



BRITISH COLUMBIA
FireSmart™

Education Program

(Grades 7-9)



Lesson Four

In this lesson, students identify important lessons from Indigenous Peoples' traditional knowledge and practices that could help prevent wildfires and protect communities from them.



Lesson Question:

What important lessons about wildfire prevention and safety could be learned from Indigenous Peoples?

Lesson Challenge:

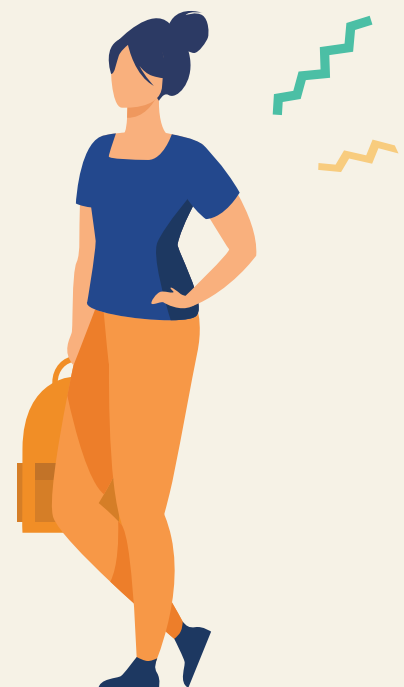
Develop a visual to show how Indigenous Peoples' traditional knowledge and practices could help prevent wildfires and protect communities.

Suggested Materials

- **Activity Sheet A:** My Thoughtbook
- **Activity Sheet B:** Identifying Important Lessons
- **Backgrounder:** Indigenous Peoples' Relationship With Fire
- **Additional Sources:** Learning from Indigenous Peoples About Wildfires
- **Activity Sheet C:** Illustrating Important Lessons

Big Ideas

- Evolution by natural selection provides an explanation for the diversity and survival of living things. (Grade 7 Science)
- Earth and its climate have changed over geological time. (Grade 7 Science)
- The biosphere, geosphere, hydrosphere, and atmosphere are interconnected, as matter cycles and energy flows through them. (Grade 9 Science)
- Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world. (Grades 4-9 English Language Arts)
- Exploring and sharing multiple perspectives extends our thinking. (Grades 6-7 English Language Arts)



Before Starting the Lesson



Consider beginning this lesson by acknowledging the traditional territories upon which your class is learning. Your school or district likely has an acknowledgment you may share with students. Model for students the importance of taking time to think about what the acknowledgment means. Share with students how you respect and honour the peoples and the land and invite them to do the same.

While this lesson includes some examples of Indigenous Peoples' perspectives and knowledge about fire, please be mindful of the following:

- Students can use the thinking strategies in this lesson to learn more from local Indigenous Peoples' knowledge and practices. Consider inviting Elders and Knowledge Keepers into the classroom to provide local examples as the content for this lesson, remembering to respect that not all Indigenous Peoples' knowledge can be shared.
- Follow proper protocols when inviting an Elder or Knowledge Keeper to your classroom. Your school or district likely has guidelines for collaborating with local First Nations.

Start the Thinking



1. Invite students to think of important lessons that they have learned from someone important in their lives. Encourage students to share their important lesson with a trusted classmate.
2. As students share, ask them to suggest why these lessons are important. For example, students might suggest that an important lesson teaches you something you can use; helps you treat others better; helps you be healthier or safer; helps you avoid making mistakes in the future; or is something worth sharing with others. Use students' suggestions to co-construct or share the criteria for an important lesson. An important lesson can help us
 - understand something better
 - change how we think and/or act in a positive way
 - live in a good way with ourselves, other people, and the Earth
3. Introduce the lesson question and challenge. Briefly explain that in this inquiry activity, students will use information from different sources to design a visual that represents important lessons we can learn from Indigenous Peoples' traditional knowledge and practices that can help communities prevent wildfires and protect communities from them.
4. Guide students in working as a class to create a focused list of as many terms, facts, ideas, concepts, definitions, or experiences as they can recall from previous learning about important lessons for preventing wildfires and



protecting communities from them. Alternatively, students could work in small groups to develop collective lists. Consider posting the list for later use in the lesson.

