

Seneca Thanksgiving

DePaul University Center for Urban Education

This teaching plan can expand your students' knowledge of other cultures as they see past the stereotypes about Native Americans.

General outcomes include:

- Students gain knowledge about Native American life
- Students develop concept of thanksgiving as a way of valuing rather than a holiday
- Students comprehend relationships between traditions and values
- Students develop inferential thinking ability

Background

You can use this literal information to develop students' inferential abilities.

A Thanksgiving ceremony was an ongoing part of the Seneca culture long before the Pilgrims arrived. The Seneca people were the largest division of the League of the Iroquois, a tribe of Native Americans. Today, about 7,000 Seneca live in New York, Ontario, and Pennsylvania.

The Ceremony

The Seneca thanksgiving was a ceremony that the leaders of the group would hold when they would gather together for an important occasion. The original thanksgiving therefore was not restricted to autumn.

During the ceremony, the Seneca would recognize the parts of nature as well as the members of their community who were valued.

Here are just a few of the individuals and parts of nature the Seneca would thank:

- > The earth, which holds up our feet.
- > The young, who are taking their places among us.
- > The elders, who share their wisdom with us.
- > The birds, that are always free.
- > The faith-givers, who help us in many ways.

An example of how to use the literal to make inferences.

Get Literal Knowledge	Organize It	Make Inferences Based on the Literal
Identify the items the Seneca appreciated in their ceremony.	Classify in a two-column chart : parts of nature and members of the community.	Infer other parts of nature and members of the community that the Seneca might have recognized in the ceremony.
Research the Seneca environment (eastern Woodlands). Identify climate, vegetation, natural resources.	Make a three-column chart listing features of the climate, vegetation, natural resources.	Infer kinds of homes and clothing that the Seneca would have made to live in that environment.
Make a list of the things you do every day.	Make a time-line of a day in your life in Chicago today.	Infer the kinds of things that you would put on a time-line of a day in the life of a Seneca family. (You can put that on another time-line.)
Identify elements of the Chicago environment that people appreciate.	Chart them.	Infer the kinds of statements that people would make about these elements--tell why they value them.
Locate symbols of Native American peoples.	Chart the values of the culture that the symbols represent.	Infer what a child in each of these societies would have learned about how to live and what to value.

See Values

To help your students see the diversity of cultures within the Native American societies and their relevance to Chicago, have them do research on native peoples who used to live in the Chicago area. For example, the Wabanaki, the Potawatami, and the Winnebagos are native peoples who once traveled, traded, and lived in the midwest. Organize a class project in which teams or pairs of students research and report on the cultures of this area. They can use the traditional categories of the archaeologist: collecting and charting information on travel, trade, housing, food, shelter, and clothing. Then, have your students infer the values of the culture they are profiling based on the ways they used natural materials.

Important Objects Represent Important Values

Object	How—What Natural Resource Used	Why—What Value does it Represent?

Write to Clarify

Write a paragraph about this culture.

Tell what was important to the people.

Include the information from your chart in your paragraph.

Write your paragraph for a younger student.

Make your paragraph so clear that the student understands how the people lived and their values.