

Recycling Plastics

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Introduction:

This cultural unit will focus on the years of change in what we had before and what is now happening.

Cultural Objective:

Students will learn that as years passed what damage was done to Aki (Mother Earth) and how we are working towards renewal of Aki.

Cultural Information:

The PowerPoint presentation will demonstrate how this change occurred throughout history of our way of life.

I was born in the nineteen forties and plastic products were few and far between, if any. There was an abundance of products made of plastic, during the 1950's. Before that time most of the bottles, jars, anything they had to store things were made of glass and of course, they were heavy, breakable, and when packed would sometimes break in the shipping of the products.

As a young girl I didn't see garbage thrown on the ground and we would use paper bags for groceries. But, that discontinued when we began looking at the trees that had to be killed to make paper products. The cities and Marine camps I lived in were clean, the skies were blue, the water was clear and the most beautiful color of blue. You could see what was in the water; fish, sea animals, coral so beautiful you wanted to touch it, but was not allowed. There was no smog. We didn't have many cars on the road in those days, if you had one you must have had lots of money or good credit. The forest was green and clean all the time, people didn't leave their garbage on Aki, they took it home or threw it away in a trash container that were available at the sites. Trees are vital. As the biggest plants on the planet, they give us oxygen, store carbon, stabilize the soil and give life to the world's wildlife. They also provide us with the materials for tools and shelter.

So, when the plastics boom began it boasted a unique and useful set of properties as I have seen during my life.

As years went by, I was wondering what these plastic containers were going to do to our environment and if we had a way of using them. When my oldest boy was born, I used cloth diapers. Then when my second son was born, I used Pampers disposable diapers on him the whole time. I didn't think what using disposables would do in the dump grounds.

As new technology emerges, plastics are also being produced from renewable materials like corn or cotton; as I have learned going to seminars about how to help Mother Earth stay clean. As my journey continued, I have seen what was easier for us to grab, and fit into our lifestyles to make them fit a purpose in our way of life.

About five years ago when I was working with students on a project that had to do with recycling, I found out that it takes a disposable diaper 40 years to dissolve in the ground. Wow, I was shocked and ashamed at the same time for using them instead of cloth diapers. In 1968, young women didn't want to do the work it took to use cloth diapers. Also, a lot of women had to go out and find a job so it was easier to use the already made ones.

I have seen the oceans water being not as blue as once before and now gray colored, skies are full of chemicals in the air, and Mother Earth is dying from the garbage. The toxins put underground to hide from the public are now causing cancer in our people. Our trees give us our oxygen and we give the carbon dioxide for them in an exchange of life, the excess carbon dioxide is building up in our atmosphere, contributing to climate change and the trees absorb odors and pollutant gases so we don't have to breath them. There is so much to learn from our environment if we just look around.

Recycled plastic has recently been used to manufacture an expanding range of products, including furniture, roads, packaging, and clothing. When I found this information, I was glad that our engineers are looking at what is happening here on Aki and how to change it for our future generations. When I saw what they can do to these items I was astonished and grateful as well.

In general, plastics offer excellent mechanical and barrier properties with a low bulk density and inertness, making them superior materials for a wide number of applications. This is important for the young people today to find a field of interest that could continue when the elders no longer are here but have taught us the right way of doing a good job of cleaning up Aki.

However, today only 15% of plastic waste is recycled. So, this is a concern for me now that I have learned how to take care of Mother Earth (Aki).

Long ago we did not have these problems. We used everything on Aki and it had a time to disintegrate on a good time line. Even now, I see the old homes that were made from our trees are left to go back to Aki. The same goes for our ceremony buildings built out of materials from Aki. I have seen them in my travels throughout the US.

Our ancestors taught us to clean, nourish, respect Aki, and think about our future generations to come. This was handed down through generation of story-telling, writings, songs, teachings from the animals and all of nature.

