

# The Elementary Woodshop

Applied Design, Skills and Technologies

## ABORIGINAL Perspectives and Knowledge



On our Learning Journey

## Aboriginal Perspectives and Knowledge on Our Learning Journey

Embedding Aboriginal Perspectives and Knowledge into the curriculum is relevant to all BC students and teachers. How to present this information is a key question for many educators.

Our expertise lies in the development of Applied Design, Skills and Technologies lessons through the modality of woodworking. Working with an Indigenous Education Resource Teacher we have succeeded in integrating Aboriginal Perspectives and Knowledge into workbooks we have written to accompany woodworking projects for students in Kindergarten through Grade 7.

This document offers educators an opportunity to view each of the Aboriginal Perspectives and Knowledge lessons provided in our Workbooks.

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## COMMUNITIES

### Our Communities

We all live in a community. Some communities are small like a village and some communities are large like a city.

Communities are made up of many people who have different interests and do different jobs. Everyone contributes to their community.

Larger communities have more people working at more jobs than in a smaller community. This is why we sometimes need to go to a larger community for more services, like more stores or more doctors' offices.

Communities are built by people who have jobs that require them to work with their hands. These are tradespeople and the jobs they work in are called trade careers.

Tradespeople have traditionally been known as craftspeople. In most First Nations communities, master craftspeople are well respected for their skills. A person who carves canoes may train to become a Master Canoe Carver or a person who weaves may train to become a Master Weaver. The skills developed by these masters may be passed down from generation to generation.

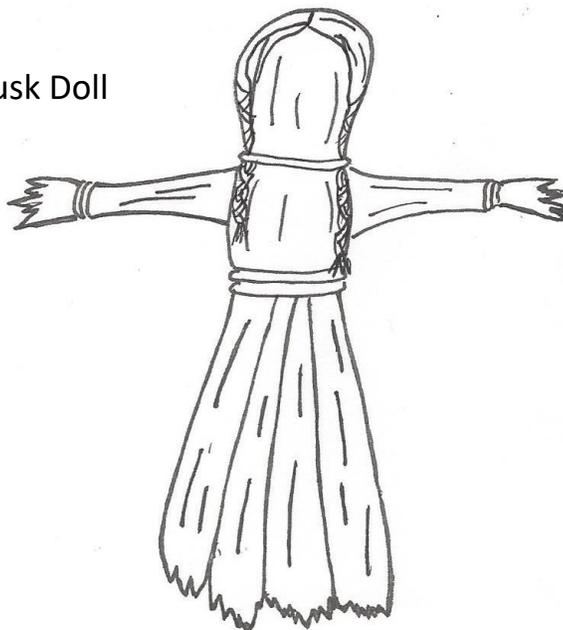
### Traditional Aboriginal Perspectives and Knowledge of Dolls

Children have dolls to play with and to keep them company. Indigenous People have traditionally made dolls out of natural materials such as fur, leather, wood, and in some parts of Canada, even corn husks. Some of these dolls have no face and some may be decorated with natural materials like shells or feathers, even porcupine quills; some dolls are decorated with man-made decorations such as beads and buttons.

Can you think of other items to gather from nature to decorate a doll? \_\_\_\_\_

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Corn Husk Doll



## Traditional Aboriginal Perspectives and Knowledge of the Canoe

Aboriginal peoples of the west coast of British Columbia have traditionally used dugout canoes for transportation along the coast.

In traditional First Nation cultures, there are strong spiritual connections to all living things and the cedar tree and its spirit are very highly respected.

The cedar tree is known as the Tree of Life, or the Mother Tree as it offers many gifts that can be made from different parts of the tree. A very important gift is the canoe which can be carved from a single cedar tree.

When a cedar tree is taken from the forest to be carved as a canoe, a ceremony is performed. After the canoe has been completed, another ceremony is held where the canoe is blessed and welcomed into the community and given its name.

Old growth cedar is a soft wood with straight grain and very few knots in the wood. This makes it much easier for carving.

Cedar also has natural oils that protect it from rotting, and it is lightweight which makes it float better than some other woods.

In addition to moving people from place to place, canoes used by First Nations were also used to transport goods between villages and to transport goods used for trade. Can you list some of the items that may have been transported by canoes?

