LESSON 1 – POTLATCH

P̓ASA – KWAK̓WALA WORD WHICH MEANS, "TO GIVE"

1. Grade Level: Grade 4/5 (can be modified for Primary and Intermediate)

2. Activity: Students will learn about the Kwakwaka'wakw Potlatch and Potlatch Prohibition.

3. Estimated Time: 3 periods

4. Prescribed Learning Outcomes:

- Governance
  - C2 identify the impact of Canadian governance on Aboriginal people's rights
- Identity, Society, and Culture
  - B3 Identify effects of early contact between Aboriginal societies and European explorers and settlers
- A2 use maps and timelines to locate, interpret, and represent major physical, political, and economic features of BC and Canada
- C3 identify the distinct governance structures of First Nations in Canada

RESOURCES REQUIRED

Section of Website containing relevant information, photographs and film clips:

- Our People
- Our Land
- Our Language
- Potlatch
- Potlatch Ban
- Our Masks Come Home

Blackline Masters:

- BLM 1A – 'Namgis Origin Story
- BLM 1B – Kwakwaka'wakw Territory
- BLM 1C – Why Potlatching?

Audio Clips:

- Potlatch Means to Give (in Kwak̓wala) – Chief Bill Cranmer
- The Meaning of U'mista (in Kwak̓wala) – Chief Bill Cranmer

Film Clips:

- Potlatch Means to Give
- Why We Potlatch
- T̓łi'na
- Impact of the Potlatch Ban on our People
- How Gwa'nalalis Became a River
- Origin Story of the 'Namgis People

Kwak̓wala Language Component:

- Potlatch Means to Give – Chief Bill Cranmer
- The Meaning of U'mista – Chief Bill Cranmer

NEW WORDS

Kwakwaka'wakw – people who speak the Kwak'wala language living on the Northwest Coast of British Columbia from northern Vancouver Island and the adjacent mainland, made up of 18 tribes each having their own origin story.

Maya'xala – treat someone or something good, the closest word that defines maya'xala in the English language is "respect". It is a respect for all living beings, humans, animals or plants, for things and for oneself.

P'asa (potlatch) – to give; during this ceremony, chiefs would share their family's history.

Nawalakw – supernatural spirit.

Gukwdzi – Bighouse. Huge wooden building inhabited by nuclear families belonging to the same extended family and under the same chief's rule. The building is cleared and reorganized for ceremonies.

Dzaxwan – Oolichan, also called candle–fish, the oolichan is a small, smelt–like fish rich in oil. Living in the sea, it returns to rivers to spawn.

T'łi'nagila – giving away oolichan oil at a grease potlatch.

PERIOD I – WHO ARE THE KWAKWAKA'WAKW?

Prior to lesson discuss with class that we will be learning about a First Nation group of people who live on the Northwest Coast of Canada and have their own stories and beliefs and culture that make them unique in Canadian society. This first lesson will introduce students to the Kwakwaka'wakw and their belief of who they are and where they come from. It is important to note that Western society calls First Nations stories legends or myths but the Kwakwaka'wakw consider them oral history due to the fact of having no written history prior to contact. Let the students know that in the beginning, the earliest time of our history, animals had the ability to transform or change from animal to human form, this was a supernatural time. Nawalakw – supernatural spirit.

Kwakwaka'wakw means Kwak'wala speaking people – prior to contact there were 24 tribes, each having their own origin story. Today, there are 18 nations who continue to carry on their traditions and ceremony.

Start lesson by informing students that each nation within the Kwakwaka'wakw have their own oral history of how they came to live within their own territory. They will now learn two 'Namgis origin stories; the first tells of the Gwa'ni River using video clip titled, *How Gwa'nalalis Became a River,* this story can also be found on BLM 1A – *'Namgis Origin Story*. The second video clip titled, *Origin Story of the 'Namgis People* tells of the supernatural creatures that were one of the first people to live at the Gwa'ni River.

Using BLM 1B – *Kwakwaka'wakw Territory*, identify the Kwakwaka'wakw territory as well as the Gwa'ni or Nimpkish River, and discuss that this particular river is believed to be the man Gwa'nalalis during the time of supernatural events. It is important to bring into the discussion that the people of this land believed in the connection of all living things, from the land, sea, sky and spirit world.

To complete the lesson have students brainstorm as teacher records what they now know about the Kwakwaka'wakw, (keep this recording of what they now know for use at the end of the Unit to compare what they knew in the beginning with what they learned during the unit.)

PERIOD 2 – INTRODUCTION TO POTLATCH & P̓A̲SA (POTLATCH) TODAY

On the board write the following questions, "What do you think P̓a̲sa means? What do you think it is?" Write down some of their ideas. Together watch the video clip – *Why We Potlatch*, and *Potlatch Means to Give,* also listen to the Audio clip; *Potlatch Means to Give.* This important ceremony was the way in which this group of people recorded important events within the life of a chief and showed his family's history.

