Introduction to the Medicine Wheel

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Grade  5
Subject  Social Studies
Topic  Aboriginal Culture, An introduction to the Ojibway (Anishnabe) Medicine Wheel.

Descriptive Sentence
Students will explore the Ojibway (Annisinabe) teachings of the Medicine Wheel. Students will learn specific Ojibway words and will create a Medicine Wheel Mobile of their own.

Curricular Outcome or Expectation
Please see the lesson plan preview for the expectation/outcomes for your province.

Materials
Practice paper
Pencils
Black markers (Sharpies)
Green and blue yarn or string
Pony or barrel beads
Bristol board
Coloured markers
Scissors
Glue
Hole puncher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Ojibway Translations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>ozawah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>misskwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>mukadaw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>wabiska</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>keewatin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>zhawan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>wabun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>ninggabeun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turtle</td>
<td>mikinak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagle</td>
<td>migizi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>kiigoo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bear</td>
<td>mukwah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Sky: (Great Mystery)</td>
<td>Kitchie Manitou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Earth: (Giver of Life)</td>
<td>Nookimis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Space Requirements
Classroom with desks arranged in a circle.

Background Information:

The Medicine Wheel is an important cultural symbol to the Ojibway (Anishnabe) people. The Medicine Wheel portrays the Anishnabe belief system of life-long learning and an understanding of Anishnabe societal structure based upon the Clan system or Totems.

The basic teachings of the Ojibway Medicine Wheel can vary from each region and community. Every story told about the Medicine Wheel can be different. The version of the Medicine Wheel story that is being told, depends on how each story teller learned the story. The story can change and grow over time, just like us as human beings on the journey of life. We can change and grow.

Typically, the story of the Medicine Wheel can be told by a local Elder, Healer, Medicine person or community member. Contact your local Native Friendship Centre to see if they have a Visiting Schools Program or if they could recommend someone to come and talk to your class.

The Medicine Wheel story and symbol is important to a variety of Aboriginal nations across North America because it can represent many different teachings relating to life, nature and Aboriginal culture. The Medicine Wheel can represent Unity with all nations and people. With Unity all of us can create peace, harmony, mutual understanding and respect.

The Medicine Wheel story relays important cultural information such as the teachings around the four directions. The number four has a special significance for most Aboriginal peoples. There are the four sacred medicines of Tobacco, Sage, Sweetgrass and Cedar, the four seasons Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall, four elements, Earth, Wind, Fire and Water, there is the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual elements for each human being, and there are the four stages of life, Childhood, Youth, Adult and Elder, plus many more.

There are many different teachings or stories about the four directions. Each of the four directions, North, East, South and West have their own very special meanings. Also with each direction there can be a sacred medicine, colour, animal, plant, element, language, and age range associated with it. Also the teachings of the Medicine Wheel can be taught throughout life. The Medicine Wheel is in the shape of a circle. The circle has no beginning or ending and we all play a part. In the circle we are all equal and need to be respected.

In this lesson, students will create their own Medicine Wheel Mobile that will include information on the four main colours, the four directions, the clans, Mother Earth, Father Sky and drawings of the four main animals and feathers. The Medicine Wheel teachings will include English to Ojibway translations and the creation of a small pocket dictionary.
Getting Ready
Discuss the Ojibway view of the Medicine Wheel such as the significance of the four main colours held within it of white, yellow, black and red and the four directions, north, east, south and west. Discuss the significance of the number four and it’s important cultural significance. In small groups have students identify what they already know about the Ojibway view of the medicine wheel. Using one large sheet of paper divide the sheet into areas for each student to write what they already know. Leave a circle in the middle of the page for future collaboration. Encourage the groups to discuss their findings. In the circle in the middle of the sheet have each group list their top three findings. Each group shares their findings with the class. This strategy is often called place mat.

Development
• Translate the four main colours from English into Ojibway:
  - Yellow  ozawah
  - Red misskwa
  - Black  mukaday
  - White  wabiska

• Locate the four directions on the Medicine Wheel:
  - North keewatin
  - East wabun
  - South zhawan
  - West ninggabeun

• Translate the four directions from English into Ojibway.
• Take a moment to review the translations by echoing back as a class and perhaps practicing in small groups.

• There are four main clans (Dodums) associated with the Medicine Wheel, and those clans or dodums are represented by animals.
  - Turtle  mikanak
  - Eagle  migizi
  - Fish  kiigoo
  - Bear  mukwah

• Translate the animal names from English into Ojibway.
• Take a moment to review the translations by echoing back as a class and perhaps practicing in small groups.
• Using books or the internet, search for pictures of the four main animals.
Putting it all together:

The layout of the Medicine Wheel is as follows:

**Colour:** Yellow  
**Direction:** East  
**Dodum:** Reptilian i.e. Turtle, Snake clans

**Colour:** Red  
**Direction:** South  
**Dodum:** Winged ones i.e. Eagle and Raven clans

**Colour:** Black  
**Direction:** West  
**Dodum:** Swimmers i.e. Fish clans

**Colour:** White  
**Direction:** North  
**Dodums:** 4 Legged ones i.e. Wolf, Bear clan

**Application**

- Explain to the students the process of measuring out the four sections and drawing the Medicine Wheel.
- Place a small circle in the middle of the wheel which will be painted green and represent Mother Earth.
- Using the four colours, have the students add a different colour to each section of the Wheel which will represent the four directions.
- Now draw a circle around the drawing and cut and paste the Wheel on to a piece of Bristol board.

**Please take a moment to review the “The Wheel Template” video**

**Please take a moment to review the “The Feather Template” video**

- Next, the students will use practice paper and a pencil and draw the outline of a feather to make a template.
- Using the feather template, draw 4 feathers on to the Bristol board and cut them out. These feathers represent the four teachings.

**Please take a moment to review the “Assembling the Mobile” video**
After the feathers have been drawn and cut out and using a hole puncher, punch out a hole at the base of each feather.

Using the hole puncher again, punch out a hole in between each of the colours on the Medicine Wheel so that there are four holes around the circle.

Select a pony or barrel bead that will be threaded onto a piece of yarn or string.

Using the piece of yarn or string, line up the hole on the feather with the hole on the Medicine Wheel and attach the feathers to the Medicine Wheel to create the mobile.

Now show the students the pictures of the four main animals.

The students will draw each animal dodum using a black sharpie. All of the students will draw each animal in the Ojibway drawing style.

After the drawings of the animals have been completed, cut them out and paste them on to the Medicine Wheel on top of the colour associated with that particular dodum. Write the English and Ojibway word on the back.

**Closure**

Have the class reflect on the meaning of the Medicine Wheel to the Ojibway people. Explain to the students that the Medicine Wheel represents individuality and that no two Medicine Wheels are the same. Ask the students what has been meaningful in this process. In small groups, have students present their Medicine Wheel Mobile to one another. Display the Medicine Wheel Mobiles in the classroom or in a central part of the school so that everyone is able to share in the experience.

Please take a moment to review the “Ojibway Drawing Style” video