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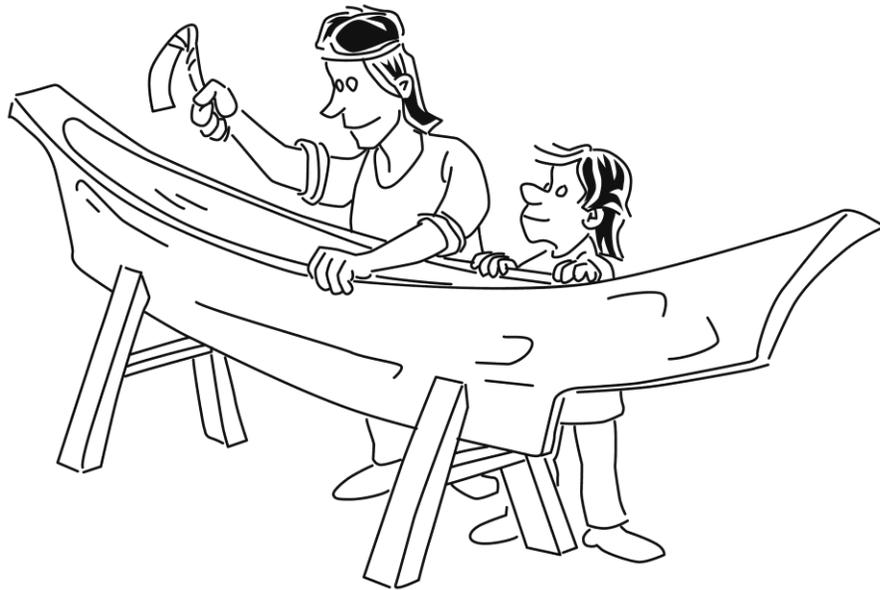
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Large dugout canoes were used as the main form of transportation to carry people and goods on the ocean, but smaller canoes that weighed less were also built for transportation. Can you think of where these smaller canoes would be used?

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At one time, there were many canoes being used for transportation along the west coast of British Columbia. While canoes are not used as often as a modern form of transportation, they are a part of many important ceremonial events representing First Nations and teachings within cultures.

The great respect and spiritual connection that Aboriginal peoples have for the cedar tree, together with the skill used to create these beautiful and functional vessels is world renowned. Aboriginal people use natural resources to make tools from items such as shells, stones and animal teeth and bone to cut trees and to carve canoes. Dried, rough skin of the dogfish was traditionally used for sanding the canoe if it was to be painted.



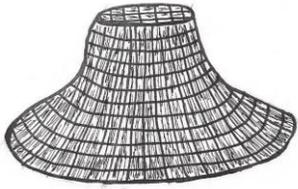
The area at the front of this Northern canoe is called the bow. The bow was sometimes carved or painted to represent the family of the carver or the name of the canoe.

## Traditional Aboriginal Perspectives and Knowledge of the Cedar Tree

In Aboriginal culture, all living things are treated with great respect. The cedar tree has a special place in the lives of Aboriginal peoples in British Columbia. The cedar has a spirit and it may be known as the Tree of Life, or the Mother Tree. Many items are made from the different parts of the tree and these items are gifts from the cedar.

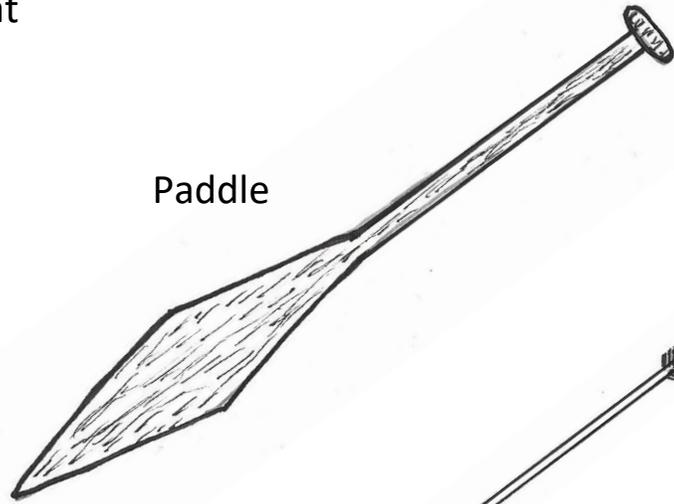
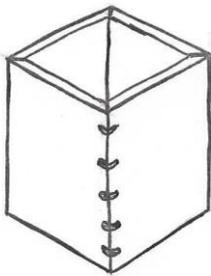
The main part of the cedar tree is the trunk which can be used to carve a house post or canoe. This is because cedar is soft, has straight grain with a lack of knots and it has natural oils that protect it from rotting. Other parts of the tree are the branches, outer bark and the inner bark, the roots, and long thin hanging branches called withes.