"In the old days the Kwakwa̲ka̲'wakw constantly sought to give meaning and purpose to their existence….they (the ancestors) interpreted it in song and ritual, dance and ceremony, often through the use of masks." — Chief Bobby Joseph

After viewing and listening to the video and audio clips discuss with students what they saw and heard. How is this different from how we record things that happen in our life today? For example: a person getting a name, or a family today sharing where they come from. How are the Kwakwa̲ka̲'wakw ways of being, different from mine and yours?

Finish off lesson with BLM 1C – *Why Potlatching?* This worksheet has a list of reasons why the Kwakwa̲ka̲'wakw potlatch, have students read through and choose the correct answers to the question. Students will write their answers to show their understanding of why potlatches take place.

End off lesson with video clip – *T̓ɬi'na*. It is important to know that today, in 2014 the Kwakwa̲ka̲'wakw continue to carry on their traditions; songs, dances, name-giving which their ancestors and forefathers have practiced since the beginning of time.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT T̓ŁI'NA: THE ART OF GREASE–MAKING

"My grandfather used to tell me that grease was our sunshine in the winter," remembers Chief Arthur Dick Jr. For centuries, grease or t̓ɬi'na made from a small and very oily fish called oolichan has been a staple in the diet of the Kwak̓wala–speaking peoples, or Kwakwa̲ka̲'wakw. Oolichan is eaten fresh, dried, smoked and processed into t̓ɬi'na which is a highly nutritious, energy rich oil.

T̓ɬi'na (pronounced "tli-na") was traditionally stored in waterproof bentwood boxes or kelp which made it easy to transport and trade. The Kwakwa̲ka̲'wakw were known for producing the best tasting grease and they used a vast network of trails, called grease trails, to trade their t̓ɬi'na up and down the coast and with the peoples of the interior.

T̓ɬi'na plays a very important role in a potlatch ceremony where a host gains status by giving away his wealth. The highest honour a Chief can give another Chief is the gift of t̓ɬi'na. At a grease potlatch, the host gives away enormous quantities of this precious oil. The host family will also throw t̓ɬi'na onto the fire to make a dramatic statement about their high status.

Oolichan was once abundant, but, due to habitat destruction numbers have greatly declined since the 1990s. This decline represents both a grave loss to our ecosystem and a devastating cultural loss. Many coastal First Nations have suffered a complete loss of oolichan from their waters and can no longer practice the centuries old tradition of making t̓ɬi'na.

Making T̓ɬi'na

Making t̓ɬi'na involves many steps and takes about a month. After the fish are caught with nets, they are shoveled into pits and left for six to fourteen days depending on the family's preference. Next, the fish are dumped into water filled vats that must be kept at precisely 140 to 145 degrees in order for the oil to rise. Long sticks are used to lift and shake the oolichan to loosen more oil from

their bodies. Skimmers are used to collect the oil that rises to the surface. Finally, the oil is filtered several times through cheesecloth into buckets before it is poured into bottles for storage.

PERIOD 3: POTLATCH PROHIBITION

In the late 1800s, the Canadian government felt First Nations' traditions were keeping Native people from becoming "civilized." The government saw Native culture as a threat and enacted a law to shut down the ceremonial potlatch. The anti–potlatch proclamation was issued in 1883; it became law January 1, 1885. It read:

"EVERY INDIAN OR OTHER PERSON WHO ENGAGES IN OR ASSISTS IN CELEBRATING THE INDIAN FESTIVAL KNOWN AS THE 'POTLATCH' OR IN THE INDIAN DANCE 'TAMANANAWAS' IS GUILTY OF A MISDEMEANOR, AND SHALL BE LIABLE TO IMPRISONMENT…"

For more than sixty years the ceremonial potlatch was outlawed. During that time many Native people were arrested; for some, the charge was dancing. Still, potlatches continued—but in secret. Barb Cranmer is Kwakwaka'wakw and a member of the 'Namgis Nation. The Cranmer family has kept the potlatch traditions alive for generations, in spite of the law. At Christmas time, 1921, Barb's grandfather, Dan Cranmer, held the largest potlatch recorded on the northwest coast of British Columbia. This potlatch is best known for the fact that forty–five people were arrested, and the participants were given a choice of either surrendering their potlatch regalia— to prevent them from having future potlatches—or going to jail. Twenty–two people went to jail.

The potlatch and all that it included—the songs, dances, masks, blankets, speeches—were the things that defined the Kwakwaka'wakw. "It was a dark time for our people," says Barb. "There was a great sense of confusion. People were wondering why this was happening when this was how we had lived, historically, forever and ever."

Discuss what prohibition means and how do you think you would feel if you were prohibited from doing something that was an important part of your daily life. Ask the question, Why was the potlatch outlawed? Do they think it was a good law? Explain.

Look through the masks in the potlatch collection and choose a mask to learn about. There are video clips of some of the masks being danced. Students may draw a picture of their mask and write down how it was used in the video clip. Remind students that at one point in history these masks were used in important ceremonies and then the Canadian Government created a law to say that they could no longer be used. Add that elders went to jail for not turning over their masks and regalia.