

FOUR DIRECTIONS LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Elder Nation	Tom Porter Mohawk
Lesson Plan Grade Level	Intermediate (Grades 7-9)
Time Required	3 – 4 hours
Subject Strands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Studies • Social Studies
Traditional Teachings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving Thanks • Thanksgiving Address • Morning Prayer • Mohawk Creation Story
Student Summary	<p><u>Giving Thanks</u> Giving thanks for the blessings of life, health, food, shelter, family, friendship and so on is an ancient practice shared by cultures around the world. Whereas some cultures celebrate thanksgiving as an annual one-day event, others celebrate numerous occasions throughout the day and the month and the year to give thanks to God – who is often referred to in English as “the Creator” by many Aboriginal peoples. Traditional indigenous cultural practices typically include prayers of thanksgiving at sunrise to show <i>gratitude</i> for the gifts of the Creator that make life possible, such as the sun. Other ceremonies may honour and give thanks for the plant life, the water, the moon, and so on. Through the ceremonial practice of giving thanks, one remains <i>aware</i> and <i>appreciative</i> of the gifts and the people that make life meaningful, with the hope of never taking them for granted. Giving thanks for the various elements of the world should never be confused with “worshipping” those elements in the sense of idolatry. All prayers recognizing elements like the sun, moon, or plant life, for example, are a thanksgiving to the Creator for the gifts of these elements, and the Creator’s existence is recognized as existing within these elements.</p> <p><u>Thanksgiving Address</u> In traditional Mohawk culture, the Thanksgiving Address is a prayer of <i>reconciliation</i> with the universe. It pays tribute to multiple forms of life such as plants and animals, the natural elements, the four directions, the four seasons, and everything that exists. Giving thanks is a way to acknowledge all the energy forces that work together to <i>sustain</i> life, including those that are seen and unseen and heard and unheard. Saying prayers of thanks in Aboriginal cultures is a practice to remind oneself of the interdependency of these energies, and the need to be <i>respectful</i> of these life forms.</p> <p><u>Morning Prayer</u></p>

	<p>Mohawk Elder Tom Porter describes a morning prayer, thanking the Creator for creating life and for sustaining and embracing us through the sun. He then describes how traditionally Mohawk people will continue to express gratitude throughout the day: for their family members, by greeting them each day; and after eating and drinking water; after feeling the breeze of the wind; after stepping on Mother Earth, and so on. Thanking the sun each morning pays respect to the energy force that provides warmth and makes our plants grow, which we need to survive. In respect for all these things, the traditional practice is to say, “Nya weh,” which means “thank you” in Mohawk. Showing gratitude creates positive relations with others and makes it easier to communicate. The traditional Mohawk mindset is focused on the spiritual, constantly paying respect to all these things.</p> <p><u>Mohawk Creation Story</u> In the Mohawk Creation Story, a woman came from another planet, helped by birds to travel to Earth, but this planet was covered in water. A turtle appeared to this woman and she landed on its back as there was no other place for her to stand. The woman was the great, great, Grandmother of the Mohawk and she brought gifts of food with her. Walking in a <i>counterclockwise</i> direction on the turtle’s shell, she created the miracle of birth, turning the seeds of the fruits into humans and into corn. Singing songs from this other planet, the woman continued to dance in a counterclockwise motion, making a <i>sacred</i> circle, turning the turtle into earth and growing to form North America. The more she danced, the more the earth grew.</p> <p>People of the Longhouse continue to dance in the counterclockwise direction as taught by this woman, their great, great, Grandmother. Sky Woman taught the Mohawk to dance this way although many other Aboriginal cultures dance in a clockwise direction. Longhouse people continue to dance in the sacred circle to keep the corn growing and to keep beans growing and to keep the culture alive as taught by Sky Woman.</p> <p>Sky Woman had a daughter, and this daughter had two sons: Brother Sun (Daytime), who gives life, and Night time; but the Sky Woman’s daughter died in childbirth. The Mohawk believe that in birth each of us is given three spirits, or <i>souls</i>: three sources of energy that make a person who he is, which come together as one. At death, these three parts of the spirit are unraveled with each returning to its place of origin. One returns to the sky while the other two return in the direction of the earth. So at death, Sky Woman’s daughter was covered with earth, to make a <i>mound</i>, not buried below. Today you can visit sacred mounds in Mohawk territories in the USA.</p>
Learner Objectives	<p>Knowledge/Understanding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To demonstrate understanding of the Mohawk Creation Story • To describe the benefits of demonstrating gratitude to others