The following page shows some of the many uses of the cedar tree which are an important part of Aboriginal culture.

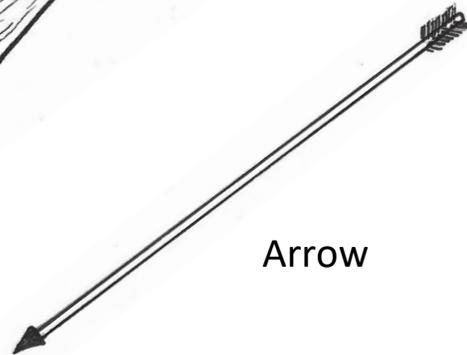


Hat

Bentwood Box



Paddle



Arrow

Items that may be made from parts of the cedar tree:

Basket

Cradle

Paddle

Blanket

Diaper

Rattle

Bowl

Fishing Net

Rope

Box

Hat

Roof Boards

Canoe

House Framing

Spear

Ceremonial Pole

Mask

Spoon

Clothing

Mat

Thread



Great consideration goes into selecting a cedar tree for carving a pole and when it is chosen, a ceremony of respect and gratitude may be performed for the tree. The pole is designed to represent a family's ancestry with symbols that have spiritual significance to that family. When the carving is complete, a pole raising ceremony takes place and the significance of the pole is shared with everyone attending.

This pole stands in Duncan, BC and was carved from a cedar tree by Gwe-la-y-gwe-le-gwa-les, (Richard Hunt) who is from the Kwagu'l Tribe in Alert Bay, BC.

The symbols carved on this pole represent special dances that were performed by the carver's family. These dances belong to the family and may only be danced by them. Does your family have a tradition that is important to you? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Traditional Aboriginal Perspectives and Knowledge of Birds

Traditional teachings amongst Indigenous People teach a great respect for all animals, and birds have a very special place in culture and in art.

Hummingbirds, ravens, owls, loons, kingfishers, herons and eagles are commonly illustrated in First Nations art.

The eagle often appears in traditional Native art and can be seen in carvings, paintings, jewelry and totem poles. In many cultures, the eagle symbolizes power and grace and may bring messages of hope.

There are many legends about the raven, who is known in some cultures (like Tsimshian or Gitsan), as a trickster who teaches us between right and wrong. The raven drawing on the following page has been drawn by a Cowichan Person of the Salish people who tells us that this drawing represents our past and whether or not we have learned from our journey.

Different First Nations use different colours for their art. Commonly used colours on the coast are black, red, green, blue and white. Colour the raven using your choice of colours.



Raven drawing by Herb Rice, Coast Salish Artist  
Cowichan Valley, Vancouver Island, BC

## Traditional Aboriginal Perspectives and Knowledge of Tree Harvesting

The majority of First Nation communities in British Columbia are located in forested areas. These sacred forests are alive, and they play an important cultural and spiritual role in the lives of the Aboriginal people who live among them.

First Nations people have historically harvested trees only for what they needed; for housebuilding, carving canoes or poles, or for many useful household items. All of these items are gifts from the tree and before a tree is felled, a prayer is offered to the spirit of the tree.

Before contact, harvesting a tree using traditional methods was not an easy task. Historically, First Nation fallers did not have the convenience of machines to cut or transport the trees; there were no chainsaws or even hand saws. They made their own hand tools and relied on simple but ingenious methods to fell a tree. There were three main methods used to fell a tree.

### 1. BURNING

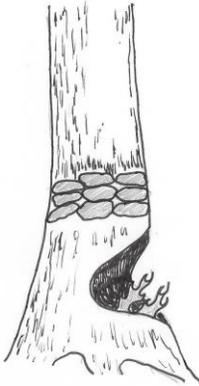
A fire was set near the base of the trunk to burn the bottom of the tree, and wet clay was packed around the tree trunk just above the burn. The wet clay would prevent the fire from spreading up the tree and eventually the tree would topple.

