple sugar?  
**30 to 40 gallons.**
4. When did the Anishinaabe people know when it was time to end the maple sugar making?  
**It was time to end the sugar making when the sap became cloudy and bitter.**
5. What was cedar bark used for and when was it collected?  
**Cedar bark made bags and mats and was collected in the spring.**
6. What kinds of economic activities took place in the summer months?  
**Fishing, hunting, gathering herbs, berries, and roots. Planting corn, pumpkins, squash and potatoes. Collecting various kinds of barks for making mats, containers, canoes and other items.**
7. Why was birch bark collected at mid-summer, and what was it used for?  
**The bark was collected at mid-summer because the tree would then have time to grow new bark before winter. The reading mentions birch bark was used in making baskets and containers and canoes. (Birch bark was also used to line the sides and top of wigwams).**
8. Under what conditions does wild rice grow?  
**It grows where there is a current and shallow water at the right temperature.**
9. What processes were involved in processing wild rice for future use?  
**The article mentions parching, threshing, and winnowing. (Other processes included gathering by canoe, drying the wet rice out, and storing it in birch bark baskets).**
10. How was the wigwam prepared for winter living conditions by Noodinens' family?  
**The men cleared the snow over a wide area (enough to hold six or more wigwams). After the wigwam was put up, it was banked with tree boughs and snow. Inside, cedar mats were put down and then blankets for sleeping. (A low fire was kept burning at the center of the lodge as well).**
11. What economic activities took place in the winter months?  
**Hunting, trapping, ice fishing, sewing, and repairing clothing.**

**STUDENT ACTIVITY:****Moons of the Year in the Northern Anishinaabe Seasonal Round****Moon**

Halfway Through the Winter Moon  
 Little Bears and Born Moon  
 Crow Comes Back Moon  
 Loon Comes Back Moon/or Maple Sugar Making Moon  
 Tree Buds Moon  
 Strawberry Moon  
 Half of Summer Moon  
 Time to Pick Wild Rice Moon  
 Leaves Turning Moon  
 Tree Shedding Moon  
 Water is Freezing Moon  
 Mid-Winter Moon

**Month**

January  
 February  
 March  
 April  
 May  
 June  
 July  
 August  
 September  
 October  
 November  
 December

Which of the moon names reflects a food gathering activity?

Based on the student reading, draw a picture showing an activity for one of the moons of the seasonal round. As a class, compile all the pictures into a circle that shows the full seasonal round.

**English Words**

subsistence  
 reciprocity

sugarbush  
 parch  
 seasonal round

thresh  
 winnow

the act of supplying oneself with the resources needed to live  
 the transfer of goods and services from one person or group to another; gift-giving  
 an area where groves of maple trees are located  
 to dry out a grain with a heat source  
 a pattern in the production of food, clothing, shelter, and tool resources that is based on particular seasons of the year  
 process of separating grains from husks  
 process of removing chaff from grain by tossing grain in the air

**Ojibwe Words**

[Anishinaabe](#)  
[ziigwan](#)  
[daagwaagin](#)  
[biboon](#)  
[niibin](#)  
[makak](#)  
[wigwaas](#)  
[waabooz](#)  
[Noodinens](#)

the name the Ojibwe or Chippewa call themselves.  
 spring  
 fall  
 winter  
 summer  
 birch bark container  
 birch bark  
 rabbit  
 Little Wind, a woman's name



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