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop some awareness of people and things that make life meaningful <p>Inquiry/Values:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To explain the concept of giving thanks in contemporary society and in traditional Mohawk culture • To relate the importance of showing respect to others and to one's belongings • To identify the source of three life forces that unite at the moment of birth and separate at death <p>Skills/Applications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To practice giving thanks • To make corn soup
Strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Generate a discussion on the origin of life. What are some of the beliefs that people have about how earth was first created, by whom, and when. 2. Introduce Tom Porter as a Mohawk elder who has traditional teachings to share on how the earth was created from a traditional Mohawk view. 3. Visit www.fourdirectionteachings.com and listen to the teachings how earth was created. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Go to "Creation of the Cosmos" to hear the Mohawk Creation Story. b) Go to "Creation of Humans" to hear about the creation of humans. 4. Discuss the story in parts. Who were the main characters? Why did Sky Woman fall to the earth? Why did the birds come to her aid? Why did the turtle help her? Who else helped her? What gifts did she bring and why were they so important to the Mohawk? Was this story meant to be taken literally? What is the significance of dancing on the back of the turtle? What was the lesson in this story? 5. In groups, discuss the point that Mohawk continue to dance in the counterclockwise direction, as they were taught through this story. Discuss how cultural traditions originate. How do peoples learn cultural dances? How do they keep their cultural languages? How are traditions passed down from generation to generation? 6. Discuss the concept of thanksgiving of all that sustains life. The Mohawk have traditional teachings on giving thanks. Like many cultures, the Mohawk people have a practice of giving thanks to all the people and things that make life possible. 7. Visit www.fourdirectionteachings.com and listen to the elder's teachings on giving thanks. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Go to "Morning Prayer" to learn about how traditional Mohawk people greet the day. b) Go to "Outcircle Prayer" to learn about giving thanks throughout the day. 8. Discuss Mr. Porter's teachings on the rays of Brother Sun coming up every day to watch over us, shedding light to make trees grow, corn grow, and so on. Without this light we would not survive as we need the sun, so this is why thanks are given. What other things did he mention that Mohawk people are thankful for? What are you thankful for today? Who are the people in your

	<p>life who are important to you? What are the things that you have in life that you enjoy? Why is it important to give thanks to these people and to respect your things and others' belongings?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Working in groups, assemble the ingredients necessary to make corn soup as practiced by Mohawk people (see recipe below). 10. Arrange table settings in class and practice giving thanks for the food and companionship, etc. while enjoying the soup. 11. Wrap up the lesson with a reading of the summary and a selection of discussion topics and optional exercises below. <p>Discussion Topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The turtle figures prominently in the Mohawk Creation Story. It was the turtle who provided Sky Woman with a comfortable place to rest when there was no land for her to stand on. Today Aboriginal people refer to North America as Turtle Island. In what ways did the animals help Sky Woman to create life? What does this kinship with animals say about the Mohawk relationship with animals today? • Sky Woman is a mythological being from another planet who came to create earth and subsequently, people. How does this story compare to other Creation Stories? What does she represent? <p>Option Exercises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a beaded object to symbolize one of the elements in the Mohawk Creation Story such as the turtle or corn (see link below for instructions). • Make a sculpture of a turtle representing North America. Using papier mache or other objects create a symbol for the turtle as it relates to the Mohawk Creation Story. • Make a journal entry on the Mohawk Creation Story. What did you think of Sky Woman? Look at a map of North America. Can you picture North America as a giant turtle? If North America was formed on the back of a turtle, would that change how you treat the earth? • Write a report on how the concept of thanksgiving impacts on Mohawk culture and how it impacts on contemporary society. What can be adapted from traditional Mohawk thanksgiving practices?
Vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gratitude • Reconciliation • Aware • Appreciative • Sustain • Respectful