### 2. CHISELED GROOVES

Workers would build a scaffold around the tree to stand on. From here they would remove bark from a section of the trunk and then chisel two grooves around the tree. Then they used stone tools called mauls to pound wedges into the grooves to split out the wood between the grooves until the tree fell.

### 3. BEAVER STYLE

Using adzes, (tools with a sharp edge and a handle) the workers would chip away at the tree, much the same way as a beaver chews around the base of a tree. It would often take several days to fell a large cedar tree.

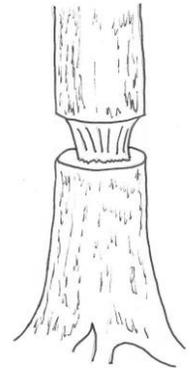


Wet clay surrounds the trunk above the fire



Hand crafted Adze made with a wooden handle and sharpened stone

Grooves chiseled around the base of the tree



List some of the differences in harvesting a tree in the logging industry and harvesting a tree in traditional First Nations culture. Consider the methods used and the reasons for harvesting the tree as well as the feelings that may be involved with the experience of going into the forest to remove a tree.

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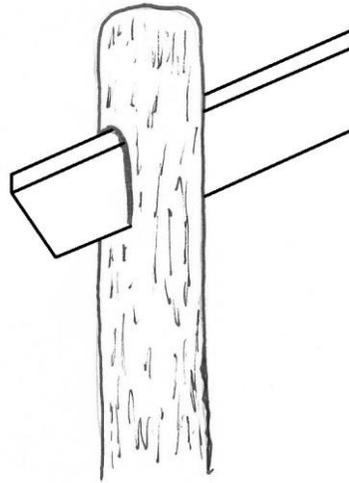
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## Traditional Aboriginal Perspectives and Knowledge of Joinery Techniques

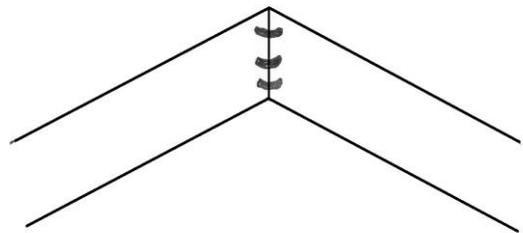
In British Columbia, Aboriginal people construct traditional dwellings that are very large and elaborate. These homes are known as big houses, or long houses and are often constructed of red cedar. The dwellings are so large that one could take up to several years to complete. Historically, some First Nations would have a summer village and a winter village and they would move their homes between the two villages. They would partially dismantle their homes, removing the roof and walls and transport them to the other village by canoe to be rebuilt onto the frame left behind the year before.

Traditional framework of these homes use butt joints as well as more complicated joints such as the keyhole joint, the laced joint and tongue and groove joints. These joints are specially designed for strength, and some for their ability to be disassembled and assembled repeatedly so care had to be taken to select the right natural resources to do the job.

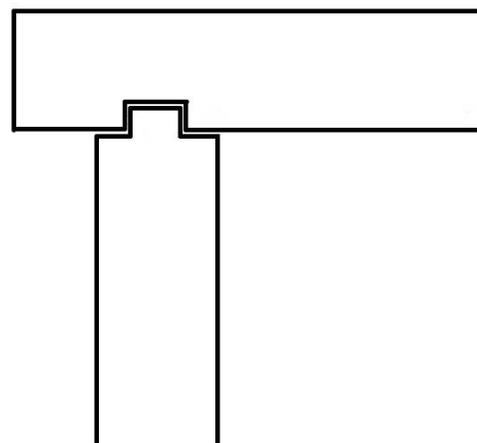
A keyhole joint has a slot cut in the vertical log to allow the adjoining piece to pass through it, interlocking the two pieces of wood.



A laced joint is similar to lacing a shoe. The joint is laced with rope made from long thin branches from the red cedar tree called withes.



A tongue and groove joint has a protruding “tongue” which has been carved at the end of one post and fits into a groove which has been carved into another post.



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