5. Provide each student with a copy of My Thoughtbook (Activity Sheet A). Explain that a Thoughtbook is a place to draw or write their ideas that can help answer the lesson question and challenge. Guide students' attention to the left-hand column and invite them to use words or pictures to describe any important lessons about preventing wildfires and protecting communities from them. Encourage students to use their focused lists and criteria for an important lesson to help support their thinking. Assure students that their ideas can be big or small and in words or in pictures, and that they will be able to change and add to their ideas during this lesson.

Grow the Thinking



1. Provide each group with a copy of Identifying Important Lessons (Activity Sheet B). Explain that Indigenous Peoples have specific traditional knowledge and practices that include the use of fire. These practices can help with wildfire safety and prevention, such as through the practice of cultural burning (using carefully set fires) and their relationship with fire. Indigenous Peoples have other teachings which, while not specifically about fire, can also be important in helping us to prevent wildfires and protect communities from them. These include teachings about interconnectedness, respect, responsibility, and reciprocity.
2. Ask students to read Indigenous Peoples' Relationship With Fire (Backgrounder) to find information about Indigenous Peoples' traditional knowledge and practices that could help prevent wildfires and protect communities from them. Prompt groups to note their ideas in the left-hand column of the activity sheet. Encourage them to use the criteria for an important lesson to guide their thinking.
3. Direct groups to note in the right-hand column how each of the ideas could be used to prevent wildfires and protect communities from them. Invite groups to share their thinking with the class.
4. Invite students to revisit their focused lists and Thoughtbooks. Encourage them to review and revise their thinking using what they learned about cultural burning. Ask them to decide what they would add, remove, or change to best reflect important lessons we can learn from Indigenous Peoples.



5. Ask students to look for important learnings in additional sources that describe Indigenous Peoples' traditional knowledge, beliefs, teachings, world views, and uses of fire to care for the land. Consider inviting students to choose from a variety of types of sources. These sources could include those listed in the Additional Sources handout.
6. Invite groups to share their ideas with the class. As they share, prompt them to choose three important lessons about wildfire prevention and safety that can be learned from Indigenous Peoples. Remind them to use the criteria to guide their decision-making. Direct them to note their choices at the bottom of Activity Sheet B.

Reflect on the Thinking



1. Guide students' attention back to their focused lists and Thoughtbooks. Encourage them to use ideas and information from the research and class discussion to review and revise their thinking about important lessons for preventing wildfires and protecting communities from them.
2. Invite students to note three important lessons about preventing wildfires and protecting communities from them in the right-hand column of their Thoughtbooks, encouraging them to use ideas from any of the resources that they used during this lesson.
3. Before students complete the lesson challenge by creating a visual, consider inviting them to explore art that features Indigenous teachings about fire such as the following:
 - **FireSmartBC: Reigniting Cultural Burning Through Painting**
<https://firesmartbc.ca/reigniting-cultural-burning-through-painting/>
 - **Creston Valley Advance: Cariboo Art Beat workshops combine fire and art**
<https://www.crestonvalleyadvance.ca/community/cariboo-art-beat-workshops-combine-fire-and-art/>
4. Provide each student with a copy of Illustrating Important Lessons (Activity Sheet C). Direct students to create a visual (for example, a diagram, picture, collage, graph, or combination of types of visual images) that shows at least one important lesson about preventing wildfires and protecting communities from them that can be learned from Indigenous Peoples.

Activity Sheet A: My Thoughtbook

My First Ideas

What important lessons could be learned from Indigenous Peoples about preventing wildfires and protecting communities from them?



My Final Ideas

What important lessons could be learned from Indigenous Peoples about preventing wildfires and protecting communities from them?



Criteria for an Important Lesson

An important lesson can help us

- understand something better
- change how we think and/or act in a positive way
- live in a good way with ourselves, other people, and the Earth

Activity Sheet B: Identifying Important Lessons

**Important Lessons from
Indigenous Peoples**

**How might this important lesson
help prevent wildfires and
protect communities from them?**

My Three Important Lessons

Reasons for My Decisions



Criteria for an Important Lesson

An important lesson can help us

- understand something better
- change how we think and/or act
- live in a good way with ourselves, other people, and the Earth

Backgrounder:

Indigenous Peoples' Relationship With Fire

Introduction

Fire has been an important aspect of Indigenous Peoples' cultural practices since time immemorial. In fact, there are known to be about 70 different uses of fire by Indigenous Peoples.