Author biography:

Boozhoo, my name is Miigizi Ikwe, Wapski Makwa indoodem, Mikanock Wajii. My other name is Frances Allard, I'm from the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Reservation in Belcourt, ND. I am Anishinabe Ikwe (Ojibwa)/Cree/Mitchif and the eldest of 8 siblings. I have two sons, an adopted daughter, a foster daughter and an adopted grandson. I have seven grandchildren and one great-granddaughter. I raised two other young men as well; one lives here in Belcourt and the other lives in Colorado. My father was a marine, my mother was a beautician, and when I was a child, we traveled throughout the US/Guam/Japan before returning to the Turtle Mountain home of my parents in 1959 when I was 14 years old.

I have had a lot of educational experiences, both formal and informal. I graduated from Turtle Mountain Community High School in 1963; got an LPN degree in 1974 through the Lake Region Jr. College in Devil's Lake, ND and was trained in Belcourt; completed a BA in Communication/Dance in 1985 (Missoula, Mt) during the summers I worked as a woodland fire fighter; added an AA in Chemical Dependency in 1993 and an AA in Child Abuse/Neglect in 1994 from Lummi Community College (which later became Northwest Indian College) in Bellingham, WA; and then went back to TMCC for an AA in Commercial Art/Graphic Design in 2005; and picked up many certificates along the way. During those years, I was educated also by many Elders from different tribal nations and finally came home to Belcourt in 1995 and began my studies with all the Elders in the Turtle Mountains. I learned a lot and was honored to sit with them and learn from them. I also went to Canada to learn from the other half of my blood line, the Cree Nation. My travels took me across the US/Canada and across the ocean to Guam and Japan, learning many cultures along the way. The very first teachings I learned were the Seven Teachings of the Ojibwa, which came from my Aunt Edna Cloud who began this journey for me.

While I was in college, I learned to do research and found that very interesting. That training has become even more useful now that I am a board member of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Tribal Nations Research Group, a board that reviews and approves all research done on the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Reservation. There are individuals from various universities who want to do research with our Turtle Mountain people, and the board makes sure they are following the guidelines of the Tribal Nations Research Group. We are the protectors of our people in the research/data arena.

I learned to sew in high school and loved it. This is one of my gifts that I have. I design all of my regalia (the traditional clothing/accessories) that I wear for Ceremonies/Pow Wows/special occasions. Since I have moved home, I have designed and made regalia for my grandchildren and other young people as well as others who request it of me.

I am a Cultural Advisor for TMCC and ND EPSCoR. I work with 6-12 graders in ND EPSCoR NATURE camps during the summer months and ND EPSCoR NATURE Sunday Academies during the school year. I write cultural supplements for each of the STEM topics covered in the various STEM activities. If I am not familiar with a STEM topic, I do research on the topic so that I can figure out which cultural information fits best with it. This I have been doing for 22 years. I work for TMCC as an instructor, and was asked by the TMCC president and vice president many years ago to develop an archive for our artifacts by our people (clothing, tools, baskets, sculptures, etc.) for the college, which I did for 6 years. I am also currently working for the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Heritage Center for the last 3 years as an archivist/assistant for our artifacts and the tour guide to explain the historical way of life of our people here on the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Reservation. I also do research on various artifacts in our collection to find the importance/year/geographic origin of the items.

I realize that my passion is all about what I have learned and how to give back to our families, relatives, friends, and those who want to know who we are as Anishinabe people. I am grateful for the teachings of our elders, our young people of today and my children. I am also a sponsor for those who are struggling with

alcohol/drugs on a one-on-one basis, as well in the sweat lodge. I work with the youth, adults, and the elders, outside this community in all four directions.

As I look at my journey throughout my life, my vision is to work with my people in any way I can to teach what I know, and pass it on to all that are interested in our Native way of life. I live simply so that I can live in peace and harmony in nature, which means I will follow the Seven Teachings in a good way. Those teachings came from my elders and I take the lessons they taught me seriously and to heart. So, my mission is to guide those who want the Seven Teachings in their life. The Seven Teachings are Love, Honesty, Humility, Bravery, Respect, Wisdom and Truth.