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counterclockwise • Sacred • Soul • Mound
Materials Required	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Food ingredients as per corn soup recipe below 2. Table settings
Evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher evaluation of student discussion responses 2. Peer evaluation of soup

STUDENT SUMMARY

Giving Thanks

Giving thanks for the blessings of life, health, food, shelter, family, friendship and so on is an ancient practice shared by cultures around the world. Whereas some cultures celebrate thanksgiving as an annual one-day event, others celebrate numerous occasions throughout the day and the month and the year to give thanks to God – who is often referred to in English as “the Creator” by many Aboriginal peoples. Traditional indigenous cultural practices typically include prayers of thanksgiving at sunrise to show *gratitude* for the gifts of the Creator that make life possible, such as the sun. Other ceremonies may honour and give thanks for the plant life, the water, the moon, and so on. Through the ceremonial practice of giving thanks, one remains *aware* and *appreciative* of the gifts and the people that make life meaningful, with the hope of never taking them for granted. Giving thanks for the various elements of the world should never be confused with “worshipping” those elements in the sense of idolatry. All prayers recognizing elements like the sun, moon, or plant life, for example, are a thanksgiving to the Creator for the gifts of these elements, and the Creator’s existence is recognized as existing within these elements.

Thanksgiving Address

In traditional Mohawk culture, the Thanksgiving Address is a prayer of *reconciliation* with the universe. It pays tribute to multiple forms of life such as plants and animals, the natural elements, the four directions, the four seasons, and everything that exists. Giving thanks is a way to acknowledge all the energy forces that work together to *sustain* life, including those that are seen and unseen and heard and unheard. Saying prayers of thanks in Aboriginal cultures is a practice to remind oneself of the interdependency of these energies, and the need to be *respectful* of these life forms.

Morning Prayer

Mohawk Elder Tom Porter describes a morning prayer, thanking the Creator for creating life and for sustaining and embracing us through the sun. He then describes how traditionally Mohawk people will continue to express gratitude throughout the day: for their

family members, by greeting them each day; and after eating and drinking water; after feeling the breeze of the wind; after stepping on Mother Earth, and so on. Thanking the sun each morning pays respect to the energy force that provides warmth and makes our plants grow, which we need to survive. In respect for all these things, the traditional practice is to say, “Nya weh,” which means “thank you” in Mohawk. Showing gratitude creates positive relations with others and makes it easier to communicate. The traditional Mohawk mindset is focused on the spiritual, constantly paying respect to all these things.

Mohawk Creation Story

In the Mohawk Creation Story, a woman came from another planet, helped by birds to travel to Earth, but this planet was covered in water. A turtle appeared to this woman and she landed on its back as there was no other place for her to stand. The woman was the great, great, Grandmother of the Mohawk and she brought gifts of food with her. Walking in a *counterclockwise* direction on the turtle’s shell, she created the miracle of birth, turning the seeds of the fruits into humans and into corn. Singing songs from this other planet, the woman continued to dance in a counterclockwise motion, making a *sacred* circle, turning the turtle into earth and growing to form North America. The more she danced, the more the earth grew.

People of the Longhouse continue to dance in the counterclockwise direction as taught by this woman, their great, great, Grandmother. Sky Woman taught the Mohawk to dance this way although many other Aboriginal cultures dance in a clockwise direction. Longhouse people continue to dance in the sacred circle to keep the corn growing and to keep beans growing and to keep the culture alive as taught by Sky Woman.

Sky Woman had a daughter, and this daughter had two sons: Brother Sun (Daytime), who gives life, and Night time; but the Sky Woman’s daughter died in childbirth. The Mohawk believe that in birth each of us is given three spirits, or *souls*: three sources of energy that make a person who he is, which come together as one. At death, these three parts of the spirit are unraveled with each returning to its place of origin. One returns to the sky while the other two return in the direction of the earth. So at death, Sky Woman’s daughter was covered with earth, to make a *mound*, not buried below. Today you can visit sacred mounds in Mohawk territories in the USA.

Diagram for MOHAWK Curriculum