Cultural burning is one of those important uses. For some Indigenous Peoples, cultural burning is defined as the traditional practice of planned and controlled use of fire on the landscape by Indigenous Peoples for cultural and land management purposes. This includes burning for the health of particular plants and animals, as well as using fire for ceremonial purposes.

In the late 1800s, governments in Canada began banning cultural burning. British Columbia was the first province in Canada to ban cultural burns with the Bush Fire Act of 1874. Individuals caught burning were subject to fines. The ban on cultural burns led to a loss of fire-keeping knowledge and had negative impacts on ecosystems. A build-up of forest fuel, as well as dead, over-aged, overgrown, diseased, and bug-infested forests and grasslands, are contributing to more dangerous and severe wildfire activity.

Increases in wildfires have led to many recommendations to bring back cultural and prescribed burning. Evidence suggests that cultural burning would help care for the land, reduce fuel, and prevent dangerous wildfires and protect communities from them.

Though much fire-keeping knowledge has been lost because of government actions, there are still Indigenous Peoples, such as the Syilx People of the Okanagan Nation in the southern interior of British Columbia, who continue to use cultural burns. Supporting and honouring First Nations' traditional knowledge and practices will be an important part of helping prevent wildfires and keeping communities safe from them.

Benefits of Cultural Burning

Indigenous Peoples know that cultural burning and prescribed burning have many important effects on ecosystems. Small fires were started at carefully chosen times of the year, such as early spring or late fall. Important benefits of these fires include the following:

- There were usually more different kinds of plants and trees, or greater biodiversity, in areas that had cultural fires.
- Opening up space by burning overgrowth allowed some plants and animals that had been outcompeted for space and resources to emerge and flourish.
- The fires would burn pests that could harm the plants and animals, such as ticks and bark beetles. When plants become sick or die from pests, they are more vulnerable to spreading fire. Healthy forests are greener, more resilient, and less prone to destruction from wildfire.
- The cultural fires used by Indigenous Peoples helped keep unplanned wildfires small. Cultural fires could burn the fuel on the ground such as dead grass, leaves, and trees. If a wildfire started, it would not be as big or as hot. Carefully studying maps and history shows that there have been fewer big wildfires in areas where cultural fires had been used.
- Cultural fires provided a chance for learning on the land. Bringing people together on the land helped them to better learn about how fire interacts with the land. It also helped them to better understand how they were connected to the fire, the land, and all of Mother Earth.

An Example of Traditional Burning Practices from the Okanagan

According to Elders, Okanagan People exist in a two-way relationship with the land. The land provides all foods, medicines, shelter, and materials needed for survival; in return, Okanagans are responsible for being caretakers of the land. This responsibility means Okanagans must make sure all plant and animal communities have the food and shelter they need. Fire has been a major part of this responsibility for Okanagans.

Traditional Okanagan burning practices were regularly done until about 30 or 40 years ago. Elders speak of forest conditions that were far different from what they are today. Fire Keepers regularly visited an area to figure out when, where, how, and how often to burn. With the use of fire, the land was able to provide new life and new growth, completing the circle of giving and receiving. Two types of burns are common in this traditional practice: big burns in the fall, and smaller safe burns in the spring.

Children are taught that all fire is sacred, all land is sacred, all air is sacred, and all water is sacred; these are the four elements of life. Fire is a cleansing purifier, it warms us, and it cooks our food, and therefore it is an important element. The children are taught the respect that they need to give to the fire. When they address the fire, they are taught to offer prayers from their heart.

Sources

- **Brend, Y. (2017, July 15). Forget Smokey the Bear: How First Nation fire wisdom is key to megafire prevention. CBC News.**
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/fire-fighting-first-nations-firekeepers-annie-kruger-penticton-bc-wildfire-mega-fire-1.4205506>
- **Cultural burning. (n.d.). Cultural Burning and Prescribed Fire.**
<https://prescribedfire.ca/cultural-burning/>

Additional Sources: Learning from Indigenous Peoples About Wildfires

Listening

Excerpts from podcasts that feature Indigenous teachings about fire such as the following:

- **Get FireSmart: Reigniting Indigenous Cultural Burning: A FNESS Feature**
<https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/23-reigniting-indigenous-cultural-burning-a-fness/id1562371977?i=1000593805352>
- **NPR: Managing Wildfire Through Cultural Burns**
<https://www.npr.org/2021/07/21/1018886770/managing-wildfire-through-cultural-burns> (This podcast is from the United States and uses tribes to refer to Indigenous nations.)
- **Get FireSmart: What Is Cultural Burning and Prescribed Fire**
https://open.spotify.com/episode/7GsEosyqxLqXBksXYM0QUz?go=1&sp_cid=d8458dad0e09ab959e1ce2b908c61304&utm_source=embed_player_p&utm_medium=desktop&nd=1 (starting at 35:40 to 45:00)
- **Good Fire Podcast: Cultural Safety with Joe Gilchrist and Natasa Caverly**
<https://yourforestpodcast.com/good-fire-podcast/2022/3/13/season-2-episode-4>
- **Right Country, Right Fire**
<https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/right-country-right-fire/id1463470135>
(starting at 5:00)

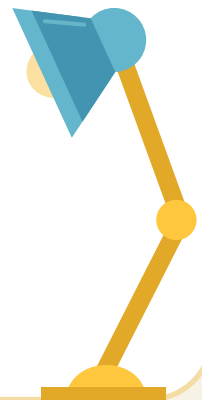
Reading

- Infographics that feature Indigenous teachings about fire such as the following:
 - **The Nib: Prescribed Burn**
<https://thenib.com/prescribed-burn-forest-fires/>
 - **Revitalizing Cultural Burning**
<https://twitter.com/ChristiansonAmy/status/1067868427635884033/photo/1>
- Excerpts from articles and reports that feature Indigenous teachings about fire such as the following:
 - **BC Wildfire Service: How Cultural Burning Enhances Landscapes and Lives**
<https://blog.gov.bc.ca/bcwildfire/how-cultural-burning-enhances-landscapes-and-lives/>
 - **Frontiers for Young Minds: How does cultural burning impact biodiversity?**
<https://kids.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/frym.2022.734864>
 - **Science World: Good fire: Revitalizing cultural burning**
<https://www.scienceworld.ca/stories/good-fire-revitalizing-cultural-burning/>
 - **The Narwhal: The art of fire: Reviving the Indigenous craft of cultural burning**
<https://thenarwhal.ca/indigenous-cultural-burning/>
 - **BC Grasslands: Helping our land heal: A cultural perspective on fire and forest restoration**
https://bcgrasslands.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2004-fall_bcgrasslands.pdf
 (p. 7) (Indigenous teachings about cultural burning and Fire Keepers; Indigenous world view of reciprocity and respect)
 - **CBC News: Indigenous fire keepers and ecologists say it's time to light a careful fire to calm wildfires**
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/fire-indigenous-cultural-burning-prescribed-burning-wildfires-bc-fires-climate-change-solutions-1.6503543>

Watching/Viewing

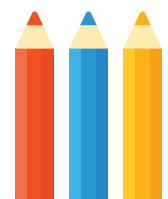
Excerpts from videos that feature Indigenous teachings about fire such as the following::

- **FireSmartBC: Introduction to Cultural Burning & Prescribed Fire**
https://vimeo.com/708338114?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&owner=93909388
- **Cultural Burning and Prescribed Fire: History of Fire**
<https://prescribedfire.ca/history-of-fire/> (reading text is college level)
- **Cultural Burning and Prescribed Fire: A Conversation With Fire Keepers**
<https://prescribedfire.ca/cultural-burning/> (reading text is college level)
- **FireSmartBC: Indigenous Cultural Burning—Shackan**
<https://firesmartbc.ca/resource/indigenous-cultural-burning-shackan/>
- **Gathering Voices Society: Revitalizing Traditional Fire Management in Tsilhqot'in Territory**
<https://www.gatheringvoices.com/tsilhqotin1>
- **Returning Fire to the Land**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2k5-IVNUpP4>



Activity Sheet C: Illustrating Important Lessons

In the space below, create a visual to represent important lessons we can learn from Indigenous Peoples to help prevent wildfires and protect communities from them.



Criteria for an Important Lesson

An important lesson can help us

- understand something better
- change how we think and/or act in a positive way
- live in a good way with ourselves, other people, and the Earth

Use the space below to plan your PSA.

Main message of my PSA:

My intended audience:

Format of my PSA:

My main points:

Other important content
(for example, images, key words,
ideas for audio):

